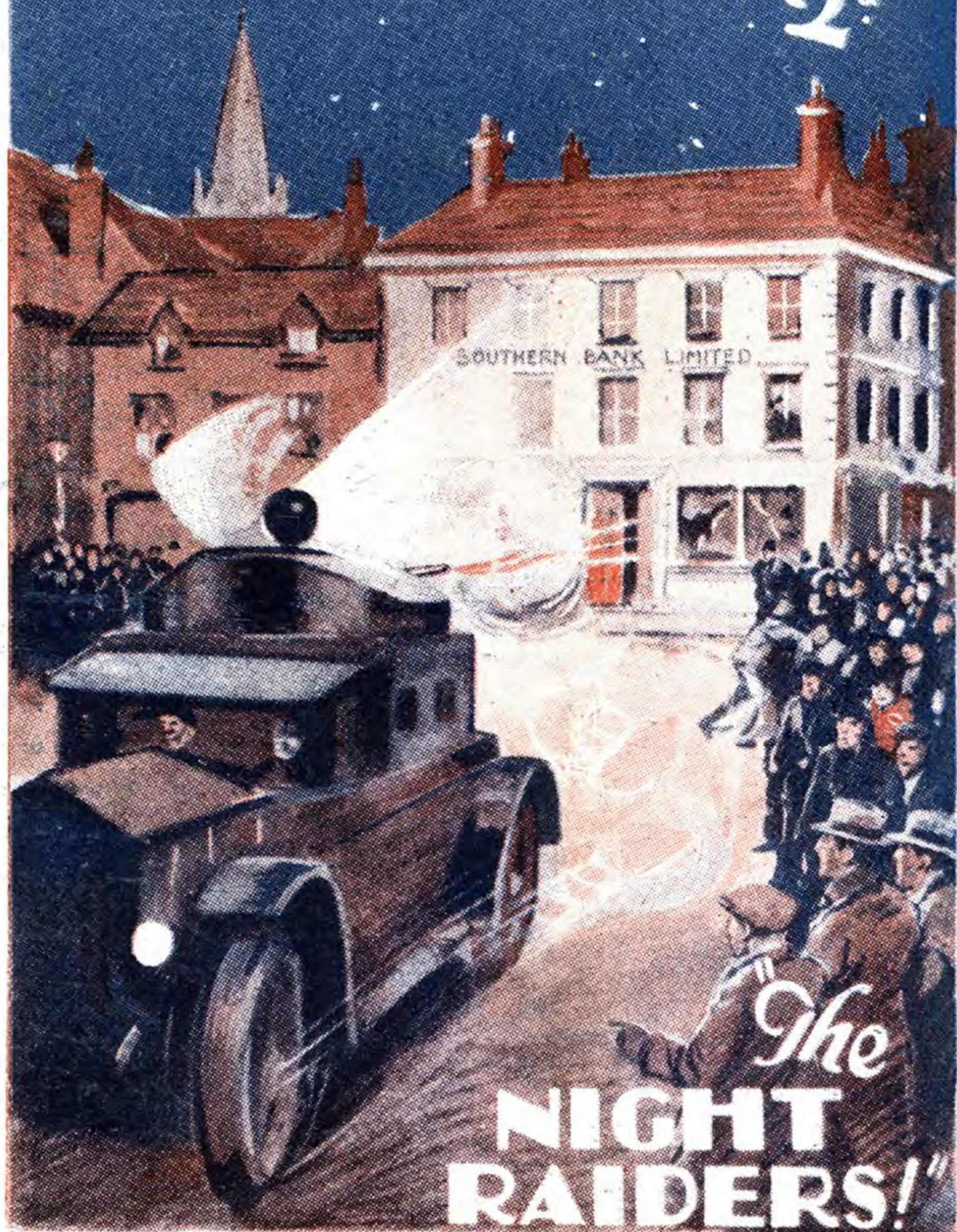


The NELSON LEE

2d



A thrilling long complete mystery and detective yarn featuring Nelson Lee and his schoolboy assistants.

New Series No. 11.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

April 5th, 1930.

A ROLICKING NEW FEATURE INTRODUCING THREE NEW PALS—

The THREE TERRORS!



Conkey, Whacky and Bob call themselves the Three Terrors—and they're all that. Just ask Puzzo the Dude, the notorious Chicago gunman, who comes up against 'em this week!

Sacked!

THE dirty 'ound! And I offered to buy him a new hat an' all!"

Conkey King stood irresolute in Half a Mo' Alley, with hands in his pockets. These were about all he had in his pockets, too, for it was only ten o'clock on Monday morning, and Conk had got the most noble order of the boot from the tank builder's yard, having dropped a red-hot rivet on the foreman's new bowler-hat.

The foreman had turned nasty about it, for the glowing rivet had not only spoiled his hat but had raised a blister on the top of his cokernut as big as a pigeon's egg.

He was a silent man, like one of those dogs that bite without talking. He had just taken Conk by the ear, and had chucked him into Half a Mo' Alley, his sized thirteen boot assisting in the proceedings.

Conkey considered the matter. He was stony brokio to the wide-o. His sole assets were five boblets, which he had lent to Whacky Clark, who had squared up his Aunt Eliza for arrears on his lodgings.

It was half in the hope of getting back his five bob from old Whacky and a thousand-to-one chance of getting a job at Fusby's Pickle Works that Conk turned up the

alley and followed the smell of boiled vinegar and cabbage to its logical conclusion.

He was just getting up his courage to give the gateman and timekeeper the what-about-it? when the gate swung open, and Whacky Clark, with his pal, Bob Smith, showed in the gateway behind Mr. Fugg, the foreman of the labelling department.

At the sight of Mr. Fugg's face, Conk kissed good-bye to his five bob. The morning was bright and sunshiny, but Fugg's dial was as black as soot with wrath and malice.

"If you two young beggars don't know the difference between pickled cabbage and pickled onions, you oughta be in an 'ome for idiots!" he snarled. "But don't tell me! You did it on purpose! Eight hundred bottle o' Red Cabbage labelled Onions!"

"You gave us out the labels, Mr. Fugg!" protested Whacky, "and when we tried to tell you about it you wouldn't listen. Told us to get back to the labelling bench, or you'd get us discharged!"

Mr. Fugg glared at Whacky like a baited bull. The fault had been his, and he knew it.

"'Ere! 'Op it!" he ordered. "Get outa this! And if I find you hangin' round the place, I'll call a policeman to you!"

He stood aside, ready to give Whacky a parting kick as he passed out. But Whacky was wide-o to Fugg's tricks.

He did a swift turn and a twist, and Fuggo, instead of kicking Whacky behind, landed a left on the granite stop-block at the gate. He lifted his foot with a howl of pain, and stood on one leg, nursing his toe.

Whacky turned and grinned.

"What's the idea, Fugg?" he asked. "Practising a few new shots on yer corns?"

Mr. Fugg slammed the gate with a bang as Conkey strolled across the alley.

"What me old Conk!" said Whacky, by way of greeting. "What you doing here at this time of morning?"

"Same as you," said Conk. "I'm paid off. Dropped a hot rivet on the foreman's crust, and—it's Monday morning! Just ran me out through the gate, and here I am. What's your trouble?"

Whacky told him.

"I hate foremen!" he finished bitterly.

"Never mind, Whacky," consoled Conkey. "The day is yet young, and we are all in the same boat!"

Whacky brightened up. He thought very highly of Conk, who was a lad of great resource. Bob was more gloomy. He was wondering how he was to go home that night and tell his old Uncle Harry that he had slipped off the first rung of the ladder of Fame.

"I suppose you haven't got any money, Whacky?" said Conk delicately.

"I owe you five bob, Conk. That's all the money I've got," replied Whacky.

"I've got ninepence," said Bob.

Conkey thought for a moment.

"You give me your ninepence, Bob," said he, "and I'll sell you that five bob that Whacky owes me. Whacky will pay you when his balloon goes up, and I'll use the ninepence best way I can. That's threepence each, and lots of lads have started the world on less!"

Bob handed over the ninepence, and the boys turned down along the canal bank.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Conk. "Here comes old Sausage!"

A large policeman was coming along the canal bank. The boys knew him well. His name was Fryers, but the football fans always called him "Sausage."

The rozzar turned his eye on the lads inquiringly as they drew near.

"Hallo!" said he. "What you boys doing about at this time of day?"

Conk grinned ruefully.

"We've joined the other million, sergeant," quoth he. "We've all got the push within the last hour!"

"Quick workers!" said Sausage, rather pleased at being called "sergeant." "Watcher been up to?"

The boys told him their story. Sausage was sympathetic.

"Well, well!" he commented. "We've all got our troubles!"

"What's yours, officer?" asked Conk. "You get good money and nothing to do

but to walk about an' wait for your pension to come along!"

"That's all you know about it," said Sausage. Then he gave the three boys a piercing glance, as if he was wondering if he should make confidences. "Can you boys keep a tight lip?" he asked.

"Try us!" said Conk.

"I've seen you nosing about the town," continued the rozzar thoughtfully. "Do any of you happen to have rubbed up against a dark chap with the top of his left ear gone, a gold crown on his right dorg tooth, and answering to the name of Enrico Puzzolini, otherwise Puzzo the Dude?"

"Seem to remember him," said Conkey. "What about him?"

"Well, if you see him about and let me know, you can count on five bob," said the rozzar. "But mind you, he's a dangerous young feller. One of these Chicago gunmen, hiding over here for a holiday. It was him that shot Al Farralone, the bootlegger, over in Chicago."

"Coo lummy!" said the boys, delighted.

"They haven't asked us for him yet," went on Sausage. "These Italianos are very difficult to get hold of, slippery as banana-skins. But if you see him about, pass the words to me, and it's as good as five bob in your kicks!"

The boys were hoping to hear more, but Sausage seemed to think that he had told them enough. He dried up suddenly.

"Use your eyes," he warned, "and not a word!"

"Slit me throat!" Conkey assured him. "We'll be silent as three corpses!"

"You will, if you muck about with that there Puzzolini!" said the rozzar meaningly. "He's more dangerous than dynamite. All you gotta do is to give me the wire!"

And he moved on, as if he were afraid of saying any more.

Conk looked bright.

"That's as good as our lunch," said he.

"How?" asked Bob, who could not see how they were going to fill their tummies from Puzzo the Dude unless it was with bullets.

"Leave it to me!" said Conk, and he quickened his step.

On the Trail!

THEY had got to Whiffles, the wireless shop in Market Row, when suddenly Conkey came to a stop. There was his cousin Lil, dressed in her best nursemaid's uniform, coming up the street, looking as if she had run her face into a bus, so swollen was it with tears.

Conkey stepped in front of her.

"Ullo, Lil!" said he. "What's your trouble?"

"Whoo—hoo!" wailed Lil. "We've lost our dear little ba-aby, Master 'Oward!"

"Coo lummy! Not dead!" said Conkey, with real concern. "Lil! You ain't been letting 'im kiss that ole parrot down at Murphy's seed stores? You know—that one wiv the raspberry top-knot that bites!"

"No," sobbed Lil. "Ba-aby's not dead! He's been stolen—pram an' all!"

"Ho!" said Conkey, and he scratched his head. "Look 'ere, Lil!" he added swiftly. "You been talkin' to any fellers lately?"

"I never talk to no fellers," warned Lil. "At least, only one or two. There's Towser Biles, and Nutty, and Coughdrop Smiles!"

"Aw! Forget 'em!" said Conkey patiently. "They ain't kid snatchers. No, Lil. Who's the other feller you been talkin' to? Cough up 'is name!"

"Well, there was an Italian chap," she admitted. "A perfect gentleman. He admired baby."

"Now you are talkin'!" said Conk. "What was he like?"

"He had a gold tooth," wept Lil, "and a chip outa his ear where a bullet took it off in the war!"

"How old?" asked Conk, controlling his excitement with difficulty.

"Twenty-two," sighed Lil.

"Then he must have been fighting for his country when 'e was eleven!" said Conk.

"And I suppose you got telling him about Dr. Smithers, your employer, and what a lot of dough he's got!"

Lil didn't answer.

"That's it!" said Conk. "You go chucking your weight about, and you get your baby pinched. Where did you lose him?"

"Outside Woolworth's," sobbed Lil, turning on the tap again. "I jus' popped in for half a minute, and when I come out the pram was gone! Whoo-hoo! I lost the dear little ba-aby, and now I'll lose my situation!"

"Well, you won't be the only one," said Conk philosophically. "But don't worry, Lil. We'll sleuth the kiddo and the chap that's pinched him! Tell me, Lil, did your chap sell hot chestnuts and ice-creams? Is he one of the Italian clique down Dagoes' Alley?"

"No," replied Lil. "He was a cinema-star. Showed me his photo—all dressed up in the movies, playing the part of a girl."

"Hey?" snapped Conk. "A girl?"

"Hospital nurse. It was part of a spy play——" began Lil.

"Kid, you've spilled a whole bibfull!" cut in Conk. "'Nuff said! Come along, boys! Don't worry, Lil, we'll see you righted."

Conk shot off, followed by Whacky and Bob. He made straight for Okey Spiffiano's fried fish and chip saloon, and shot in at the door like a terrier after a rabbit. Okey was alone in his fine saloon, peeling spuds.

"What me old Oke!" hailed Conkey.

"Ullo, Conka!" said Okey. "What you do dis time a morning? Why you no work?"

"We've lost our appointments," explained Conkey frankly. "And we ain't got no money, and we've come to touch you on the soft for three pork-pies."

Okey looked at Conk over his glasses.

"Nothin' doin', Conka!" said he. "You no bitea my ear'ole for t'ree porka-pie!"

"All right, Okey," said Conk easily. "We won't make a song about it. Thought you might on the off chance, as we are off into the country on a bit of a sleuth job."

"You sleutha alla you likea, but no porka-pie on da nodda!" replied Okey, trying to cod himself that he would be adamant.

Conk nodded.

"'Nuff said!" he answered. Then he dropped his voice. "Say, Okey, boy," he went on, "d'ya know a kiddo called Puzzo the Dude?"

Okey's olive face turned a sort of dirty grey.

"Hush!" said he. "What do you know of dat fella?"

And he went to the door of the spud palace and locked it and put the chain up.

"Nothing much, except that we are sleuthing him," replied Conk. "We are the Three Terrors, we are. Out with it, Okey! You got something on your mind! Don't be afraid!"

"Conk," said Okey, "d'you know dat feller is a mos' dangerous man?"

"Sure thing!" agreed Conk.

"He come and he blackmail me," said Okey. "I pay him money!"

"Then he must have blackmailed you pretty hard," commented Conkey. "Well, I jus' dropped in to tell you we was off to get your compatrioto if we could, but we had breakfast early, and we are stony-brokio!"

Okey was wrapping up three of the largest pork-pies the boys had ever seen. He slipped in some Italian pastry as well.

"S'posa you get dat fella, you come here and I always give you a good feed!" he promised.

"Right!" said Conk, making for the door with the parcel of pork-pies under his arm. "The Three Terrors will see you through, Oke!"

Outside was a furniture van, doing a move to Connington, twenty miles away. The driver was a friend of Conk's, and he said that they could ride behind with the mangle and the garden-roller. In two seconds they were on the lorry, and in three seconds they were off. Soon they were buzzing through the market-place and away to Connington.

"Keep your eye open for a nursemaid and a pram, boys!" said Conk.

"Here's one!" pointed out Bob, after a while.

"It's a nursemaid," agreed Conk, "but it's not the kid."

"Here's another!" said Whacky.

Again Conk had a squint; again he shook his napper. The lorry slipped along merrily, and they saw no more nursemaids or prams for ten miles. They were getting into wooded country, where the road ran between steep banks covered with primroses.

Presently, as they wheezed and rattled uphill, Conk gave a start. Sitting by the roadside, looking at the blistered heel of a rather large foot, was a handsome, dark nurse. She was perched on the deep bank amongst the primroses of Hangman's Wood. Down below in the roadside was a pram with the hood up. Conk could not see the baby, which was covered by a rug under the hood, but he had no difficulty in recognising the pram.

Conk waited till they had turned the bend of the hill. It was a stiff hill, and it made the old lorry cough like a sick sheep. It was going slower and slower.

"Get ready to leave the ship, lads," said Conk, in a low voice. "That was Puzzo, and he's blistered his heel beating it along the road. One—two—three!"

Conk dropped neatly from the van, landing on his feet. Whacky came down in the road on his sternsheets. Bob landed on his ear and bounced.

"Coo lummy!" exclaimed Conkey. "Don't make me laugh, boys! I gotta split lip! Any bones broke?"

Whacky felt himself behind, and shook his head rather ruefully. Bob rubbed himself behind the ear to see if he had fractured the base of his skull.

"I think my old nut is all kiff," he moaned. "But what now?"

"To the woods," said Conk. "We want to get on the upper ground above him. Sleuth him like Red Indians!"

The Three Terrors nipped into the woods, which were thick here with lots of undergrowth. They slipped noiselessly from tree to tree. Suddenly Conkey touched his finger with his lips.

"Hush! Not a word!" he warned. "We are getting near the quarry!"

Gunman Conkey!

THE last approach towards Puzzo the Dude was a masterpiece. Three Red skins could not have done it better.

The notorious Italian gunman was sitting atop of the bank, just in front of the Three Terrors, busy powdering up his nose, for he had shoved the old pram along from Clayborough at such a lick that he had perspired right through his clothes, and his complexion had been washed off.

His large leather lady's-bag lay by his side. He was just touching up an eyebrow in his little glass when, down below in the pram, the baby started wailing. Poor little Howard Smithers had not had his eleven o'clock bottle, and he was beginning to feel as if all the sawdust had run out of him.

The gunman gave a snarl of anger, and slipped down the bank—not to attend to the baby's wants, but to give him one that would surprise him into silence. As he disappeared over the bank, Conk slid forward and grabbed the bag. Then he fell back into the greenstuff.



Fuggo landed out at Whacky with his foot, missed—and caught himself a hefty wallop against a lump of granite!

In the bag was a packet of fags, an unfinished letter addressed to Dr. Smithers, at Clayborough, a magazine pistol, a box of face-powder, a return ticket to New York—and some money. Conkey's face beamed.

There was a howl from the poor little baby down below as Puzzo the Dude snatched him from his pram and gave him half a dozen Fascisti kisses, which smacked up the echoes of the woods like the cracking of a whip.

"The dirty 'ound!" muttered Conk. "Hear him towsing that poor baby? No; the pistol is mine! If there's any shootin' doin', I'm Sureshot Dick, o' the Rocky Mountains!"

All the same, Conk held the pistol rather doubtfully. He had never fired a pistol of this sort before. Nor did he know that the trigger was eased to a hair-pull, Chicago fashion, where they shoot quick from the side-pocket.

The baby's wail died away, and the Three Terrors heard Puzzo the Dude climbing up the bank once more. Then, somehow or other, the pistol went off. There was a flash and a bang, and the bullet came near collecting some more of Puzzo's ear as he rolled over and over and went sliding down the bank again.

Bang!

This time it was not Conkey's pistol that spoke. The flash was from the hand of the spurious nursemaid as he ran out into the middle of the road, looking round him for the police. The bullet cut through a branch of laurel over Conkey's head, and crowned him with a wreath. Two inches lower, and he would have needed it.

"I'll teach the dirty 'ound to smack British babies!" muttered Conk.

Bang, bang, bang! went the pistol in his hand, going off almost of its own accord. And Puzzo the Dude leaped into the air as three bullets scored the tarred road at his feet.

Then he turned and ran for his life. Those three bullets had settled it. Puzzo decided that it was no policeman who fired. The shooting was too quick, and Three Shot Harry, of Al Farralone's gang, always had the fault of shooting low. He decided that Al Farralone's gang had followed him to England. Puzzo ran down the hill without looking behind him, and when Whacky climbed a tall fir-tree to see where he was, he was still running in the direction of Clayborough.

Down in the pram the baby, pleased with the bangs, was crowing and laughing when Conk fetched him out to see if he was hurt. He knew Conk, and cooed and punched Conk's nose like a bantam-weight.

"He's a nib, ain't he?" said Conk proudly.

"But we got to do something about feeding him!"

"What about a bit of old Okey's pork-pie?" suggested Whacky.

"Don't talk silly, Whacky!" said Conk. "Who ever heard of feeding babies on pork-pie? If Puzzo's running, we'll run the other way. We've got money now!"

"How much?" asked Bob.

"Three pound ten and a return ticket to New York!" said Conkey proudly. "And look what the dirty 'ound was writing!"

He read out a typical blackmailer's letter—the letter threatening Dr. Smithers that if he did not part with five hundred nickers inside a week he'd get the baby's ear in a registered letter, and after that his fingers, and there the letter stopped.

"Coo lummy!" growled Conk. "I wish I'd tickled that Italiano with that gun! But come on, boys! We'll push for the old Gamekeepers' Arms, at the top of the hill, and get the kiddo some milk and sponge-cakes. They won't upset his little portmanteau, and we can wait for the empty lorry. She'll be back from Connington by two, and Albert always stops there to water the old lorry."

Conkey pushed the pram, and got chipped unmercifully for his pains.

The Three Terrors tottered up to the top of the hill, and treated themselves to ginger-beer with Puzzo's money. They stuffed the baby with milk and sponge-cakes in the tea-garden till he squinted, and presently Albert came along with the empty lorry, and Conk stood Albert a pint as he listened solemnly to their story.

Then they hid the baby and the pram in the lorry and covered them with straw. The baby was now asleep, and Conk knew that he would stay asleep till four o'clock. Then the boys were hidden in the lorry, peeping through a hole in the tarpaulin to see if they could see the spurious nurse going along the road. There was no sign of Puzzo the Dude.

Clayborough was reached, and the Three Terrors immediately nosed round to Dr. Smithers' shack. They found him telephoning, nearly wild with anxiety.

"Hallo! What do you young devils want?" he roared at the sight of the three boys.

"Please, sir," said Conk, "we've got the baby safe outside in the furniture van."

Mrs. Smithers, who had been having hysterics and sal volatile, bounced out of the drawing-room at the glad news. She threw her arms round Conk and kissed him, and said that he was a noble boy.

And when Albert got the baby out of the van, still sleeping in his pram after his feed of milk and stale cakes, Mrs. Smithers nearly kissed him, too. But Albert had had a bit of trouble with the old lorry, and his face was covered with oil and black streaks. So she gave Albert a quid, which he liked better.

"And what are you thinking of giving these noble boys?" asked Mrs. Smithers.

"I thought about ten bob between them," said the doctor.



Bang, bang, bang ! went the pistol in Conkey's hand—and the disguised Puzzo leapt into the air as three bullets scored the road at his feet.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Smithers. "Do you mean to tell me that my darling baby is only worth ten shillings? They shall have three guineas each for bringing baby home."

"Lummy!" groaned the doctor, looking a bit blue. "Why, that's more than I get from the Health Insurance!"

However, he weighed out three guineas each, and the boys took the money with muttered thanks and sparkling eyes. At that moment the doctor caught sight of the pistol in Conkey's pocket—for that bright lad intended to keep it as a memento of his duel with Puzzo—and immediately claimed it.

"Too dangerous for a youngster like you to carry one of those things," Dr. Smithers said.

Conkey reluctantly handed over the pop-gun. The doctor took it, started fiddling about with it, and then—bang! A large vase on the mantelpiece fell with a clatter into the fireplace. Mrs. Smithers had some more hysterics, and the doctor gnashed his teeth until they rattled, for he had prized that vase.

"Eustace," said the good lady when she had recovered, "put that horrible thing away."

Eustace obliged; he put the pistol in the poison cupboard. Then the three boys pushed

off, well content because Mrs. Smithers had whispered to Conk that Lil shouldn't be sacked.

"Twelve fifteen!" said Conk, counting out their money up a quiet alley. "That's not so bad for our first day out of work. Now we'll go and see Okey Spiffiano and knock him for a fish-and-tater tea."

They found Sausage eating his namesake and mash in the spud palace.

"There's been a nice to-do since I saw you this morning!" said the rozzar.

"Sure thing!" replied Conkey carelessly. "But we got back the baby all right. Puzzo had got him—Puzzo dressed as a nursemaid."

Sausage nearly fell off his chair in astonishment.

"We'd ha' got Puzzo," put in Whack. "but you said you'd sooner arrest him yourself."

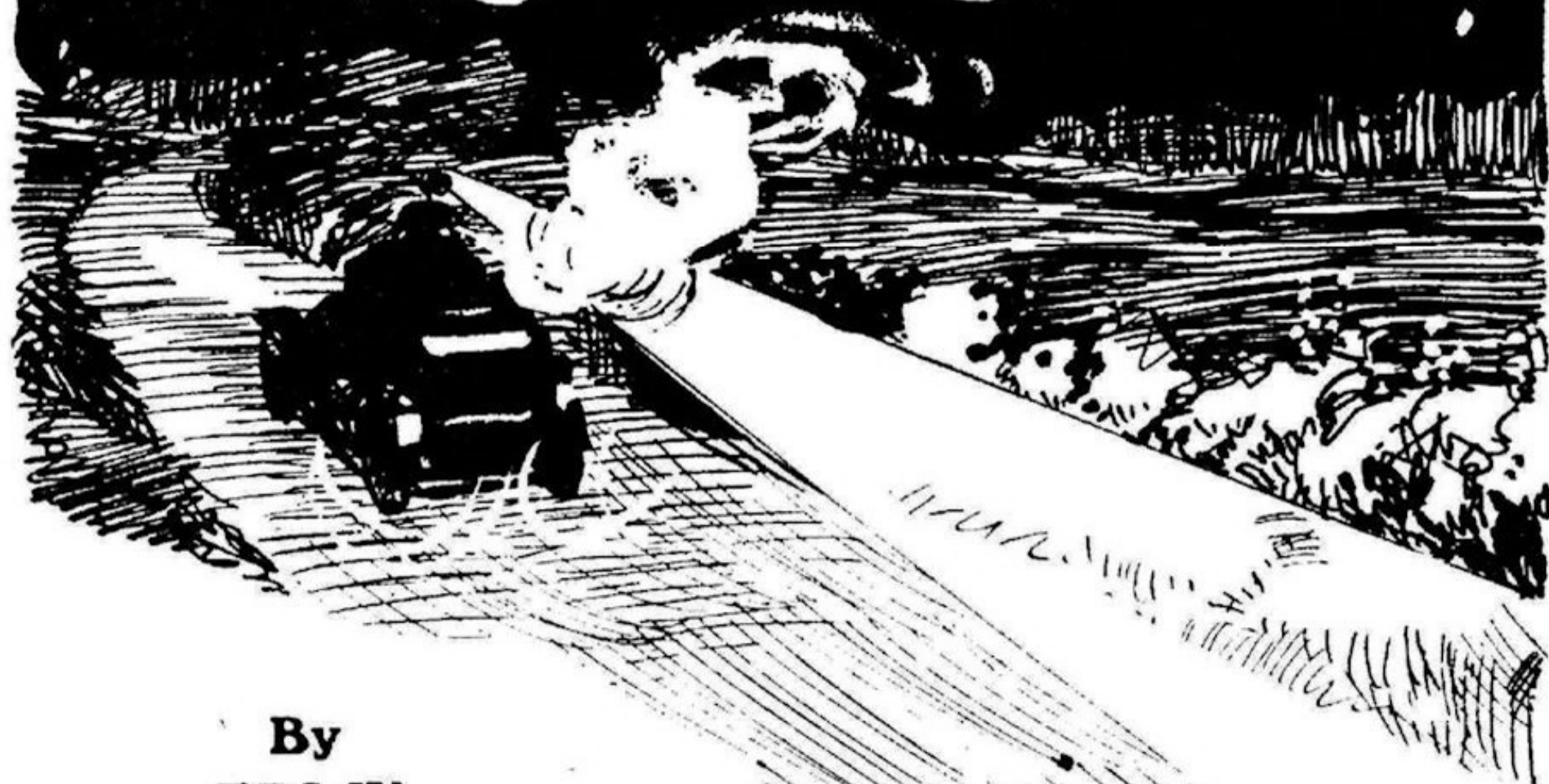
"Who are you," asked Sausage, "to talk about arresting one of the mos' dangerous criminals in the world?"

"The Three Terrors!" replied Conkey, grinning. "And we'll have three big sausages and mashed, an' a coupla gallons of tea. Sleuthin's thirsty work. Sausage'll pay for this lot, Okey," added Conk. "He owes us five bob! And don't forget—big helpings for the Three Terrors!"

(The Three Terrors next Wednesday, chums. Oh, boy! They'll give you a thrill and a laugh.)

A GRAND LONG COMPLETE FULL-OF-THRILLS MYSTERY AND DETECTIVE YARN!

The Night Raiders!



By
**EDWY
SEARLES BROOKS**

Bandits with armoured cars; gunmen holding up motorists and robbing banks. A night of terror comes to England—and Nelson Lee and his "cub" detectives find themselves confronted with a baffling mystery and involved in a whirl of thrilling adventures!

CHAPTER 1. The Hold Up!

NELSON LEE, peering through the night over the top of the steering-wheel of his powerful racer, eased his foot slightly from the throttle. A red light, some distance ahead, was waving rhythmically to and fro.

"Somebody in trouble, by the look of it, guv'nor," remarked Nipper, who was sitting next to Lee.

"Well, I hope we shan't be detained," said the famous Gray's Inn Road detective. "We can't afford the time, young 'un. We must be in Southampton before the Titania sails."

There were two others in the big sports roadster—two other members of Nelson Lee's celebrated Detective Academy. They were Stanley Waldo and Ralph Leslie Fullwood. They had not come on this trip because there was anything particular for them to do; but they had jumped at the prospect of a fast ride through the southern counties to the great sea-port. It was just after 10-30 p.m., and the early April night was quiet and mild. No stars were visible, and the sky was moonless. Except for the dazzlingly illuminated road ahead, the countryside was enveloped in blackness.

Nelson Lee's mission in Southampton was a simple one. In his pocket he had a warrant for the arrest of a famous international crook

—a man who was sailing that night on the *Titania* for New York. He was wanted for a spectacular jewel robbery, and Nelson Lee had been engaged on the case. If he made the arrest to-night, as he hoped, he would bring that particular case to a successful conclusion.

Nelson Lee slowed down considerably as he beheld the figure of a man in the middle of the road. This man was waving a red light; and on the grass border of the road, close at hand, stood a big open car. As a rule, Nelson Lee was ready enough to assist a fellow motorist in distress, but just now the minutes were precious. Any considerable delay might mean the failure of his mission.

Lee, as he looked ahead, saw something else. This was no motorist in distress, as he had first thought. There was a barrier right across the road—a scaffold pole, resting on two trestles. The road itself was closed.

"There must have been an accident farther along, guv'nor," said Nipper, peering forward through the windscreen. "It's funny, though. The road seems clear enough."

"There are some other men there—lurking against the hedge, sir!" put in Waldo, from the rear seat. "And look! They're masked!"

Stanley Waldo's eyes were uncannily keen. Like his famous father, the Peril Expert, all his senses were acute. But he had only

anticipated Nelson Lee by a split second; for before he had got the words out, Lee himself had seen those masked men. He had seen something else, too. The men were carrying pistols in their hands!

It was a moment for quick thinking. Lee's car had slowed right down, and the man with the red lamp was just ahead. The others now moved out from the hedges menacingly. The whole thing was amazing in its audacity. A hold-up! These fellows were modern highwaymen!

The idea occurred to Lee that the men might be friends of the crook who was trying to flee from England on the trans-Atlantic liner. The next second, the detective dismissed this theory. He had laid his plans too carefully for the international crook to have got wind of the impending arrest. These thoughts passed swiftly through Nelson Lee's mind, and now, with the car nearly at a standstill, he determined upon his course of action. The man with the red lamp had just moved aside, and two others were closing in.

"Hands up—and make it quick!" came a sharp command.

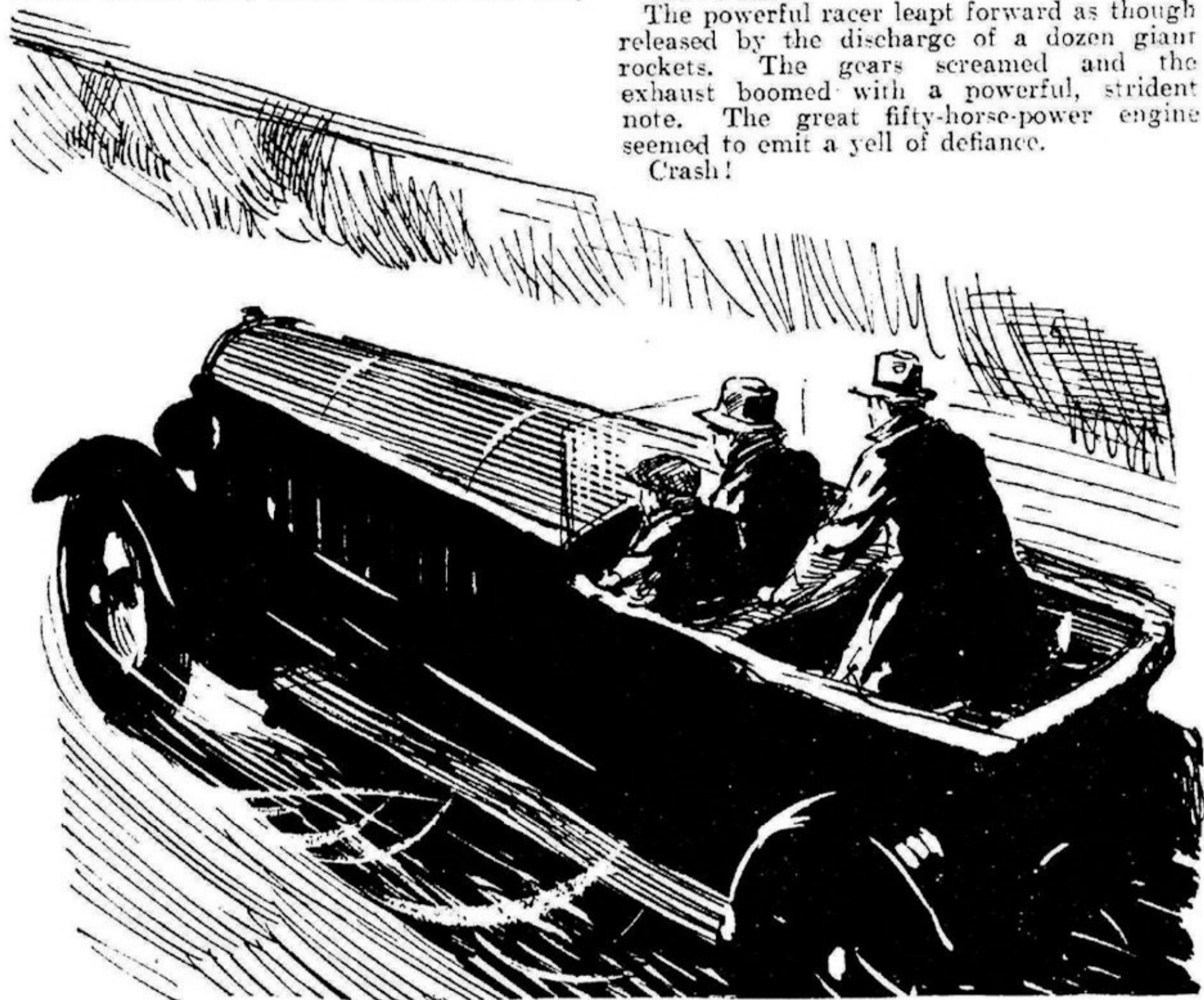
In the same instant Nelson Lee put his foot down hard on the throttle, and moved the gear-lever forward into second.

"Duck!" he shouted.

Zoo-oo-oom!

The powerful racer leapt forward as though released by the discharge of a dozen giant rockets. The gears screamed and the exhaust boomed with a powerful, strident note. The great fifty-horse-power engine seemed to emit a yell of defiance.

Crash!



The car struck the scaffold pole with terrific force, and Nelson Lee's injunction for his companions to duck was timely. The pole, splintered and broken, shot into the air, but before it could come down again the car had passed underneath and was racing away with a deep-throated roar.

Crack-crack-crack!

Revolver-shots rang out on the night air. Every second Lee expected to hear the duller report of an exploding tyre, but the bandits, in their startled surprise, were firing wildly.

"All right, boys?" sang out Lee.

"Yes, sir!" they yelled.

"Sorry I had to take the risk, but we're in a bit of a hurry," went on Lee complacently. "Let's hope the radiator isn't damaged; the bumper took the full force of the blow, I fancy."

"It was wonderful, guv'nor!" panted Nipper. "By Jove! Fancy trying to hold us up like that!"

"You did the right thing, Chief!" declared Fullwood. "They were trying their tricks on the wrong man when they held you up!"

Nipper was staring back along the road.

"They're not following," he said breathlessly. "There's no sign of them."

Nelson Lee eased the car's speed.

"Job for you, Waldo," he said briskly. "Are you game?"

"Game for anything, Chief," replied Waldo promptly.

"Good man!" said Lee. "Jump off, run back, and find out what's doing there. Report to me later—and be careful."

"O.K., Chief," said Waldo briefly.

His training at the Detective Academy had taught him to obey orders without asking questions. The car had now slowed down to about fifteen miles an hour, and Waldo, with a quick leap, landed on the grass at the roadside. Nelson Lee had slipped the clutch out, but his other foot was still pressed on the throttle, so that the engine was roaring as loudly and as evenly as ever.

"Good luck!" sang out Nipper.

The car increased its speed and was soon shooting along the dark road at over fifty miles an hour.

STANLEY WALDO, alone on the dark road, watched the rear light of Nelson Lee's car as it vanished round the bend. He could hear the powerful throbbing of the engine echoing and reverberating on the night air. This, too, gradually died away. Waldo was feeling very bucked with himself. The Chief trusted him to do this job single-handed, and there were armed bandits to face! It was a remarkable proof of Nelson Lee's confidence in his young assistants.

The very brevity of Lee's order was a joy:

"Run back—see what's doing—report later." He trusted Waldo to look after himself, and to find his way back to headquarters. How he was to do so were details which had not been worth mentioning. Waldo's task was to get back to the spot of

the hold-up as quickly as possible, and to use his eyes and ears.

He ran swiftly. His common-sense told him that the crooks would probably set about making their departure; and Lee's car had sped the better part of a mile before Waldo had dropped off. He rounded a gradual bend, and a gleam of satisfaction came into his eyes as he beheld a red light some distance down the main road. The bandits were still there!

Waldo acted cautiously now. In the gloom he spotted a gate just ahead. He took that gate in his stride, leaping over it in an effortless way. Although the night was nearly black, he could see that he was now in a ploughed field. Waldo's eyesight was like that of a lynx.

Bordering the field there was a narrow strip of grass which had not been touched by the plough, and Waldo kept to this. He ran lightly and speedily, and soon he found himself approaching the spot where the bandit car was standing. The hedge was high and thick; and Waldo's movements, as he approached, were absolutely silent. A panther on the trail could not have been more cunning.

"Nearly killed me," were the first words that came to Waldo's ears. "The end of that infernal pole missed my head by half an inch!"

"The man was a fool," said another voice, with a savage inflection in it. "He took a big chance, driving on like that. Well, Jim, you'd better get the engine running."

"Just what I was thinking," said one of the other men. "That bird will probably give information in the next town, and we shall have the police after us."

Waldo, cautiously parting a section of the hedge, took a look at the scene. There were three of these bandits—men dressed in dark overcoats and soft hats. And all three were masked. Their car, standing on the side of the road, close at hand, was an open four-seater.

At this particular point of the highway some minor repairs were in progress, but only at the side of the road. The bandits had evidently chosen this spot because they had found it easy to shift the scaffold-pole across the road, so as to form a barrier. They had utilised one of the red lanterns, too.

"Hold on!" came a sharp command. "Don't start that engine yet. There's another car coming from the direction of London. Big lights—looks like a private car. Listen!"

They all listened, and on the night air could be heard the faint purr of the approaching car.

"Rolls or a Daimler," said the man who was evidently in charge. "Get ready, boys! This won't take us more than five minutes, and if we don't take some loot back to headquarters with us the boss will want to know the reason why."

Waldo felt his heart beating slightly faster. Headquarters! The boss! These men, then, were merely a part of a big gang!

CHAPTER 2.

■ The Modern Highwaymen!

THE car which approached was a luxurious limousine, and, in addition to the chauffeur, it contained an elderly lady and gentleman. Both were in evening-dress, the lady wearing an expensive wrap.

"What's the trouble now," growled the man in evening-dress. "What's Payne slowing down for?"

"There seems to be a red light ahead, dear," said his companion.

"Huh! More road repairs, I suppose," grunted the other. "They talk about our roads being improved, but, by gad, we have to pay the penalty while the improvements are being made!"

The car came to a standstill, and Payne, the chauffeur, was amazed to see three masked figures approaching.

"Hands up!" came a sharp command.

The chauffeur blinked. He was too surprised to obey.

"Put up your hands." The command was repeated more menacingly this time. "If you start any tricks we'll fill you full of lead."

"Well, I'm darned!" ejaculated the amazed chauffeur.

He put his hands up. There was nothing else for him to do. The bandits were all armed, and it would have been madness to resist.

"Keep your gun on this fellow, Jim," said the leader curtly. "You get round to the other side, Charlie."

The leader opened the rear door, and his eyes glistened as he beheld the occupants. There ought to be some good pickings here.

"A thousand apologies, madam," he said, his voice becoming suave and polite. "The same to you, sir! I regret that I must trouble you to step outside."

"What the— How dare you?" thundered the man in evening-dress. "Who are you? What is the idea of this nonsense?"

"John!" screamed the lady. "They're robbers!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" roared her husband. "Fiddlesticks! This is merely some senseless joke!"

"I am afraid I must disillusion you," said the man in the mask. "You will both kindly step outside, and I shall require your valuables. I would remind you that my time is limited."

"This is outrageous!" ejaculated the old gentleman. "Do you know who I am, you scoundrel? I am General Sir John Branston. How dare you? Payne, drive on! Do you hear me?"

"One moment!" said the bandit, his voice becoming grim. "If your chauffeur makes any attempt to drive on, he will be shot down at the wheel!"

"Upon my soul!" panted Sir John, aghast.

In spite of his anger, he had noted the menace in the other's tone. For the first time he realised that this hold-up was, indeed, the real thing.

YOUNG WALDO, behind the hedge, watched and listened with fascinated interest. He could do nothing to help the general, of course; he was alone and he was unarmed. Indeed, if he was rash enough to show himself, he would probably be shot down before he could move a couple of yards.

The youngster possessed many extraordinary qualities. He inherited them from his father. He was uncannily strong; he was as swift as the wind; his hearing and eyesight were as acute as a forest animal's. Yet, in spite of these advantages, he knew that he could do nothing against these three armed highwaymen. Every fibre of his being told him to spring out and to help this unfortunate lady and gentleman in their extremity, but his common sense held sway over his impulses. He could do far more good by watching and waiting.

"Out of the car—both of you!" said the leader of the bandits. "It pains me to be so brusque, Lady Branston, but our time is limited. You will be good enough to hand me your jewels."

The general puffed and snorted, but Lady Branston was already out of the car: the unfortunate lady was almost on the point of collapse through sheer terror.

"Take them—take them!" she faltered.

With trembling fingers she removed her diamond rings, her superb pearl necklace and her emerald bracelet. Sir John himself did not yield such treasure; his pocket-book was well stuffed with notes, but the amount could not have been more than fifty or sixty pounds. He was also relieved of the diamond studs which gleamed in his shirt-front.

"You scoundrels!" he panted thickly. "You infernal rogues!"

"Calm yourself, sir," interrupted the masked man. "You are now free to go your way. If you will help Lady Branston into the car—"

"You shall suffer for this!" burst out the general. "By Heaven! I'll have the police on your track within the hour—and every highway in the Kingdom will be scoured until you are found."

"My dear sir, you don't realise what you're up against," said the masked man, in a mocking voice. "This is to be a night of action, and to-morrow's newspapers will provide the great British public with a rare sensation."

The general was almost incoherent. Lady Branston managed, somehow, to get back into the car, and her husband followed. The masked man obligingly closed the door, and then he tapped the chauffeur on the shoulder with the muzzle of his revolver.

"All right—you drive on," he said.

The limousine moved off, for one of the bandits had removed the broken scaffold-pole which had formed a barrier.

"In the car, Jim!" said the leader quickly. "Get the engine going."

Jim ran to the car, and leapt into the driving seat. The limousine, by this time, had gathered speed.

Thud-thud!

Two strange sounds came from the automatic pistol in the leader's hand. They were not reports—just muffled thuds. It was a silenced weapon. And following those sounds came others—from the limousine. Both the back tyres emitted a loud screeching hiss as the air shot out. The limousine swerved slightly, and came to a stop.

"They won't give the alarm yet awhile," said the leader of the three bandits. "It might be an hour before another car comes along this road; but we're safe, anyhow. Let her go, Jim."

All three men were in the car now. It was a powerful racing model.

"Pretty good haul, eh?" asked one of the men.

"You bet!" said the leader. "Even if we don't get any more pickings to-night, we shall have done well."

He spoke in a satisfied tone, and he glanced rearwards at the same time, noting that the road was dark. He had seen nothing of the agile form which had slipped through the near-by hedge a few moments ago; he saw nothing of the lithe figure which now clung to the rear of the car.

Stanley Waldo, in fact, had taken a big chance. Single-handed, he could do nothing against the bandits; but he could go with them and find out where their lair was situated. Nelson Lee had ordered him to get busy, and Waldo was carrying out those orders.

There was no carrier attached to this car; there was nothing at the rear except the spring shackles, which projected out some distance, and the spare-wheel. With the agility of a monkey, Waldo hooked his feet round one of the spring shackles, stretched himself out, and grasped the other shackle with his hands. He pressed himself close against the spare wheel, hanging low.

The car started off, her engine humming musically. She gathered speed, and the headlights were switched on. Off she went

into the night, her three occupants thoroughly satisfied with their recent haul. And with them, unsuspected, went Waldo!

CHAPTER 3.

An Amazing Development!

NELSON LEE was looking quietly satisfied when he rejoined Nipper and Fullwood on the dock at Southampton. The big racing roadster was standing there, with Nipper and Fullwood seated in it.

Towering close alongside was the mighty bulk of the liner, *Titania*, a blaze of light and a bustle of activity. She was on the

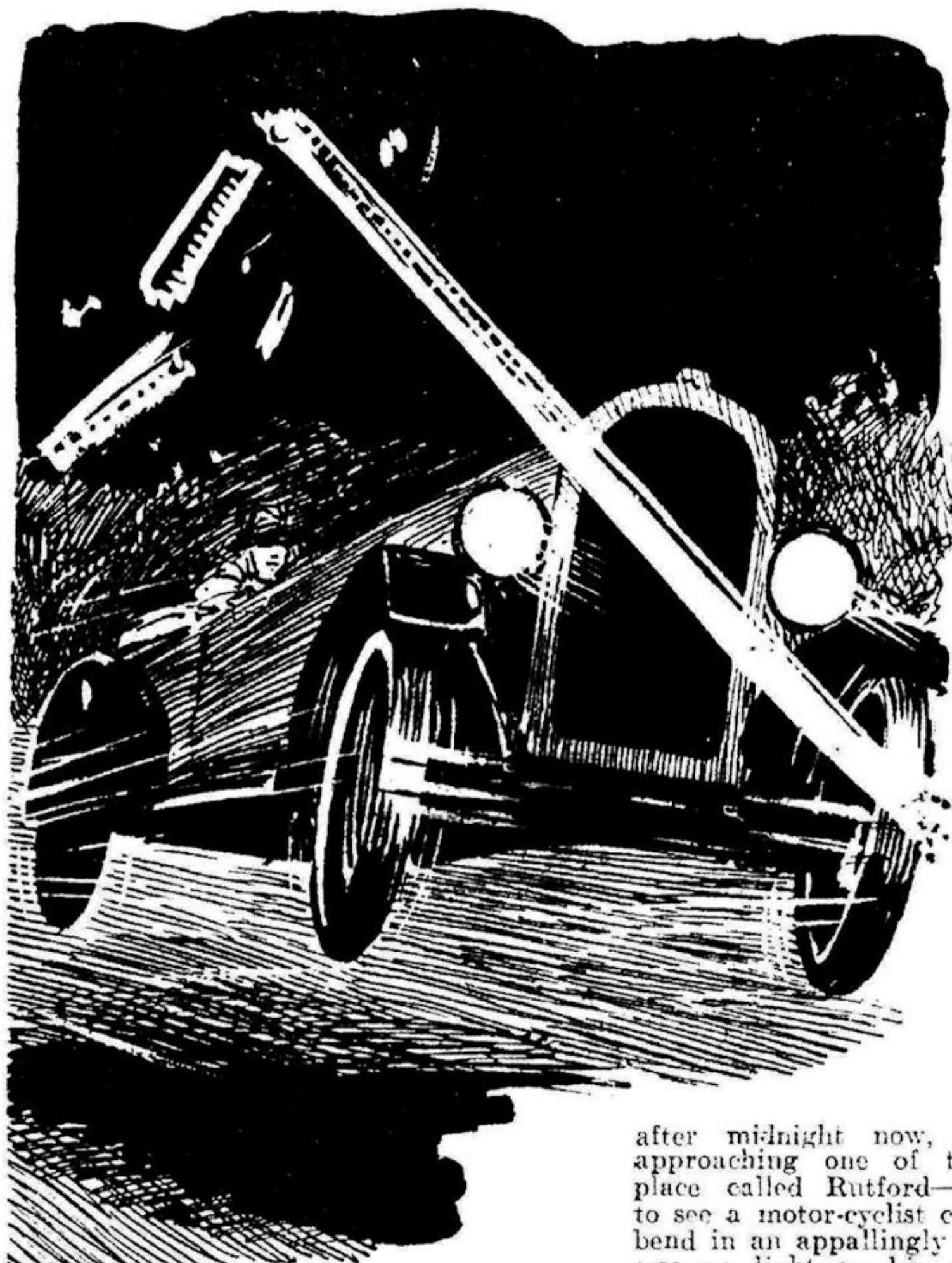


point of sailing, and numbers of powerful tugs were standing by. The last gangways were just being removed.

"All serene, gov'nor?" asked Nipper.

Nelson Lee had not taken the two "cubs" aboard with him. He had been accompanied only by two plain-clothes officers of the Southampton police force.

"It was quite simple, Nipper," said Lee contentedly. "We surprised our man in his cabin, and the handcuffs were on him before he could get his hand to his hip-pocket."



Undeterred by the bandits, Nelson Lee deliberately drove on, and his car struck the barrier with terrific force.

"My hat! He's a gunman, then?"

"Oh, yes," replied the great detective.

"Our friend is a gunman all right! He would have shot us down if he had had half a chance. He was brought ashore by plain-clothes officers five minutes ago—and by now, I should think, he is in a cell. Our task in Southampton is done."

"And that jewel case is done, too, sir," commented Nipper, with satisfaction.

"We'll get straight back to London," said Nelson Lee, as he climbed into the driving-seat. "I had originally intended staying in Southampton for something to eat; but in the circumstances I fancy we had better waste no time."

"You're thinking of Waldo, aren't you, Chief?" asked Fullwood.

"Yes," replied Nelson Lee, looking thoughtful. "Something else, too. The police, I understand, have had more than one report of highwaymen to-night. These rogues of the road have apparently been very busy. I doubt if we shall see anything of Waldo to-night—but there's just a chance. We shall return by that same road, anyhow, and Waldo knows this. He might be waiting for us at some point."

Two minutes later they were off. After threading their way out of the maze of docks, they sped out of Southampton and took the main road back to London. It was

after midnight now, and as they were approaching one of the smaller towns—a place called Rutford—they were surprised to see a motor-cyclist come tearing round a bend in an appallingly reckless way. There was no light on his machine, and Nelson Lee was compelled to swerve unpleasantly close to the ditch. The motor-cyclist waved one arm, and jammed on his brakes.

Lee and his companions were surprised to see that the newcomer was a young police constable. His tunic was only half buttoned, and he wore no helmet.

"I'd like to commandeer your car, sir!" he panted as he allowed his machine to crash over and ran up.

"What's happened?" asked Lee sharply.

"Robbers, sir—gunmen!" panted the constable. "They've got an armoured car in the market square—machine-guns—everything! They're holding up the local bank!"

"My only sainted aunt!" breathed Fullwood.

"They've cut all the telephone wires, and they're keeping everybody at bay with machine-guns," went on the policeman breathlessly. "Never saw anything like it in all my life!"

"How did you manage to get away, then?"

"I was asleep when the row started, sir. I dressed, ran out, but when I saw what was happening I knew that I couldn't do much good," explained the young officer. "So I dodged back, got my old bike out, and shot across to the main road by a footpath."

"Well done," said Lee approvingly.

"Your car's better than my bike, sir," went on the constable. "We'll drive to the next town, if you don't mind; perhaps we can get help."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I'm afraid we should be too late," he replied. "No; I think you had better carry on with your original plan. I'll drive into the town—"

"Hold on, sir," said the constable, his voice hardening. "This is an urgent matter. The bank is being robbed. I'm a police-officer, and I commandeer this car in the name of the law."

"I admire your zealous devotion to duty," said the great detective. "My name, officer, is Nelson Lee. I think you can trust me to handle—"

"Mr. Nelson Lee, sir?" broke in the constable, his manner changing. "Why, hang it, I thought your face was a bit familiar!" He saluted. "It's an honour to meet you, Mr. Lee."

"You go ahead on your cycle—do the best you can," said Lee. "I'll drive on and see what the bandits are doing."

"Yes, sir," said the constable, saluting again.

He ran to his motor-cycle, picked it up, and was in the saddle again within a few seconds. The machine went spluttering and roaring off into the darkness.

"Sensible chap, sir," commented Nipper.

"I shall make it my business to report his admirable conduct to his superior officers," nodded Lee. "Well, we'd better push on and see what's doing. There appears to be a good deal of excitement in Rutford."

"I'll bet they're the same men who tried to hold us up, sir!" said Fullwood.

"Men belonging to the same gang, perhaps—but not the actual men," replied Lee. "There was no armoured car when we were held up."

He switched off his lights, and proceeded cautiously, the engine purring with such smoothness that it was scarcely audible. Nipper and Fullwood peered eagerly forward towards the little town, their hearts racing and thudding.

On the outskirts of the town, Lee spotted a narrow lane leading off to the right. He turned into it, and the big racing car went bumping and jolting over the uneven surface. As he had expected, two other lanes branched off some distance along, and he took one of these—judging that it would lead towards the centre of the town by a roundabout route.

He was right. The car passed down a narrow, winding street, where quaint, old-fashioned houses and shops overhung the pavements. There was another sharp turn, and then the market square lay ahead. Lee brought his car to a standstill just inside

the square, and he stopped the engine. Nobody had noticed the arrival of this car; for the attention of everybody was directed towards a bank building on the other side of the square.

There were two or three hundred people in that open space, many of them only half-dressed. The whole place was throbbing and quivering with excitement. The uproar was tremendous. All round the square, windows were open and people were leaning out. The excited voices of hysterical women arose above all other sounds.

"Extraordinary!" muttered Nelson Lee, taking in the scene with one swift, comprehensive glance.

Even he was amazed. He had never expected to witness a scene such as this in a sleepy town. Nipper and Fullwood also watched, fascinated.

The building on the other side of the square was the local branch of a famous bank—in fact, the Southern Bank, Limited. Standing immediately in front of it was a low-built, powerful-looking armoured car. It was painted dark grey, and there was something wicked and menacing in its appearance. At the rear there was a sort of turret, and a machine-gun was mounted on this. Behind the gun stood a man. His face was concealed by a mask. He was training the gun on the crowd. Standing on the steps of the bank were two other men—and these held rifles to their shoulders. They, too, were masked.

"An ugly business, by the look of it," remarked Lee, compressing his lips.

"Great Scott!" breathed Nipper. "It's as bad as Chicago!"

Lee nodded. He, too, had been reminded of the desperate gunmen who occasionally raid banks in the United States. That such an order of things could happen in rural England was a staggering shock.

"Can't something be done, sir?" asked Fullwood breathlessly. "They're not going to let these rogues do just as they like, are they?"

"I can't see any way of stopping them, young 'un," replied Lee.

"Can't you do something, sir?"

"Not yet, Fullwood—later, perhaps."

Even as Nelson Lee was speaking the sharp crack of a rifle rang out, and a man's hoarse cry instantly followed. Lee caught sight of a police inspector; he had run forward suddenly out of the ranks of the crowd. The man fell and lay writhing on the ground. Instantly a great tumult arose—an uproar of anger and excitement. There were other police in that crowd, but wisely they hung back. They were not lacking in bravery or in devotion to duty, but they were unarmed, and the bandits had proved that they were ruthless.

A voice sounded, and apparently a megaphone was being used, for the voice was greatly amplified.

"Better keep back!" it sounded. "We've no quarrel with you good people, but if you

make any sudden move towards us we'll use this machine-gun. And that'll mean death!"

There was a hush—awed and breathless.

"Keep back, and you'll come to no harm!" went on the voice through the megaphone. "That police officer is only hit in the leg. If this machine-gun starts into action, it'll distribute death like wildfire. Keep back and you'll be safe!"

There were one or two angry shouts, but nobody moved.

"Two of you can come forward," added the voice. "Fetch this officer and take him back so that his leg can be attended to. But only two, mind! We'll start this little popgun if there's any rush."

Two policemen came forward out of the crowd; the unfortunate inspector was lifted and carried back. Just at that moment there came the sound of a muffled explosion from the interior of the bank building.

Boom-oom!

Many windows in that old market square rattled, and there was a fresh chorus of excited shouts.

"I was expecting that," murmured Lee. "They've blown the safe open!"

A few minutes later, several figures appeared in the shattered doorway of the bank; they were masked like the others. They were carrying bags and bundles.

"Looks like a rich haul," muttered Lee.

The engine of the armoured car sprang into life, roaring with terrific power. Powerful searchlights were switched on; the men climbed into the interior, and a heavy steel door clanged.

Crack—crack—crack—crack!

A salvo of shots sounded, and there were shrieks and shouts from the crowd. But those shots had been fired into the air, merely as a signal of departure. The armoured car jerked forward, a great siren screaming with devastating effect. The crowds ran, helter-skelter, as the monster bore down upon them.

"Now for it!" said Nelson Lee, his voice full of grim purpose. "This is what I have been waiting for!"

CHAPTER 4.

Vanished!

THE great detective touched the self-starter button, and the powerful engine of the racer purred into life. Nelson Lee depressed the clutch-pedal and engaged the gears.

"You're going to give chase, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"I am curious to see what the next move in this game will be," replied Lee. "As I have no desire to commit suicide, however—or to bring about the untimely decease of you boys—I shall keep at a respectable distance behind."

The armoured car, gathering speed rapidly, was shooting across the square, taking the main road towards London. Nelson Lee spent an anxious minute. His

car had no lights—he did not want to give the crooks an inkling that he was following yet, and he was afraid that the crowds would get into the way and thus delay the chase. However, by skilful driving, Lee dodged through before the good people of Rutford could spread themselves over the road again. The car was out on the open highway within a few seconds. Then suddenly the dazzling beam of a searchlight blazed into Nelson Lee's eyes. The effect was blinding.



"My giddy aunt!" gasped Nipper. "I hadn't expected that!"

"I was waiting for it," said Lee calmly.

With a flick, he pulled a pair of goggles down from his cap. No ordinary motorist could have withstood that white, devastating glare. Even an anti-dazzle shield would have been ineffective. But those goggles of Nelson Lee's were a speciality of his own—a product of his private laboratory. He could see the road just as clearly as before, and all the dazzle was taken out of that blinding searchlight.

On the armoured car, the man in the little turret who was operating the searchlight called down to his companions, in the body of the vehicle.

"This blamed fool is following!" he shouted.

"Let him follow!" came a defiant reply from the driver. "We'll soon shake him off!"

He opened the throttle, and the monster engine with which this car was equipped answered like some animal to which a spur had been applied. It leapt forward, pounding and drumming over the smooth highway.

"We've moving now!" said a man who was sitting next to the driver.

"Look!" exclaimed the latter. "Sixty-five—seventy—seventy-five!"

"The Boss knew what he was doing when he got hold of these buses," put in one of the other men. "We can lick anything on the road! What's the haul, boys?"

"Don't know yet. Pretty good, though—something between eight and ten thousand."

"Not bad for a country bank," said somebody.

The man in the turret called down again:

"This fool's still on our tail. Let her right out, Fred!"

The driver cursed. The immensely powerful headlamps—they were really searchlights—revealed the road for nearly a mile ahead. There was a curve not far off, and instead of increasing speed he would be obliged to slacken.

"We're doing eighty!" he grated. "Let the fellow have a taste of the machine-gun!"

But Nelson Lee, at the wheel of the powerful racer, was not bent upon precipitating a fight. Such folly would have meant disaster. He contented himself with keeping well in the rear, out of range of the machine-guns and rifles.

It was thrilling—exhilarating—wildly exciting. Nipper and Fullwood, clinging to their seats, felt their hearts thudding tumultuously. This was the real thing! A headlong chase through the darkness of the night—the glorious thrill of speed! Another straight stretch loomed in front—a clear mile of open, deserted highway. Seventy—seventy-five—eighty—eighty-five! Fast as the armoured car went, Nelson Lee's racer followed.

In the armoured car the crooks were changing their tone.

"We can't do it, Fred!" shouted the man with the searchlight. "This bird is behind all the time! Must be a Bentley—or a Sunbeam."

"We'll get him!" grated the driver. "Got the machine-gun handy?"

"Yes!"

"All right, then—look out!" called the driver. "I'm going to slow right down—suddenly. Hang on, everybody! That fool won't be prepared, and he'll come within range!"

"I'll get him!" said the man in the turret.

"Give him all you've got!" panted one of the other men.

A screech arose as the armoured car's brakes were applied. The vehicle rocked and swayed as her speed was reduced. The man with the machine-gun had his finger on the automatic trigger.

Crackle-crackle-crackle!

The gun spat with vicious fury. Then the man at the trigger cursed with rage. For the following car, instead of coming within range, slackened its speed in exactly the same way as the fugitive.

"He's wise to us!" snarled the man with the gun.

He was right. Nelson Lee had been on the look-out for such a manoeuvre from the first. He had been ready for instant action; and when he had seen a spark or two flying from the rear wheels of the armoured car, he had known what was in the wind.

"They're trying to trap us, boys," said Lee. "But we weren't born yesterday, eh?"

"Supposing they stop altogether, guv'nor?" asked Nipper breathlessly.

"Then we shall stop, too," replied Lee. "They can't get us, young 'un. If we have to stop, we'll stop out of range—and before

they can take any sort of action we can be well away."

He increased speed as he spoke, for the bandits were again racing away into the night, cursing at the failure of their dodge. Once again the wild chase continued.

Through sleeping hamlets, over bridges, round curves—sometimes with two wheels almost leaving the road—on through a town, thundering and roaring, to the startled amazement of more than one night-duty constable. Occasionally a lorry would be met, and the armoured car, its syren screaming, would charge past. More than one sleepy lorry driver—more than one late private motorist—received the fright of his life. And still the chase went on, with Nelson Lee clinging grimly and relentlessly to the "tail" of the fugitive bandits.

Twice the bandits had left the main highway, taking to secondary roads; but they had been unable to shake off this unexpected pursuer. They had left Rutford in triumph, but by now they were filled with alarm. They had believed that their car was capable of outdistancing anything on the road!

"They've doubled back!" said Lee, after a series of nerve-shattering twists and bends had been negotiated at high speed. "They're on the main road again by now—and going over the same stretch of highway as before——"

He broke off, staring intently ahead. The fugitives had disappeared round a gradual bend, several hundred yards ahead. At the same moment the searchlight had snapped out. More than this; the armoured car's headlights had gone, too. The vehicle was now lost to sight.

"Is it a trap, guv'nor?" asked Nipper tensely.

"It looks tricky," admitted Lee.

He had half an idea that the crooks had stopped just round the bend—perhaps dodging into some tiny by-way, ready to ambush the pursuing car when it arrived. Nelson Lee was not to be caught so easily. He reduced speed, and his own brilliant headlamps revealed the road with dazzling clarity.

The bend was reached, and the racing roadster glided round. Another long stretch, straight and level, came within sight. There was utterly no sign of the armoured car. The hedges were short, and on either side of the road there were high, grassy banks. It was impossible for that grey monster to be concealed; there was not a side road, not a gateway, not a backwater of any description.

"Queer!" muttered Lee, fully on the alert.

He increased speed. His eyes were intent upon the roadsides and the hedges, but nothing happened. The fugitive car seemed to have vanished into thin air. A signpost appeared, and a small lane led off to the left. With a sudden decision, Lee trod hard on the foot throttle. The racer leapt forward. It shot past that side road like a rocket,



The bandits drove away, little suspecting that Stanley Waldo was clinging on to the back of their car.

Lee yelling to the boys to duck low. But no stream of machine-gun bullets spattered out. The armoured car was not lurking there. Half a mile further on there was another side road—this time to the right. Again Nelson Lee charged on at full speed, taking the risk. And again there was the same result. Then houses loomed up ahead—street lamps—pavements. Another town had been reached.

"Police!" ejaculated Nipper suddenly.

Lee had already seen. A cordon of police officers stood in the road, and Nelson Lee could see that they were ready to jump

aside. The detective slowed down and came to a standstill. Instantly the police made a rush.

"Steady, inspector!" said Nelson Lee, as a big, broad-shouldered police inspector leapt upon the footboard and placed a heavy hand on his shoulder. "I don't think you want to arrest me, do you?"

The inspector's face was pale and drawn.

"Who are you?" he rapped out. "We're looking for——"

"Bandits," said Lee, nodding. "I know. But my name is Nelson Lee——"

"Why, of course—I recognise you now, sir!" said the inspector with relief.

Lee admired the pluck of these police officers. Believing this car to contain armed bandits, they had nevertheless leapt at it in order to perform their duty.

"It's a regular nightmare, Mr. Lee!" ejaculated the inspector. "Bank robbery at Rutford—another one at Darrow—motorists held up and robbed in a score of places—and Heaven only knows what else! We've had reports from all quarters. Surrey and Sussex and Kent are full of bandits, by the look of things!"

"I've been following an armoured car from Rutford," said Lee quickly. "We got there while the raid was in progress—couldn't do anything against those armed bandits—but we followed. We've been chasing the beggars for miles."

"Gave you the slip, did they, sir?"

"I can't understand it," said Lee, frowning. "Has any armoured car come through here?"

"We've seen no sign of it," replied the inspector, shaking his head.

"How long have you had this cordon across the road?"

"For the past half-hour."

"And no armoured car came this way!" said Lee, pursing his lips. "That's infernally funny, inspector! We didn't lose

sight of it for a minute until they put the lights out. I expected an ambush, but there wasn't one."

"Must have dodged up a side road," said the inspector.

"That's all I can think," nodded Nelson Lee with considerable annoyance. "Confound them! I didn't think they would be able to elude me like that. I'm going back to make sure."

"Any objection if I come with you, sir?" asked the inspector.

"Not at all—jump aboard," said Lee. "There's room for one of your men, too."

The inspector and a constable jumped on, and a sergeant was left in charge. Lee reversed, turned the car round, and sped back along that stretch of road in which the bandits had disappeared. They came to the first side road, and Nelson Lee stopped. One glance up the narrow lane was sufficient. The surface was gravelly and damp. There were no tyre marks visible, as there would have been had the fugitive car passed that way.

"They didn't come up here, sir," said the inspector. "And they couldn't have turned off at any other place, because there's no road—not even a farm track."

"You're right—there is nothing," agreed Lee. "We'll carry on to the next side road."



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.

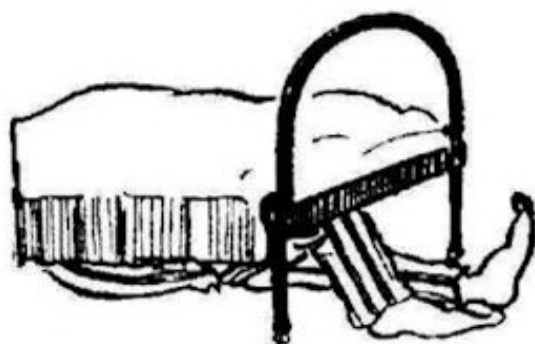
"Roadside" Repairs!

An important person was being taken round the hospital by a nurse. On coming into one ward the man asked what kind of patients were kept there. The nurse replied that it was a ward for motor-maniacs.

"But there is no one in the beds!" said the important one.

"No," replied the nurse; "at present they are all under their beds doing repairs."

(T. W. Moloney, 36, The Lawns, Hinckley, Leicestershire, has been awarded a handsome watch.)



A Brain-wave!

Jimmie (only son of a famous and much-transferred footballer): "Mother, I want a bicycle."

Mother: "But we can't afford it."

Jimmie: "Then let's sell daddy again!"

(J. Harris, 57, Probyn House, Page Street, Westminster, S.W.1, has been awarded a penknife.)

Seething!

A very small car was stranded for petrol on a lonely road, the nearest garage being eight miles away. Then a large, magnificent car came in sight.

The driver of the stranded vehicle stepped into the middle of the road and signalled the other to stop. Out stepped the occupant, who was acquainted with the position.

"It's not petrol you want," he sniffed, eyeing the very small car. "You want a new flint!"

(G. Nuttall, St. Augustine's Vicarage, Tonge Moor, Bolton, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

He Was Unlucky!

First Office-boy: "Don't you ever have a day off for your grandmother's funeral?"

Second Office-boy: "What a hope! I work



They drove on, keeping their eyes open. The lodge gates of a big country house came within sight, and they were closed.

"Couldn't have dodged up there, sir," said the inspector, as he noticed Nelson Lee's glance. "That's Hale Manor—Sir Bertram Fleming's place. Wouldn't be any good the crooks dodging up that drive, even if the gates had been open. It only leads to a house."

"No chance there, then," said Lee, nodding. "Well, what about this next road?"

He brought the racer to a standstill again. This second lane proved as unenlightening as the first. There were tyre marks, true enough, but they were small and a day or two old. Probably some commercial car had been along there recently. That armoured car belonging to the bandits had certainly not passed that way. Lee drove on until he arrived at the spot where he had been when the bandits lights had been switched off.

"It's—it's uncanny, guv'nor," said Nipper, staring. "Those crooks disappeared somewhere between here and the town, but how *could* they have disappeared? They didn't go down either of those side roads, and there's only one private house."

"With a drive and a lodge," put in the inspector. "If the beggars had tried to get up that drive the lodge-keeper would have been awakened. There's nowhere. Are you

sure, Mr. Lee, that this is the place? Couldn't the bandits have put their lights out a mile or two farther back?"

"No—this is the place," replied Lee. "I don't mind admitting that I am exceedingly puzzled."

He was more than puzzled—he was baffled.

How had that bandit car got away?

CHAPTER 5.

The Next Move!

IT was some time between three and four when Nelson Lee's powerful racer drove into London.

"What now, sir?" asked Nipper, as Lee brought the racer to a standstill in the early morning quietness of Gray's Inn Road.

"Bed, young 'un," replied Lee promptly. "We must get some sleep; can't work efficiently without sleep, you know. You two boys had better get straight in. No need for you to wait for me. I'll put the car up."

The racer was purring quietly. The bandits had been wrong in setting her down as a Bentley or a Sunbeam. Actually, Nelson Lee's famous car was a Rolls-Royce Special. Her engine was really of an aero type, specially adapted for road use. On

for the blooming registrar of births and deaths!"

(*F. Stevens, 21, Chestnut Walk, Harebreaks, Watford, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

Foresight!

When Angus McBain beheld McTavish drowning, he had more sense than to pull him out, but went off to try and get his job at the shipyard.

"You're too late, laddie," he was informed by the foreman. "We've given his job to Sandy Fraser, who pushed him in!"

(*R. Norman, 14, Bayston Road, London, N.16, has been awarded a penknife.*)

He Obligated!

Persistent Traveller: "I do wish you would give me an order, sir."

Business Man: "Certainly. Get out!"

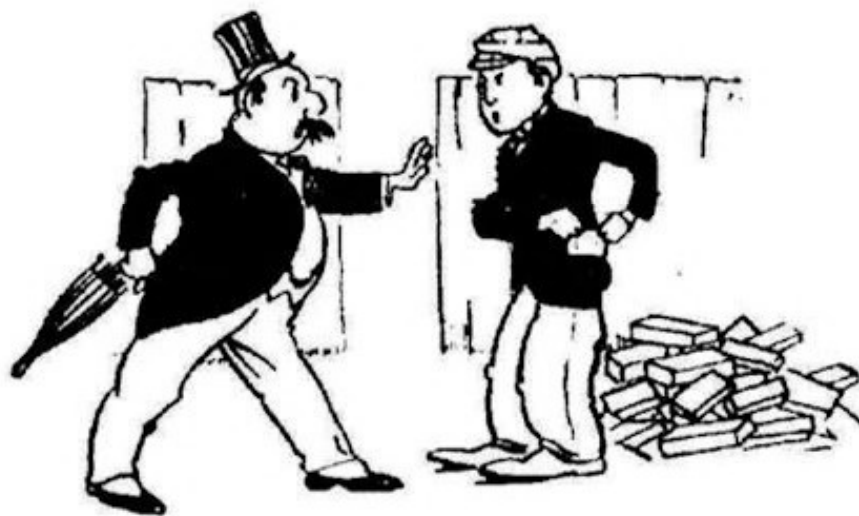
(*H. Ostler, 15, Park Grove Road, Leytonstone, E.11, has been awarded a penknife.*)

Moth-eaten!

First tar (referring to new officer): "There ain't no flies on him!"

Second tar (referring to officer's baldness): "No, but you can see where the moths have been at him!"

(*R. Pickard, 15, Danby Street, Peckham, S.E.15, has been awarded a penknife.*)



His Mistake!

Entering the football enclosure one of the spectators was observed to walk towards a pile of bricks and put one in each pocket.

"Hi!" said an official. "Those bricks are for the new grandstand!"

"I'm sorry," replied the man. "I thought they were for the referee!"

(*L. Booth, 51, Derby Street, off Broxton Drive, Mansfield, Notts, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

A Golfing Story!

Golfer: "Hi, caddy! Isn't Major Pepper out of that bunker yet? How many strokes has he had?"

Caddie: "Eighteen ordinary and two apoplectic, sir!"

(*G. Bisset, 18, Hertford Road, East Finchley, N.2, has been awarded a penknife.*)

Tact!

Examining admiral: "Name four great admirals."

Tactful recruit: "Drake, Nelson, Beatty—I did not catch your name, sir!"

(*G. Murphy, 12, Hill Street, Dukinfield, Cheshire, has been awarded a penknife.*)

the track, this car could touch the hundred-and-fifty-mile-an-hour mark with ease.

When Nipper and Fullwood got into the Detective Academy, they found most of the "cubs" awake. Fenton and Morrow and Biggleswade, the senior scholars of this most novel academy, were all fully dressed. Browne and Handforth and Glenthorne and Travers, and the rest, were mostly in pyjamas and dressing-gowns. They were all collected in the big Common-room of the academy—a most comfortable apartment this, with a soft carpet on the floor, lounge-chairs dotted here and there, and with writing-tables and handy reading-lamps.

"Hallo, by George! Here they are!" sang out Handforth eagerly, as the pair entered. "Now we shall hear something exciting. It's been very interesting talking about St. Frank's—we're all pleased to hear that the old school is being rebuilt and will be finished shortly, but——"

"Has Waldo come back?" interrupted Nipper, looking quickly round the room.

"No," replied Fenton, puzzled. "We thought he was with you."

"He was—but he went off on a special job," replied Nipper. "He hasn't got back, eh? That looks bad."

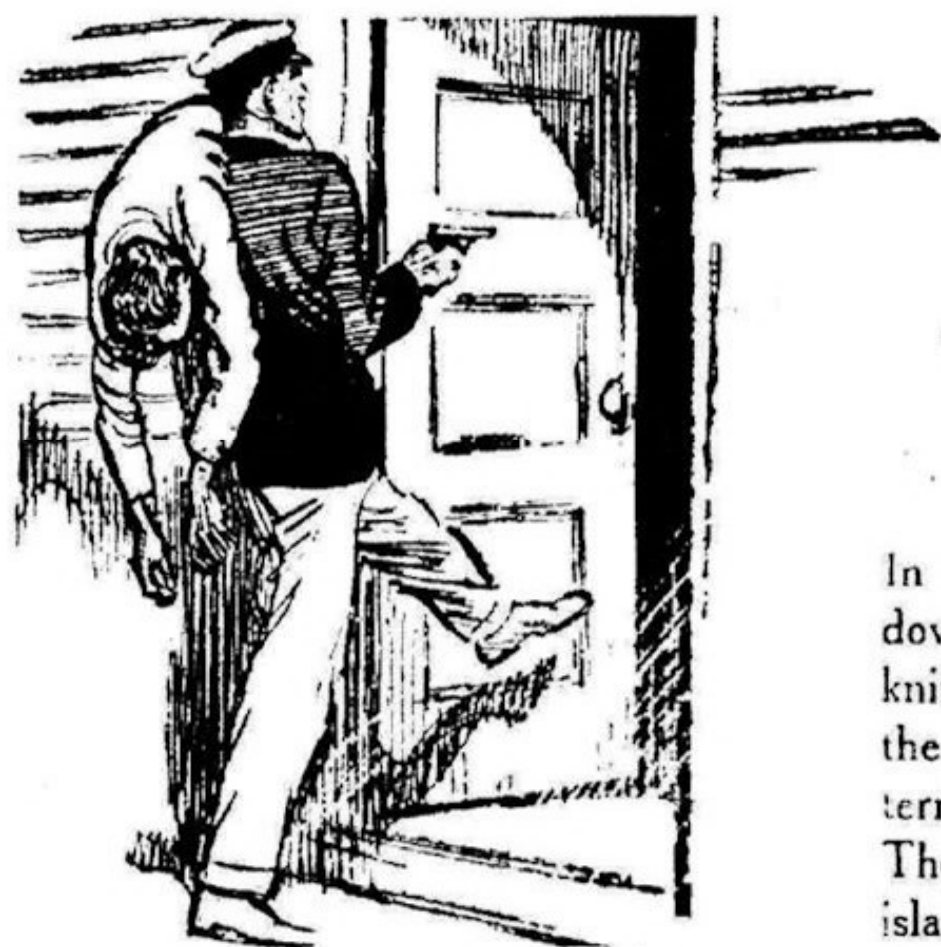
William Napoleon Browne came over and placed a hand on Nipper's shoulder.

"Without wishing to appear over-inquisitive, brother, may we ask exactly what has been happening?" he inquired. "We have heard, on unimpeachable authority, that various manœuvres of a hectic character have been taking place over the countryside during the night."

"Manœuvres!" echoed Nipper. "There's been the very dickens! Bandits—hold-ups—bank robberies! How did you know?"

"Mr. Lennard, of the Yard, 'phoned up once," explained Fenton, "and, when he told us what was happening, we thought

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we'd like to keep in touch with things. But we're still pretty puzzled."

"No more puzzled than the guv'nor is," said Nipper. "By Jove! We've had a thrilling time! If you can picture Rutford as a sort of miniature Chicago, you'll get an idea of what has been happening."

He gave a few brief details, and all the young detectives listened eagerly and breathlessly.

"Alas! It was ever thus!" sighed Browne, dolefully shaking his head. "Whenever there is something particularly juicy afoot, I am left out of it!"

"You chaps get all the fat!" said Edward Oswald Handforth, with a grunt.

"Never mind that," retorted Nipper. "What about Waldo? I'm worried—dashed worried."

The door opened, and Nelson Lee entered. When he learned that Waldo had not returned, he was not perturbed.

"Well, there's nothing more we can do now," he said. "You boys had better get to bed again—you were a crowd of young asses to disturb your sleep, in any case."

"What about Waldo, sir?" asked Nipper.

"He'll turn up—probably later in the morning," replied Lee confidently.

YET when Nipper got up at half-past eight, after three or four hours sleep, there was still no sign of Stanley Waldo. He had not returned, and no word had come from him. It was this latter fact which caused Nelson Lee an inward qualm of uneasiness. Even if Waldo had been held up somewhere in the country, he could, at least, have telephoned.

"What are you going to do, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

He had found Nelson Lee in his private sitting-room, leading out of the consulting-room. The great detective had just finished a snack of breakfast, and, although he had had only a brief sleep, he was looking fresh and alert.

"About Waldo?" he asked. "Nothing—yet."

"I'm afraid that he's got into a mess, sir."

"We'll give him a chance, young 'un," replied Lee. "When I put one of you cubs on to a special duty, I trust him. In all probability, Waldo is doing his job, and he will report in due course. Have a look at this."

Lee indicated a morning newspaper, and Nipper picked it up. Across the front page, in huge headlines, were the words:

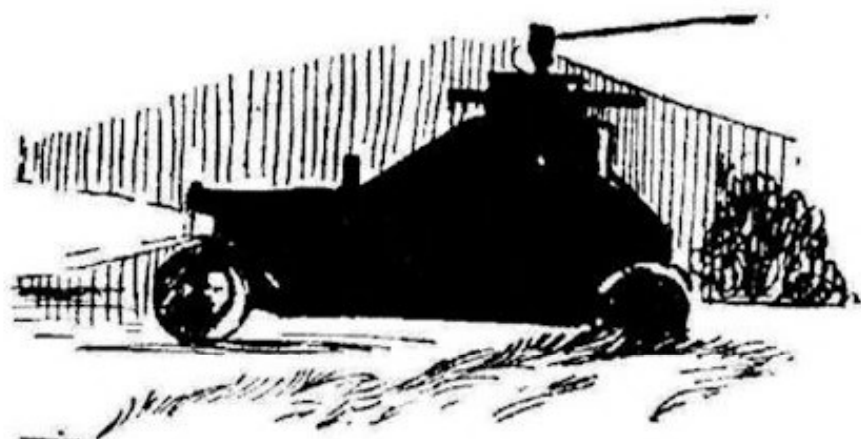
"Amazing Series of Hold-Ups in Southern Counties"—"Modern Highwaymen Make Rich Haul"—"U.S. Methods in England."

"This is staggering, guv'nor!" said Nipper, taking a deep breath. "That armoured car we chased seems to have made three or four raids on banks! It says here that at least five banks were openly entered and robbed—and the same methods were used every time. An armoured car, and bandits with machine-guns!"

"Perhaps there was more than one armoured car, Nipper."

"Phew! It's a stupendous gang, then!" ejaculated Nipper. "And look at this! Between forty and fifty motorists held up and robbed of all their valuables! My only sainted aunt! What a night!"

"We only saw a fringe of it," nodded Lee. "These crooks were operating, it seems, over



a wide area between the hours of midnight and four a.m."

"And the police have done nothing!" commented Nipper, with a sniff.

"Steady, old man! Give them a chance!" protested Nelson Lee. "The police were taken completely by surprise, and, naturally, they could not do a great deal. When they are caught napping a second time, it will be for us to criticise them."

Zing-zing!

The telephone twin-bells rang sharply, and Lee lifted the receiver from its hook.

"Waldo!" muttered Nipper eagerly.

"Yes, this is the number you require, madam," said Lee. "Yes—speaking."

"Can you come at once, Mr. Lee?" came a lady's agitated voice. "I am Lady Wroxton, of Wroxton Park, Bucks. Perhaps you have heard of the dreadful things that have been happening during the night?"

"Yes, madam, I am aware of what has been taking place."

"My husband, Lord Wroxton, was held up outside our lodge gates late last night, Mr. Lee!" said the lady agitatedly. "He resisted the dreadful bandits, and he was shot dead."

"I am indeed grieved to hear this," said Lee gravely.

"I want you so much to come, Mr. Lee!" pleaded Lady Wroxton. "Some very valuable papers were stolen from my poor husband, and it is imperative—vital—that they should be recovered. I cannot possibly give you the details over the telephone."

"But surely the police—"

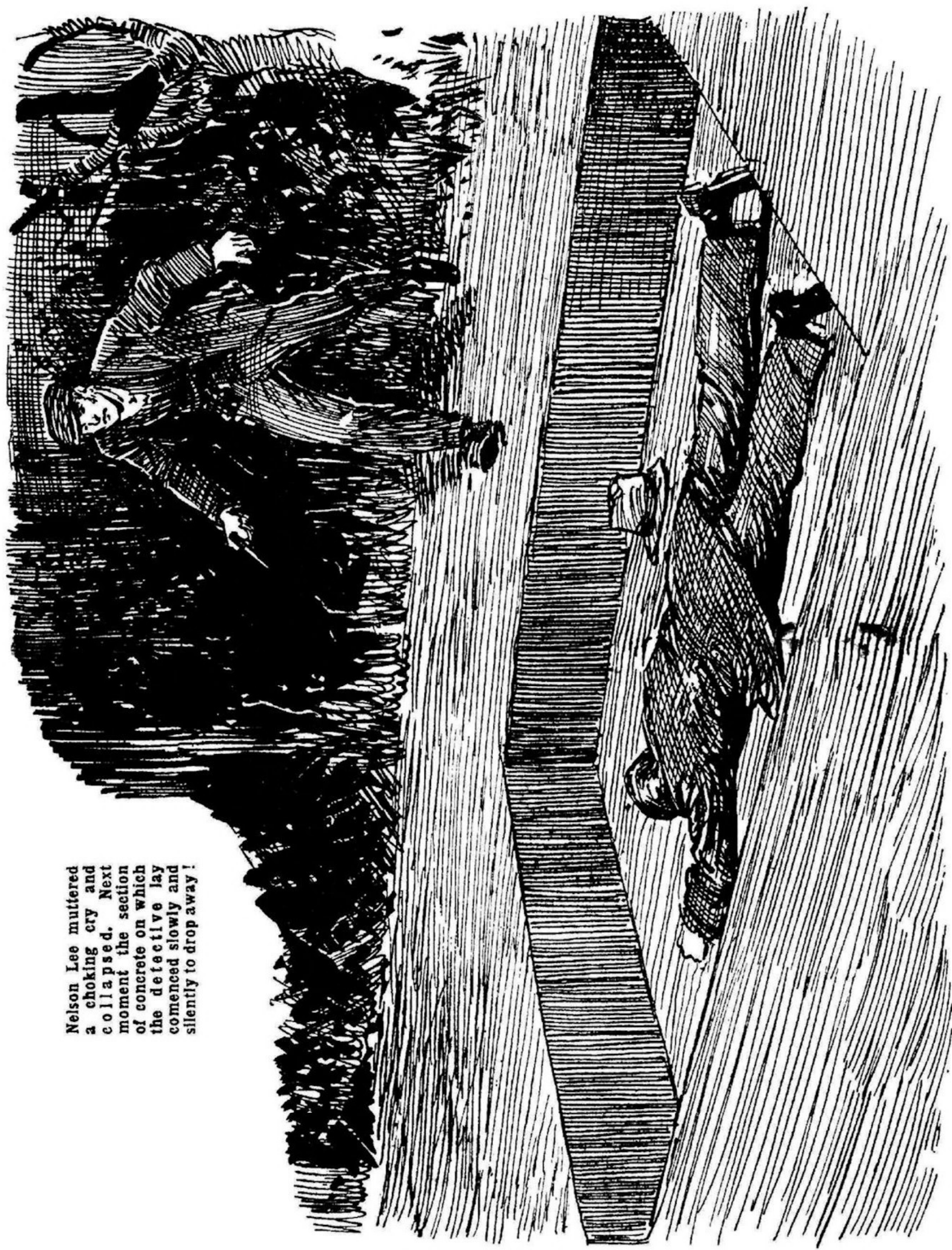
"The police are useless!" interrupted the lady. "I am tired of them, Mr. Lee! They can do nothing but ask inane questions."

"Even if I come, I am afraid there is very little that I can do," demurred Lee. "I really think that the police—"

"No, no!" interrupted Lady Wroxton. "I want you, Mr. Lee! There is something of paramount importance which I must tell you, and which I cannot tell you over the telephone. Please, please come!"

Her tone was half-hysterical, and, in the circumstances, perhaps this was not to be

Nelson Lee muttered a choking cry and collapsed. Next moment the section of concrete on which the detective lay commenced slowly and silently to drop away!



wondered at. Nelson Lee could deal very effectively with hysterical women when he had them face to face; but it was more difficult over the telephone.

"You say that Wroxton Park is in Buckinghamshire?" he asked, as though playing for time.

"Yes—Bucks."

"Buckinghamshire?"

"Of course—Buckinghamshire," came Lady Wroxton's impatient voice. "You can name any fee you choose, Mr. Lee. I have the utmost faith in your ability, and, as I have said, this matter is terribly vital."

Nelson Lee made up his mind.

"Very well, Lady Wroxton, I will come," he promised.

"At once?"

"Yes, at once," replied Lee. "I will leave without a moment's unnecessary delay."

"Oh, this is good of you, and I am so grateful," came Lady Wroxton's voice. "But don't come by train, Mr. Lee—the service is poor. You will get here much better if you use your car."

"I should not think of coming in any other way," answered Nelson Lee dryly. "Expect me within the hour, Lady Wroxton."

He hung up the receiver, and found Nipper looking at him with anxious eyes.

"What's the idea, guv'nor?" asked Nipper. "What about Waldo?"

"I will admit that I am just a little anxious concerning Waldo, but we must continue to carry on, young 'un," said Lee. "And it is highly possible that I shall be able to pick up something useful at Wroxton Park. The bandits were there last night—they murdered Lord Wroxton—and it will be strange if they have not left a single clue."

He lifted the receiver again, and was soon in touch with Scotland Yard. He requested to be put through to the office of Chief Detective-inspector Lennard, and he soon heard the bluff inspector's voice.

"Oh, hallo, Lee!" said Lennard eagerly. "I've been trying to get in touch with you. What do you think of this Edgar Wallace stuff?"

"It's bad business, old man."

"Bad business!" echoed the chief inspector bitterly.

"It's rotten! If I wasn't a

police officer, if I wasn't afraid of sullyng the ears of any girl operator who happens to be listening in, I could fire off a supply of language that would surprise you!"

"You sound rather peeved, Lennard."

"Just you watch the newspapers," said the chief inspector sourly. "Scotland Yard's going to get it in the neck over this—and even the Government won't escape criticism. But I'd like to know, by all that's infernal, how we could prepare ourselves for such a game? I understand that you were in the thick of things last night?"

"Pretty well," said Lee. "Later on,

Nelson Lee muttered a choking cry and collapsed. Next moment the section of concrete on which the detective lay commenced slowly and silently to drop away!



Lennard, I'd like to have a chat with you; just at the moment I'm off down to Wroxton Park."

"Then you might meet me there," said the chief inspector. "I have an idea that I shall be shot off on that affair. Those blighting bandits murdered Lord Wroxton, and there's the devil to pay. I think he resisted, or something."

"Just a minute, Lennard," said Lee, turning away from the 'phone and looking at Nipper. "Buzz round, young 'un, and fetch the car."

"O.K., Chief!" said Nipper briefly.

WHEN he got back, Nelson Lee had finished his chat over the 'phone with Chief Inspector Lennard, and he was looking brisk and alert.

"Am I coming, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"Afraid not; there's nothing you could do," replied Nelson Lee. "Stay here, Nipper, and keep your eye on things in general."

"If Waldo turns up, shall I 'phone you?"

"If he turns up there'll be no need—and if he doesn't turn up it would be just as pointless to 'phone," said Nelson Lee, as he prepared to go. "I don't suppose I shall be away very long; I can soon deal with this matter, and if I pick up a few clues, all the better."

He hurried down, leapt into his waiting car, and the latter was soon threading its way through the busy traffic of Gray's Inn Road.

Two minutes after he had gone, a man, lounging about on the other side of the street, went into a public telephone box and gave a number on the Harrow exchange. He was soon through.

"That you, Smallpox?" he asked, when he heard a voice.

"Yes, Measles," replied the voice. "What's the wire?"

"L' has just gone, so you'd better be ready."

Without another word he hung up the receiver and left the box, an ugly smile on his face!

CHAPTER 6.

The Trap!

THE April morning was sunny and bright as Nelson Lee drove out of London. It was a real spring day, with a crisp blue sky flecked with little white fleecy clouds. It was a day which made one feel good to be alive.

Once beyond the outskirts of the great metropolis, Lee put on speed. Not that he drove furiously; he seldom allowed the Rolls-Royce Special to go beyond the forty-miles-an-hour mark—



and this, for such a car, was a crawl. He had passed Rickmansworth, and was on the stretch of road which led towards Chesham. Wroxton Park was not many miles further on, picturesquely situated in the Chilterns.

Lee came to a spot where there was a fairly long length of clear road ahead. Behind him sounded the raucous note of an electric hooter. He drew farther over to the near side of the road, glancing into his rear mirror as he did so. He could see a powerful open car overtaking him. He did not glance round, but merely beckoned the car on with the recognised hand-signal.

And now the great detective's lips were set in a thin line. He watched his rear mirror intently—knowing perfectly well that his very life depended upon his quickness of action. A steely glitter entered his eyes as he beheld the big open car drawing nearer; and now he saw two men standing up in the rear seats. Both of these men held automatic pistols in their hands.

"Good!" muttered Lee. "Exactly as I expected! But you've made a mistake, my friends—I'm not caught napping, as you hoped!"

With a sudden swerve, he went from one side of the road to the other, right in the path of the overtaking car, just as it was on the point of commencing to shoot past. It was a risky thing to do—but Nelson Lee's nerves were of steel. That swerve of his had the immediate effect he desired; the overtaking car was compelled to swerve, too, and the driver jammed on his brakes until the wheels locked and shrieked. Incidentally, the aim of those two gunmen was utterly destroyed.

In a flash, Nelson Lee turned, his own gun in his hand.

Crack-crack!

Two shots he fired as he swung round in his seat and took aim, and never had he been cooler—never had he been more deadly. Both those bullets took effect. The two front tyres of the bandit car burst in quick succession. Yelling with sudden alarm, the driver nearly lost control. The car, swaying dizzily, and skidding from side to side, plunged on to the grassy side of the road. At the same moment Nelson Lee jammed his own brakes on, vaulted to the road in one clear leap before the car had stopped, and then ran swiftly back. He reached the other car before it finished its violent jolting.

"Hands up!" he commanded sharply.

The surprise was absolute. That other car contained the driver and the two gunmen. These latter were looking startled, dismayed, even scared. One of them attempted to take aim.

Crack!

Lee's automatic spat, and a shriek arose from the man as his weapon went flying, and he clutched at his arm.

"I warned you, my friend!" rapped out Nelson Lee. "Hands up—all of you! And keep them up!"

"He's got the drop on us, boys!" gasped the driver, shooting his hands into the air.

A powerful saloon car came humming along the road from the direction of Rickmansworth. It pulled up smartly, and out tumbled Chief Detective-inspector Lennard and five men of the Flying Squad.

"Here they are, Lennard," said Lee, without turning his head. "Better get the handcuffs on them without delay."

"You said a mouthful," grinned the chief inspector.

A MINUTE later the three crooks were handcuffed, and, very crestfallen, they were bundled into the police saloon.

"That was smart work, Lee," said the Yard man admiringly. "By glory! You needed a tidy nerve, too!"

"Not so much," replied Lee, making light of his achievement. "I had the advantage of them; I knew they were coming, and I was prepared. Well, we've got three of the gang now, Lennard, and it's just possible that you might be able to get something out of them."

"We'll try!" said the Yard man grimly.

"It'll be something for the newspapers, too," said Lee, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Scotland Yard hasn't been so slow, after all, eh? Three of the bandits arrested already!"

"Yes—by you!"

"My dear chap, don't bring me into it," said Lee. "You can have the credit of this—and welcome."

"You're a sportsman, Lee," said the Yard man gratefully. "Why on earth were you so sure that this was a trap to 'get' you?"

"Merely a matter of reasoning," replied the famous criminologist. "I figured that the bandits had recognised my car last night; they knew that it was I who chased them so relentlessly. I gave them a very uncomfortable time; and, between you and me, I believe I nearly ran them to earth. Naturally, they concentrated their attention this morning upon putting me out of the way. They didn't want a repetition of that chase."

"Yes, I see," nodded Lennard.

"I wasn't actually suspicious of the 'phone call at first," went on Lee, "but it struck me as rather peculiar that Lady Wroxton should desire my aid, and the story of a vitally private matter was not very convincing. It also happens that I have met Lady Wroxton, and, although women's voices are none too distinguishable over the telephone, I fancied there was a false note in that voice. And when I made the lady repeat the word 'Buckinghamshire' I was convinced that there was something in the wind."

"The word 'Buckinghamshire'?" repeated Lennard curiously.

"It is a very useful thing, old man, to remember comparatively unimportant trifles. I recalled that Lady Wroxton has a way of referring to her home county as Bucking-

hamshire, with quite unnecessary emphasis on the 'ham.' The lady on the telephone did not use that emphasis."

"You're a caution!" declared Lennard, with a whistle. "You're quite right, though—that little idiosyncrasy of Lady Wroxton's was certainly worth remembering. You knew, at once, that this woman was a fake."

"So I was on the look-out for something exciting along this road," said Lee. "That was why—after I had sent Nipper for the car—I requested you to come along with a few of your Flying Squad men."

"We've had you in sight ever since you left Harrow," said the chief inspector.

They walked across to the bandit's car, and Nelson Lee examined it with interest. It was a powerful open four-seater—a Graham-Paige.

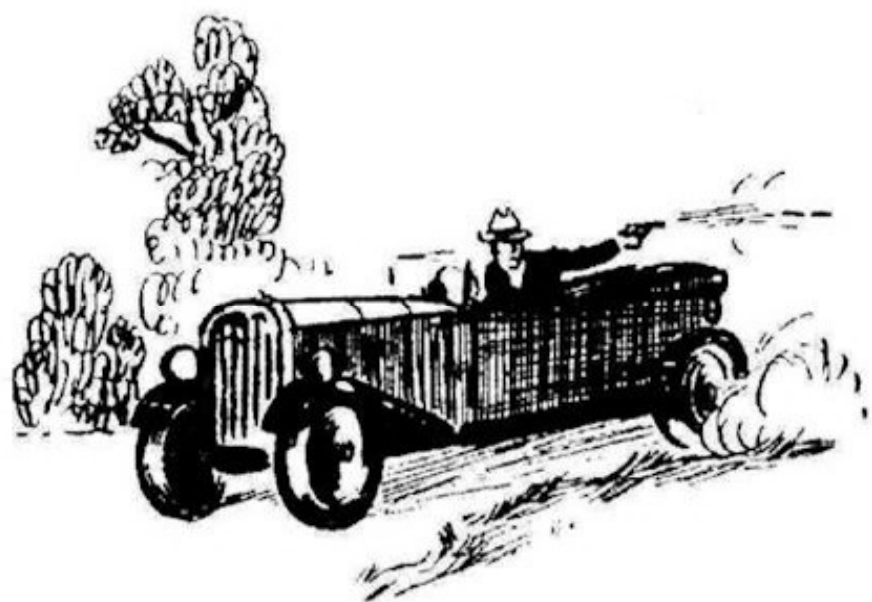
"Stolen, I'll bet!" commented Lennard. "False numbers, of course. Anyhow, we'll soon make certain. By Jove, this is round one to you, Lee, all right!"

Nelson Lee did not appear to be listening. He was looking thoughtfully at the offside front wing of the bandit car.

"What is it?" asked Lennard.

Lee pointed, and the Yard man could see a long scratch on the outer edge of the wing, as though the car, in emerging from a narrow gateway, had scraped against a wall or a fence.

"What about it?" asked Lennard.



"This is new, old man—it was probably done during the night."

"Supposing it was?"

"It might be useful, that's all," replied Lee. "I've no doubt that this car was used, among others, in the recent series of hold-ups. I'm glad I noticed this, Lennard."

"Well, personally, I can't see how it will help us," said the chief inspector. "That scratch might have been made anywhere, by anything."

"It might, of course," agreed Lee. "Yet I fancy that there's a clue here."

He took a small metal box from his pocket, opened his pen-knife, and carefully scraped some tiny flakes of greenish paint from the damaged wing. In his eyes there was an expression of keen satisfaction.

"Aren't you going to look at that stuff through your magnifying lens?" asked Lennard, with a grin.

"No need to, old man," replied Nelson Lee. "I really believe that this unexpected clue is going to lead me to the trail—and, what is more, the trail is a hot one."

CHAPTER 7.

Startling Discoveries!

A RAMSHACKLE old Ford pattered and wheezed along a main road in Sussex. The engine spluttered badly; and now and again it promised to peter out altogether.

"It's no bloomin' good, Alf!" said the man at the wheel, shifting his chew of tobacco from one side of his mouth to the other. "Unless this old bag-o'-tricks gets a move on, we shall lose our ship!"

"We'll get there, mate," said the other. "These 'ere Fords make a bit o' fuss sometimes, but it's surprisin' what you can get out of 'em."

The two men in the car were roughly attired. They wore greasy peaked caps, blue jerseys and reefer coats. They were, apparently, merchant seamen on their way to Southampton or Portsmouth. The man who was driving was elderly, his face wrinkled and the colour of mahogany. A grizzled beard adorned his chin, and his eyebrows were thick and bushy. The other man was younger, but of very much the same type. He sat next to the driver, and when he spoke his voice was low.

"Is it really necessary for us to keep up this sort of talk while we're on the open road like this, Chief?" he asked. "I mean, nobody can possibly hear us—"

"You mustn't take anything for granted, Fenton," interrupted the man with the grizzled beard. "This game is too risky for us to take any chances. Your name is Bert Higgins, and mine is Alf Roberts. Understand? We've got to talk like a pair of uneducated sailor men."

"Right-ho, mate—you know best, I s'pose," replied Fenton, changing his voice cleverly.

Nelson Lee had certainly excelled himself; seldom had he achieved such brilliant success in any disguise. It was practically impossible to detect any flaw in his make-up, or in Fenton's. They looked a pair of rough sailor men to the life.

There was an excellent reason for these precautions on Lee's part. He was concentrating his attentions upon that stretch of road which he had gone over during the night—the stretch where the armoured car had so mysteriously vanished. Lee was convinced that the secret of the riddle lay here.

A night investigation would have been difficult, if not impracticable. No doubt the crooks had a look-out—and suspicions would immediately be aroused at the sight of anything unusual. The same applied to the daytime. Lee could hardly come along openly and examine this three or four mile stretch of road.

But who would suspect these two sailors in their decrepit old Ford? It was easy enough for Lee, at the driving-wheel, to cause the ancient engine to splutter and choke, and occasionally to peter out. And, although the countryside seemed utterly deserted, Lee acted as though a spy lay concealed at every yard. He was not going to give the crooks the slightest opportunity to "twig" this game.

For, truth to tell, Nelson Lee was anxious. He was concerned about Waldo. And what was the meaning behind that attempt to murder him? The bandits had tried to trick him, and it was only because of Lee's brilliance that he had turned the tables on his enemies. But they must have *known* that he was *hot* on their trail. How? Merely because he had chased that armoured car during the night?

Lee hardly thought so. There was something else. Waldo, in carrying out his orders had probably fallen into the hands of the enemy; and his capture had told the bandits that Nelson Lee was interested in them. So they had tried to get him out of the way.

All this boiled down to the one definite conclusion that Stanley Waldo was a prisoner in the hands of these desperate bandits. It was Lee's plain duty to use every ounce of his energy to rescue this "cub" who had

met with disaster in the course of doing his job.

THE old Ford rattled along the road in a succession of jolts and spurts. Suddenly the engine spluttered noisily and finally petered out. Nelson Lee climbed out of the car and began tinkering about with the carburetter. At least, so it seemed; actually, the detective was using his eyes. At every stop he scanned the grassy banks on the roadside; he was on the look-out for any tell-tale mark, any clue that would bring enlightenment to him. They were in the middle of that "mystery stretch" now. Having made some adjustments, Lee gave the starting-handle a wind, and the engine spluttered into life.

"Op in, Bert! We're off agin!"

They both jumped on to the shaking vehicle, and it jolted forward for another ten or fifteen yards. Then, with a wheezy sigh, the engine again gave up the ghost.

"We'd best walk, an' done with it!" growled Lee in a savage voice.

He jumped out and walked round to the front of the car—his eyes scanning the roadside as usual. And this time a sudden hard glint came into them. However, he did not even turn his head; he raised the rusty bonnet and stared at the engine.

"I'm fed up with this, Bert!" he declared. "We'll 'ave this blinkin' carburetter off."

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There was an excellent reason for them to play their parts now. They were nearly opposite the lodge gates of Hale Manor, and the lodgekeeper, standing at the door of his picturesque little house, was watching them with some curiosity.

It only took Lee a few moments to detach a portion of the carburetter. This he took to the grassy side of the road, and bent down, apparently tinkering with the thing. Actually he was looking closely at a little patch of soil near the grassy bank, under the hedge.

Lee was looking at a faint footprint. The hedge, just at this point, was slightly damaged, many of the twigs being broken. The fresh young leaves, just springing into life, were drooping here and there. There were indications that somebody had stepped on to the grass border here, and had tried to push his way through the hedge. And that footprint, as Lee could see at the first glance, was one of Waldo's!

Lee had a memory for small things. He had noticed, the previous night, that Waldo had been wearing a pair of stout brown shoes; and those shoes were fitted with crepe-rubber soles. This impression had been made with such a sole! Waldo had a habit of wearing the toes of his shoes extensively, as Lee remembered, and he could see that this impression on the soft earth showed no sign of the toe. Without question, Waldo had been here—Waldo had run across the road, had attempted to push his way through the hedge—Lee's heart suddenly beat faster. He had seen something else. Two or three little brownish spots in the grass, near the footprints.

"Got a bit o' stick, mate?" he asked, glancing at Fenton. "All right, don't bother! This'll do."

He reached over towards the hedge, his eyes alert. He recognised those brownish spots. They were spots of blood! It was a grim discovery, and Lee's anxiety for Waldo increased. The boy must have been wounded—perhaps he had been captured at this spot, before he could force his way through the hedge. The need for action was more imperative than ever. Lee suddenly moved across the road diagonally towards the gates of Hale Manor.

"Shan't be a jiff, Bert," he called back over his shoulder. "Mebbe this feller will be able to lend us a bit o' wire."

As he approached the lodge gates his eyes were noting every detail. He scrutinised the gates, the pillars, the lodge itself—everything.

"We're 'avin' a bit o' trouble, mate," he said to the watching lodge-keeper. "I s'pose you ain't got a bit o' wire you could lend us? This 'ere thing seems to be bunged up, an' we're in a blamed 'urry."

The lodge-keeper stirred himself.

"Bit of wire?" he repeated. "I don't know as I've got any handy. Still, I'll have a look."

He entered his lodge, and Lee, fumbling in his pocket, produced a little box. He

opened it, then leaned against the gates, searching in the box and grunting.

"No bloomin' good," he muttered. "Thought I 'ad a pin, but I ain't."

He put the box away again, and gazed casually up the drive, the surface of which was concrete. Then the lodge-keeper came back.

"This do?" he asked, holding out a small piece of thin, rusty wire.

"Matey, you've saved us!" said Lee, with a nod. "Just the very thing!"

He took the wire, thanked the lodge-keeper again, and went back to the old Ford. He tinkered for a while with the carburetter, fixed it on again, and then wound the engine. She answered at once, roaring triumphantly.

"There you are, Bert!" roared Lee. "Who sez I ain't a mechanic?"

"Yes, but 'ow long will it keep goin'?" retorted Fenton. "Best jump in quick."

Nelson Lee did so, and he jammed in the gear. The Ford screamed and rattled, and continued on her way; within a hundred yards Lee got her into top, and she was soon making a good speed.

"Looks as though we'll do it, mate," he said, glancing at Fenton and winking.

Fenton was puzzled. He could not see why Lee was going off in this fashion. Fenton had understood that the game was to stop every two or three hundred yards, pretending that the engine was causing everlasting trouble. Yet Lee drove right through the next town, continued onwards, and the Ford was soon bowling through the open country again.

"What's the idea, sir?" asked Fenton, in a low voice.

"Don't talk—I want to think," replied Lee briefly.

Horsham was only a few miles further on, and Lee said nothing until he drove the car into a hotel yard in the town. A stoutish, farmer-like man came out into the yard as Lee and Fenton were climbing out of the old car.

"Evenin' Mr. Bodley," said Lee, touching his forelock.

"Well, this is a pleasant meeting, my man," said Mr. Bodley. "Come inside and have a drink."

Lee and Fenton went in, and the proprietor led the way down a passage and opened a door.

"Everything's ready, Mr. Lee," he said cheerfully. "By gum! If you hadn't told me what to expect I should never have known you, sir."

"You're a good fellow, Bodley," said Lee, with approval.

They went into the room, and the door was closed. Fenton's eyes were wide open.

"Well I'm jiggered!" he ejaculated. "So you arranged to come here, Chief?"

"A man who sets out on a task without making as many arrangements in advance as possible is asking for trouble," replied Lee. "Yes, Fenton, I fixed this up. We can have some food here—and Messrs. Bert

Higgins and Alf Roberts are no more. As soon as darkness comes, we've got to get busy. At least, I have."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Fenton, staring. "We've discovered nothing."

"Nothing?" retorted Nelson Lee, his eyes agleam. "My dear fellow, we've discovered the vital point. Hale Manor, the residence of Sir Bertram Fleming, is the centre of this mystery—it is headquarters of the bandit gang!"

Fenton's jaw sagged.

"But—but—" he began.

"It is the only possible place," interrupted Lee grimly. "A concrete drive, eh? Why? Answer me that, Fenton! Why a concrete drive? Because concrete leaves no marks—no tell-tale tyre prints!"

"By Jove! I noticed the concrete drive, but I didn't think it was significant."

"Perhaps you didn't see one of Waldo's footprints near the roadside—and some spots of blood?" said Lee, in a hard voice. "I'm worried, Fenton; infernally worried. I've got to get back to Hale Manor and start my investigations as soon as darkness falls. Three bandits were captured this morning, Fenton—including a car. There was some greenish paint on one wing of that car. That paint exactly tallies with the paint on the lodge gates of Hale Manor."

"How do you know, sir? I didn't see you comparing—"

"I didn't do it quite so clumsily as that, I hope," said Lee. "But I *did* compare the paint, Fenton—when I leaned against the gates. That captured Graham-Paige came through that gateway last night, and presumably one of the gates swung to on it by accident. A trifle—but in many instances trifles are of paramount importance."

Fenton's eyes opened wider.

"Then you suspected Hale Lodge before you started on this trip, Chief?" he asked.

"I did," replied Lee. "I remembered the colour of those gates—and I felt that I had a clue as soon as I saw that paint on the wing of the captured car. Did you notice the hinges of those gates, Fenton? Enormous hinges, elaborate, ornamental affairs. I'll warrant they are electrically controlled. Did you notice the peculiar construction of the lodge? An enormous chimney with ornamental slots near the top. Significant, young 'un! Oh, yes! Hale Manor, I feel sure, contains many secrets!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Mystery Explained!

A SHADOW moved amidst the bushes in the gardens of Hale Manor.

It was dark now, although the evening was young. The fine old house showed lights here and there, and it appeared to be everything that a gentleman's country house should be. At the back

of the house there was a low range of outbuildings—garages, stables, tool-sheds, and so forth.

The shadowy figure among the bushes moved forward with the silence of a forest creature. Nelson Lee was alone. He knew that this investigation was going to be a ticklish business—a perilous business—and he had deemed it advisable to do the job single-handed. He crouched low, dodging across a lawn. So far as he had been able to discover, there were no precautions being taken here; nobody seemed to be on guard. Yet, if things were as he believed, Hale Manor was very different from the innocent country house it pretended to be.

Lee reached the end of the outbuildings, and he crept along the wall. He found a window, deftly opened it and slithered through. He was in a disused stable. He crept forward in the darkness, feeling his way carefully. He ventured to pull out a small electric torch, the bulb of which was almost completely covered with a shield. Only a tiny beam of light was allowed to escape; but it was sufficient for Lee's needs.

He found a door, and this led into an adjoining garage. A luxurious saloon stood there. Lee quickly found that there was nothing suspicious in this car. Furthermore, the dry nature of the tyres convinced Lee that the saloon had not been used for two or three days.

Lee spent half an hour in that range of outbuildings. He found no other car; he found nothing whatever suspicious. Lee was a little disappointed, yet he wasn't surprised. He had certainly not expected to find the armoured cars and the other fast automobiles which the bandits had used in these outbuildings. Then where were they?

Lee crept through the grounds again, and he frowned when he noticed that the house was entirely surrounded by gravel. There were terraces and drives; but the concrete had not come as far as this. The concrete surface only reached to the bend of the drive. The gravel itself showed no tyre marks. Lee paused amid some bushes at the point of the drive where the concrete changed to gravel.

"Let me think this out," he told himself. "Am I wrong about this concrete? A bandit car, closely chased, might turn into this drive and leave no tracks. But what if the pursuer turned in, too? The fugitive car would certainly leave tracks on the gravel, thus giving the whole game away. And what could become of the car afterwards, in any case? H'm! This is a puzzle!"

An idea came to him.

"Unless—unless the car somehow disappears between the lodge gates and this point—where the concrete ends," he went on tensely. "But how? How could any car vanish— By James! I wonder if—"

Another idea had come to him—a startling one this time. With a cautious glance up and down the drive, he moved out on to the

Nipper sprang to the machine gun on the armoured car, while the other "cub" detectives, with rifles to their shoulders, faced the bandits!



concrete. He went down on his hands and knees, progressing forward slowly.

"Imbecile!" he muttered. "Why didn't I think of this before? Where's my memory? There are quarries in this district—chalk quarries, for the most part. Surely there must be some connection? And there's a reason for this drive being covered with concrete."

Slowly he crawled on, examining every crack and crevice. And now, as he paused in the silence of the still evening, he fancied that a faint, elusive throbbing had come to his ears. A possible explanation occurred to him. He went flat down, and laid his ear against the cold concrete. Thud-thud-

thud! He heard the sound distinctly now. From somewhere below came a throbbing, like the regular beating of an engine.

"I'm right!" he breathed.

Continuing his crawl, he saw that the concrete was laid in big sections, the edges of these sections being filled in with pitch, or some such substance. Lee had progressed two-thirds of the way towards the lodge gate when a tiny sigh of satisfaction escaped him. He was not daring to use his electric torch, but his eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom by now. He could not see distinctly, but he could feel; and here, at this point, there was a little crack extending all along one of the concrete sections,

He stood up, meaning to walk across to the further end of this section, but at that moment a curiously-muffled thud sounded from the direction of the lodge. Nelson Lee uttered a choking, gurgling cry, and pitched over. A moment later an extraordinary thing happened. That section of concrete upon which Nelson Lee was lying commenced slowly and silently to drop away!

A man came running out from the lodge, and he stood on the edge of the newly-revealed shaft. Then he ran back again to the lodge and did an astonishing thing. He pulled the fireplace out of position and quickly climbed an iron ladder which led right up through the great chimney! Near the top he halted, and pressed a bell-push. He took a small telephone receiver from its hook.

"Lift coming down!" he panted, as he heard a voice. "Somebody prowling about, and I plugged him. He's on the lift. Get him!"

A LIFT!
Nelson Lee was being taken down into the bowels of the earth. So that was the explanation! One section of this concrete drive was, in reality, the floor of a cunningly-concealed lift.

Lee, sprawling there just as he had fallen, was glowing with inward excitement. When he had remembered the old quarries, it had occurred to him that these quarries might extend right beneath the grounds of Hale Lodge; and it was then that the possibility of a lift had occurred to him.

He was in no way injured—the bullet had gone several inches wide in the darkness—but, recognising the familiar thud of a silenced automatic pistol, he had instantly dropped. A second bullet might not have been so unsuccessful!

Lee knew that he was in a tight corner, and that some exciting things were liable to happen within the next few minutes. The lift suddenly came to a great opening, where lights were gleaming. The detective saw a number of men waiting. He held himself ready, and just as the lift bumped slightly, indicating that it had got to the bottom, he leapt to his feet, a revolver in his hand.

"Hands up—everybody!" he snapped. "Quickly, now!"

"It's Nelson Lee!" gasped a startled voice.

Several of the men flung their hands up. There was something very grim and relentless in Nelson Lee's manner.

"I'll shoot the first man who makes the slightest move!" continued Lee. "Keep your hands up, and move back—"

Crash!

He broke off. Something had come hurtling down the shaft. Up above, the lodge-keeper, seeing what was happening, had thrown down an ornamental flower-pot. It struck Nelson Lee on the shoulder, glanced off, and shattered to fragments on

the concrete lift floor. Lee's shoulder felt as though a sledge-hammer had struck it; his arm drooped slightly, and a spasm of pain shot through his face. The next instant two of the men flung themselves forward, grabbed his legs and pulled him over.

"The gun—get the gun!" panted one of the men hoarsely.

Within a minute Nelson Lee was captured, and ropes were bound round his arms and body.

"Yes, it's Lee!" said one of the men—it was the man who had been driving the armoured car the previous night. "He's the blighter who chased us. The Boss said he was dangerous, didn't he?"

"We'd better take him straight to the Boss now," said one of the other men.

Nelson Lee was quite calm, although he was looking very crestfallen. This adventure had started so promisingly—and now it had ended in failure!

He found himself in a great cavern. The roof was not very lofty, and it appeared to be chalky; it extended widely in all directions, with many tunnels and side caves. Electric lights were glowing in various places. Cars were standing about, two of them being armoured cars. A soft thudding noise from the distance told of an oil-engine which probably drove a dynamo and generator. There were great work benches and stacks of spare tyres and other parts. This place, in fact, was a regular repair depot—a secret service station.

There were eight or nine men in all, and most of them were attired in mechanics' overalls. Two or three, by their talk, were Americans; the others were a hard-bitten looking lot.

Lee was propelled along by two of the men. He was led up a narrow, chalky tunnel for some distance, and then a wooden door was pulled open. Lee found himself thrust into another lift; this time a tiny one, only large enough to accommodate the three of them. It commenced ascending.

The top was soon reached, another door slid open, and Lee found himself in a beautifully-appointed library, where a refined-looking, grey-haired man was seated at a desk. Yet directly Lee looked at this man he saw the hard, cruel lines at the corners of his mouth; Lee saw his pale, flat blue eyes. In spite of his evening dress, and his refined looks, Lee recognised the unmistakable stamp of the criminal.

"Sir Bertram Fleming, I think?" asked Lee smoothly.

"Bring him here, boys," said Sir Bertram, with a motion of his hand. "This is a good piece of work. I exceedingly regret, Mr. Nelson Lee, that you should have been so foolish as to interfere with my affairs. You realise, I hope, that you have placed yourself in a very dangerous position? In the circumstances, you will understand that I cannot possibly allow you to live?"

"At least, you are quite frank about it," said Lee.

"Better do the job at once, hadn't we, Boss?" asked one of the men in an anxious voice. "It'll be easy enough. There's a big pit down in that part of the quarry we've never used. We could drop him down, and he'll never be seen again—and while we're at it we could put that boy with him."

Nelson Lee's heart beat faster. So Waldo was still safe!

"Yes, the boy is no longer of any use to us," said Sir Bertram. "I hoped to use him as a means of stopping your activities, Mr. Lee. No doubt you came here to-night to find out what had happened to your young friend?"

"I came here mainly to discover what I have discovered," replied Nelson Lee. "Unhappily, I blundered."

"It is a blunder which will have very unpleasant results," said the Boss. "Take him away, boys, and put him with the youngster. Don't do anything else at present. Keep him bound up, however, and make sure that——"

"Why not finish it straight out, Boss?" asked one of the men. "I'm scared of this fellow."

"Do as I order," retorted Sir Bertram sharply. "We must not take any risks just now. Lee may have brought some of his infernal cubs with him; even at this minute they may be lurking out in the grounds. We've got to make a thorough search—and satisfy ourselves that there is no further danger."

Sir Bertram spoke quietly and calmly; but his eyes were burning with hatred. There was an expression of apprehension in them, too. He could not disguise the fact that he was intensely alarmed.

NELSON LEE was taken down the little lift again, pushed along a tunnel, and finally thrust into a cave, the entrance of which was protected by a strong wooden door.

"Chief!" ejaculated an eager, excited voice.

"I'm sorry I've come in this way, Waldo," said Nelson Lee. "I join you as a prisoner."

Stanley Waldo was sitting with his back to the rock wall, his arms bound behind him.

"I'm afraid I made an awful mess of things, sir," he confessed. "I managed to cling on behind that bandit car, and it brought me here. I nearly had a fit when the car started coming down the lift shaft. You know about that lift which is part of the concrete drive, I suppose, sir?"

"Yes."

"I jumped off just in time, sir, clung to the edge of the shaft, and pulled myself up," continued Waldo. "I thought I'd done something pretty good, but as I was moving away in the darkness somebody shot me."

"As I expected," muttered Lee. "You did well, young 'un; you weren't to know that there would be a lurking assassin."

"He only got me in the leg, sir, and it's nothing but a flesh wound," continued Waldo. "I ran out into the road, but two men came after me and collared me as I was trying to get through the hedge. They brought me back, and they've kept me a prisoner like this ever since."

Nelson Lee did not seem to be paying any attention. He was sitting there in the darkness, listening. It was almost as though he was waiting for something to happen.

CHAPTER 9.

Bravo, The Academy!

THERE had been plenty of reason for Sir Bertram Fleming's fears.

Nelson Lee, although a prisoner, was far from beaten. He had been prepared for capture, and he had made careful advance preparations. In the darkness of the Hale Manor drive lurked a second figure—the figure of Edgar Fenton!

Fenton had received strict instructions to remain in the background; it was his job to keep Nelson Lee in sight, but to take no action whatsoever unless Lee needed help. Thus, Fenton had heard that muffled thud of the silenced pistol; he had heard Nelson Lee's gasping cry, and he had seen the detective fall. Even in these dramatic circumstances, Fenton had not acted rashly. He waited, hiding behind a clump of bushes; and, a minute or two afterwards, he was glad that he had waited.

Like a shadow, he moved silently forward, staring in amazement at the great black gap which had appeared in the white concrete of the drive. Then he heard Lee's voice, floating up from the mysterious abyss of the lift shaft.

"Hands up!" came Lee's crisp, clear tones.

Fenton's heart leapt with relief. Good old Chief! So he wasn't badly hurt, after all!

Fenton had been warned in advance that Nelson Lee might be captured, and he knew, by glancing at the luminous dial of his watch, that the moment was rapidly approaching when other things might be expected to happen. In fact, everything seemed to be working out with clockwork-like precision.

Fenton ventured to creep a foot or so closer—and then he caught in his breath. He saw a dim figure standing on the edge of the shaft; there came a shattering crash, a series of shouts, a veritable confusion of sounds. Edgar Fenton now acted with commendable promptitude. He saw the man—evidently the lodge-keeper—moving back towards the lodge; saw, too, the concrete lift floor silently coming into place again.

Nelson Lee was down there—probably in great peril. Fenton had a responsible task;



he had been placed on this job so that he could see exactly what happened to Lee, and now it was his task to get things moving. As a preliminary, Fenton ran lightly forward, gave a sudden, tremendous leap, and landed fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the lodge-keeper.

Crash!

They both went over, but they were upon their feet again within ten seconds, the lodge-keeper startled and shaken. Fenton's fist came round, with all the force of his shoulder behind it. It was a terrific blow, and it caught the man on the point of the chin. The fellow was nearly lifted from his feet, and he went clean over, turned a somersault, and lay still. Edgar Fenton had been the champion senior boxer during his St. Frank's days!

He knelt down beside the fallen man, pulled out a scarf, and bound it round the fellow's face. Then he took out some stout cord and trussed up his prisoner, rolling him behind the bushes.

Fenton glanced at his watch again, and ran quickly out into the main road, looking towards London. There was no sign of any traffic. He hesitated a moment, and then he ran into the open door of the lodge and took a quick look round. He was startled to see the fireplace out of position—hanging forward, like a door.

"So that's it!" muttered Fenton.

There was nobody else here—no other men. He went over to the fireplace, and found the iron ladder which led upwards. Quickly he climbed it. And now he understood. Up here, fitted into the side of this false chimney, there were some electric switches. There was a telephone, too. Fenton had no doubt that one of those switches operated the electric lift, and that another worked the lodge gates.

"This place is a look-out tower!" he muttered. "By Jove! This organisation seems to be pretty complete! I'll bet there's a system of signalling. The look-out man sees a car coming along, and if he gets the right signal he whips open the gate. The car drives through, the gates are closed like lightning, and then the car descends on the lift. And there's this watcher up here all the time, hidden and unseen, keeping his eye on things in general."

Suddenly Fenton stiffened; he heard the far-away purring of a car, and when he peeped through one of the spy-holes in the side of the chimney he saw some headlights in the distance. He nearly fell down that iron ladder; he ran out, and arrived in the road just in time. The vehicle which was approaching was showing unusual lights, in so far as one of them was ordinarily white, whilst the other was distinctly bluish.

Fenton ran out into the road, waving his arms. A charabanc drove up—one of those modern monsters, capable of high speed and luxurious in every detail. A crowd of figures tumbled out. They were all in smart khaki uniform, and each one carried a rifle.

"What's the idea of the uniform?" asked Fenton in astonishment.

"My wheeze!" said Nipper. "Thought we might as well shove our cadet things on—more impressive. Well? Anything happened?"

"Good man!" said Fenton with approval. "That cadet idea is fine. Come along—all of you!"

It was Nelson Lee's Detective Academy which had arrived. Every man-jack! Handforth, Travers, Reggie Pitt, Archie Glen-thorne, Church, McClure, Forrest, Browne, Handforth minor, and the others.

"No time to tell you much," said Fenton, addressing them all. "You arrived here on the stroke of time."

"Chief's orders," put in Nipper. "If we received no signal we were to drive straight past, just as though we were an ordinary party; then, after ten minutes, we were to drive back and repeat the manoeuvre."

"Yes, I know that," said Fenton impatiently. "Well, as it happens, you're wanted now. The Chief has been collared!"

"What!" went up a chorus.

"There's a secret lift here, leading down to a cavern, I believe," continued Fenton. "There's only one thing for us to do—and that is to rush the place. Are you game?"

"Rather!"

Fenton turned and ran up the concrete drive. The others all followed, excited and eager.

"Stand here—wait!" ordered Fenton. "I'm going to operate the lift. I don't exactly know where it is, but you'll see it directly it starts moving. Jump on, and go down with it. I can't come with you, worse luck, but I'll stay out here and keep my eye on things."

He ran into the lodge, and a few moments later a part of the drive slowly began to sink. The "cubs" leapt on, gripping their rifles.

"Quiet, now!" urged Nipper. "We want to take these crooks by surprise! And be ready for trouble, you chaps; they're gunmen, and they'll shoot."

"We're ready for anything!" said Handforth aggressively.

The lift slowly descended; it reached the bottom, and with a rush the cub detectives ran out. They found themselves in a great cavern. Four or five men were standing over by a bench, not far away; two others were working on a car. All stared in blank amazement as the uniformed figures appeared.

"Hands up!" shouted Morrow.

The cadets spread out and placed their rifles to their shoulders. In the same moment, Nipper leapt forward, reached a machine-gun on one of the armoured cars, and gripped the trigger.

"Better surrender!" he snapped. "We've got you all covered!"

The bandits were staggered; they were taken completely by surprise. Although they had heard the lift descending, they had suspected no raid. On or two of the men put

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their hands up, and before the others could do anything a number of the cadets had run forward and were whipping the revolvers out of the men's pockets.

"Get back there—into that corner!" ordered Morrow. "Keep your hands up, and don't start any tricks!"

The men obeyed, realising that resistance was useless.

"This way, boys!" sounded a familiar voice.

"The Chief!" went up the cry.

Willy Handforth ran up a passage, found a door, and shot back the bolts.

"Good man, Willy!" came Lee's voice. "Get your knife out—cut these ropes!"

"O.K., Chief!" said Willy.

He sliced the ropes neatly, and then did the same service for Waldo. Lee sprang out, took in the situation at a glance, and nodded approvingly.

"Well, we took a big risk—but the end has justified the means," he said. "If I hadn't been able to rely upon you boys to turn up as ordered, I wouldn't have dared to invite capture as I did. Do you think you can hold these men as they are, Morrow?"

"Yes, Chief," replied Morrow. "Leave them to me."

"Right," said Lee. "Nipper—Handforth! I want you two with me."

They sprang to attention, and followed the great detective up the passage towards the little private lift. It was Lee's intention to go straight up and capture Sir Bertram Fleming at once. He was saved the journey. For, as he arrived at the lift, the door opened and Sir Bertram himself appeared. The latter evidently had no idea of what was in the wind, for he took a half-step backward's, his face expressive of amazement and consternation.

"The game's up, my friend," said Lee.

He leapt forward, but the other, recovering from his amazement, was quicker. He jumped backwards into the lift, attempting to close the door as he did so. The detective's foot snaked out just in time to prevent it closing completely.

With a scream of rage Sir Bertram's hand flew to his pocket. He tried to withdraw his revolver, but Nelson Lee kicked out, striking the other's wrist. The bandit leader uttered a cry of pain; the revolver fell helplessly from his half-paralysed hand and clattered to the ground.

The detective made to grab his opponent, but Sir Bertram wasn't finished yet. He

(Continued on page 35.)

HOW TO JOIN THE LEAGUE

ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE APPLICATION FORM No. 118.

SECTION

A

READER'S APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP.

I desire to become enrolled as a Member of THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE, and to qualify for all such benefits and privileges as are offered to Members of the League. I hereby declare that I have introduced "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY" and THE ST. FRANK'S LEAGUE to one new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. Will you, therefore, kindly forward me Certificate of Enrolment with the Membership Number assigned to me, and Membership Badge.

SECTION

B

MEMBER'S APPLICATION FOR MEDAL AWARDS.

I, Member No..... (give Membership No.), hereby declare that I have introduced one more new reader, whose signature to certify this appears on second form attached hereto. This makes me (state number of introductions up to date) introductions to my credit.

SECTION

C

NEW READER'S DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that I have been introduced by (give name of introducer) to this issue of "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY."

(FULL NAME).....

(ADDRESS).....

INSTRUCTIONS.

INSTRUCTIONS.—Reader Applying for Membership. Cut out TWO complete Application Forms from Two copies of this week's issue of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY. On one of the forms leave in Section A, crossing out Sections B and C. Then write clearly your full name and address at bottom of form. The second form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his name and address at bottom of form. Both forms are then pinned together, and sent to the Chief Officer, The St. Frank's League, c/o THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

Member Applying for Bronze Medal: It will be necessary for you to obtain six new readers for this award. For each new reader TWO complete forms, bearing the same number, are needed. On one of the forms fill in Section B, crossing out Sections A and C, and write your name and address at bottom of form. The other form is for your new reader, who fills in Section C, crosses out Sections A and B, and writes his

name and address at the bottom of the form. Now pin both forms together and send them to the Chief Officer, as above. One new reader will then be registered against your name, and when six new readers have been registered you will be sent the St. Frank's League bronze medal. There is nothing to prevent you from sending in forms for two or more new readers at once, providing that each pair of forms bears the same date and number.

Bronze medallists wishing to qualify for the silver medals can apply in the same way as for the bronze medal, filling in Section B. Every introduction they make will be credited to them, so that when they have secured the requisite number of readers they can exchange their bronze medal for a silver one.

These Application Forms can be posted for 3d., providing the envelope is not sealed and no letter is enclosed.

A FEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF JOINING THE LEAGUE.

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You are offered free hints on holidays, whether walking, biking, or camping.

You can qualify for the various awards by promoting the growth of the League.

If you want help or information on any subject, you will find the Chief Officer ever ready to assist you.

NOTICE.

The St. Frank's League has now attained such proportions that we are compelled to discontinue the offer of gold medals in connection therewith. The silver and bronze medals will still be available, however, as heretofore, to those who qualify for them in accordance with the rules.

THE NIGHT RAIDERS!

(Continued from page 33.)

must have known that escape was impossible, but in his rage he knew no other thought than to get at grips with this man who had hounded him down.

He launched himself forward savagely at Lee, and then began a fierce fight. Outside the lift hovered Nipper and Handforth, who, owing to the confined space, were unable to assist their chief. They just watched, awaiting their opportunity to pounce.

Kicking, clawing, scratching, Sir Bertram fought like a madman. Nelson Lee, however, remained cool. Cleverly he held off his antagonist as much as possible, and then, seeing his chance, his right fist suddenly came round in a terrific swing. The bandit leader stopped it with his jaw. With a cry of pain he staggered backwards, to crash to the floor. Immediately Nipper and Handforth rushed up, and before the man could recover they had grabbed him. Sir Bertram was beaten—and he knew it. When he picked himself up, held in a vice-like grip by his young captors, he was nearly foaming at the mouth with rage.

Then came another surprise. Out of the main lift shaft which led down from the drive poured a number of keen-looking men, with Chief Detective-inspector Lennard at their head. A section of Scotland Yard's flying squad had arrived.

"Glad to see you, Lennard," called Nelson Lee. "Here are your men—including the leader."

The chief inspector took in the situation at a glance, and an expression of disgust came over his face.

"Well, I'll be dithered!" he roared. "The fun's all over! Hanged if these young cubs haven't robbed us of our entertainment!"

"Well, what does it matter?" asked Lee. "Don't worry, Lennard; my youngsters may have done the work, but I'll warrant the newspapers will give the credit to Scotland Yard. I expected you to get here first, but once again my menagerie—as you have sometimes disrespectfully called it—has beaten you by a short head!"

A CLEAN sweep was made. Every bandit was arrested and taken off, and when Sir Bertram Fleming's antecedents were gone into, no record could be found of any title. The "Sir," without doubt, had been added by Mr. Bertram Fleming for effect. Fleming was a man who had once been the leader of a hold-up gang in Canada, and it was certain that he had operated in the United States. He had attempted to bring the American gunmen methods into England.

He had nearly succeeded, too. Before starting operations he had had everything perfectly organised, and but for Nelson Lee's chase on that first night, the police might have been completely baffled. The gang, of course, would have laid low for weeks—perhaps for a month or two. Then suddenly, when the scare had died down, they would make another daring raid over the countryside, holding up motorists, robbing banks, and flying back to their secret retreat.

Owing to Nelson Lee and his "cubs," however, this elaborate plan had never been able to materialise. The Night Raiders were no more!

THE END.

(There will be another stirring, long, complete yarn about Nelson Lee and his "cub" detectives next Wednesday. Look out for the title: "Without Trace!")

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The NIGHT HAWK!



Episode 1.—THE WINGED AVENGER!

To wreck the night express—that's the object of the Benton Gang. But they have reckoned without the Night Hawk!

Ready For Battle!

"AT last!"

Drawing himself up to his full height, Thurston Kyle, scientist flung back his head and laughed—bitterly, exultantly. His latest, greatest invention was finished at last!

Save for his young assistant, Snub Hawkins, he was alone in his magnificent laboratory and workshop. Stepping through a French window on to a low veranda, he stood with folded arms, looking down on the twinkling lights of the great city below. Thurston Kyle's rambling house stood on a hill in one of the highest parts of London, and his workshop was under the roof. From where he stood he could see cars and trains, all the inventions of this modern age of hurry—and a mocking smile curved his lips at the sight.

Snub Hawkins watched him with fascinated eyes—this grim, sombre figure, clothed from head to toe in supple black leather, fitting so close that every ripple of the fine muscles showed beneath.

The great invention was already strapped to his master's shoulders—two great wings, curved and feathered like those of a hawk, with slender control straps fitted to the flyer's thighs and elbows. Between his shoulder-blades lay the flat, beautifully-made dry battery that drove the mighty wings.

It was the last word in man's conquest of the air. The perfect bird-man had arrived!

For months Kyle had laboured, forging the light strong metal—the composition of which was a secret—into the exact pattern of every feather in a bird's wing, fitting them together and covering each with oiled silk.

Now, as he stood poised on the veranda rail above the lighted city, he was no longer a man. He was King of the Air, a sinewy, ominous bird of prey, stretching his great pinions before taking flight.

Timidly, Snub reached out and touched Kyle's arm.

"Will—will you be all right, sir?" he ventured breathlessly; and Thurston Kyle turned his piercing eyes on him at the words.

He nodded lightly.

"I shall be all right, Snub! My wings will not fail!"

"Tain't that, sir. I know they're O.K. But—but are you going on that other business with 'em?"

Kyle's face hardened.

"I am. I shall test the wings thoroughly, and then——" He saw the concern in the boy's eyes, and smiled again. "Never fear, lad. I shall win. For years I have been fighting the Benton gang—the greatest criminal band in Britain, Snub—and the men who killed my father!"

His long, pliant hands tightened.

"They know I am fighting them! They have defied all my efforts, hidden themselves behind high walls, electrified fences, gone armed with revolvers. To-night, a party of them will endeavour to hold up the North-Eastern express at midnight and rob the mails. But, Snub"—he laughed again in a tone that made Snub's blood tingle—"I shall be there. And then we shall see if their guns and electric wires are proof against—my wings!"

Next moment he was gone.

Running to the veranda, Snub was just in time to see him swoop silently towards the ground. Like a great shadow, he flattened out, the curved wings flapped, then remained rigid as the flyer banked steeply and began to throw himself about in the air like a bird at play, darting, climbing and wheeling.

Snub's fingers gripped the rail until his knuckles whitened. Ten feet above him, Thurston Kyle hovered in the air, satisfied. Out of the darkness came a short, hard laugh of victory; then like an arrow from a bow he shot upwards, over the house roof and away.

His first headlong dive sent him gliding at terrific speed out and across the city, invisible in his black clothes against the darkness. The tall figure of Lord Nelson on his column loomed up, and Kyle flicked round it sharply, studying the millions of lights below before settling down to a long steady flight.

Attracted by the dark gleam of the Thames, he sank, sailing smoothly over the tall masts of the shipping by London Bridge. Suddenly, a shrill scream rang out. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw a man hurl himself crazily over the high parapet of the bridge and drop swiftly towards the moving waters.

Turning in his own length, Thurston Kyle swept to cut him off. It was a race, the falling man against the power of his wings. The wings won. A fraction of time before the man's body touched the waves, Kyle skimmed above him, caught him up in his powerful arms and whizzed beneath the arch of the bridge.

A moment later a dazed and fainting man was deposited in a heap on an Embankment seat, and Thurston Kyle's fierce laugh rang out as he soared into the air once more. On the round dome of St. Paul's he rested for a while, preening his feathers and tightening the controls.

Away to the north a red glare was staining the sky. He gazed at it thoughtfully. There was something sinister about the glow, and taking off, Kyle winged towards it speedily.

As he drew near the brazen clamour of fire bells floated up to him, and far below he could see crowds of people rushing along the streets. A great oil warehouse had exploded into flames, and the fire had already spread to the neighbouring houses.

Hovering above, unseen, Thurston Kyle

watched the frantic efforts of the fire-fighters. Beaten back by the terrible heat and clouds of rolling smoke, they were powerless to enter the buildings, although scores of hosepipes played on the flames.

Then it was that a united cry of horror arose from the anxious crowd of onlookers. On the roof of one of the taller houses three women appeared, throwing out appealing arms to the defeated firemen. Half suffocated with smoke, one fell limply against a chimney stack, but the others continued to run wildly about, their cries shrilling through the tumult in the street.

Drawing down the vizor of his black flying helmet till only his eyes showed like slits, Thurston Kyle smashed through the oily clouds in one glorious plunge. His strong arms flicked the two distracted women off their feet, and he glided with them over the roofs to safety. Setting them down, he banked, flew high and began his second flight through the billowing smoke in wide graceful spirals.

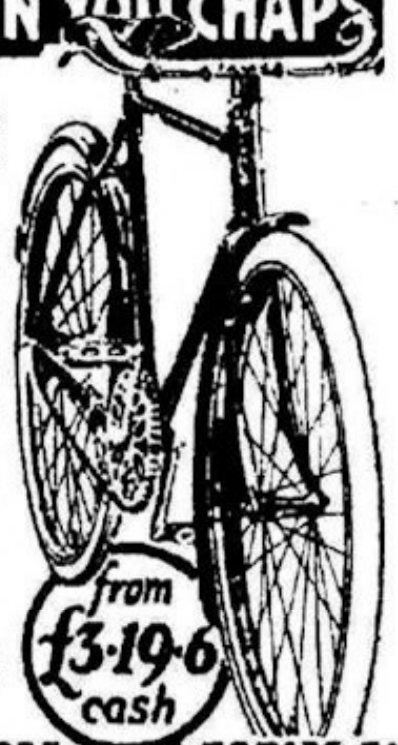
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On the roof all was flame and dense, choking fumes now. The woman had come out of her stupor and lay cowering against a parapet. With difficulty, Kyle saw her through the smoke, winged towards her, and caught her up just as the slates beneath crumpled into an inferno of fire.

Great orange tongues shot into the air as he wheeled and flung himself about recklessly to escape being singed. With safety in sight, the fear-stricken woman in his arms began to struggle, and, taken by surprise, his arms relaxed their grip for a second.

Instantly his burden slipped from him and fell, turning over and over in the air. She was falling into a great well formed by the tall buildings, but although there was danger of smashing his wings in the narrow space, Thurston Kyle did not hesitate.

Dropping through the air like a stone, he ranged alongside and caught her again, his wings brushing the walls of a house as he turned aside to save them from disaster. Then, clutching the woman firmly this time, he darted up again high into the air.

The cries of the rescued women had already been heard, and other roofs began to swarm with men. One of them saw Thurston Kyle when he flew over their heads with the woman safe in his arms, and pointed excitedly.

"A night hawk!" he cried, so loud that Kyle heard the words, and his cold eyes glittered.

Without a word he set the swooping woman down in safety, then, with long, steady drives of his wings, flew back across London, across the brilliant streets and lighted houses, alone and free in the starlit sky.

"The Night Hawk!" he cried, with the man's startled cry still ringing in his ears. "Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk!" The smile faded from his masterful face, leaving it as white and as cold as marble. "And like a night hawk I swoop upon my enemies!" he added triumphantly, shooting forward as he increased the speed of his black wings.

The Terror of the Sky!

THE lights of London were left behind by the Night Hawk. Presently, beneath him, bright streets gave place to dark fields, then the fields melted into the lonely salt marshes of the coast. He was nearing the sea; the wind beat against him, strong and fresh.

Turning inland again, he picked up his bearings and sank lower, following a railway track, the metals of which gleamed faintly in the starlight. A glance at the luminous dial of his watch, showed Kyle he had little time to spare. Already, far across the flat country, he could see a tiny thread of light moving towards him rapidly—the midnight express, carrying hundreds of passengers and the mail-bags to London!

Silent on outspread wings, the Night Hawk coasted along the railway until his keen eyes

picked out the enemies he was looking for, hiding in ambush on the top of a deep cutting. Twenty yards away on the road, two long grey racing cars stood in the shadow of some trees, and the men lay in the long grass ready to pounce.

With eyes intent on the coming train, not one of them saw the Night Hawk floating above them like an angel of destruction. A tiny blur on the shining metals attracted his attention, and he sneered as he saw through their plans.

The tiny object was a bomb fixed to the lines—it could be nothing else! The rushing, roaring train, striking it, would explode into a bedlam of crashing coaches, rending steel and splintered woodwork.

Lives would be lost; but the men crouching in the grass would care little for that! In the midst of the confusion and panic, they would storm the mail coach, take the bags and make their escape in the hidden cars. The deaths of innocent passengers would matter nothing to the members of the Benton gang—the gang Thurston Kyle had long ago sworn to exterminate!

Softly as a falling feather, he swung down the track until he reached the bomb. Already the train was in full sight, the metals throbbing and murmuring as the monster rushed towards destruction.

Bending, the Night Hawk began quickly to detach the infernal machine. From the surrounding gloom a figure darted to the line, cursing in bewildered anger. A shot rang out, the bullet singing past Kyle's head. His hand streaked downwards, a thin jet of scarlet spurted from his hip in answer, and the villain stumbled forward heavily.

There were shouts and cries—the rush of feet down the grassy bank—and then the train was upon them all, thundering and swaying as it flew over the lines at top speed, the men in the lighted cab above knowing nothing of the peril that had lurked beneath them.

With the bomb safe in his hands, the Night Hawk hurled himself on frantic wings from beneath the very buffers of the express, the vortex caused by its passing throwing him out of control for a brief, palpitating second.

By a desperate effort he straightened out and drew clear, smiling sardonically as the train passed beneath him, flowing on its journey with its sleeping passengers, who were blissfully unconscious of their narrow escape from death.

Motionless in the air, Thurston Kyle watched the scene in the dim light below. Consternation and panic reigned among his foes, some of whom bent beside the limp figure he had shot, while others stood on the lines and watched the disappearing train open-mouthed.

Before they could move, another man appeared on the top of the cutting, standing silhouetted against the stars while he screamed at them for fools.

The Night Hawk's eyes seemed to flame through the slits in his mask. Slashing down—

wards through the air, he pounced. The leader of the gang had an instant's vision of a huge and terrible bird above him, glaring down with faintly green eyes; then a steel talon clamped around his throat and lifted him off the ground.

When at last he pitched silently among his terrified men, he was dead. From the dark sky above them came a shrill, mocking laugh.

At that the would-be train-wreckers became terror-stricken. Feverishly they clawed their way out of the ambush, pelting for the cars—and escape!

Again and again that awful laugh rang out, and twice the Night Hawk struck, so that two more men fell in huddled heaps—and stayed where they fell!

Only three of the gang reached the cars—three men whose eyes were wide and glazed with terror. Hurling themselves into the first vehicle, they switched on the headlights, reckless of discovery by the police so long as they could see and get away from the terrible menace cruising above them like some awful avenging human bird of prey.



Like a human bird of prey, the Night Hawk launched himself at the terrified man!



In the first glare of the lights they saw him—floating down from the darkness into the brilliant rays like a nightmare from another world.

Trembling and horror-stricken, the men cowered back in the car, too shaken to reach for their weapons. Then Thurston Kyle's right arm moved quickly forward, and the bomb he had snatched from beneath the wheels of the express train curved down among them!

The world rocked. Trees, hedges and fields shone for a second in a great vivid flash, fol-

lowed by a thunderclap. After that, an awful silence—

Three hundred feet above, flying upwards in spirals, Thurston Kyle wheeled and turned. He had triumphed. His great invention was perfect, and the first step in his new campaign had been taken.

One of the leaders of the widespread gang, together with six of the rank and file, had gone to their doom. Not one had glimpsed their flying foe—until the end!

"So perish all the Benton gang, one by one—and Silas Benton last of all!"

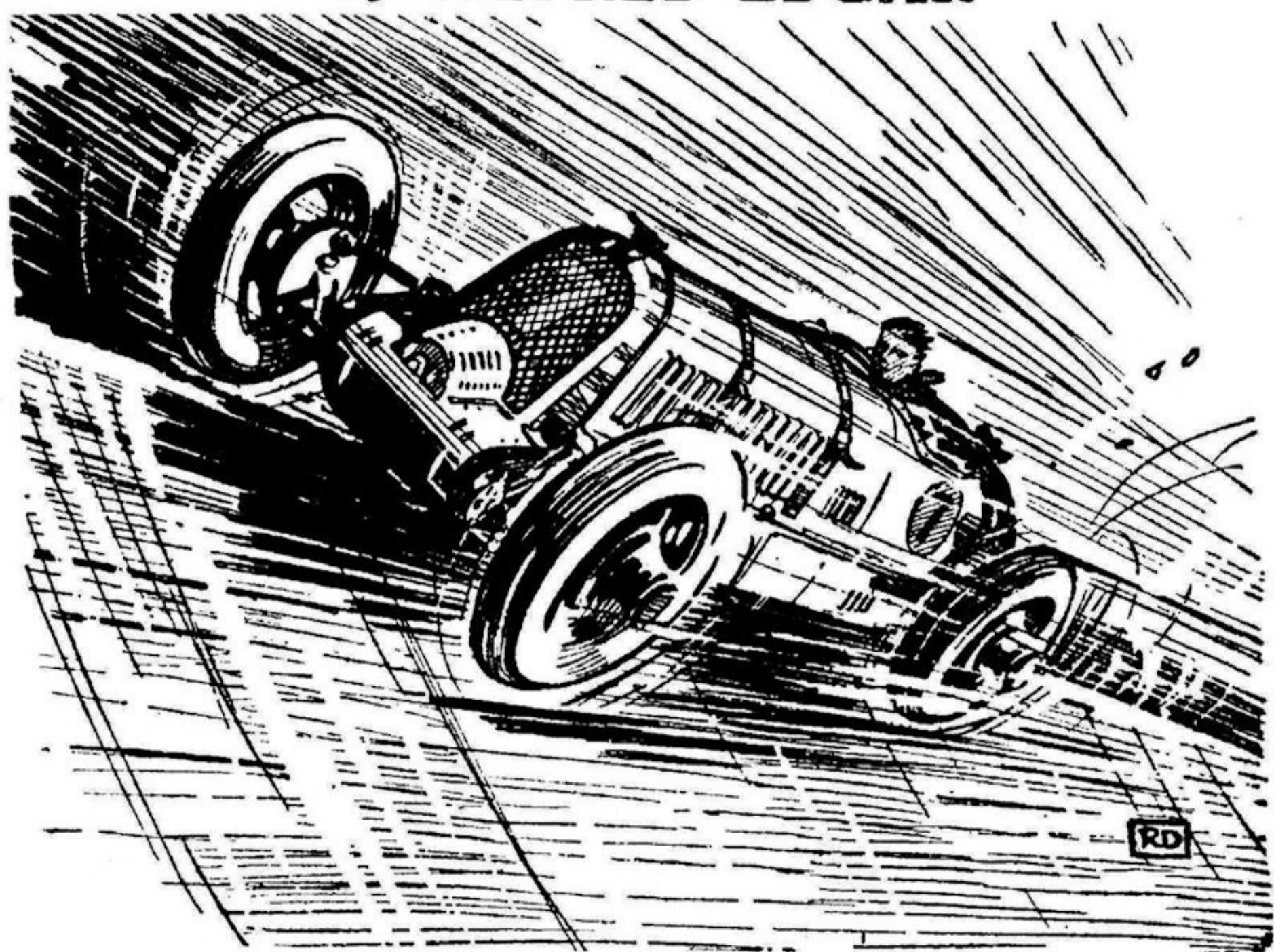
And, alone in the starlit sky, his wide wings bearing him homewards, Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, laughed aloud in scornful triumph.

("Thrilling, isn't it, chums? Well, next week's yarn featuring this Night Hawk is even more exciting—make sure you don't miss reading it!")

ALL THE THRILLS OF MOTOR-RACING IN THIS WEEK'S STIRRING INSTALMENT OF—

THE IRON SPEEDMAN!

By ALFRED EDGAR



The Crash!

"I'M going to knock Sniff's head off!" repeated Jim, and his eyes were glittering, while his jaw stuck out.

"That's all the proof I want! He fired our hangar——"

"D'you want to get chucked out of the race?" asked Joe coolly. "Because if you start a fight on the starting-line here, that's what'll happen. You can't go and punch a bloke in the eye on Brooklands — not when there's about ten thousand people watchin', anyway. You simmer down!"

Jim slid into his narrow seat, with Joe dragging on his arm; both bent forward to glare towards Lon Stargie's car. They saw Sniff say something to the driver and grin as he climbed into the cockpit, then Stargie himself glanced at the chums.

The man's dark face was set, and there was the ghost of a smile about the corners of his thin lips. He looked full into Jim's eyes for just a moment, then turned his gaze to where the starter stood.

"He can grin!" Jim muttered. "But we're not licked yet! I'll show him how to travel when that flag drops."

"I thought you'd get an idea like that," Joe called above the vibrant roar of their engine. "Don't you be a fool! You let Stargie make the pace, and just follow. There's no sense in going all-out right at the beginning of the race. You might bust something straight off, and what good will that do?"

"I'll have to go fast to get away from this bunch," Jim told him. "There's nearly thirty cars in the race, and they'll all fight like anything for the first couple

*The big race at Brooklands!
Jim and Joe hurtling
round the track—to victory?*

of laps."

"Then settle down when they've sorted themselves out," Joe counselled. "Hallo, he's lifted the flag!"

The starter's arm went up, and his red flag made a splash of colour against the patchy grey of the track where it curved for the banking ahead.

With the first movement of his arm drivers revved up their engines, and azure smoke

stammered out from the spanging exhausts.

"Don't forget—drive with your head as well as your feet!" Joe yelled through the sudden uproar.

Jim nodded, then pulled his goggles down over his eyes and kicked out the clutch as he slipped into gear. His gaze was riveted to the flag, he saw it twitch—then slash down!

Instantly every car on the starting-lines leaped forward, wheels spinning, tyres scrabbling on the concrete. The leading German machines went off as though they had been shot from guns. Stargie's Ace fairly hurtled itself ahead—and the Ross-Eight went away like a silver arrow pitched by some colossal bow.

Full between two of the cars in front Jim flung it, ripping past the green machines with his wheel-hubs all but touching theirs.

He cleared the row with Stargie moving near him, and together they went in chase of the German cars, packed in a solid group in front with an Italian and a Frenchman challenging them.

Jim changed up. The Ross-Eight seemed to surge as it felt the change of gear and left Stargie behind. Joe yelled, eyes alight as the car gathered speed and the wagging tails of the white machines slid back to them. The steep banking rose high, and the car tilted as it climbed it.

"G'wan—pass 'em!" Joe fairly howled the words, all his previous advice forgotten as he felt the power-filled surging of the magnificent machine.

High on the banking swept the Ross-Eight, and the air became filled with the sonorous roaring of the other cars. They drew level with the Germans: then, at their other side, Stargie and an Italian car suddenly ripped into the lead. One of the four white machines came out of the bunch, and a moment after the group of leading cars were together, tearing beneath the bridge across the track, with the railway straight opening up in front.

Stargie and one of the Germans were now in the lead. Jim was just half a length behind them, with a French car on his tail and a flaming red Italian to his left.

Back of them came the rest of the machines, stringing out, wheels stamping the concrete, driver's heads nodding, tyres kicking from the bumps—all striving to catch those who had gone ahead.

Jim snapped into top gear and felt the car buck as it started the dive off the banking to the flat. He ripped level with the German, saw the car's long, narrow instrument board, its big dials, the driver's square-cut jowl and knotted hands.

The man glanced at him, gave his engine more throttle and pulled ahead. The Italian car suddenly shot in front of them all, howling like a tornado travelling through a ravine, streaking like a red demon.

Down the straight the machines went, and to the spectators they seemed so close that they appeared to be touching one another. Stargie and the German spurted and fetched the Italian back, then Joe saw that Jim was pulling wide as the turn on to the Byfleet banking whipped up in front.

He pulled out, stamping the throttle full open, and when the others slowed to take the turn in safety Jim let the Ross-Eight go its limit. Joe saw his teeth clench as he forced the steering over. He heard the scrabbling scream of the tyres as they struggled for grip on the concrete. They flashed past the other cars and took the lead—and for the fraction of a second Joe thought they were going to shoot straight off the track!

An instant later and they were safe on the banking, but so close to its upper edge that the off-side wheels seemed to be riding thin air, although they were three inches from the top of the concrete.

Round the banking they dived, the other cars behind coming up like a quartette of coloured avengers. These four machines were the pace-makers for their teams; their object was to try and go so fast that rivals would crack up endeavouring to hold the same speed.

These drivers, men who had learned the game in Continental road races, believed that they could force the Ross-Eight to a greater speed than the engine would be able to stand. It didn't matter what happened to themselves; if they could force Jim to go fast enough and smash his engine, the other cars in their teams could fight the race out at a less cracking pace.

Stargie grinned when he saw Jim take the lead. He wanted nothing better. A few laps like this, and the Ross-Eight would "blow up"!

They came like hounds after a silver fox, exhausts baying, engines howling, while over

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

JIM ROSS, iron-nerved, daring, is a born racing driver. His 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 a figure creeps into the hangar containing the Ross Eight and sets fire to the tins of special petrol which the car uses. The car itself is unharmed. Next morning, when the competitors are on the starting-line just before the race is due to commence, Jim learns that it was Sniff Dix, Stargie's mechanic who set fire to the petrol. "I'm going to knock his head off!" Jim says, and starts to climb out of the car.

(Now read on.)

in the paddock and enclosures the crowd gasped at the mad speed of the machines, while the slower cars, stringing out behind, drew farther and farther away.

"Stick it—you've got 'em all beat!" Joe's eyes were glowing as he howled the words through the thunder in which the car moved.

The end of the banking came, and they leaped from it, sliding to the flat at 110 m.p.h. They saw the starting line again, and finished the first lap thirty yards in the lead, with Joe craning to see if Steve had arrived yet. But the Ross pit was empty.

"She's going well, even if we have got dud petrol!" he yelled. Then he turned to look behind. "Step on it, they're closing up!"

He was right. As they hurtled towards the next banked section, just past the end of the lap, the machines behind started to gain ground.

Jim jammed his foot at the throttle-pedal, but it was wide open all ready. He could give his engine no more power.

The others crept up. The German car pushed its white nose along the Ross' silver flank, and Lon Stargie's Ace came up at the other side, drawing level as the machines heeled to the banking.

"Step on it!" Joe bawled again.

"I am!" Jim shouted the words through the smashing thunder of the other machines, as the footbridge slashed away overhead. "It's the dud juice!"

That first lap had warmed the other cars up. The drivers were showing what they could really do now. But the Ross-Eight was moving at the limit its dud petrol would allow, and when Joe peered at the speedometer he saw that they were now shifting at just a shade above 120 m.p.h.

Bunched again, they went down the railway straight, and once more Jim pulled the car out. He knew that the only way he could now keep with the leaders was to take chances—and he took a big one when he went into the curve.

The car weaved like a restive horse, tearing its tyres on the concrete and sliding to the banking in a screeching half-skid that took it to the top, with Jim still fighting for control.

Grit, concrete fragments and dust flew out as the tyres bit against the very lip of the banking. Joe could feel the whole car quaking as it tried to go over the edge, then Jim had drawn it down to safety, and was hurtling along two yards in front of Stargie and the German.

At 125 m.p.h. the three leaders slung round the banking, with the Frenchman and the Italian on their tails, their radiator shields plastered with the tiny stones and the dust which the leaders tore from the track and slung behind.

Past the hangars they went, and Jim braced himself to take the jump from the banking to the flat for the Fork. He tensed in his seat, every muscle taut and his foot driven hard down on the throttle pedal.

His speed carried him wide. His outer wheels skimmed across the black safety line, drawn on the track to mark the limit to which a car can ride if it is to get round the bend.

The Ross-Eight was juddering under its speed, then it came off the banking in a mad leap. The spinning wheels screamed round as it left the track and jumped high. The leap appeared to last an age, then the tyres thudded to the track again, the car heaved on its springs—and skidded!

The tail slid outwards. Joe saw the corrugated iron fence by the track's edge swoop at them, and he yelled as the machine lurched.

The tyres slid to the grass. The tail went further out, and the fencing dissolved as it was struck!

A mad shower of debris flew high. Jim was raised in his seat as he battled to hold the car. More of the fencing was torn out. Rusted sheets of corrugated iron and slivers of woodwork skated on the air. A rear tyre burst and sent its blackened fragments out like a spray, then the car lurched back and skidded the other way—full across the track!

Joe had a glimpse of the white German car smashing at them. He saw the driver's mouth come open as he shouted, saw his hands shift as he flung the steering-wheel over, to miss the Ross-Eight by a hair's breadth as it slid onwards, spinning round and round.

Another tyre burst. The machine lurched violently, all but turned over, then settled back, sliding on, with debris tumbling all about it, to come to a grinding, crunching halt in the middle of the concrete—with a wildly-howling pack of machines hurtling off the banking and plunging like wolves down on the disabled machine!

Only then did Joe see that Jim was slumped back in his seat, a great gash across the front of his helmet and blood on his forehead!

Joe at the Wheel!

WITH two tyres burst, with its tail dented and with bits of wood jammed through its broken radiator guard, the Ross-Eight stood athwart the centre of Brooklands track. A score and more racing machines, hurtling off the Byfleet Banking, came headlong for the lamed car.

Joe heard the wild, triumphant howls of the Ace and the big white German machine as they rocketed away, and he heard the rising screech of the cars hurtling up from behind—then he forgot them all as he bent over Jim.

The young driver's crash helmet was gashed across the front, and a thin trickle of blood ran down from his forehead, across the temple to his cheek. He was slumped back against the squab, unconscious—although his last act had been to fight the machine away from the broken fence to the safety of the concrete.

"Jim!" Joe shook him, yelling through the roar of the approaching cars, but his chum did not respond.

Joe twisted in his seat, then pitched himself over the side of the car. The bunch of cars coming at him split to pass the disabled Ross-Eight. Two went by, bellowing at a two-miles-a-minute lick, slashing grit and stones at him as he raced around the tail of the machine, put the gear lever in neutral, and then tried to shove the car forward.

But two of its wheels carried only the shreds of burst tyres. The bared steel rims grated on the concrete, providing resistance too great for Joe to overcome. He ran around and dragged the starting handle from under his seat, then jumped to the front to restart the stalled engine.

Cars were whirling past him now, their tyres spurning the debris of the fence which the crash had slewed across the track. Officials and first-aid men were running out from the pits at the Fork, and the great crowd was staring breathlessly.

It taxed all Joe's strength to swing the mighty engine, but he got it running. Somehow, he dragged Jim's slack figure from behind the wheel, then slid into the cockpit himself.

He sent the lamed Ross forward, bare wheel-rims screeching and grinding against the concrete as he drove on towards the Fork and the line of replenishment pits beyond.

(Will the Ross Eight have to withdraw from the race? You'll know when you read next week's instalment of this exciting serial.)



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B.K. 27

EDITORIAL ANNOUNCEMENT!

Opinions, Please!

THIS week I am going to ask you to do something for me, please. Nothing much; it will only take you a few minutes.

This issue of the NELSON LEE contains two new features—"The Three Terrors" and "The Night Hawk"—and when you have read them both, I want you to write and tell me what you think about them. Whether you like them or otherwise: why you like them or if your opinion happens to be otherwise, your dislikes. I also want you to tell me if you like them better than the "Tubby and Slim" and the "Primo the Terrible" features which concluded last week.

My object in asking readers to do this is obvious, I expect. It is my desire to give you exactly the kind of stories you like, and your writing to me, criticising the contents of the paper, helps me materially. So just drop me a line or two, please: a postcard is quite sufficient.

By the way, readers will be interested to hear that there is much activity down Belford, Sussex, way. Scores of workmen can be seen working hard for *St. Frank's is being rebuilt!* Very shortly now the famous old school will be ready for occupation once more. Look out for announcements concerning this in the near future.

Join the League To-day!

IHAVE had letters from many readers who want to join the St. Frank's League, and who say they are only awaiting the next Entry Form. They will have their chance this week. A form appears on page 42, and with it full instructions on how to join. Fill in the form now, please!

THE EDITOR.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

A. Critchlow, 31, Queen's Road, Fairfield, **Buxton**, Derbyshire, offers copies of the N.L.L. from No. 92, new series.

Fred. A. Clarke, 25, Elm Park Road, Leyton, **London, E.10**, wants members for his correspondence club.

Robert d'Orleans, 15, Union Gate, **Taunton**, Somerset, offers N.L.L. old and new series, to date.

Miss Dorothy Beasley, 12, Monmouth Street, Arch Hill, Auckland, **New Zealand**, would like to hear from girl readers interested in cigarette cards.

A. E. Lonsdale, 19, Albert Street, **Melbourn**, S.E.1, Melbourne, **Australia**, wants to correspond with readers about animal pets and natural history generally.

Philip W. Evans, 14, Foden Road, **Walsall**, Staffs, is forming a correspondence club, and wants to hear from readers.

Miss Betty Cozens (M), 21, St. Helens Road, **Dorchester**, Dorset, wants to hear from girl readers of her own age.

Roy Gilbert, Box 95, **Tananga, New Zealand**, wants stamp correspondents anywhere.

J. W. Dunn, 137, Birmingham Road, **Walsall**, Staffs, would like to hear from readers in his district with a view to forming a club.

W. Osborn, 29, Tavistock Street, **Poplar, London, E.14**, wants to correspond with readers interested in stamps.

Emmett Spar, 11, Little Street, Commercial Road, **London, E.1**, wants to hear from readers aged about 19.

Alf Taylor, 4, Sylvia Grove, Moorwood Road, **Leeds**, wants correspondents in Australia, U.S.A., Ireland, and Wales; ages 14-21.

Miss B. Hicken, 58, Northcote Road, **New Malden**, Surrey, wishes to find a girl correspondent at Blackpool who will give her information about staying in the town in August.

Miss Iris Salinger, 3, Bedford Terrace, Lyham Road, Clapham Park, **London, S.W.2**, wants N.L.L. new series, between Nos. 63 and 117.

J. W. Boucher, 18, Borsman Street, Grosvenor Street, **Camdenwell, London, S.E.5**, offers 400 N.L.L.

R. Rigby, 137, Chester Road, **Southport, Lancs**, wants N.L.L. Nos. 35 to 39, new series.

Miss Ida G. Locke, Fernside, **Liss, Hants**, wants girl correspondents in Portsmouth.

Ken Sheppard, 206, Charlton Road, **Kingswood, Bristol**, wants correspondents interested in talkies, wireless, motor, etc.

A. E. Angus, 51, Harrington Place, Lowfields, **Sheffield**, offers N.L.L. old series, from No. 450, and new series from No. 100.

Hector Hart, 297, L.N.E.R. Cottages, New England, **Peterborough**, wants to hear from a correspondent keen on swimming.

Miss Jeanette Collins, 30, Delyell Road, Stockwell, **London, S.W.9**, wants girl correspondents overseas.

A. Jackson, 3, Holden Road, Bow, **London, E.**, wants correspondents anywhere; interested in talkies.

W. H. Miller, 21, Como Avenue, South Yarra, **Victoria, Australia**, wants stamp collecting correspondents.

H. Ransom, Lower Ford, Stoodleigh, **Tiverton, Devon**, would like stamp collectors to write.

Geoffrey J. Leather, 118, Arundell Terrace, Lidget Green, **Bradford, Yorks**, wants members for his correspondence club.

John Trowbridge, June 27, Bunsford Grove, Roundhay Road, **Leeds**, wants correspondents.

Ivor Blake, 7 or Mrs. Barr, March Road, Orange, **N.S.W., Australia**, wants to hear from Alan Horton. Also from readers in his district.

Reg. J. Powell, 39, Coventry Road, Small Heath, **Birmingham**, offers back numbers of the N.L.L.

Ralph Clarry, 11, Algonquin Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, **Canada**, offers back numbers of the N.L.L.

Reuben Taylor (M), 31, Grant Place, Roundhay Road, **Leeds**, desires correspondents.

Harry Chioertz, 41, Alvington Crescent, **London, E.8**, wants to hear from stamp collectors.