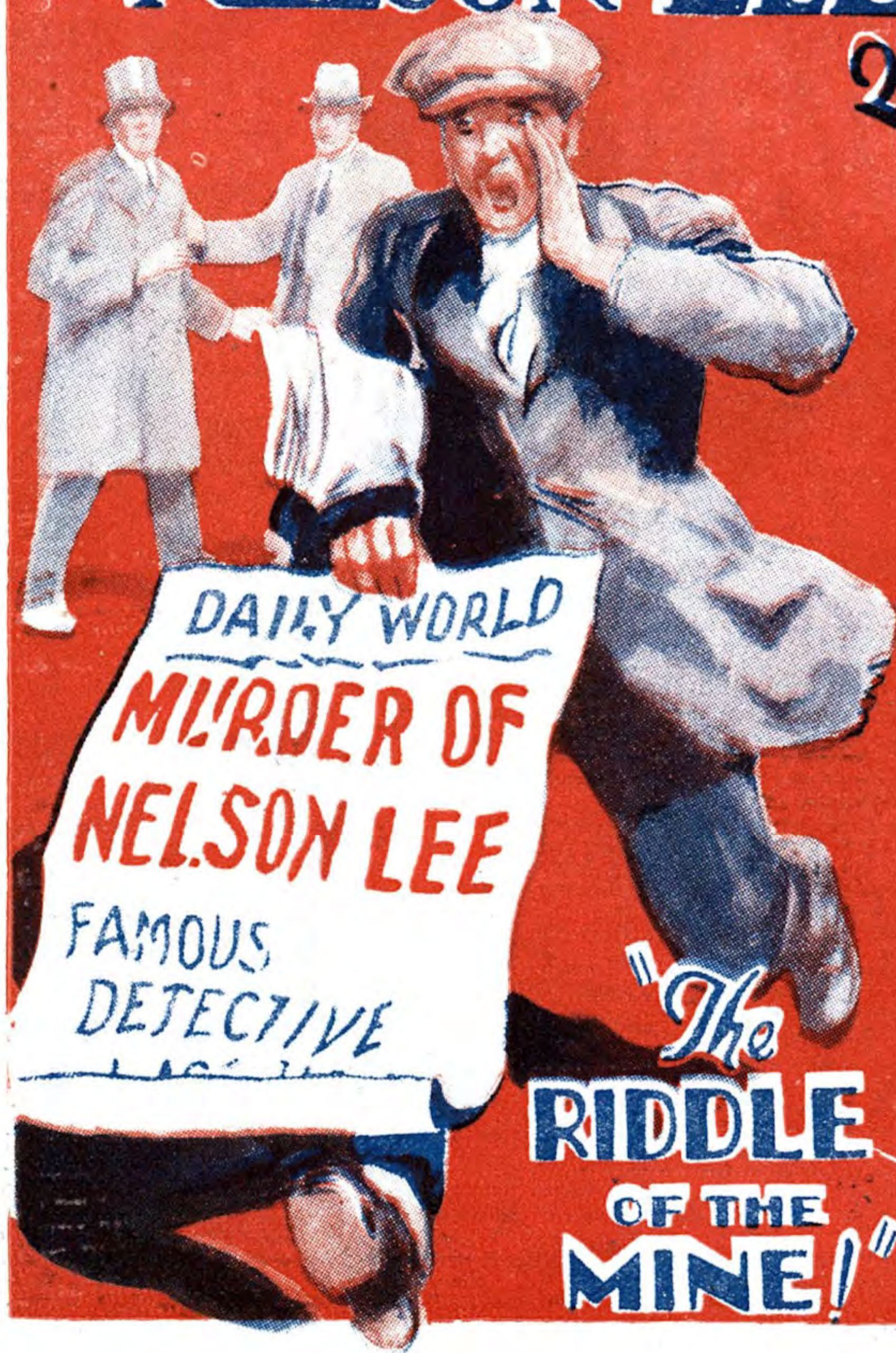


The NELSON LEE

2d



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RIDDLE
OF THE
MINE!"

A magnificent long complete yarn of thrilling detective adventure, introducing Nelson Lee and his schoolboy assistants.

New Series No. 14.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

April 26th, 1939.

The THREE TERRORS!



Conk Does a Bit of Business.

"NO, I don't want any of your dustpans and brooms; and I don't want any of your feather dusters, either!" said the woman who had come to the door of the cottage.

Conk King, one of the Three Terrors, and loaded up with goods which he was trying to sell for his gipsy friend, Cocko Lee, gave the woman a smile that would have disarmed a rozzar.

"Lady," said he, "I didn't reely want to sell you any goods. I only took the excuse because I thought it was Lilian Gish looking outa the window at me!"

"Saucy young 'ound!" snapped the woman, and she instinctively smoothed her hair with her hands and had a dekko at her dial in the reflection of the window. "How much did you say them feather dusters were?" she added.

"Ten and a half to you, lady," said Conk. "A bob to anyone else."

"Have you seen Lilian Gish on the movies?" asked the woman, as she paid for her feather broom.

"Coo lummy!" exclaimed Conk with enthusiasm. "Haven't I! She's a wow! But, o' course, lady, if you went on the screen she'd have to look out for 'er job!"

The woman took another squint in the glassy reflection.

"Well, they always did say I had an acting face," said she reminiscently. "And I always used to get the prize for saying my piece at the Village Prize Giving. But the stage—no! Think of the temptations of stage life! What's a pore girl to do if she's per-sooed by a wicked baronet waitin' for 'er every night at the stage door?"

"Why, clump 'im in the ear!" said Conk practically.

"Are you from that caravan across the road?" asked the woman, and then, as Conkey nodded, added: "Where are you travelling to, my dear?"

"Nowhere in particular," replied Conk. "We are just working across country, trying to

get away from the motor-cars. I run with ole Cocko, him that's sitting there under the spreading chestnut tree doing a bit of tinkerin'. Most respectable man, though he's a gippo!"

"Aren't you a gipsy?" asked the woman. She might well have been excused the question, for the fresh air and the sun had coloured up old Conk's boko like a meer-schaum pipe.

"Me a Romany boy? No, lady," said Conk. And then, with an eye to further

*Texas Jack's a bad lad—
with a strong partiality for
stew. But he doesn't appre-
ciate the stew the Three
Terrors serve out to him!*

business, he went on to explain how he and his two chums, Whacky Clark and Bob Smith—who, incidentally were trying to sell goods at other houses in the vicinity—had joined Cocko and taken to the roving life under his protecting wing to escape the clutches of the Red Dagger, a dangerous Italian Secret Society. The woman was visibly impressed, and when she looked at Conkey after he had finished his tale there was a friendly light in her eyes.

"Here, I'll give you one of my apple turnovers. Then you'd better push off," she said. "I can see you are telling the tale, but you look an honest boy. Are you going anywhere near Greystone Bridge?"

"Yes, lady," replied Conk.

"Then I'm going to trust you to take a couple o' fowls to Mrs. Mumby at the Fisherman's Rest for me!"

"They will be there afore three o'clock, lady," promised Conk. "Old Cocko is going to pull up anchor as soon as he's finished putting a clump on that ole kettle and has sharpened the butcher's meat saws."

The woman nodded, and, going out to her larder, she brought back a couple of huge fowls wrapped in white napkins, a big box of a dozen five-pound jars of home-made marmalade, and a huge turnover.

"The turnover is for you, and the other things are for old Mrs. Mumby, with my love, and I'll collect the basket on Wednesday," the woman explained.

"Right-ho!" said Conk. "Our old hoss will be able to get these over for you. Used ter work in a boiler factory once. Don't mind a five-ton boiler be'ind 'im or arf an express engine!"

Conk staggered off with the load, realising wryly that the woman had landed him with two fowls and sixty pounds of marmalade to carry ten miles for a turnover.

"What yer got there, Conk?" asked Whacky, coming up at that moment.

"Nothing!" snorted Conk. "Just been obliging a gal, that's all! Here, have a bit of apple roll. It's all right."

They walked over to the caravan, where Bob was awaiting them.

Conk put Whitewash, the old white horse, into the shafts and harnessed him up.

A few minutes later the caravan pulled out. And Conk kissed his hand to the woman, who was beginning to wonder whether she had done right to trust a couple of her largest fowls to a gipsy outfit.

"It's awright, sweetie!" he yelled. "We'll see the ostriches get there afore dinner-time."

Enter Texas Jack!

CONKEY was in high spirits when, six miles along the road to Greystone Bridge, they pulled aside into a bit of roadside woodland, lit a gipsy fire and put on a pot of Irish stew. They had been cooking it all the morning, so it only wanted hotting up.

Old Cocko, who was never idle, at once sat down in a chair he had to cane, and started to put a seat in the trousers of another chair.

The boys were left to watch the stew, and they did not worry much about it, for they knew that the more you cook an Irish stew the better it is.

Now and then Conk sniffed the steam as it rose from the pot. He was as hungry as two hunters, and the whiff of onions, mutton and spuds was beautiful. Then he sat down and sniffed the fragrance of the pines in the air.

"It's lovely in the country, isn't it?" he said. "It's so quiet, and nothing ever happens."

"Up with your hands, kiddos!" snarled a voice over a bush of holly.

Conk looked at the holly-bush and slowly lifted his hands. On the other side of the bush was a wild-eyed, foreign-looking man, and levelled at Conk's head was one of those nasty little pistols which figure so largely in the movies.

"Up with 'em!" said the man to Whacky.

Whacky had stood up, and he caught a glimpse of old Cocko bound to the chair in which he was seated.

"My name is Texas Jack, and what I wants I take!" said the man, who had apparently been drinking freely. "I roped up ole Gipsy John, and now, boys, it's your turn!"

Conk figured his chances as the man stepped round the bush. He had nothing to throw, and he was caught bending, so to speak.

A coil of washing line, snatched from the caravan, fell over his shoulders as the man kept his pals covered with the gun.

Whatever he was, this man was a rope artist. Without moving, he sent coil after coil twisting round Conk till he was tied up like an Egyptian mummy.

The man stepped forward and lashed the remainder of the rope round a small sapling. Conkey found himself unable to move. Then Texas Jack roped up the other boys.

"Shout an' I shoot!" he growled. "I'm Texas Jack, the Bad Man of Nagodoches, and when I shoot I kill!"

Conk, overwhelmed with astonishment, took some time to get his voice.

"Say," he asked at length, "what's the game?"

"Food!" said the man. "I'm hungry!"

And, lifting the stew-pot from the fire, he started to eat stew with the iron spoon.

"Ere!" protested Conk. "Leave a little bit for us!"

The man glared at him ferociously.

"Guess there won't be much left when I'm through," he said. "I got a wolf inside me!"

"Should think you got a whole menagerie, mate," said Conk, as the man tore at the bones with strong teeth and threw them aside like a savage.

"That ole gipsy that I tied up got anything to drink?" asked the man.

"No," said Conk. "We only drink water—or tea."

Texas Jack grunted. Noisily he continued to dispose of the stew. Then he glared at Conk as if he would like to shoot him.

"Ere, point that gun somewhere else!" protested Conk, as the stranger flourished his pistol in his left hand and lapped Irish stew from the ladle in the other. "We haven't done you outa your estates! We're only gipsies."

"Yah!" said the man. "Gipsies! Blamed Cherokees—English Redskins—that's what you are. I've a mind to pistol the lota yer. In the old days I couldn't eat my breakfast till I'd shot an Injun!"

"You get on with the stew, mate," urged Conk hurriedly. "Maybe it'll put you in a better frame of mind."

"Yes, I been done outa everything," went on the man wildly. "My aunt disowns me. For why does she disown me? Because she done me outa my property when I was fighting for my country in the war. Yus! I'm from the Lone Star State. I belong to goo' ole Texas! I drink to the burnin' sons o' the Golden South, to the boys of the Lone Star State!"

And lifting the pot, he tried to drink what was left of the stew, pouring some of it into his waistcoat and the rest on the ground. Then he staggered off through the woods, leaving his pistol on the ground behind him.

"Hi, mate, you left yer Maxim behind yer!" called Conk after him, as they heard him crashing through the woods.

But the stew thief did not turn, and presently all sounds of him died away.

"Well, that's a rum 'un!" opined Conk. "Wait a minute, lads. I've got me dagger up me sleeve. I'll get free in a tick-o!"

Conkey ingeniously shook his dagger into his hand. He had sharpened it on ole Cocko's grindstone till it was as sharp as a razor, and, with a bit of manœuvring, he freed himself and released his companions.

Then he ran to Cocko, who, with a handkerchief stuffed in his mouth, was roped very uncomfortably in a high-backed chair.

"Where's that man?" asked Cocko.

"Gone," said Conk.

"The scoundrel took a pound out of my pocket!" growled Cocko, very angry.

"And he wolfed all the Irish stew," said Conk. "But he's left us his gun. Barmy, I should say. Maybe he's hopped it from an asylum!"

"Not him," said Cocko. "He's a bad man. If he's eaten the stew, boys, we'll have to put up with a piece of bread and cheese. We'll eat it as we go along. We'd better get away from here as soon as possible. It's not healthy with that man knocking around."

Conk kicked out the fire and looked with wonder into the empty stew-pot.

"Lummy!" said he. "Whatever that gun-

man was, he'd got a William J. Kelly on him that'd hold something. Dinner for five! Why, 'e's like one o' them giants in the fairy-books!"

They ate their bread and cheese going along, and Conk sat on the back step of the caravan with the loaded gun, keeping a watch as rearguard.

"Lummy!" he mused. "If 'e comes back 'e'll want to eat the 'orse!"

But the man did not show up as they descended a long, winding hill into a beautiful valley, where the River Dither—a stream famed for its trout—meandered through pretty meadows. And down below was Grey-stone Bridge, with the Fisherman's Rest and its lovely old-world gardens, and a bit of common land with trees where they could camp.

Trouble for Texas!

CONK took the fowls which he had been asked to deliver, and Whacky and Bob carried the marmalade. They went up to the back door of the Fisherman's Rest.

It was quickly opened by a nice-looking old dame who was all of a flutter, and whose eyes were red with crying.

"Mrs. Mumby, ma'am?" asked Conk politely. "If so, we brought you a couple of fowls nigh as big as dromedaries, and a dozen jars o' marmalade."

"Oh, yes; that'll be from Mrs. Staggers," said Mrs. Mumby. "I saw your caravan coming down the hill, and I wondered if she'd send them by Mr. Lee. He's a nice, reliable man, and he's caning my old chair that belonged to my grandmother!"

"Yes, and he copped out all right himself in that same chair!" said Conk dryly.

"I'm so glad to see you," went on the old lady, not noticing much what Conk was saying, so full of trouble was she. "We've been having such dreadful times here. There's an awful man been hanging about who says that he's Joe Mumby, my long-lost nephew; and sometimes he says he's Texas Jack, a gunman. He's been drinking and won't pay for anything, and he's threatened to shoot all the bottles in the bar; and three lady guests left this morning. They said that they can't stay here with that man around."

"And he ain't your nephew?" asked Conk, interested.

"Goodness, no!" said the old lady, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "My poor nephew was drowned in war-time by a German submarine which sunk his ship with a lot of mules on board. This man has got his papers, but he's not my dear Joe. Why, Joe was the best boy in the world."

"I see the palaver," nodded Conk thoughtfully. "This here tough-neck must have been a cattleman on the same ship. He got the story outa your nephew, and now he's working the ole wires! Where does he come from?"

"Says he comes from New York," replied the old lady, "and before that he was in Chicago!"

"You've said it, Mrs. Mumby," commented Conk. "They made it too hot for 'im in Chicago, and sent 'im off to warm up little ole New Yoick. And I s'pose this kiddo warmed up that village till it was too hot to hold him, and he thought he'd come here amongst the simple folk."

"He's ruining my business!" wailed the old lady.

"Where's the cop?" asked Conk.

"The policeman's in bed with plumbago, ten miles away," said Mrs. Mumby. "Nothing has ever happened before to want a policeman here since that night the Zepelin come over in the war-time."

"It's always the way, lady," commiserated Conk. "When you want a rozzer he's as rare as a bluebottle in winter. When you particularly don't want him, there's a whole division of him round the ole Jimmy 'Orner. Coo! I know rozzers!"

"This man's gone away," pursued the old lady, "and he's coming back at ten o'clock to-night, with his gun. He says that he's going to force his way into the house and stay here. He says it is his right. And now that those ladies have gone the house is empty."

"What are you doing about it?" asked Conk.

"Some of the neighbours are coming. There's Miller Grimes, from the old mill up the river—a very strong man; and there's Mr. Bubbles, the harness-maker; and Mr.

Soaping, from the grocer's shop—though he's a poor sort of fish; and one or two more. The sexton, Mr. Marsh, is coming, too, though I don't see what good he is. Oh dearie me! I don't know what's going to happen!"

And the old lady started crying.

"Cheer up, ma!" said Conk. "We'll see you all right. Look!"—and he brought Texas Jack's pistol out of his pocket. "We got 'is gun," he went on. "And he got our Irish stew! Coo lummy! I never see a chap wolf Irish stew like that nib. He's a reg'lar Irish stew hound. Take my advice, Mrs. Mumby, and don't you let him in! That man would eat Joe Lyons outa house an' home! But don't you worry, the Three Terrors are standing by!" finished Conk proudly.

"Did he attack you?" asked the old lady in wonderment.

"He roped us all up," said Conk. "Took us unbeknownst, as you might say, when we was getting dinner ready. He ate all our stew, and then went off, leaving his pistol behind him. He's a lad, that's what he is!" added Conk appreciatively.

"Then you poor boys haven't had any dinner!" exclaimed the old lady.

"We had a bit of bread an' cheese coming along," said Conk.

"You shall have a nice tea," beamed Mrs. Mumby, who was glad to have old Conk to cheer her up. "There's a cut ham, and I can fry you some eggs, and there's a veal-and-ham pie that the ladies wouldn't eat yesterday."



Texas Jack sent coil after coil winding round Conkey until the boy looked like an Egyptian mummy.

"That'll suit us down to the bargain basement!" said Conk, beaming. "And don't you worry, lady. We'll wait on that rough and show him how. He thinks he's the Bad Man of Badville, but we'll show him that we're the Worst Boys of Worcestershire, where the sauce comes from. We won't let him into your house, an' we won't let him fill his Darby Kelly at your expense. He copped us on the ear this time, but we'll be ready for him next. He took a George-an'-the-dragon off ole Cocko, an' Cocko ain't arf got the lemon flavour about it. Can Cocko come to tea, lady?" added Conk diplomatically.

"To be sure!" said Mrs. Mumby.

Conk was well pleased, and when the tea was ready at half-past four, he made nearly as good a show with the abandoned veal-and-ham pie as Texas Jack had made with the Irish stew.

That night there was a big gathering of the village lads at the Fisherman's Rest.

The miller was there—a big, silent, hairy man, with whiskers growing out of his ears. Then there was Bubbles, the harness-maker—who had a face like a horse; and Mr. Soaping, from the grocer's shop—a little bloke like a worm, who twisted all over the place and could not sit still, but who told the world what he was going to do with Texas Jack if that bad lad came along that way.

Conk watched him out of the corner of his eye and decided that Soaping was a non-starter. The others were non-starters, too. As the hour drew nigh, a lot of the lads who were chucking their weight about concerning what they had done in the Great War and what they were going to do with Texas Jack, finished up their liquid refreshment and said that their wives were waiting for them, and that the Terror of Texas would not come that night. They went off, and eventually only the miller and Cocko were left.

Conk gave the wink to his pals and they went off to the caravan and slipped on their monkey-skins. After making a point of stuffing the long tails with a length of stout rope, the boys crept back into the inn and waited.

The boys listened. All was silent save the murmuring of the weir up by the mill. The moon was rising over the trees on the other side of the river. A trout splashed. Then came a voice yelling in the distance that Texas Jack didn't eat his breakfast before he'd shot an Indian, and that he was going to have his rights.

"Here he comes," said Conk tensely.

The old lady had hidden herself in the parlour. The miller and Cocko had come out on the lawn by the whispering river.

Conk and his pals crept up to the front bed-room. They saw a dark shape come into the light, and it started to shout.

"Stop that!" said the miller. "Go away!"

Then the miller caught one in the jaw that

stood him on his head. There was no doubt that Texas could use his fists as well as a gun.

"Who's got my gun?" he yelled. "I want my gun! I'll shoot the lot o' ya!"

Cocko squared up to him—and Cocko was an old fighting man. Texas Jack leaped upon him like a tiger. Cocko made a brave show. He had been done down for a pound note, and it gave him strength. But he was an old man now, and though he could use his fists, there was not the weight behind them as in the old days.

Texas Jack bore him to the ground. He had got old Cocko by the throat and was mad with rage. Then suddenly his grip loosened. For, from the top window of the Fisherman's Rest there issued a huge gorilla, followed by a brace of orang-outans.

Texas Jack's jaw sagged as he stared at these apparitions.

"Hey!" he muttered. "Monkeys—am I dreaming?"

"Op it!" cried the leading monkey. Lifting a long tail which trailed behind him, he brought it down with a thump on Texas Jack's neck, knocking him flat on the lawn with his nose in the clock golf hole.

"Let's have a round of golf!" brilliantly suggested Conkey, and, using his tail like a driver, or a brassie or whatever they use, he proceeded to belabour Texas Jack on the rear—much to that worthy's discomfort.

Indeed, the bad lad had a rooted objection to being used as a golf-ball. Uttering a roar of wrath, he leaped to his feet and made a wild dash for safety. Not so soon were Conkey & Co. to be done out of their spot of sport, however. Golf seemed napoo, so they turned to cricket. Using their tails as bats, they scored sixes with reckless abandon.

The game would have continued indefinitely, only Whacky put a stopper to the proceedings. Aiming a hefty whack at Texas Jack, Whacky missed and copped Conkey a biff on the shoulder. Conk wasn't expecting this. With a protesting howl at having been turned upon by one of his own henchmen, he stepped backwards—right on to Bob's toe.

Now Bob was very touchy about the toes. He had a large-sized corn on his big toe, and one of his pet aversions was having it trodden upon. With a fiendish howl he jumped about three feet into the air, knocked into old Conkey, who was sent flying against Whacky, and somehow the three of them got mixed up and landed on the ground in a sprawling heap of legs and arms.

Texas Jack seized his chance pronto. Holding his pants tenderly, he did a bunk while the bunking was good. Out of the grounds of the Fisherman's Rest he tore like a man pursued by about five thousand wasps, across the road and into the field on the other side.

But it was Texas Jack's unlucky night. He reached the field all right, but after that he hadn't gone more than a dozen yards before he tripped up on an unseen lump of turf. Over he went with a crash, and for the



The disguised Conkey brought round his long tail and gave Texas Jack a terrific thump on the head.

second time that night his nose made its acquaintance with the hard, unsympathetic ground.

Whimpering with pain, Texas Jack struggled to his feet, cast a hasty glance over his shoulder, and then uttered a cry of fear. Bearing down upon him were the three apes who, having sorted themselves out, had taken up the chase afresh, and were now intent upon teaching the bloke who insisted on eating a Redskin before breakfast a lesson he would never forget.

Texas Jack took to his heels again, but Conkey & Co. gained upon him easily. Panting, cursing, the man went down again as three figures hurled themselves upon his shoulders.

"Got yer, my beauty!" said Whacky, as he flicked his tail across the fallen one's swollen nose. "What yer going to do with him now, me old Conk?" he added.

Conk was looking thoughtful. His brain-box was doing thirteen to the dozen—and then some.

He looked around him, and his eyes lighted up as they beheld a nearby pond. A very special pond it was. Conk had noticed it earlier during the day, and never before had he seen one with so much slime on it!

"Cast your optics to your left and you'll soon see," he replied.

Whacky and Bob cast their optics in the direction indicated, and they laughed their glee and approval. Texas Jack, screwing his head round with difficulty—for it was difficult, seeing that Conk was squatting on

his head—looked also. And he didn't laugh his glee and approval. To the contrary!

Two minutes later a screaming, kicking figure hurtled through the air and dropped into that pond with a plop. Four minutes later an apparition, bearing some resemblance to a human being, emerged from that pond. It was Texas Jack—a very green one!

Watched by the Three Terrors, who had laughed so much that their monkey skins had been within an ace of splitting times on end, Texas Jack disappeared into the darkness. They felt that he had received his deserts.

Smiling with satisfaction, Conk led his followers back to the Fisherman's Rest, where the miller and Cocko were looking out for them.

"Where's he gone, boys?" asked Cocko.

"I don't know where he's gone," said Conk, "but he won't come back here no more."

The miller rubbed a lump like a pigeon's egg on the top of his coco-nut.

"That's a good thing!" he growled thankfully. "Fellers like that ought not to be allowed. Now, seeing that all is well that ends well, I think we might have a spot of refreshment. What'll the monkeys take?"

"Ginger-beer!" said Conk.

THE END.

(You'll never have the blues while the Three Terrors are knocking around, chums. Next week Conkey & Co. are in their best form. They come up against an old enemy in Puzzo the Dude—and once again this notorious Chicago gunman knows all about it!)

You'll Enjoy Every Chapter Of This Magnificent Yarn—

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By
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SEARLES BROOKS.**

Gloriously exciting! Wonderfully thrilling! Nelson Lee and Nipper on the job; first, unravelling a baffling mystery in London; then following the trail to South America, there to be mixed up in a whirlwind of amazing adventure!

CHAPTER 1.

A Young Man Named Carroll!

THE voice over the telephone was excited and eager.

"Can I possibly see you, Mr. Lee?" it asked.

"There is really no reason why you shouldn't see me," replied Nelson Lee, the famous criminologist, of Gray's Inn Road. "Whether I shall want to see you, however, is a different matter. It all depends upon the nature of your business."



"I'm speaking from Victoria Station, Mr. Lee," said the eager voice.

"What name, please?"

"Granville Carroll—same as Christmas Carol, only with two 'r's' and two 'l's,'" came the voice. "I'd like to have a talk with you, if it's possible. I only got back from abroad to-day—Burma—and I've seen all this excitement about the Red Mountain Mine Company's shares in the paper. It's a fishy business, Mr. Lee."

"Indeed?"

"That mine is worthless," continued the unknown Mr. Carroll excitedly. "There's not a pen'orth of gold in the whole darned

—Featuring Nelson Lee And His Schoolboy Assistants!



thing. Those shares are a fraud, and it isn't right that these people should be allowed —" He broke off, and Lee could hear him breathing hard. "But if I'm going to see you, Mr. Lee, there's no need for me to say this over the 'phone," continued Mr. Carroll more calmly. "When can I come?"

"If the matter is particularly urgent, I can see you this evening if you wish," replied Lee obligingly. "How would seven o'clock suit you?"

"Fine! Thanks, Mr. Lee!" came the voice. "I'll come and——"

His voice seemed to trail away, and Lee thought he heard a faint gasp, almost like a groan, immediately followed by a thud.

"Hallo!" called Lee sharply.

But there was no reply. The detective shrugged his shoulders, and hung up the receiver. Possibly Mr. Granville Carroll had been in such a hurry that he had not even waited to say "Good-bye."

Lee thoughtfully picked up the evening paper, Mr. Carroll's words having stirred his memory. Usually, Lee was not interested in the financial columns of any newspaper; but just recently there had been a sensation over the Red Mountain shares.

Only a few months ago Red Mountains had been worth a few shillings each; now they were running into pounds. The rise had been meteoric, and there was no sign that the boom had yet reached its peak. Red Mountains were regarded as a safe, solid investment, for the mining company which had issued these shares was a highly prosperous concern. This particular mine, it seemed, was a miniature Klondike, and it was producing an extraordinary amount of gold.

The door of Nelson Lee's comfortable study opened, and Nipper looked in.

"Busy, guv'nor?" he asked.

"Not particularly, but I want you," said Lee. "You're just the fellow. Go through the index files and the records, and see what you can find concerning the Red Mountain Mine."

"O.K., chief," said Nipper briskly.

Nelson Lee's files were remarkably complete and comprehensive. Almost any subject under the sun could be looked up—and the vital information would be found.

"**T**HE Red Mountain Gold Mine was discovered four years ago, guv'nor," said Nipper, after he had looked up the necessary information. "There was a bit of a boom at first, but the mine didn't keep up its promise, and within eighteen months it was more or less abandoned."

"Where is it situated?"

"In South America, sir—Brazil, I think," replied Nipper, looking at his references. "Yes, Brazil. In the interior; nearest town is a place called Padista, more than twenty miles from the railhead. Right out in the wilds, by the look of it."

"Who discovered this mine?"

"Two English prospectors," replied Nipper. "A company was formed, and an engineer was sent out—"

"What are the names?" broke in Lee.

"The people who formed the company? Gill and Simmonds."

"And the engineer?"

"Carroll."

"The engineer was named Carroll, was he?" mused Lee. "Well, he certainly ought to know something about the Red Mountain Mine. H'm! Anything else?"

"Not much, guv'nor, except that there's an item here which says that the mine was more or less abandoned," replied Nipper. "Then there are these later insertions about the new boom. The mine seems to be going great guns now, and is producing gold in big quantities."

"Thanks, young 'un—that'll do," said Lee.

"What's it all about, sir?" asked Nipper curiously. "Anything special in these inquiries?"

"I don't know—there might be," replied the detective. "It all depends."

AT Victoria Station an extraordinary thing had happened.

Granville Carroll, in the telephone booth, had taken no notice of his surroundings. He was giving all his attention to his talk with Nelson Lee. Rather a brain-wave, this, to ring up the great private detective. Carroll couldn't very well go to the police—he hadn't any case to place before them; but Lee would certainly give him some good advice.

Although Granville Carroll had been, until recently, buried somewhere in the wilds

of Burma, he had never been out of touch with the main happenings of the world. It was while Carroll had been in Burma that he had heard of the remarkable exploits of Nelson Lee in connection with the recent Balghistan affair. Everybody in the East, white and brown people alike, had been talking of Nelson Lee's brilliance.

Granville Carroll was a tall, lithe young man. His face was deeply tanned, and there was a clear-cut, active look about him. While he was talking to Nelson Lee over the 'phone, he suddenly became aware that the door of the kiosk had been opened. He half-turned, in the middle of a sentence, with the vague idea of remonstrating.

Carroll, who had lived in the wilds, was a man who could act as quickly as a panther. He caught a glimpse of a flushed face, with intense, burning eyes; he caught a glint of steel. But in that confined space he was unable to turn swiftly enough. The steel blade plunged forward, and Granville Carroll, with a gasping groan, sagged down.

So sudden had been this attack that the young man had been unable to make any loud outcry. He lay huddled in that telephone-box, with the noise and bustle of Victoria Station all about him. With astounding daring, the stranger replaced the telephone receiver on its hook, then putting his weapon away he bent down over his victim. Quickly he rifled Carroll's pockets. Then, after making sure that nobody happened to be near the telephone-box at the moment, he walked out of the booth, carefully closed the door, glanced about him casually; and strode away.

Fully five minutes elapsed before anybody else went to that particular booth. It happened to be a smartly-dressed girl, who paused for a moment to take some coppers out of her handbag.

She pulled at the door, and it opened with unexpected abruptness. With startled, horrified eyes, the girl saw a man's body roll out of the telephone-box almost at her feet. There was something wet on the floor just inside—something red. Blood! The girl screamed.

People hurrying for their trains paused in astonishment and looked at the girl, who was now swaying and clutching on to the edge of the door for support. She screamed again—a wild, frenzied cry, charged with terror. Two City men dropped their bags and ran to her assistance; they caught her just as she was about to fall.

"Look!" she breathed, with a shudder. "Blood! He—he fell out when I opened the door—"

CHAPTER 2.

The Mystery of the Stabbed Man!

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT BODLEY, of the C.I.D., was fat. He had some little difficulty in squeezing himself into Nelson Lee's favourite arm-chair.

"Decent of you to give me a few minutes, Mr. Lee," he said, as he took some papers out of his pocket. "Mr. Lennard advised me to look you up. It's about these bank-note forgeries which have been causing so much trouble."

"You look worried, Bodley," said Lee dryly. "The expression doesn't suit you a bit, and if I can do anything to restore you to your usual cheery amiability——"

"Well, I thought perhaps you'd have a look at these forgeries, Mr. Lee," interrupted the Yard man. "You've got a pretty complete file of crooks, haven't you? We've been through our records at the Yard, and I'm hanged if we can tack this job on to any particular man. Once we've got a line to work on, we might be able to nab the beggar."

"Let me have a look at the notes," said Lee. "Most forgers have their own characteristics; they give themselves away in some little trifling detail."

"That's just it," said the stout detective-sergeant. "This man hasn't given him- away at all—at least, I don't think he has. That's why I've come to you—you may have some information in your files which we've missed."

Nelson Lee was about to take the papers when the telephone buzzer sounded. With an "Excuse me," he lifted the receiver.

"That you, Lee, old man?" came a familiar voice.

"Yes, Lennard. What is it?"

"Bodley's there with you, isn't he?" asked Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard.

"Yes—arrived five minutes ago."

"Sorry to disturb him in the middle of his whisky-and-soda, but ask him to come to the 'phone, will you?" said Lennard. "There's been a murder at Victoria Station—somebody stabbed in a telephone-box. I'm too busy to go along, and as Bodley is at your place he might just as well shoot straight off from there."

"All right," said Nelson Lee, a thoughtful look coming into his eyes. "A murder at Victoria Station, eh? A man in a telephone-box? Know who he is?"

"We don't know anything yet—the railway police sent out a frantic S.O.S., and we think it advisable to send a man along," replied Lennard.

"I'll get Bodley to talk to you," said Lee.

The detective-sergeant was soon at the 'phone, after ruefully hoisting himself out of the comfortable armchair. He hung the receiver up after half a minute.

"Afraid I'll have to leave this matter until later, Mr. Lee," he said, reaching for his hat. "I've got orders to have a look at this queer business at Victoria Station."

"Mind if I come along?" asked Lee.

"Mind? I'd take it as a favour," said the detective-sergeant eagerly.

"Right," said Nelson Lee. "Somehow, I have an idea that this case will interest me."

WHEN they arrived at Victoria Station they found that a small section of the great entrance hall had been barricaded off. Several railway policemen were on duty. Near the fateful telephone-box stood a group of officials, including the local police inspector. Nelson Lee and the Yard man had no difficulty in getting through. The police-inspector saluted his colleague and then shook his head.

"Afraid there's nothing much you can do, Bodley," he said. "The fellow was stabbed in the back. Killed instantly, I should think. Anyhow, nobody seems to have heard any outcry. Fell out of the box when somebody else went to use the 'phone."

"What about the man who opened the door and let the body fall out?" asked the detective-sergeant.

"It wasn't a man—it was a girl," said the police inspector. "She's O.K. I took her name and address, and some other lady undertook the job of seeing her home. Gave her several kinds of a shock, I fancy."

"Have you had a doctor to this man?" put in Lee, with a sharp note in his voice.

"Not a doctor, sir," replied the inspector. "One of the station's first-aid men came along, and the ambulance ought to be here soon."

They all looked down at the body, and the Yard man pursed his lips.

"H'm! Rummy business," he commented. "Looks a bit like a foreigner—or a chap who's spent a good deal of his life abroad. You say that nothing suspicious was seen near this particular booth?"

"Nothing at all," put in one of the station officials. "Nobody knew there had been a tragedy until that girl opened the door and the body fell out."

"What about fingerprints?" asked Bodley. "You haven't been handling this box in any way, I hope?"

"No, it hasn't been touched," said the station official.

"Good! Has this poor fellow been identified?"

"There's nothing on him that we can identify him by," put in the police-inspector. "No money, no keys, no wallet—nothing at all. His pockets are empty."

"H'm! Stabbed and robbed," said the Yard man. "Did he have any baggage? A suitcase, or anything like that?"

"None that we've found," said the railway official. "We've questioned all the porters."



and the taxi-men, but we've found no trace of any baggage."

Nelson Lee was looking thoughtfully at the soiled band inside the stabbed man's hat.

"I can tell you who this man is," he said, looking at Bodley. "His name is Granville Carroll."

"Oh! The name's in his hat, is it?"

"No, but I see that this hat was purchased in Rangoon."

"We saw that, too, Mr. Lee," put in the station official. "But I don't see how that gives you the man's name."

"What new magic is this?" inquired the corpulent Yard man, looking at Lee in astonishment.

"No magic at all," replied Lee, as he bent beside the body. "This man happened to ring me up this evening—told me his name was Granville Carroll, and that he had recently arrived from Burma."

Lee remembered with a start that gasping groan he had heard—and the thud. The thud had probably been the sound of Carroll's falling body. So this young man was stabbed even while he was telephoning!

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Lee abruptly. Almost without knowing it, he had placed a hand over Granville Carroll's heart. "Water—brandy!" he went on, looking up. "Quickly! This man isn't dead!"

"What!" went up a general cry.

"Who's the fool who first examined him?" went on Lee angrily. "If prompt measures had been taken, Carroll's life might have been saved. Perhaps it will be too late now."

Bodley was on his knees now, and he and Nelson Lee managed to force a little brandy between Carroll's clenched teeth. Nelson Lee's finger was on his pulse. There was a faint, almost imperceptible fluttering.

"Never mind the police ambulance," he said, looking up. "Get hold of the nearest hospital—tell them to send an ambulance at once—with first-aid men. Hurry!"

SOMEHOW, Nelson Lee felt relieved to discover that Granville Carroll was not dead. The knife-thrust was a serious one, but there was no certainty that it would prove fatal. Carroll seemed to be a wiry, husky sort of fellow. With luck, he might pull through.

But who was the man who had stabbed him? And why? What was the motive?

Nelson Lee did not accompany the ambulance to the hospital; he could make inquiries later. In the meantime there was a chance that he might be able to do something. There was the beginning of a mystery here, and all Lee's instincts were aroused. He had received no commission to investigate, but that did not matter. He felt responsible, in some way.

Lee remembered the young mining engineer's words. He had been very excited

about the Red Mountain shares. He had more than hinted that there was some fraud being perpetrated in connection with that Brazilian gold mine. It might be useful to look up the offices of that mining company. Perhaps those people would be able to give him a clue. Lee consulted a telephone directory, and found what he wanted. Red Mountain Mine Company, Limited, Whitfield Chambers, E.C.4.

Nelson Lee chartered a taxicab and was soon off. He knew that Whitfield Chambers was a large block of office buildings somewhere near the Monument, close to the river. There was very little chance of finding anybody at the office now; but Lee could at least have a look round.

When he arrived, he found the place quiet and deserted, wearing that bleak, unfriendly look which affects all big City offices after hours. The doors weren't closed, however, and he inspected the long list of tenants, just inside the lobby.

"Red Mountain Mine Co., Ltd., Reuben Prance, Managing Director—Fifth Floor."

A man wearing a green apron and carrying a broom appeared as though from nowhere, and he looked at Nelson Lee doubtfully.

"Nobody here now, sir," he remarked. "All gone home."

"That's a pity," said Lee, turning. "I suppose you don't happen to know Mr. Prance's private address? The matter's rather urgent—"

"Oh, if it's Mr. Prance you're wanting, you're lucky," said the man in the apron. "He's the one man who is here. Came in about half an hour ago, with a friend. Working late, I suppose."

"Thanks—that's good news," said Lee, handing the man a tip. "I haven't an appointment with Mr. Prance, but I dare say he'll see me."

The man looked dubious.

"Better go easy, mister," he said, lowering his voice. "Mr. Prance ain't a good-tempered man at the best of times; an' I reckon he's a bit off colour this evenin'. Just a friendly tip, like."

"Off colour?" repeated Lee, realising that this man mistook him for an advertising agent, or some such person.

"Regular queer he looked when he came in," said the other. "All pale like an' shaky. Looked as if 'e'd 'ad a big shock; didn't even answer when I spoke to him. Never see 'im like it before."

Nelson Lee did not reveal his thoughts. Here was a significant piece of information—and picked up quite by chance! So Mr. Reuben Prance, the managing director of the Red Mountain Mine Company, Limited, had come in recently, shaky and pale!

Granville Carroll, the former engineer of the Red Mountain Mine, had been found stabbed at Victoria Station!

Was there something more than coincidence in these two circumstances?



Opening the door of the telephone booth, the girl was horrified to see the limp body of a man fall out.

CHAPTER 3.

The Fight on the Fire Escape!

NELSON LEE was not long in making up his mind.

"Perhaps I'd better leave it until to-morrow, after all," he said, looking at the man in the green apron. "It's after hours, and if Mr. Prance isn't in a good temper I might spoil everything by approaching him this evening."

He nodded, and walked out of the building. In the circumstances, he did not think it advisable to proceed openly to the offices of the mining company.

The detective did not walk far. Turning down a little alley, he proceeded towards

the river, finally finding himself in a mere passage. Glancing up, he could see the rear of the Whitfield building. It was practically flush with the river, and here, too, there was something which caused Lee's eyes to glisten.

An emergency staircase!

QUIETLY scaling a wall or two, Lee had no difficulty in getting to the foot of the emergency staircase at the back of the Whitfield office building. It was one of those iron staircases running right up the face of the building. Just below, black, ugly and mysterious, was the river.

The upper reaches of the Thames are beautiful, and even just west of Blackfriars Bridge the wide sweep of the great river is

majestic and impressive—particularly at night, with the myriad lights of the Victoria Embankment gleaming. Here, east of London Bridge, where there are no embankments but just a profusion of wharves and warehouses, the picture is different.

In many parts there was a bustle and a hurrying and scurrying under powerful lights. Ships were being discharged, and tugs were puffing busily to and fro. In other places the wharves and warehouses were dark—deserted for the night. The swirling river, noiseless except for the gurgle of the flood tide, looked cold and grim.

It was just such a spot as this—dark and forbidding—at the rear of the Whitfield office building. Nelson Lee, as he mounted the iron staircase, passing the dark windows, felt that he was on the verge of an adventure.

Lee was encouraged by the fact that there was a lighted window above him—just one solitary window amongst all those others. And it was on the fifth floor! He congratulated himself upon his move. Yet he did not deny that there was an element of luck in this. He had been prepared to force an entry on the fifth floor; he had hardly expected to find the offices of the Red Mountain Mine Company, Limited, at the rear, just where he wanted them to be.

Creeping up the final flight of iron stairs, Lee became very cautious. The light was gleaming out from that window. There was no blind—no curtains. As stealthily as a panther, Lee reached the platform of the fifth floor—which was the top storey of the building. The lighted window was right in front of him.

With great care, he raised his head and peered in. He looked into an office which was commonplace enough—an office severely yet adequately furnished. Two men were standing in the centre of the room, talking.

One of them was a big, heavily-built man of about forty-five, clean-shaven, heavy-featured, scrupulously attired. His face, in spite of its pallor, was beaded with perspiration. This, no doubt, was Mr. Reuben Prance. The other man was younger, and seemed to be a subordinate. Yet there was something almost insolent in his expression as he regarded the elder man.

Prance was fingering some objects on the big, flat-topped desk. Nelson Lee's attention was attracted towards those objects. A wallet, a tobacco-pouch, a pipe, a card-case, a watch and chain, some loose papers which looked like letters. In short, a collection of articles that represented the contents of an average man's pockets!

As Prance was speaking to his companion, he collected those articles, moved across the room, and stowed them away in a big safe. He closed the safe, and twirled the knobs. He was speaking animatedly now—almost

excitedly. But that window was tightly closed, and the glass was thick. Nelson Lee could not hear a single word—not even a murmur.

The detective was a little uncertain regarding his next move. What he had seen was suggestive, but Lee readily admitted to himself that it was by no means conclusive. A man had been stabbed in Victoria Station, his pockets had been rifled, and at the time he had been ringing up Lee with regard to the Red Mountain Mine.

Lee was now looking into the offices of the Red Mountain Mine Co.; Mr. Reuben Prance had just placed the contents of somebody's pockets into the safe. A case of two and two making four? So it seemed. But Nelson Lee, with all his experience, knew how easy it was to jump to a wrong conclusion.

As it happened, however, the whole matter was taken out of Lee's hands just then. For Prance, striding suddenly across the room, looked out of the window. It was an unexpected move. He caught sight of something unusual on the iron platform outside. His attention became attracted; he stared. Then his jaw sagged, and the pallor of his face became more pronounced.

"Phillips! There's a man out here!"

"What!" shouted the other man, leaping forward.

Prance swept the window-catch up with one motion, and flung the window open. The desperation in his voice, the fear in his eyes, told Nelson Lee a lot.

For a split second, the detective hesitated. Should he bolt, or should he stay here and face these men out? Fate decided the question, for as Lee half-turned his heel jammed in the metal work. That platform was like many others of its kind; it was of wrought-iron, and was of an open-work pattern. The heel of Lee's left shoe had got badly stuck, and the more he pulled the more the heel became jammed.

During those fateful moments Prance obtained a better view of the man on the platform.

"Lee! Nelson Lee!" he ejaculated, aghast.

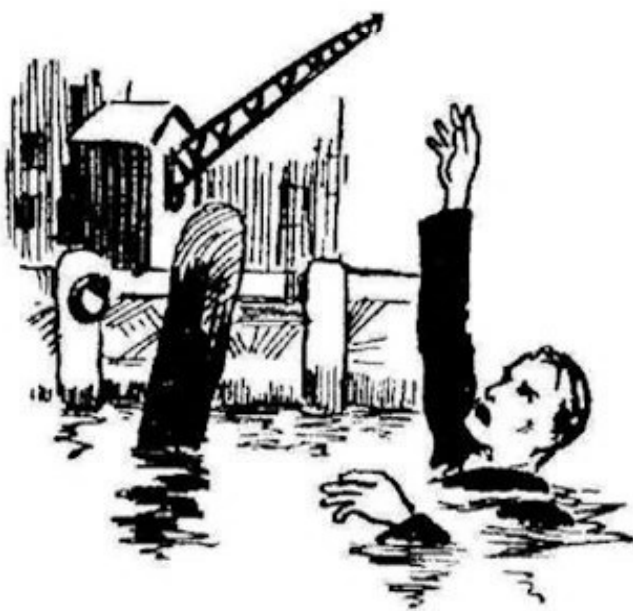
Phillips clutched at the big man's arm. "Lee!" he panted. "Didn't you say that Carroll was ringing up a man named Lee? He's on to us—"

"You fool!" snarled Prance. "Keep quiet!"

But the damage was done.

"There is no need to be excited, gentlemen," said Nelson Lee smoothly, as he produced a revolver. "I must request you to put your hands up, and to keep them up. There are one or two questions—"

Before he could get any further Reuben Prance had flung himself forward. The



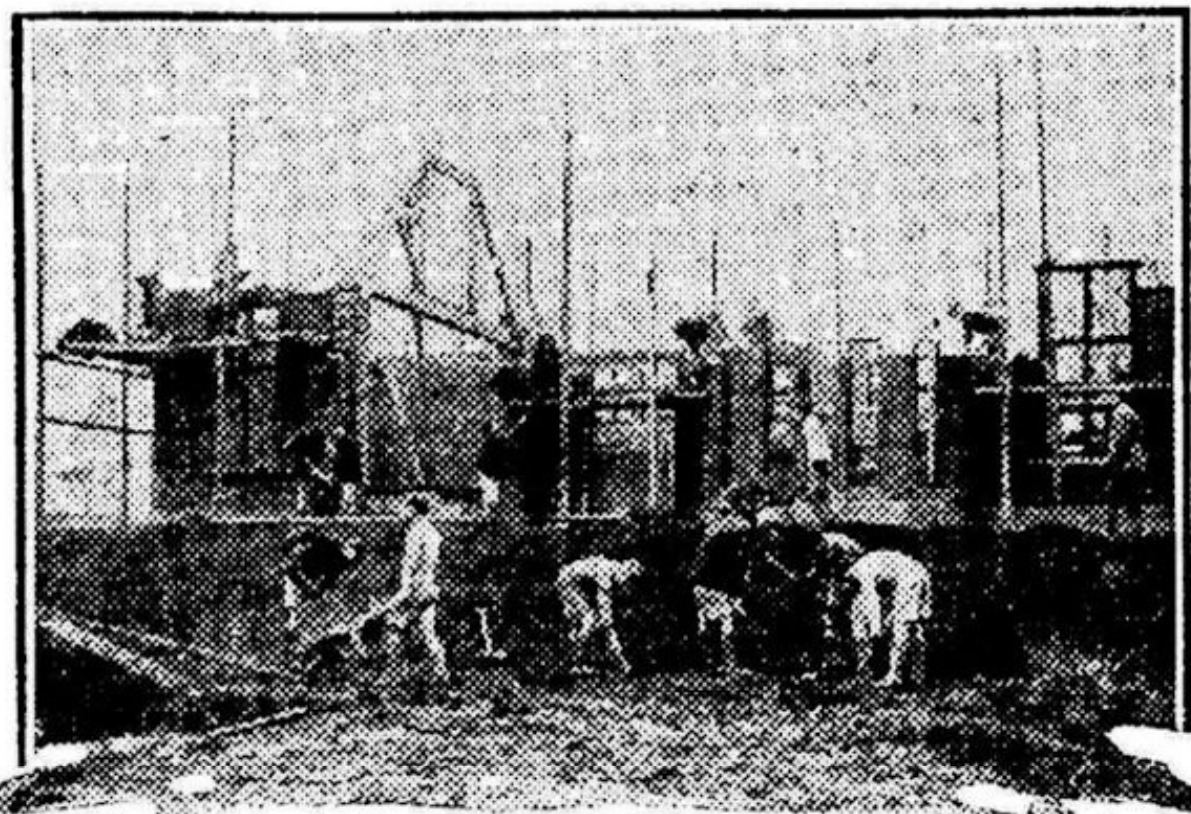


Photo shows the boys of Trent College, in Derbyshire, at work on their school library, which they are building themselves.

ST. FRANK'S Rises Out of the Ashes!

The famous old school is fast nearing completion. Out of a forest of scaffolding, the buildings are rearing their bulks to the Sussex sky, laboured upon by hundreds of workmen. Indeed, the Ancient and the West Houses are finished and ready for occupation. St. Frank's, in fact, is

Re-opening—Next Week!

Once more the school will echo to the shouts of cheery schoolboys. Familiar old faces will be seen in the Triangle, in the studies, in the Form-rooms. E. O.

Handforth, Church, McClure, Travers, Potts, Gresham, Duncan, Castleton, Burton, Dodd and others—all are coming back to the old school! There will be new faces, too—among them Kirby Keeble Parkington and his eleven chums, known as the Carlton Gang; and the Carlton Gang means to wake up St. Frank's!

Look out next Wednesday for Edwy Searles Brooks' first rollicking story in this stunning new series of school yarns. It's entitled:

“BACK TO ST. FRANK'S”

man was beside himself with fury, and he was utterly reckless. He collided with Lee so violently that the detective's jammed heel was freed. The next moment Phillips had joined in.

“Hold him!” panted Prance. “Get that gun out of his hand!”

They hurled themselves at Nelson Lee with animal-like ferocity. The detective, every inch a fighter, was unable to withstand that combined onslaught. He backed against the iron railing at the farther end of the platform. His assailants pressed upon him. Then the unexpected happened. So great was the force of this onslaught that Lee lost his balance. He clutched at the top of the iron railing, but the whole thing happened within a second. Nelson Lee toppled over, hovered for a moment, and then went plunging outwards and downwards.

“Good heavens!” gasped Prance, as though stunned.

He and Phillips stood there, watching. They saw Lee's body, arms and legs waving, shoot down towards the ground. It would be certain death for him. Falling from the fifth floor—

Splash!

By a miracle, Lee escaped the stonework. The outward swing of his downward flight had been just sufficient to carry him clear.

He plunged into the swirling waters of the Thames.

Like two figures that had become petrified, Prance and Phillips stared down. They saw Lee plunge into the water, but they saw nothing else. There was no frantic thrashing of the surface—no shouts for help. Lee must have sunk like a stone.

The moments passed, and they became minutes. Still no sign. Just the darkness below, the flowing stream, the lights of a tug, with a string of lighters in tow, out in mid-river. And, from the distance, the low rumble of traffic, combined with the noises of a ship being unloaded.

Reuben Prance came out of his trance; he looked down at the ground, immediately below. Not a soul was within sight. All the windows of the Whitfield building, and the neighbouring buildings, were dark. He suddenly drew back, shuddering.

“Come in, Phillips—come in!” he panted.

They staggered back through the window, and closed it. Prance was shaking as though with the ague. He gulped down some whisky from his flask.

“You killed him!” muttered Phillips shakily.

“And you helped, my friend!” retorted Prance, his nerves a little steadier.

"I didn't!" denied the other. "It was your doing——"

"Are we going to quarrel?" snapped Prance. "What does it matter? It was Lee—the detective! Carroll must have told him more than we knew. We're lucky, you fool! We've finished Lee before he could even commence his investigations—before he could start any trouble. We're safe now—safe! With Carroll dead and Lee dead there's not another soul on earth who knows anything against us!"

"Supposing he isn't dead?" faltered Phillips.

"Don't be such an infernal idiot!" snapped Prance. "We were watching, weren't we? Lee plunged right in. He didn't come to the surface again. He must have hit the water head first, and he was probably stunned."

"His body might be found somewhere near," said Phillips nervously. "Then there'll be inquiries——"

"You talk like a child!" interrupted Prance impatiently. "Don't you know that there is a strong current in the river? Go out there on that platform and listen! You can hear it swirling. Lee must have been carried away at once—and by now he is well down the river. His body might not be found until it reaches Erith or Gravesend. What can be proved? Nothing! It's a mercy that he came up that staircase instead of through the building in the ordinary way."

Phillips pulled himself together.

"Yes, I think we're safe from Lee now," he muttered. "But it's no good taking things for granted, Prance. Supposing Lee told somebody else? What if he called in at the Yard and explained where he was going?"

Reuben Prance shook his head.

"It's a possibility—but a very remote one," he replied, his nerves now much steadier. "Lee is—or was—a fellow who preferred to play a lone hand. He never worked in conjunction with the police unless he was compelled to. And in this case he had no proof. He wouldn't go to the police until he had something definite to tell them. That was why he came here—to get hold of something definite. Don't you see?"

It was a shrewd shot of Prance's—and not very far off the mark. But he had made one miscalculation. He assumed that the complete disappearance of Nelson Lee, after he had hit the water, was proof that the detective had been stunned and drowned.

Reuben Prance did not give Lee the credit that was due to him.

CHAPTER 4.

"Death of Nelson Lee!"

THE shower came down with true April suddenness.

It was a drenching, soaking rain while it lasted, and Nelson Lee was very glad of it. The weather had served him

well. Soaked to the skin, with his clothing flapping wetly about him, he might have drawn attention had the evening remained dry.

It was true that Nelson Lee had not appeared again on the surface after plunging into the river; but he had not been stunned. He had entered the water cleanly, and had dived straight down.

He knew that he could do nothing more against Reuben Prance at the moment, and it might be very useful if he fooled Prance into thinking that he—Lee—had been drowned. Moreover, it was such an easy deception.

Swimming powerfully under the surface, Lee struck out and finally came up close against the wet, slimy wall at the river side. He allowed only his face to appear above the surface, so that he could breathe. And there he clung, waiting.

He was by no means dissatisfied at this sudden turn. On the face of things, he had failed; but he saw, in a flash, that he could turn this thing into good account. If Prance thought him dead—and had proof that he was dead—then his further investigations would be made easy.

After three or four minutes, Lee swam gently out, so that he could look up beyond the angle of the wall. He saw the iron emergency staircase, and the lighted window at the top. There were now no figures on that platform. Prance and his companion had gone. But even now Lee did not relax his caution. Turning on his back, he floated gently down stream, invisible. Not until he had progressed a hundred yards did he make any attempt to land. Then he quietly approached a deserted wharf, found some slippery, slimy steps, and crawled up.

His next move was to get back to Gray's Inn Road without causing any comment. He did not want to use a taxi. Yet, if he walked, his condition would attract unwelcome attention. And then the heavy shower started without any warning.

"Splendid!" murmured Lee. "Nothing could have happened better."

The rain was blinding at first—a veritable cascade. When, after climbing a wall or two, he arrived in a lighted street, the rain was beating down upon the paved road, and causing a spray to rise for over a foot. Streams were already gushing and gurgling down the gutters.

Lee, thrusting his hands deeply into his pockets after turning up his coat collar, trudged along. And no one would have recognised in that drenched, slouching figure the celebrated detective of Gray's Inn Road.

Half-an-hour after Lee was safe in his own quarters again. He bathed, rubbed himself down, and changed. Then he sat in his study with only the glow of the firelight. He sprawled in an easy-chair, smoking and thinking hard.

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH, as usual, was laying down the law. He and Church and McClure were in Study D, and Church and McClure were trying to get some work done.

Handforth didn't want them to work. He wanted to tell them how their old school, St. Frank's, was being re-opened in a week's time. Church and McClure knew all about it—but Handforth didn't care. The three chums had almost come to blows—and then, at that moment, the door of the study opened, and Vivian Travers looked in.

"You're wanted in the Common-room, dear old fellows," he said briskly.

"Blow the Common-room!" replied Handforth. "We're busy!"

"Chief's orders," said Travers.

"Eh? Oh well, that's different," said Handforth, his eyes lighting up. "Is it work for us?"

"You never know—it might be," replied Travers, moving off.

When Handforth and his chums arrived in the Common-room they found most of the other "cubs" there. Nelson Lee was present, too. Within a minute the stragglers had come in, and Lee looked round with a twinkling eye.

"Well, we're all here, I think," he remarked. "Wait a minute, though. Where's Tubbs, the page-boy? And what about Cuttle and Mrs. Poulter?"

"Do you want them, too, sir?" asked Fenton, in surprise.

Lee nodded, and a few minutes later the domestic stuff of the Academy had arrived. There was evidently something special afoot here.

"I've collected you all together because I want to tell you something—something that will probably surprise you," said Nelson Lee, at length. "Until further notice, I want you to understand that I am dead."

"Good gad!" murmured Archie Glenthorne. "I mean to say—dead!"

"Is this a joke, Chief?" asked Morrow.

"By no means," replied Nelson Lee, smiling. "This evening I was thrown into the River Thames by two enterprising rascals. They thought that they had sent me to my death—and it suits my plans to further that belief."

"How did it happen, sir?" asked Handforth.

"Never mind that now, young 'un," replied Lee. "That really doesn't matter. What *does* matter is that you must all act as though I had suddenly met with a tragic end. You understand? I don't expect you to go about



The two men made a rush at Nelson Lee. The detective lost his balance—and he fell headlong into the darkness below!

with tears in your eyes or anything like that, but if anybody happens to question you, you'll know what to do. If you go out, pretend to be a little sad."

"Right-o, Chief!" chorused the cubs.

"Can't we help in the case, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"I'm afraid not, old man," replied Lee, shaking his head. "At least, not now. This is not one of those cases where I require a small army of assistants. You see, I am

supposed to be dead, and any action that I take must be taken in secret."

Mrs. Poulter and the other members of the domestic staff went away, shaking their heads rather dubiously. They didn't approve of this sort of thing.

"There's one thing I want you to do, Nipper," said Lee. "Ring up Mr. Trevor Dexter, of the 'Daily World,' and say that you want him to come round here at once. Tell him it's urgent."

"Supposing he says he won't come?" asked Nipper.

"He'll come if you tell him there's a good story attached to it," replied Lee dryly.

THE great detective was right. Within half an hour, Trevor Dexter, lean and long, was in Lee's consulting-room. This cheery young man was the star crime reporter of the "Daily World," and he had worked with Lee before.

"I didn't know you were here, Mr. Lee," he said. "Nipper said that it was he who wanted to see me."

"Precisely," nodded Lee. "The fact of the matter is, Dexter, I want you to do me a little favour. I want you to send in a report to the effect that I was found dead this evening—and, if possible, I want you to get it into the stop-press columns of the evening newspapers. I think you'll be able to wangle that, won't you?"

Dexter pulled a long face.

"I can't give a hot story like that to the rival rags," he protested. "Besides, it isn't true. I've seen a few dead men in my time, Mr. Lee, and I'll swear that you're not dead. You don't expect me to tell a fib, surely? What would my vicar say?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"It is because this report is false that I thought you might easily be able to get it printed in your rival rags, Dexter," he replied, with a twinkle. "It might be as well to print it in your own paper in the morning, too—with a nice little article, written by yourself, recounting some of my most famous cases. You know the idea."

Trevor Dexter looked distressed.

"I'm always willing to lend a hand if I can," he said, "but, hang it, isn't this a bit thick? What about the row I shall get into with my news editor later—when he finds out that you're not dead at all? I'm not suggesting that you're asking too much, Mr. Lee, but don't I get any compensation at all?"

"These reporters only think of money!" said Nipper tartly.

"You young ass!" roared Dexter. "I didn't mean money! Don't I get a story of any kind?"

"You certainly do—or will do later," replied Lee. "If you'll arrange this little deception for me, Dexter, I'll guarantee



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.

With the Tide!

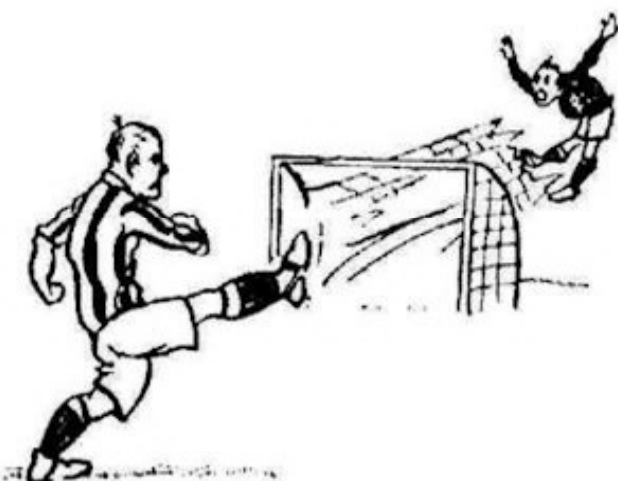
After the heavy rains the football pitch looked like a lake, but the referee decided that the game could be played.

"What!" gasped the visiting captain. "Surely we're not going to play in this?"

"Certainly you are, and don't hang about. You've won the toss; which end are you taking?"

"Oh, well, we'll kick with the tide!" came the fed-up answer.

(R. Hennis, 353, Stockfield Road, South Yardley, Birmingham, has been awarded a handsome watch.)



A Handyman!

A colonel required a manservant, and he inserted an advert. in the local newspaper to this effect. Shortly afterwards an applicant called.

"What I want," said the colonel, "is a useful man—one who can cook, wait, drive a motor-car, look after horses, clean boots and windows, feed poultry, milk cows, make butter, and do a bit of painting and paper-hanging."

"Excuse me, sir," said the applicant, "what kind of soil have you around here?"

"Soil?" snapped the colonel. "What's that to do with it?"

"Well," replied the other, "I thought if the soil was of clay I might make bricks and build a few houses in my spare time!"

(W. G. Westwood, 24, Sutton Avenue, St. Anne's Park, Bristol, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

Some Shot!

Football enthusiast to goalkeeper: "Say Bill, who is the strongest shot you've ever faced?"

Goalie: "Well, Buster, of the Rangers, once took a penalty kick against us. He shot and the ball struck me—and I had to pay a shilling to get back into the ground again!"

(O. Hamilton, 23, Duchy Street, Edgeley, Stockport, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

that you will have the exclusive story of a most interesting and melodramatic case when my investigations are concluded. How's that?"

"Done!" said Mr. Dexter promptly. "That's good enough for me, old mince pie! If it's one of your cases, and I get the exclusive rights to the story, I'm on!"

MR. REUBEN PRANCE started violently.

He had alighted from a taxi-cab in Piccadilly Circus, and Phillips was just behind him. A newsboy outside the Pavilion Theatre was shouting loudly, and selling his papers at a rapid rate.

"Famous detective dead!" the newsboy was yelling. "Late extra! Murder of great detective!"

"They've found him, then!" muttered Phillips shakily.

"Be quiet, you fool!" hissed Prance.

He paid the taxi-cab and dismissed it. He bought a newspaper, and he and Phillips strode across to one of the islands in the middle of Piccadilly Circus, where there was a certain measure of isolation from the crowds.

"What does it say?" asked Phillips eagerly.

Prance did not answer. He was looking at the Stop Press column. There was a big heading in thick black letters: "Tragic

Death of Mr. Nelson Lee; Murder Suspected."

Underneath this were two or three paragraphs of small type:

"The body of a man has been recovered from the river near Deptford this evening. An examination of the pockets led to the belief that the dead man was Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous crime expert of Gray's Inn Road."

"Scotland Yard officials are of the opinion that Mr. Lee was murdered. Death occurred from drowning, although a bruise on the head suggests that Mr. Lee was stunned before being thrown into the water. Cries were heard near Rotherhithe during the evening, and it is believed by the Scotland Yard experts that Mr. Lee met his death in that neighbourhood. Mr. Lee was an excellent swimmer, and it seems unlikely that he could have met his death by accident."

Reuben Prance took a deep breath.

"We're safe," he muttered. "Read this, Phillips!"

Phillips read it.

"Rotherhithe, eh?" he said softly. "That's good! We're all right, Prance—they can't connect us——"

Hard Luck, Tommy!

Bride (to Tommy, dressed up as a bandit): "Oh, you bad boy! That's not the proper dress for a wedding page."

Tommy (disappointedly): "But didn't you tell me I had to hold up a train?"

(A. Chiles, 6, Cranmer Road, Hayes End, Middlesex, has been awarded a penknife.)

Shush!

Smith: "I got that crate of chickens you sent the wife all right, but next time I wish you'd fasten them up more carefully. Coming from the station the beastly things got out. I spent hours searching the neighbourhood, and only found ten of them in the end."

Jones: "Hush, old man; I only sent six!"
(D. Thorpe, St. Giles, 3, Cumberland Gardens, St. Leonards-on-Sea, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

Where Was He?

"Where am I?" asked the dazed man as he came round after being knocked down in a busy London street.

"'Ere you are, guv'nor," said the enterprising hawker. "Map o' London, one penny!"

(G. Baillie, 11, St. James's Road, Sutton, Surrey, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

The Winner!

Grocer: "Which cheese will you have, sir? They're both in prime condition."

Customer: "Let 'em race

across the counter, and I'll have the winner!"
(L. T. Barbrook, "The Clock House," Green Street Green, Darenth, Kent, has been awarded a penknife.)

Taken Literally!

"When you bring me my milk at night," said Mrs. Tomkins to the new servant, "be sure to bring it on a tray."

That night the servant came in with the tray swimming with milk.

"Will you have a spoon to it," she asked, "or will you lap it up, mum?"

(C. Edwards, 59, Orme Road, Worthing, has been awarded a penknife.)

Safe!

Bill (helping to burgle house): "Say, mate, do you realise we've broken into the heavy-weight champion's house?"

Sam: "Don't worry, Bill; we're quite safe. He won't fight for less than a thousand pounds."

(J. Tallis, 209, Bulkington Road, Bedworth, near Nuneaton, has been awarded a penknife.)

Bad For Business!

Agent: "I've got just the house you require, sir. Double-fronted, long garden, healthy neighbourhood——"

Mr. Black: "I'm afraid that won't suit me, then. I'm an undertaker."

(F. Sharratt, 2, Jubilee Cottages, Uttoxeter Road, Derby, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)



"Not so loud—not so loud!" warned Prance. "Come with me. We'll get a drink."

"We need one!" said Phillips, with a gulp.

CHAPTER 5.

The Amateur Cracksman!

WHEN Nelson Lee left his chambers late that same evening, his appearance was not very prepossessing. He was dressed in greasy old clothes, his face was lined and coarse, and he had the general appearance of a down-and-out derelict.

Lee was highly pleased with the way things were going. He had had a private word with Chief Detective-inspector Leonard, of the Yard, and his old friend had promised him that he would do nothing, or say nothing, to spoil the deception.

Nelson Lee was now off on an important errand. He was alone. Nipper had pleaded to come, but Lee thought it advisable to do this job single-handed. He did not anticipate any difficulties. His objective was the Whitfield building, near London Bridge. Having arrived there, he once again used that emergency staircase at the rear. He climbed up cautiously, and when he arrived at the fifth floor he found Mr. Reuben Prance's private office in darkness. But Nelson Lee did not take anything for granted; he acted with extreme caution.

With infinite patience, he tackled the window-catch, and before long it succumbed to his persuasive methods. Lee found himself within the office, and his first move was to go across to the door and to bolt it. There was another door, but this only led to a second office. There was no communication from this second office out into the passage.

Lee used an electric torch, and he now gave all his attention to Mr. Prance's safe. It was not a particularly good safe. It was of the type popularly described as "burglar proof," and it was fitted with a combination lock.

Nelson Lee had magic fingers where a safe was concerned. They were delicate, sensitive, fairy-like in their touch. With his ear pressed against the safe door, he listened for those slight, but significant mechanical sounds which told his trained ear exactly how the tumblers were falling.

Minute after minute passed, and Lee persisted. The minutes dragged on, until a quarter of an hour passed. Twenty minutes—half an hour, and then a sound came to Lee's acute ear which caused him to give a little murmur of satisfaction. The safe door swung open.

Before proceeding to examine the contents, the famous detective produced a silk handkerchief and carefully wiped the door, the safe itself, the handle, and everything connected with it. Then he drew on a pair of washleather gloves.

He not only examined those articles which Prance had put into the safe, but he

pocketed them—a wallet, a bundle of letters, and all the other things. In the wallet was the name, "Granville Carroll." The letters were addressed to Carroll, too. Lee's suspicions had now become certainties.

He was glad that Carroll lived. An inquiry at the hospital—by Nipper—had elicited the information that Carroll was still unconscious, but the doctors had hopes of saving him. If that wound had been an inch lower, death would have been instantaneous.

Lee was very sorry for Carroll. He had been attacked merely because he knew something in connection with the Red Mountain Mine. No doubt Prance had been aware of Carroll's home-coming, and he had purposely waited at Victoria Station, ready to stab the young engineer. It had alarmed Prance to see Carroll ringing up, and in spite of the publicity he had decided to stab him then and there. That was the only explanation Lee could think of.

He was convinced that Carroll was in no way connected with the mine now. That mine had been worked out and abandoned. The original owners had probably sold it for a song—to Reuben Prance and his associates. Why had these people bought it if it was worthless? Was the whole thing merely a share swindle? Nelson Lee hardly thought so; those shares wouldn't boom like that unless they had some solid backing. Yet here was another problem. If a new vein of gold had been discovered in the mine, why was Prance so afraid of Granville Carroll, the engineer who had originally been sent out to the Red Mountain?

There was nothing of note in Carroll's papers. Merely letters from his employers—a well-known mining company with large possessions in the East. Lee turned his attention to the other contents of the safe. His eyes gleamed as he examined documents, sent out from the Bank of England, acknowledging the receipt of a consignment of gold. There were several of these. Gold, it seemed, was being regularly received by the Bank of England—gold from the Red Mountain Mine.

Earlier that evening—before his "death"—Lee had telephoned to an influential friend of his in the Bank of England. This gentleman had assured him that the gold from the Red Mountain Mine was certainly genuine. The shares were booming because the mine was producing extraordinary quantities of pure virgin gold. The gentleman was rather astonished at Lee's inquiry, for there never had been the slightest doubt that everything was above board.

What could it all mean?

But for that stabbing incident, Lee would have assumed—and with good reason—that Carroll had been mistaken. He would have taken it for granted that the mine had started producing again in the ordinary way; that a new vein had been found. In that case, however, Reuben Prance would have had no reason whatsoever to attack the young engineer, for he would have had nothing to hide.

That murderous attack upon Carroll was significant in the extreme. It proved to Lee that there was something very, very fishy about this business.

His next find was a rather long letter, written in careless handwriting. It had been dispatched from Padista, in Brazil, and the date proved to Lee that the letter could only have been received in London a day or two ago. The envelope was here, too—elaborately sealed with wax. The letter had been registered and insured, and there was little doubt of its private nature. But in the circumstances Nelson Lee had no scruples in reading it.

"Dear Prance,—Everything going on all right here. Production as usual. Having no trouble with the men, who are a pretty good crowd, although dagoes. It's a good thing they don't know much about the game.

"The old gorilla is getting along all right, but he's grumbling more than ever. We have to keep a very close watch on him, and unless we keep him pepped up, he doesn't seem inclined to carry on.

"He's complaining about his glasses now; says he can't see properly. Something to do with this infernal climate. Well, of course, it is pretty rotten out here. Hot as Hades, and then some. The old boy wants those supplies, too. You'd better hurry them along, old man. Unless we get them by the end of next month, we shall be rather held up—and that wouldn't do, would it?

"You really must hustle those supplies. We got the last shipment all right, and we carted the stuff overland without any trouble. Do please remember that we can't keep this game up properly unless you attend to things at your end. In other words, get a big move on with those supplies—and see to it that the shipments are regular in future.

"Going back to old monkey-face. His eyes are really bad, you know. When you're replying to this, you had better send a big assortment of spectacles. I don't quite know what sort he wants, but if you send a large enough variety there's bound to be a pair or two which will suit him. I'm a bit worried about his eyes; if they give out it'll be serious. They've been getting worse all the time he's been with us, and that's getting on for six months—and five of 'em out here, in this God-forsaken hole. In fact, it'll be the end of our game, as you must realise, if his eyes go wonky.

"I've enclosed a full list of what we want, and I'd like a wire from you, as

soon as you get this, to assure me that it's all being dispatched without delay.

"As Ever,
"SIMON."

NELSON LEE digested this letter thoroughly, reading it and re-reading it. There was one phrase which struck him particularly—"If his eyes give out, it'll be the end of our game." What did that mean? Why should the mining of gold depend so much upon a man's eyes? And who was this man that the writer rudely referred to as "the old gorilla," and "old monkey-face"?

Nelson Lee did not spend any more time on the letter now. He put it in his pocket with the other things, and continued his examination of the safe. Not that he found anything else of importance. Books and papers connected with the mining company—shares and so forth, but nothing that gave him any vital information.

After a while, Nelson Lee switched off his electric torch, and sat back on the floor with his shoulders to the safe. He wanted to think, and he could think better in the complete darkness.

What was the solution of this riddle?

He could not get the thought of that "old gorilla" out of his head. In his mind's eye he pictured an elderly man, with weak eyes. He had been at the mine for five months, and he had been with Prance's associates for six. Five months! That was about the time the mine had been newly operating. And the unknown "Simon" had definitely stated in his letter that if anything happened to the "old gorilla's" eyesight, the game would be up.

A vague memory stirred at the back of Lee's brain. Six months—weak eyesight—gorilla. There was a connection here, and somehow a chord was struck in Lee's memory. Suddenly a picture came into his mind—a clearer picture.

He saw an elderly man, a curious, ungainly man, with enormous shoulders and stumpy legs. This man had a ragged, unkempt beard, and a mass of untidy hair. He was careless in his attire, and when he walked he almost slouched. Perched on his stumpy nose were spectacles with heavy lenses.

"By James!" muttered Lee tensely. "Mackintosh!"

He could see Professor Clive Mackintosh now—see him as he had gesticulated and pranced at one of the last lectures he had ever delivered. Lee had attended that lecture about seven months ago, just before the professor's disappearance.

"I wonder!" breathed Lee.

Professor Mackintosh had always been an extraordinary figure in the scientific world—



careless in his attire, shambling in his gait, untidy in his toilet. A man who was wrapped up in his work, he cared little for the conventions. In many ways he was not unlike a gorilla.

And this great man of science had disappeared just about six months ago! He had vanished from his home, and not a trace of him had ever been found since.

Nelson Lee was struck by the parallel. This was only a theory of his—perhaps a wild theory—but the impression clung to him that he was on the right track. If Professor Mackintosh was in South America, at this mysterious mine, then it would explain his disappearance. And Lee remembered, now that his mind was on the subject, that Professor Mackintosh had always been short-sighted; his eyes had troubled him a great deal.

The disappearance of the professor had provided the British public with a nine days' wonder. It wasn't as though the scientist had been an ordinary-looking man—a man who could be easily lost. His figure was so striking—he was such a remarkable personality—that he could not have walked abroad in any city street or country lane without being noticed—particularly as there had been a hue-and-cry after him. The whole country, from end to end, had been interested in the mystery of the professor's disappearance.

It was generally believed that he was dead; that he had overworked and that his mind had temporarily given way. And while in this condition he had wandered off somewhere, and perhaps dropped into a river or the sea.

But supposing this man Prance had kidnapped him and carried him off to South America? Here was a logical explanation of Professor Clive Mackintosh's disappearance! He could easily have been seized, conveyed by night to a waiting ship, and placed straight on board.

But why? Why? What reason could there be for taking an eminent scientist to a fever-ridden gold mine in the wilds of South America?

"If only I could find some definite proof," muttered Lee, switching on his torch and then turning his attention to the safe again.

He left the safe very much as he had found it—except for those few missing articles and papers. He closed the door and twirled the knobs. After that, carefully and systematically, he went through Mr. Prance's desk. It was here, in one of the lower drawers, that Lee came upon something which, although trivial in itself, was strangely significant. A crumpled piece of paper—a brief letter—with some intricate figures scrawled on the back. It was because of these figures that Prince had kept the letter. It ran:

"S.S. Bolivia.

"Dear Mister P.,—You're wrong. The job is worth two hundred pounds, if it's worth a penny. Unless we can agree on this amount, the thing's off.

"Yours,

"JAS. SWEENEY."

Nelson Lee's eyes gleamed as he noted the date of that letter. Just six months old! Sweeney, it seemed, was the captain of a ship called the Bolivia. And he wanted two hundred pounds for a certain job! What job? The conveying of the kidnapped Professor Mackintosh to Brazil?

Nelson Lee considered that his visit to Whitfield House had been profitable.

CHAPTER 6.

An Interesting Interview!

NELSON LEE did not go back to Gray's Inn Road. Instead, he utilised the key which Lord Dorrimore, his old friend, had given him, and he spent the night in the millionaire peer's flat. Lord Dorrimore himself was abroad somewhere.

Next morning, Nipper arrived at Dorrie's flat with a suitcase containing all the necessary material for disguise. He brought a copy of the "Daily World" with him, too.

The "death" of Nelson Lee was featured in big type, and there was a touching tribute to the detective, specially written by the energetic Mr. Trevor Dexter.

"What's happened, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly. "What have you been up to?"

"I've been busy, young 'un—



and, by all appearances, I'm going to be still busier," replied Nelson Lee. "This case has taken an unexpected turn, and it may be necessary for me to take a trip out to South America."

"To the Red Mountain Mine?"

"Yes."

"How about me, sir—and the rest of us?" asked Nipper, his eyes gleaming. "Are you going to take any of us?"

"I do not think that this is a case where I require an army of assistants," replied Lee, shaking his head. "You're a useful sort of fellow, Nipper, and it's more than likely that

I shall require your presence, but don't say anything to the others yet."

"Good man, Chief!" said Nipper contentedly.

AN hour later a benevolent-looking, grey-haired gentleman left Lord Dorriamore's flat and proceeded towards the City. His first visit was to the offices of a small shipping company in Upper Thames Street. These people were the owners of the tramp steamer *Bolivia*, which regularly made trips between Cardiff and Rio de Janeiro, carrying a general cargo.

When Nelson Lee emerged his eyes contained a hard light. He had found out that the S.S. *Bolivia* at the present moment was somewhere in mid-ocean. Her captain was named James Sweeney; and Lee had learned, too, that the *Bolivia* had left England for South America on the very day following Professor Mackintosh's disappearance.

Lee's next visit was to a quiet, old-fashioned house in Hampstead. He was admitted and ushered into the presence of a gentle, rather frail lady of about thirty-five. This was Miss Agatha Mackintosh, the missing professor's niece. She had kept house for her uncle for many years, Professor Mackintosh being a bachelor.

"You will pardon this subterfuge of mine, I am sure, Miss Mackintosh," said Nelson Lee, after he had presented his card. "But it was very necessary that I should see you—"

"I don't understand!" interrupted Miss Mackintosh, looking startled. "I saw in the paper this morning that Mr. Lee was dead! You cannot be Mr. Lee!"

"Pardon me," said Lee gently. To the lady's amazement, he deftly removed his disguise. "My sincere apologies, Miss Mackintosh, but I can assure you that it was very necessary for me to adopt this course," went on Lee. "If you still have doubts regarding my identity—or my good motives—you have my full permission to ring up Scotland Yard at once. They are aware of all the facts—"

"No, no!" interrupted Miss Mackintosh. "I can see that you are Mr. Lee. Your photograph appeared in this morning's paper. But what does it mean? Why have you done this? Is it—is it something in connection with my uncle?"



The big Swede sent the disguised Nelson Lee sprawling, causing the detective's false moustache to slip out of position.

"Yes," replied Lee gravely. "While engaged upon another case, Miss Mackintosh, I accidentally stumbled upon something which leads me to believe that your uncle is safe and well. There is more than a chance that I shall be able to restore him to you."

Miss Mackintosh clasped her hands.

"I knew all along that uncle was alive," she said confidently. "The police have been pessimistic—they have led me to believe that uncle is dead—but I know—I *know*—that he isn't!"

"Can you tell me the exact circumstances of his disappearance?" asked Lee.

"I am afraid they are not known," replied Miss Mackintosh, shaking her head. "Uncle went to Bristol to give a lecture—"

"To Bristol!" ejaculated Lee.

"Yes, and I saw him off from Paddington," continued the lady. "But he never reached Bristol. At least, nobody saw him there, and nobody knows what happened to him on the way. He vanished during that

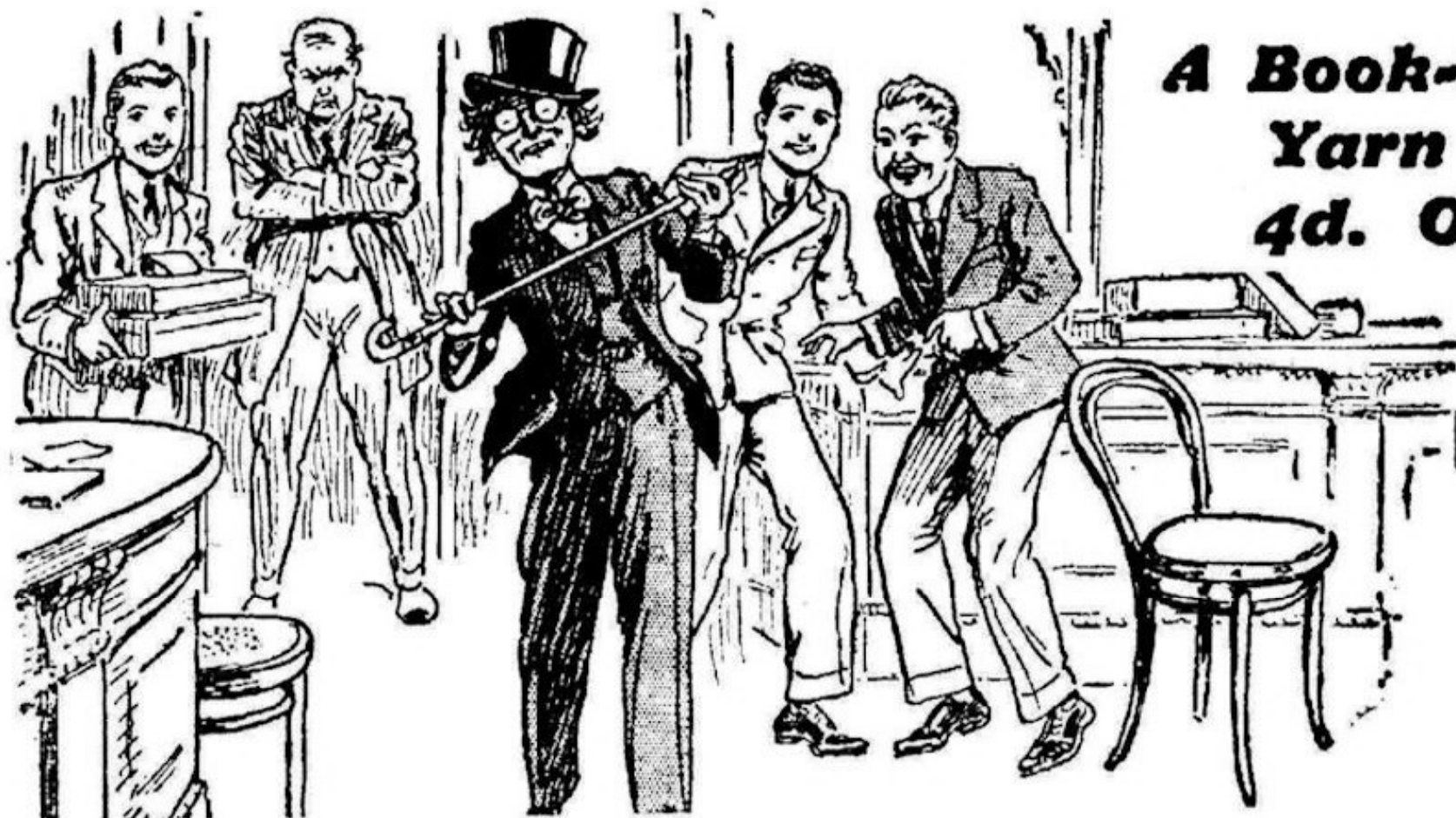
train journey, and nothing has ever been seen of him since—not a word has been heard from him."

Lee nodded, and there was a gleam in his eyes. So Professor Clive Mackintosh had disappeared while on a journey to the West of England—and the following day the S.S. Bolivia had sailed from Cardiff for South America! Another link in the chain.

"Perhaps you can tell me the nature of Professor Mackintosh's experiments just prior to his visit to Bristol?" asked the detective. "It is very important that I should know as many details as possible."

Miss Mackintosh looked helpless.

"I am afraid I cannot tell you, Mr. Lee," she replied. "Uncle was always very secretive about his experiments; he would not even take me into his confidence. He held the view that women were only useful in the household. I frequently tried to talk with him about his work, but he would never be drawn."



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"Then may I enter his laboratory, so that I can take a look round?"

"Yes, of course—by all means," said the lady.

Nelson Lee spent an hour in Professor Mackintosh's laboratory—a big building at the back of the house. And when he had finished, his suspicions were completely confirmed.

"Now, Miss Mackintosh, I want you to keep this visit of mine strictly confidential," said Lee earnestly. "There is no need for you to approach the police, or to——"

"I shall certainly not approach the police," interrupted Miss Mackintosh stoutly. "They have done nothing—nothing whatever! I have much greater confidence in you."

"All I want you to do is to be patient," said Lee. "Within a month or two, I hope to bring your uncle home——"

"A month or two!" echoed Miss Mackintosh. "But I don't understand, Mr. Lee."

"Your uncle, to the best of my belief, is not in England," said Lee gently. "It is my theory that he was kidnapped by a gang of criminals and conveyed to South America."

"Oh!"

"But you need not fear that the professor is being ill-treated," went on Lee quickly. "It is all to the advantage of these people that they should give your uncle every comfort. His services are invaluable to them, and if anything happened to him they would be the first to suffer. So you can, at least, take comfort from that fact."

After a further talk, Lee donned his disguise once more and went his way. He was thoroughly satisfied with his visit.

He was disappointed later, however, when he learned that Granville Carroll was still unconscious. He had hoped to have a chat with the young mining engineer, but there was very little chance of Carroll being strong enough to talk to anybody for at least a week. The hospital doctors believed that he was out of danger, but it would be a month or two before he was restored to anything like health.

Nelson Lee regarded Carroll as his real client, but now that this fresh element had entered the case he was unable to take any immediate action. He had sufficient evidence to lay before the police which would certainly lead to the issuing of a warrant for Reuben Prance's arrest. It did not suit Nelson Lee to take that step just yet. There was Professor Mackintosh to be considered.

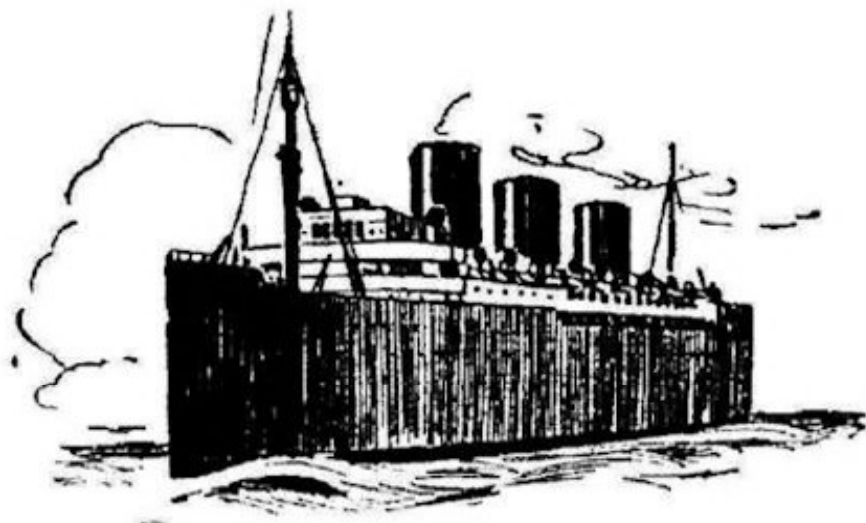
And Prance, no doubt, had a good deal to think of this morning; and if Lee's calculations were right, Prance would be precipitated into taking a certain action.

PRANCE was certainly in a great stew that morning.

Going to his safe, he had made the staggering discovery that various articles were missing. The contents of Carroll's pockets! And, what was more alarming, that private letter from the mine!

"Am I mad?" muttered Prance, dazed. "What can I have done with the things? I put them in the safe last night."

He tried to think. He knew how agitated he had been the previous night, particularly after that grim incident with Nelson Lee. This morning he had been relieved; he had read the "Daily World" confidently. That newspaper—again at Nelson Lee's instiga-



tion—had printed a small item to the effect that an unknown man had been stabbed to death at the telephone-box in Victoria Station. So Prance believed that both Carroll and Lee were dead.

Now he made this startling discovery. He frantically got hold of Phillips, his colleague, on the telephone; and when Phillips arrived he found Prance in a great state of agitation.

"You were here, Phillips," said Prance. "You saw me put those things into the safe, didn't you?"

"Of course."

"I didn't take them out again, did I?"

"Not that I know of."

"They're gone—and that letter, too!" went on Prance. "As far as I can see, the safe hasn't been touched. Nothing's been touched!"

"Well, the safe couldn't have been opened by anybody except you—or me," said Phillips. "I haven't been near the office since we left yesterday. You must have done it yourself."

"I didn't!" panted the other. "Don't you realise, you fool, that this might be a trap? Those things of Carroll's! That letter from the mine! Supposing they get into the hands of the police? Somebody's been here, some dirty spy—somebody who knows something about us! But who? If Lee wasn't dead, I'd suspect—By glory! I wonder if Lee brought somebody with him last night? One of his infernal assistants!"

Phillips became decidedly shaky.

"Even if he did, I don't see how the safe could have been opened without leaving any trace," he replied. "I tell you, Prance, that you must be mistaken. You put those papers and things somewhere else."

"We've got to get out of here!" said Prance desperately. "Ring up the shipping companies! Find out if there's a liner leaving for Rio to-day or to-morrow. We're going to South America."

"What on earth——"

"We've got to quit!" said Prance shakily. "If somebody is after us, we might be able to give him the slip. And the best place for us to go to is the mine."

THE liner Astoria was scheduled to leave Tilbury for Rio de Janeiro that very evening. Nelson Lee was by no means surprised when he received the information that Prance and Phillips had booked passages. Not only had two or three of the cubs been watching the shipping office, but Lee obtained inside information, too. He was satisfied. Things were happening as he had expected.

Two other passengers booked for Rio de Janeiro on the Astoria. They were Tom and Harry Pearson, sons of a plodding Essex farmer, who felt the urge to go out into the world. They were off to a big ranch, and they were full of optimism for the future.

It would have been difficult to recognise in these supposed brothers the world's greatest detective and his astute young assistant.

CHAPTER 7.

Prance Scores a Trick!

WHILE Prance and Phillips travelled first-class aboard the Astoria, Nelson Lee and Nipper contented themselves with quarters in the steerage. As the sons of an impoverished farmer, it was more natural that they should travel third-class. As for the discomforts of such accommodation, Lee was the last man to give a thought to such a matter. There was another reason why he desired to travel steerage. There was far less chance of actually encountering the enemy while on the trip, although he would be able to keep Prance constantly under observation.

Lee's disguise was simple, but all the more effective, perhaps, because of that. His face was ruddy, as though from the effects of an open-air life, and he wore a small moustache. His nose was much broader than usual—an effect produced by a very simple device—and it altered his appearance to an extraordinary degree. One or two discoloured teeth added to the general effect. Nelson Lee's closest friend, coming face to face with him aboard the liner, would not have recognised him, especially as it was generally believed that he was dead.

Nipper's disguise was easier. Adult clothing alone made a big difference, and with a ruddy complexion and hair dyed so that it was now a slightly reddish tinge, the transformation was considerable. He also wore spectacles.

"I suppose these blighters are really on the boat, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, on the third day out. "I've seen nothing of them so far."

"Which is merely a confession that you have not kept your eyes open, old man," replied Lee. "Our friends are certainly here, but I fancy they are feeling the effects of

the motion and are keeping to their cabin. We shall have to be more careful after they get their sea-legs."

"More careful, guv'nor? They'll never spot us!"

"Don't call me 'guv'nor'! My name, as far as you are concerned, is Tom," said Nelson Lee. "It is always advisable, Harry, to act the part continuously. Even when we are alone it will still be to our advantage to keep up this pretence. So this has got to be the last chat of this kind. From this minute onwards we are Tom and Harry Pearson, and you mustn't forget it. We're looking forward to life on a ranch, and we're full of high hope."

Nipper grinned.

"Just a minute before we finish, guv—Tom," he said, with a chuckle. "What are we going to do when we get to Rio? If Prance and this other man go straight to the mine, where do we come in? We can't very well follow them."

"Our movements, after we get to Rio, will depend upon the circumstances," replied Nelson Lee.

REUBEN PRANCE, after five days of torment, managed to crawl on deck. Phillips was, by this time, thoroughly at home aboard the liner. He had recovered from his initial spell of seasickness. Both of them were comparatively poor sailors, but the liner was in a big calm-weather area now, and there was practically no motion.

"It's about time you bucked up, Prance," growled Phillips. "I've been waiting to talk to you about things——"

"Then wait," grunted Prance. "Two days ago I didn't care a hang what happened. I was praying that the ship would go down. Curse the necessity for making this infernal voyage. I always hated the sea."

"Well, we managed to get out of England without any trouble, and that's the main thing," said the other. "I believe we've made fools of ourselves. There wasn't any need to come at all. If the police had got hold of anything they would have stopped us at Tilbury before we sailed. I still think that you must have taken those things out of the safe yourself."

"I'm more mystified than ever," muttered Prance, frowning. "If Lee wasn't dead, I'd suspect that he'd had something to do with it. He saw the things on the desk—saw me putting them into the safe. But we got him immediately afterwards. I wish to heaven I could think of some explanation. It's made me more ill than this accursed boat."

Prance brooded. The thing was on his mind, torturing him. It was the uncertainty which "got" him. He and Phillips had left England precipitately, but there was no guarantee that they would be safe when they reached the end of the voyage. Something might have developed at home—the Brazilian police might grab them as soon as the liner docked in Rio. These thoughts were not calculated to improve Prance's condition.

IS YOUR NAME AMONG THESE PRIZEWINNERS ?

RESULT OF "WHO KICKED THEM" CONTEST

In our recent competition, no reader sent in an entirely correct solution to the four sets of puzzles. The SIX "MEAD" cycles are, therefore, won by the following six entrants whose efforts each contained only one error.

J. E. Barnes, "Beech Hill," Higham Lane, NUNEATON.

Miss P. Potter, 23, Brunswick Street, Garston, LIVERPOOL.

J. Barnett, 32, Spring Gardens, SHREWSBURY
L. Harriss, 287, Walworth Road, LONDON, S.E.17.

E. J. Staples, Castle Eaton, CRICKLADE, Wilts.

P. A. Ward, 53, Lytton Road, LEICESTER.

Twenty-five readers qualified for THE TWELVE WEMBLEY CUP-FINAL TICKETS, so the value of the tickets has been added together and the total amount divided among the following :

W. Barton, 13, North Leys, ASHBOURNE, Derby ;
O. Bessant, 76, Barnwell Road, BRIXTON, S.W.2 ;
L. Bisby, 3, Fair View, Grant Street, BIRMINGHAM ;
E. Brindle, 52, Fairfield Street, ACCRINGTON ;
J. Burgess, 285, Thimble Mill Lane, Nechells, BIRMINGHAM ;
E. Canning, 171, Boundary Road, LEYTON, E. ;
C. Day, 258, Marsh Hill, Erdington, BIRMINGHAM ;
H. Donaldson, 62, King's Ride, CAMBERLEY, Surrey ;
Alec Duff, 3, Hampden Place, Mt. Florida, GLASGOW ;
Billy Ellis, Shore Street, BEAULY ;
D. Goldhill, 161, Walm Lane, CRICKLEWOOD, N.W.2 ;
H. Grove, 45, Bamville Road, Ward End, BIRMINGHAM ;
Alan Harvey, 18, Waltheof

Garaens, TOTENHAM, N.17 ; R. Herbert, 2, Middleton Road, BANBURY, Oxon ;
Joseph Hewson, 1 Hall Lane, Cronton, near WIDNES, Lancs ;
R. Housley, 5/4, Mitchell Street, SHEFFIELD ;
D. Hughes, 53, Ash Road, SUTTON, Surrey ;
J. Lennie, 28, Belleville Road, LONDON, S.W.11 ;
S. McCarroll, 62, Aldren's Lane, LANCASTER ;
Gilbert Miller, St. James Street, CASTLE HEADINGHAM, Essex ;
J. Mytton, 44, Lea Road, WOLVERHAMPTON ;
Desmond Payne, 44, Stone Street, MAIDSTONE, Kent ;
A. A. Porter, Victoria Street, WRAGBY, Lincs ;
F. A. Skillen, 136, North View Road, HORNSEY, N.8 ;
H. Wilkins, 87, Peacock Street, GRAVESEND.

THE FOOTBALLERS' NAMES WERE :

1. Cock.	6. Dean.	11. Naylor.	16. Rouse.	21. Castle.	26. Clay.
2. Jack.	7. Ball.	12. Earle.	17. Walker.	22. Camsell.	27. Rocke.
3. Pearson.	8. Miles.	13. James.	18. Puddefoot.	23. Goodwin.	28. Keen.
4. Webster.	9. Seed.	14. Pierce.	19. Wilson.	24. Littlewood.	29. Gibbins.
5. Halliday.	10. England.	15. Dimmock.	20. Penn.	25. Handley.	30. Price.
		31. Keenor.	32. Taylor.		

It was on the eighth day out that the discovery was made. It came about by pure chance, and through no carelessness on the part of Lee. True to his original plan, the detective had kept strictly to the steerage quarters, and he and Nipper had, by this time, got into the skin of their assumed personalities. Even in private they called one another "Tom" and "Harry."

It was a hot afternoon, with the Astoria ploughing lazily along through a smooth sea. There was some little stir aboard because a sail had been sighted—the first one for three days. Passengers were busy with telescopes and binoculars, examining the stranger.

Prance was mildly interested, and he went to the afterpart of the promenade deck with his field-glasses. From here it was possible to look down on the lower deck, towards the ship's stern—which was the limited deck-space allocated to the steerage passengers. Not that Prance even glanced in that direction. He was busy with his binoculars, looking at the distant ship. Then a commotion suddenly broke out on the deck below. It seemed to be only a trifle, but Prance lowered his glasses.

A hulking Swede, or a Dane, had come up the companion, and it was evident that he had been drinking. He stumbled over the feet of a fellow-passenger who was reclining in a deck-chair, reading. The Swede seemed to think that he had a grudge against this unoffending passenger. He shouted at him abusively, and the passenger, a ruddy-complexioned, clean-limbed man,

got to his feet in some annoyance, whereat the Swede rushed at him.

"What's this—trouble?" grinned Phillips, joining Prance.

"Hanged if I know," said the latter.

He put his binoculars to his eyes, and focused them. He was just in time to see the Swede's fist crash unexpectedly into the face of his fellow-passenger. It was an unlooked for blow—an unprovoked blow—and the passenger went sprawling.

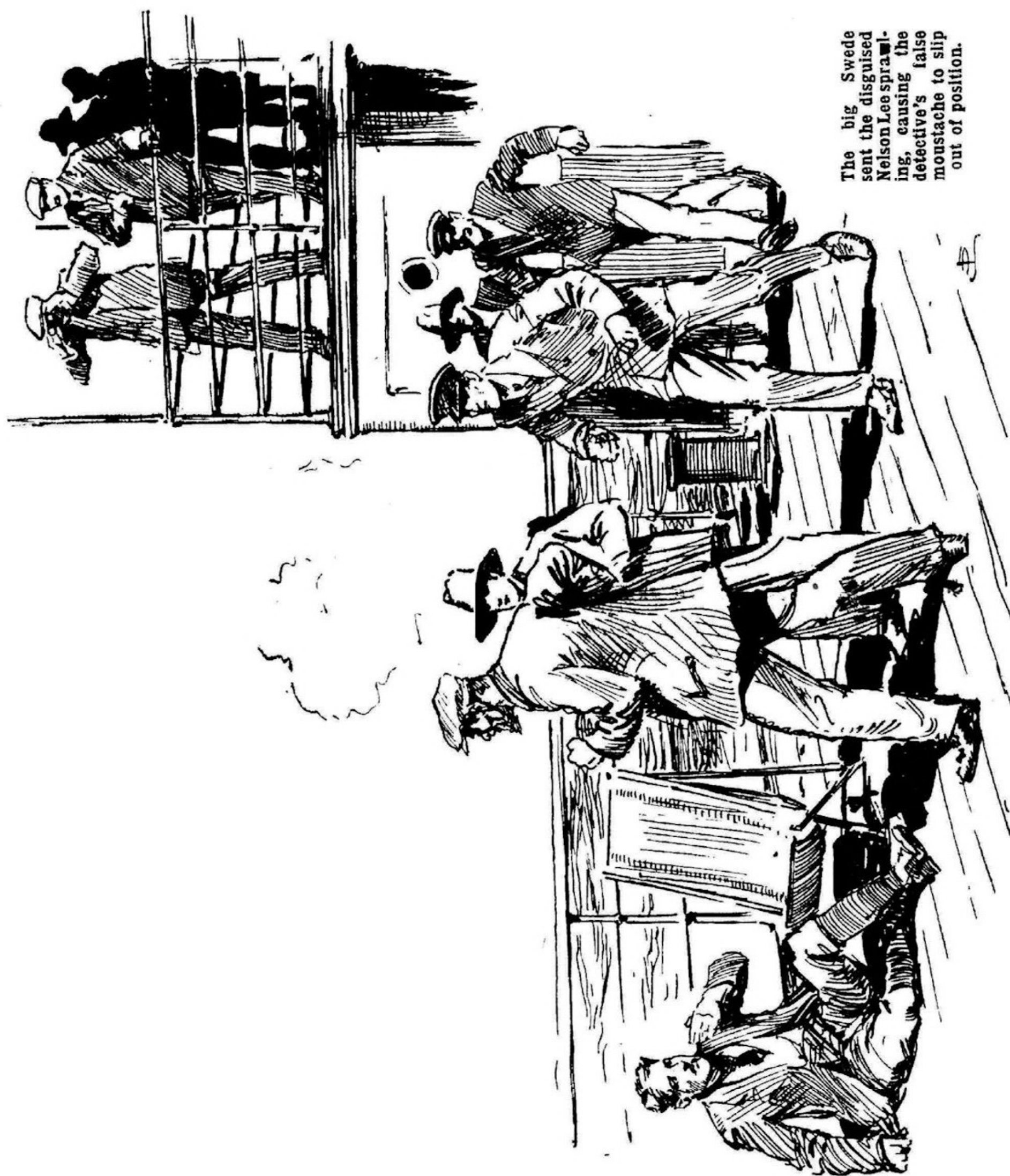
At the same second Prance shook. He had seen something which everybody else, in all probability, had missed—and merely through the chance using of his binoculars.

That punch from the Swede had landed on the other steerage passenger's mouth; and as the man sprawled on the deck, Prance saw that a part of his moustache had come away from his face! In a flash the man clapped his hand over his mouth, hiding the defect, and setting his moustache back in its proper place. Before he could attempt to retaliate on the Swede, the half-drunken man was seized by stewards and dragged away.

The incident was over.

"WHAT'S wrong, Prance?" asked Phillips curiously.

Reuben Prance had moved away, and his face was strangely pale. In his eyes there was the light of fear. From the commencement of this voyage he had been uneasy; now he was wildly agitated.



The big Swede sent the disguised Nelson Leesprawling, causing the detective's false moustache to slip out of position.

"Come!" he muttered thickly.

"Why? What's the matter——"

"Come to the cabin!" snapped Prance.

When they got there Prance locked the door. Then he sank back on to the lounge, breathing heavily. Perspiration was streaming from his face. Phillips looked at him in amazement.

"What's happened?" he demanded.

"What on earth's biting you, man?"

"There's a spy on board!" grated Prance.

"What!"

"You saw that fracas in the steerage just now?"

"Yes, but——"

"That man who was knocked down—he's wearing a false moustache," said Prance fiercely. "It nearly came off when that foreign brute punched him in the mouth."

Phillips looked dubious.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "We couldn't see very plainly——"

"You fool! I was looking through the glasses," interrupted the other. "I saw it as plainly as I can see you. Why should a man wear a false moustache? And steerage, too! We suspected all along that somebody might be after us——"

"Go easy, man," interrupted Phillips. "The fellow may be a crook of some kind, escaping the cops. It's natural that he should be wearing a disguise, isn't it? There's nothing to worry about."



Prance continued to blaze away at the approaching bandits, while his two companions turned tail and fled in fear.

But Prance would not be comforted. His conscience gave him no rest. He knew that he and Phillips had left England in peculiar circumstances, and this chance discovery of a man with a false moustache in the steerage renewed all his old fears.



At the first opportunity he got into casual conversation with one of the deck stewards.

"Farmer's sons, I think," said the steward, when Prance had casually brought the subject round to the two clean-limbed, ruddy-fea-

tured steerage passengers. "One of 'em was knocked over by that Swede to-day."

"That's what made me notice them," nodded Prance. "A fine-looking man. Rather surprised to find him in the steerage."

"Oh, we get plenty of 'em," said the steward. "Going out to work on a ranch, I think. Pearson's the name. Two nice chaps, I fancy—although I haven't had much to do with 'em myself. Come from Essex, I hear."

Reuben Prance felt relieved after he had returned to his cabin—and yet, in another way, he was even more uneasy. Farmer's sons, going to South America to start life anew on a ranch. Quite ordinary. But why should the elder Pearson wear a false moustache? The apparent innocence of the two brothers rendered that false moustache all the more significant.

"We've got to find out for certain, Phillips," said Prance grimly, "I've thought of a way. I'll get hold of a friendly deck steward and ask him to show us over the ship. Passengers are always doing it."

"What good will it do?"

"When we get down in the steerage I'll throw a faint close to those Pearson fellows.

They're bound to come round. While I'm recovering, you'll shoot down to their quarters and have a quick look round. You're bound to find something that'll give them away if they're not what they seem."

THE thing worked without a hitch. Astute as Nelson Lee was, he was unsuspecting of any tricky move on the part of the enemy. He thought nothing when he saw Prance coming into the steerage quarters, guided by a steward. Lee might have wondered if Prance and Phillips had come alone; but there was a small party, including two or three ladies. Prance had cunningly decided that

it would be safer to make up a party.

At the crucial moment the big man clutched at his heart, breathed heavily, and sank gasping to the deck. He did it so extremely well that one or two of the ladies screamed, and there was a regular commotion. For once in his life, Nelson Lee was deceived; he thought that Prance had been genuinely overcome by the heat, and was in a state of collapse.

Lee was one of the first men to reach Prance's side. He had his brandy flask out in a moment, and was forcing some of the raw spirit down Prance's throat.

"Thanks—good of you—better now," panted Prance weakly. "Infernal heat—got me! Sorry to be such a nuisance."

"Here comes the doctor, sir," said one of the stewards, with relief.

The ship's doctor, with a nurse in attendance, arrived on the scene. Prance was helped along, and finally he was put to bed in his own cabin. He was in a fever of impatience, especially as Phillips did not turn up until nearly half an hour later. And when Phillips did arrive Prance knew that something was wrong. Phillips was as white as a sheet, and terror was in his eyes.

"Well?" rapped out Prance.

"Daren't come sooner—might look suspicious," muttered Phillips. "We're sunk, Prance. You were right about those two fellows—only the thing's far worse than you believed."

"Get it out, man!" snarled Prance. "Who are they?"

"Nelson Lee and Nipper!" breathed Phillips.

Prance leapt out of his bunk.

"You're mad!" he said harshly. "You know thundering well that Lee is dead—"

"I found his note-case in his bunk," interrupted Phillips desperately. "Lee's initials on it! Also a letter from the chief commissioner of Scotland Yard to the Rio de Janeiro police, requesting them to give the bearer—Mr. Nelson Lee—every facility. In that letter it said that for private reasons a report had been given out that Lee is dead. Isn't that good enough for you?"

Prance was steadier now that he knew the worst.

"Somehow, I never quite believed that Lee was dead," he muttered. "By thunder! This is bad news, Phillips! Lee's after us right enough. The only point in our favour is that he doesn't know that we're on to him—and that gives us a pull!"

Already Prance's cunning brain was formulating a scheme. He kept to his cabin throughout the whole of the next day, and

did not appear again until the afternoon of the day following.

Prance then acted in a manner which proved him to be a man of courage as well as a man of brains. He took the bull by the horns, and carried the war openly into the enemy's camp. It was the cleverest thing he could have done, for it gave Lee no opportunity of suspecting the real motive.

Prance went down into the steerage and deliberately sought out "Tom Pearson." It was the most natural thing in the world, in view of what had happened two days earlier.

"I felt that I had to come and thank you, young man," said Prance, as he sat next to the disguised detective. "I dare say you saved my life by giving me that brandy so promptly."

"I don't think so, sir," said Lee respectfully, and using a trace of Essex dialect. "I happened to be the nearest, that's all."

"The steward was talking to me about you," went on Prance. "Got your brother with you, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Anything definitely fixed up in South America?"

"Well, no, sir," replied Lee cautiously. "We thought of starting on a ranch. My dad's given me a letter to a friend of his."

Lee wondered what Prance's game could be. He felt sure that his disguise had not

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been penetrated. But Prance was hardly the kind of man to make these friendly overtures unless he had an ulterior motive. It soon came out.

"Ranching is a rotten game," said Prance disparagingly. "I've been in South America a good many times, and I know what I'm talking about. If you and your brother are at a loose end, I can offer you a job."

"That's very good of you, sir," said Lee, becoming more interested.

"Here's my card, Pearson," continued Prance. "I am the managing-director of the Red Mountain Mine. We're infernally short-handed up there. Plenty of *dagoes* and Indians, but precious few white men of the right type. You and your brother are just the kind I'm after. I can offer you sound wages and a permanent job. Why not think it over?"

Nelson Lee did think it over. It seemed to him that here was an excellent opportunity. Prance had played into his hands! Keen as he was, he failed to realise that he was playing into Prance's hands!

Within twenty-four hours—after a supposed period of "thinking it over"—Lee and Nipper were engaged. Reuben Prance had scored a decisive trick.

CHAPTER 8.

Cortez the Bandit!

IT was hot—uncomfortably hot.

The little party was glad enough to make camp in a protected hollow after a blistering, exhausting day on the pampas. The rolling plains stretched into the dim evening haze, but ahead, comparatively near, rose the mountains.

Padista had been left behind two days ago, and the party, with a number of burros, had taken to the rough track which was the only communication between the Red Mountain Mine and the railhead. Luma was the railhead, and this was still farther back. Civilisation had been left right behind.

During these days—ever since the "Pearsons" had been engaged by Prance aboard the Astoria—the four had become more and more intimate. Yet it was a game of the cat and mouse variety.

Lee and Nipper were constantly on their guard. They felt that if their true identity was revealed now they would be ruthlessly murdered. Not that Lee relaxed his vigilance for one second. He was always alive to the possibility that Prance might get wind of the truth. So at night either Lee or Nipper took turns in their tent to watch. Never for a minute did they both sleep at the same time. Perhaps Prance became aware of this; perhaps he suspected that his dupes had begun to get "wise." At all events, he made no move.

It was far more likely, however, that he had other plans. Once he got Lee and Nipper at the mine he would reveal himself, and he would force his prisoners to work. It would be a novel situation. Lee and Nipper

prisoners—working for the man they had been after!

Prance was unusually genial to-night. Tomorrow, he promised, the mine would be reached. He had wired in advance, and special quarters were being prepared for the new arrivals. Life would be lonely out there, but the pay he had offered was liberal—in fact, magnificent to farmer's sons.

As usual, Lee took the first spell of wakefulness that night. Nipper was asleep within a minute, for the day had been particularly tiresome.

Just after eleven, when the camp was all quiet except for the occasional stamping of the burros, Nelson Lee heard the faint thudding of hoofs in the far distance.

He crept to the tent opening and peered out. The last embers of the camp fire were dying down. The tent occupied by Prance and Phillips was silent, except for the sound of steady breathing. Overhead the purple sky was bespangled with a profusion of dazzling stars.

Thud, thud, thud!

The approaching horsemen were nearer. Lee turned back into the tent and gently shook Nipper's shoulder. He was intrigued by those strange sounds. Who could be coming to the camp?

"Wake up, Harry?" whispered Lee.

"What is it?" asked Nipper, instantly on the alert.

"Don't know—horses approaching."

Lee would have given much to possess a revolver. Normally, of course, he carried one, but it had been impossible to stow one in the light clothing that was necessary in this climate—to stow one, that is, without its presence being obvious. Prance would never have allowed his two new "employees" to carry firearms.

A sudden sound—a new sound—took Lee to the tent opening in one stride. He was just in time to see Prance and Phillips leaping on to two of the burros. They went dashing off into the darkness, the other animals with them.

"Hallo!" shouted Lee sharply. "What's the idea, sir?"

"Bandits!" yelled Prance. "Run for your lives! It's Cortez and his gang!"

Lee and Nipper stood outside the tent, staring.

"The dirty cowards!" panted Nipper hotly. "Why didn't they leave a couple of those burros for us?"

"They were in such a panic that they only thought of themselves," replied Lee grimly. "Either that, or there may be something behind this. By James! I'm beginning to suspect that—"

He was interrupted by a volley of rifle shots. Horsemen, dashing up, were discharging their weapons into the air. The flashes were like red streaks in the darkness. A moment later the camp was filled with picturesque horsemen—big, powerful men, with

jingling spurs, braided clothing, and wide-brimmed sombreros.

Nelson Lee and Nipper had no opportunity of fighting—not that they would have had any chance, barefisted, against this throng. The bandits leapt from their horses, surrounded the pair, and quickly lashed them up.

"Your pardon, senors, for this rough treatment," said one of the men mockingly, "but we are the masters of these plans, and we dislike the intrusion of strangers."

Something in the man's tone caused Nelson Lee to peer forward quickly. This man was different from his fellows—taller, more impressive, more of a leader. In a moment Lee knew him to be Luiz Cortez, a bandit of much renown. He was a powerful ruffian, with swarthy features, a huge moustache with fierce ends, and eyes that contained a humorous twinkle. By no means the villainous bandit chief of the story books, but a man of character and presence.

As he saw him Nelson Lee's confidence returned.

THERE followed a long ride through the night. Lee and Nipper were carried on two of the horses, their feet bound to the stirrups, their hands bound to the saddle. The journey did not end until they were well into the mountains.

The bandits' stronghold proved to be an interesting place. It was a verdant valley in the mountains, reached only by a narrow, rocky pass, where the cliffs reached up on either hand in frowning masses.

Once through this pass—which was guarded by armed men—the valley was an unexpected surprise. Dawn was breaking now. Lee and Nipper could see many roughly-built huts—and one, indeed, was quite a respectable-looking bungalow. In front of this latter building the prisoners were cut from their horses and told to dismount.

"And now, senors, food," said Cortez boisterously. "I take it that you are hungry after your long ride—and thirsty, eh? Dios! You shall have food and drink of the best. It is my custom to treat my guests well."

"I believe you, Senor Cortez," said Lee coolly.

The bandit gave him a sharp look, but said nothing further. They were taken on to the wide veranda, and soon an excellent meal was placed before them, Cortez himself sitting at the head of the little table. The daylight was now increasing rapidly.

"I have a little secret to tell you, my friends," said Cortez, his eyes twinkling. "No doubt you wonder at your friends' escape?"

"Not at all," replied Lee. "Perhaps I was a fool to trust myself to Prance. I haven't the slightest doubt that he arranged with you to raid our camp, and to take us prisoners."

"You are not so slow, eh?" said Cortez, nodding. "Your guess is right, senor. The good Prance paid me excellent money for this task. My orders were to descend upon

your camp and to shoot you down in cold blood. Did you not hear the rifle shots as we rode up?"

"But you all fired into the air," said Nipper.

Cortez shrugged his shoulders.

"I am an outlaw—but I am not a murderer," he replied. "I took the money—yes—but I have my own way of dealing with such prisoners. You have relatives, perhaps? Write to them, and get money, and you shall go free. I get money from two quarters—and my hands remain unstained. Am I not clever, senors?"

Nelson Lee smiled. He knew that this man was telling the truth. Prance had been fooled—he believed that Lee and Nipper were dead by now. But Luiz Cortez was bent upon making as much money as he could.

"You are as astute as ever, Cortez," remarked Lee. "You have changed little during the years."

"You know me, then?" asked the bandit sharply.

"Better than you know me, perhaps," replied Nelson Lee. "It is a precarious life, senor, this of yours—selling the services of your band first to one Government, and then to another—or to one rebel leader or another. You are living a few centuries beyond your time, my friend. You are like the mercenaries of old, who, in Europe, took their men-at-arms from Italy into France, from France into Spain, and from Spain back into Italy—fighting for whatever cause paid them the best. I fancy you are more of a soldier of fortune than a bandit, eh?"

Cortez looked at Lee more keenly than ever.

"Dios! You know much for a farmer's son!" he growled.

Lee rose from the table.

"If I may interrupt the meal, senor, I should like the use of soap and water," he said smoothly. "And perhaps a little raw spirit."

"What nonsense is this?" demanded Cortez suspiciously.

But he complied with the request. There was a huge trough close by, and Lee and Nipper went to this, and were soon splashing and spluttering.

"What's the game, guv'nor?" whispered Nipper.

"You'll soon see, young 'un," replied Lee. "Prance has done us the best turn he could possibly do. He has played right into our hands—without knowing it. It is our disguises which have deceived Cortez up to now."

TEN minutes later Lee and Nipper were practically themselves. Luiz Cortez remained seated at the table on the veranda, eating steadily, and drinking even more steadily. The sun was just peeping over the hilltops.

"Well, Signor Cortez?" asked Lee, striding up to the veranda.

The man's jaw sagged. Several of the other bandits near by stared in amazement.

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The change in Lee and Nipper was astounding. That wash had completely transformed them.

Cortez acted strangely. With one heave he sent the heavily-laden table pitching over. He strode down the rough steps, grabbed the detective by the shoulders, and stared unbelievably into his face.

"Madre de Dios! It is!" he bellowed. "Signor Lee! What magic is this?" To Nipper's amazement the bandit chief seized Nelson Lee's hand, and then he embraced Lee with true Latin fervour. "My friend!" he went on delightedly. "Senor Lee—after all these years! And I—fool that I am—take you prisoner and submit you to these indignities! Triple idiot! Never shall I forgive myself!"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"There's no need for you to talk like that, Senor Cortez," he replied. "This young man is my friend and assistant. He was

not with me when we met on that former occasion. I recognised you the instant I saw you, but I did not speak then; I thought it better to wait until I heard your plans. When I heard them—when I knew that you were still the same peaceful Cortez—I thought it time to reveal myself."

Cortez turned to his gaping followers, who had gathered round.

"Behold!" he shouted in Spanish. "Any man who harms these friends of mine dies like a dog! Seven years ago Senor Lee was in Bolivia, fighting side by side with me against Calloza, the murderous rebel. In that battle, Senor Lee saved my life at the risk of his own. Many times have I desired to meet him since; and now he comes to me through the treachery of Senor Prance. While these senors are with us they are our honoured guests."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Nipper. "What does all this mean, guv'nor?"

"It means, Nipper, that we now have the game entirely in our own hands," replied Lee, his eyes gleaming. "Cortez and I are old comrades. He may be a bandit, but he is first a soldier—and a man!"

Cortez swung round on them.

"You must sit at my table again!" he declared. "Let the best foods be brought!" he went on, turning to his men. "Let the richest wine be opened. This is a day of days!"

"Wait, my friend," said Lee grimly. "Seven years ago you swore that you would repay your debt to me."

"I am ready this minute," vowed Cortez. "Tell me how I can do it."

"The man Prance is a criminal—a murderer in spirit if not in deed," replied Lee. "He has a prisoner at the mine——"

"Do I not know it?" growled Cortez. "It was I who helped to take him there. I feel none too proud of the achievement, but I was paid well, and the old man has not been harmed."

"Prance is my enemy," continued Lee. "Will you and your men come with me to the Red Mountain Mine and raid it? You shall be well paid——"

"You insult me!" interrupted Cortez gruffly. "This service, Senor Lee, will be an absurd trifle."

"It is all I ask of you," replied Lee quietly.

CHAPTER 9.

An Exciting Finale!

THE tables were turned with a vengeance!

Clever as Reuben Prance had been, he could not have known that he had betrayed Nelson Lee and Nipper into the hands of the one man in the whole of South America who was most likely to help them!

Luiz Cortez was essentially a man of action. While the morning was still young he and his followers set off for the Red Mountain Mine. Lee and Nipper rode at the head of the column with Cortez himself.

The Red Mountain Mine was reached well before noon. In appearance, it was unsightly and drab. It was situated amidst a vast waste of rocky hills, where there was scarcely any vegetation, and where the sun shone down with merciless intensity.

At the rear a big hill rose, reddish in colour, owing to the rock of which it was formed. At the base of this nestled a collection of rudely constructed shacks. One of them was the mine office, the others housed the various "Dagoes" and half-castes who were employed in the workings. There were other sheds which housed several big, up-to-date motor lofries and steam tractors. These were used, no doubt, for bringing supplies to the mine.

When Cortez and his men swept down upon the little settlement, there was no fight. Nelson Lee had half-expected that

Prance would have a kind of bodyguard—armed and ready to show resistance. There was nothing of the sort. Only a few men were encountered, and these were so scared that they bolted like rabbits, and were quickly rounded up. Not that the invaders were to have everything their own way.

Some distance from the rough buildings there was a great gap in the hillside; a kind of cave entrance, which, in fact, was the opening of the workings. This was not an open-air mine, but one which burrowed deeply into the mountain side.

A man was coming out into the open just as Cortez and his men had rounded up the last of the half-castes. The man was Phillips, and he came to a halt and stood staring blankly, his jaw agape. Then, like a madman, he turned and raced back into the workings. Shouting at the top of his voice, he stumbled on, and soon he was joined by Prance and another white man. This latter, Simon Hedges, was a big, burly, sun-burned man, dressed in riding-breeches and an open shirt. He was the manager.

"What's wrong?" demanded Prance sharply.

"Cortez and his gang!" gasped Phillips. "They're here!"

"Here?" echoed Prance. "What on earth——"

"And Lee!" croaked the other. "Lee's with them! They've let him free—they've turned on us!"

"By thunder, here they come!" snapped the manager.

There came a clattering of feet far down the tunnel, intermingled with a jingling of spurs. Prance made up his mind quickly. He had just been congratulating himself that all was well—and now this blow had fallen.

"They mustn't get past us!" he panted. "If Lee finds out the truth of this mine our game will be up. Have you got plenty of ammunition? We'll hold these dogs back!"

In a blind fury, Prance pulled out his revolver, and started firing. The others stood stock still, too startled to take any action at the moment.

Crack—crack—crack!

An answering volley came from the invaders. Cortez had been fired upon, and that was enough. Without hesitation, he ordered his men to answer. The bullets came hissing down the tunnel.

"You fool!" screamed Phillips. "We'll all be killed!"

Prance was too infuriated to take any notice. He continued to blaze away. His two companions turned tail and ran.

"Come on!" shouted Prance hoarsely. "I can hold this tunnel against the whole pack of you!"

He dragged some tins from a crevice, and utilised them as a kind of barricade. Crouching behind this, he reloaded his revolver.

"Phillips—Hedges!" he shouted. "You curs! Lend a hand here! I tell you we can hold this tunnel against them!"

The other two men had paused, and now

they came back. Their momentary panic was over. Crouching low, they joined Prance. Simon Hedges gave a shout of horror.

"You madmen!" he panted. "Don't you see what you've done? There's high explosives in these tins! If one of them is hit by a bullet——"

"High explosive!" gasped Prance, sobered. He gazed in consternation at the tins he had dragged forward as a barricade. At the same moment a number of livid spurts appeared down the tunnel. Bullets hissed overhead.

"Stop!" yelled Phillips. "We surrender! You don't realise——"

He was interrupted by a blinding, devastating explosion. One of the bullets from the invaders had struck the barricade. The thing was over in a flash. With a roar the tunnel collapsed. Prance and his two companions were killed instantaneously by the fall of the roof. For one dreadful second it seemed that the whole tunnel was about to cave in and bury every living soul.

Luckily, however, only a small section was affected, and even then the tunnel was not completely blocked.

NELSON LEE and Nipper, with Cortez in close attendance, pressed on after making sure that there was no hope for the doomed men. Penetrating deeper into the workings, they discovered a heavily-built door, fitted with a modern lock and huge bolts. Lee pulled the bolts back, and Cortez quickly shot the lock to pieces.

"Dios!" he ejaculated, when the door was opened.

They found themselves in a great cavern. It was flooded with electric light, and, unlike the cool tunnel, the heat was stifling. There were great benches, and part of the cavern was fitted up as an elaborate laboratory. Farther away there were great furnaces, one of them in full blast.

Standing in the middle of this remarkable chamber was the ungainly figure of a white man—a man with an unkempt beard, who wore thick spectacles, and who was attired in a long white smock.

"What is it now?" he asked irritably, as he blinked at the intruders. "What has happened?"

"We are here to take you away from this prison, Professor Mackintosh," said Nelson Lee crisply. "Prance is dead. I came specially from England to get you out of his clutches."

Professor Mackintosh seemed stunned. "Rescued!" he muttered, clutching at the bench. "Are you trying to delude me? I have been told that there would be no rescue for me. Who are you? What is your name? How did you get here?"

It was evident that the man of science was overcome by the sudden shock of this unexpected event. He sank down upon a stool, and Lee thought it better to give him a few minutes to recover.

"What does it mean, guv'nor?" asked Nipper wonderingly. "This laboratory—these furnaces! What are they doing here—in a gold mine? You didn't seem a bit surprised!"

"I wasn't surprised," replied Lee. "After I had examined the professor's private laboratory at Hampstead, I guessed the truth. The gold from this mine was not produced in the ordinary way—but *made*."

"Made!" echoed Nipper, staring.

"Made—manufactured," nodded Lee. "Professor Mackintosh, it seems, has discovered a profitable way of transmuting the baser metals into pure, virgin gold. Other scientists have achieved the same result, but the cost of production has always been greater than the value of the resultant gold. Professor Mackintosh overcame that difficulty. You will now understand the reason for the mysterious supplies which were transported to this mine. Brass, lead, iron, copper—I don't know which. In these great furnaces, the pure gold has been produced under this unique process."

Professor Mackintosh looked up.

"You are quite right, sir," he said quietly. "If you have indeed come to rescue me, no words of mine can express my gratitude."

"But why?" asked Nipper. "Why go to all this trouble? Why couldn't they have produced the gold in England?"

"Because gold cannot be unloaded on to the market like so much merchandise," replied Nelson Lee. "It must have an authentic, legitimate source. By purchasing this disused mine, and actually causing it to produce gold, Prance played a trump card. The gold was accepted without question—and but for the return of Granville Carroll from Burma the deception might have been carried on for years."

IN London, after sensational cables from Brazil, the "Daily World" came out with the scoop of the year. It was more than a nine days' wonder—the resurrection of Nelson Lee; the rescue of Professor Clive Mackintosh; the exposure of the biggest gold conspiracy of the century!

By the time Lee and Nipper arrived back in England, to be crowned with glory, Granville Carroll was out of hospital and well on the road to recovery. As for Professor Mackintosh, he virtually became a millionaire—for the great vested interests bought up his secret process, and promptly suppressed it. For such a process, if it became generally known, would lower the gold standard throughout the world and cause financial chaos.

Far better for such a discovery to be lost.

THE END.

("The Atlantic Pirates!" is the title of next week's enthralling detective yarn, featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper. And don't forget, chums, that St. Frank's is re-opening, and that next Wednesday's issue will also contain the first of a stunning new series of school stories introducing your old favourite characters!)



THE NIGHT HAWK!

No. 4.—SNUB HAWKINS' JOY RIDE!

Winging his way through the night on his master's wings, Snub seeks adventure—and finds it—with dramatic results!

Snub's Great Ideal

"BLOW it! I'm fed up!"

Alone in Thurston Kyle's great laboratory, little Snub Hawkins hunched his sturdy shoulders and wandered gloomily to the window.

For two days now he had been alone in his master's rambling house, for the Night Hawk had slipped away quietly on one of his occasional and mysterious absences.

Where he went Snub had no idea. It was one of the few secrets Thurston Kyle kept from him. Of course, he could guess that his keen, methodical master was not idle during his absence. Every step taken by the Night Hawk had an exact reason behind it, and he spared no pains or dangers in his campaign against Silas Benton and the wide-flung criminal organisation of which Benton was leader.

Snub was sure that, somewhere in London's underworld, the Night Hawk was picking up fresh trails and finding new chinks in the armour of the Benton gang by which he could attack. Meanwhile, things were emphatically dull for Snub! And Snub was fed up!

It was the sight of Thurston Kyle's great black wings standing against the wall that first sent a wild thrill of excitement through him.

Gosh! Supposing—

"Don't be a chump!" he panicked at the reckless thought. "Suppose you smash 'em up?"

He looked wistfully at the wings again. A small voice inside him began to talk cunningly.

"How can you smash 'em up, fathead?" it said. "There's all the wide sky to play about in, isn't there? If they can carry the boss' weight, they'll carry you, won't they? Besides—it's a dark night!"

Snub stared at the window thoughtfully. It was a jolly dark night, without moon or wind.

The latter decided him. After all, he knew all about the wings—or thought he did—and he couldn't possibly damage them. Life was pretty flat just now; he would only go for a short flight—

Snub became suddenly active. The Night Hawk's black flying-kit was too big for him, but his own leather motor-bike suit did as well, with his master's helmet strapped on his head.

His fingers fumbled nervously as he commenced to buckle on the great wings, but with the comfortable feel of them on his shoulders, he became brisker. The adjustment of the controls gave no difficulty—he always fitted them on his master and knew exactly how they should go.

Within a few minutes, Snub Hawkins stood poised on the small veranda outside the laboratory, staring doubtfully at the twinkling lights of London far below. Raising his arms as he had watched the Night Hawk do, he bent his knees and dived—

And then the fun began.

As long as he lived, Snub Hawkins never forgot that first mad, whistling, headlong dive through the night sky across London. The speed of the wings was tremendous. With Snub hanging limply in the straps, too astonished to do anything, they hurled him along till he could scarcely breathe for the rush of wind in his face.

Something loomed out of the darkness—the figure of a huge man in a cocked hat and knee breeches. With a yell of dismay, the boy threw himself sideways. Too late! The tip of one wing touched the statue and sent Snub whizzing over and over in giddy circles.

"Oh, help! Sorry, sir—me lord, I mean!" he gasped as he recovered control somehow, and recognised Lord Nelson at the top of his column. "I— O-o-o-oh!"

For the wings had taken charge again, whirling him away until he saw the Houses of Parliament rushing towards him. It was a perilous moment. Destruction stared him in the face; but in that second, Snub Hawkins recovered his nerve.

A yard from St. Stephen's Tower he backed the quivering wings, pulling himself up dead. Dropping the right pinion, he banked prettily and flicked upwards. The white glare of Big Ben dazzled him, but in another moment he was safe in the open darkness once more.

The narrow escapes had done him good. He felt more comfortable, and with plenty of space about him, he began to experiment. The wings were marvellous! Their delicate controls answered every strain he put on them, and when he had thoroughly tested every turn and swoop, he laughed outright in joyous excitement. High in the air over the centre of London, Snub Hawkins performed a war-dance that any swallow might have envied.

"Whoopee!" he carolled. "This is the stuff to give 'em!"

Full of confidence and mischief now, the lad sank till the tops of the houses were just beneath him. He looked down. The entrance to a large and fashionable restaurant was right below, and as he stared a taxi drew up, setting down a florid and pompous-looking fat man. He was clad in immaculate evening dress, and the shining topper on his head, as well as the stiff dignity oozing from him, drew the rampageous Snub like a magnet.

He dived.

"Whee-ee-ee-ee!" he shrilled.

Skimming a yard above the portly gentleman's head, Snub let fly. Both feet landed squarely on that brilliant top hat. The next moment he had shot aloft, banked steeply and hung overhead, roaring with laughter.

From the street below came sounds of consternation and fury. The majestic one sat helplessly on the pavement, bellowing with rage as he tried in vain to pull the crushed hat from his face and neck. Hefty commissioners came pouring out, and a policeman strode up to lend a hand. Snub's last hilarious vision was of them all tugging to-

gether until the crown of the hat came away so sharply that everyone rolled backwards on the pavement beside his spluttering, purple-faced victim.

Snub thought it time to go—and went!

Felix Gets a Fright!

C LIMBING, diving and wheeling, he cruised gleefully over London, rejoicing in his freedom. Circling above a fashionable square in the West End, something high up on the wall of one of the great mansions caught his eye, and he glided down to see what it was.

It was a man. Hanging by his fingers and toes to the ornate mouldings of the house, he was climbing up, skilfully and rapidly; and Snub's experienced eye placed him at a glance.

From the business-like way the man was travelling, it was obvious he had done this sort of thing before. And this was perfectly correct, for "Felix" Parker was one of London's most celebrated cat-burglars!

Snub grinned. He had no intention of spoiling his reckless, joyful evening by handing burglars over to the police, but at the same time he could not stand and watch the man break in. On silent wings, therefore, he ranged up until he hung in the air a few feet above Felix Parker's head.

"Now, now!" he scolded. "Naughty, naughty!"

The sound of that cheery voice coming out of the darkness nearly frightened the cat burglar out of his wits! Hugging the wall, he glared upwards and sideways, expecting to see a hostile face looking out from a window. There was no one in sight; the great mansion was in darkness. The chuckling Snub could see Felix fairly shaking with bewilderment.

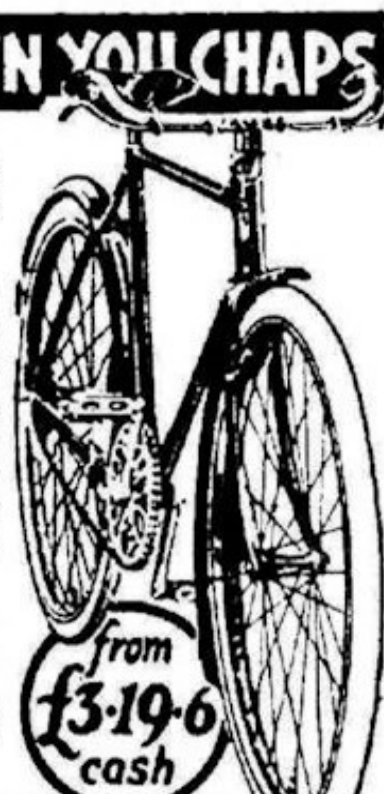
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"Look behind you, pussy!" he cooed sweetly; and, closing in, planted a rousing kick exactly where it would do most good.

With a yell, the burglar lost his foothold, threw both arms round a ledge, and stared with goggling eyes behind him. The sight of Snub, sitting apparently on nothing and wagging his head severely, was too much. He gave another piercing yell, launched out wildly—and began to drop earthwards like a stone!

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Snub.

Visions of the burglar's dreadful death on the pavement below leapt to his mind. In a flash he had dived, caught the man by the collar with desperate hands, and went gliding off across the trees with his kicking captive dangling below.

It was an awkward moment; but the faint gleam of water in a park near by gave Snub a sudden idea. The man deserved some punishment and this was where he got it!

Flying low, the boy wheeled squarely over the water.

Splash! The helpless Felix shot downwards, hit the pond all ends up, and was instantly lost to view. He reappeared a moment later, and, to Snub's relief, struck out strongly for the bank. In another minute, a soaked, cold and thoroughly terrified cat-burglar was racing through the streets for dear life, while up in the sky, Snub rocked beneath the curved black wings and laughed until he ached.

After that, the mischievous youngster tired of the West End, and, climbing high, glided eastwards on outstretched wings. It was years since he had been in Dockland, where Thurston Kyle had first picked him up, a waif of the slums, and now it was fascinating to fly gaily over the narrow streets where he had once struggled to walk.

Sailing over the banks of a dismal canal, loud shrieks and cries of pain made him look down. Instantly, the impish good-nature faded from Snub's freckled face, leaving it furious and grim.

In one of the streets by the canal, a big, brutal-looking man in shirt-sleeves had a thin, frail woman by the shoulders, forcing her to her knees in the gutter.

Terrified neighbours from the other houses were begging him to leave her alone, but he snarled them to silence. Then, disregarding the women's entreaties, he raised his arm aloft. His great brawny hand held a buckled belt in it; but that blow never descended!

Crowding on every inch of speed and risking disaster to the utmost, Snub swooped down between the narrow houses, thrust his arms accurately under the brute's shoulders and whirled him aloft by sheer impetus. At the end of the street a great hoarding blocked the way, and, halting a foot above it, the lad dropped his burden neatly over the top edge.

Bellowing with terror, the man fell across and hung there. Seeing him thus bent nicely in position, Snub smiled fiercely. He took off his own belt.

Not until a startled squad of men came running with ladders under the impression that the man was dying did Snub relax his efforts. But by that time his right arm ached with weariness, and the squealing, blubbering bully leaning over the hoarding had received the soundest thrashing of his life!

Hovering high in the air, the youngster watched the rescue party yank him down the ladder to earth. From first to last no one had any idea who or what had punished the street tyrant, for Snub had shot past too quickly. Only the howling wife-beater had glimpsed the boy's great wings; and he was too hurt and terrified to do anything else but groan.

A few people stared hastily upwards as a faint, merry laugh floated down from the sky—but all they saw was a dim blur moving swiftly across the house-tops.

A Drama of the Sky!

SHOOTING ahead, Snub climbed once more, higher than ever this time. Soon he was a mere speck above the great city, watching an aeroplane that had suddenly appeared from the direction of the East Coast, and which was heading towards London at full speed.

Snub watched it idly. It was a big 'plane, capable of carrying several passengers, and the lad could see people in its lighted cabin as it drew abreast.

Then something made him draw in his breath sharply! The cabin door had opened and a man came crawling out on to the right wing.

Snub frowned. Wing-walking, he knew, was a common stunt nowadays, but to do it up here in the darkness was asking for trouble. The 'plane was behaving queerly, too, dropping to half-speed and rocking crazily as the man edged along!

"The howling goats!" growled Snub disgustedly. "How can they expect the fellow to do his stunt if they wobble like—my only sainted aunt!"

A startled and tremendous drive of his wings sent him spinning after the 'plane, staring with horrified eyes. For he had seen something which made his blood run cold.

The man on the wing was not stunting. Nor had he started his perilous walk of his own free will. What Snub had first thought was a foolish prank now revealed itself as stark, hideous murder!

Through the sliding cabin-door, he saw two men staring out with evil, gloating eyes. In steady hands, each grasped a sleek automatic revolver. And the guns pointed squarely at the man outside, forcing him along the wing until he reached the tip, and then—

Like pirates of old, the villains were making their victim walk the plank! Only now, instead of a watery grave, the man would be smashed to atoms somewhere in the great lighted city far below. No wonder the boy was horrified!

Even as the man hurtled helplessly through the air, Snub recognised him. "Guv'nor!" he cried hoarsely—and then swooped down in a headlong dive.

In that awful second, Snub allowed his wings to take charge once more. At frantic speed they hurled him through the air, closing up the gap between himself and the slow-flying aeroplane, nearer, nearer—

The man on the wing had reached the tip now. Slowly he drew himself upright, clinging to the end strut. Whoever he was, he intended to meet his death bravely.

Opening the throttle of his engine, the pilot roared into full speed, at the same time banking sharply.

Like a stone from a catapult, the man on the wing-tip was hurled into the air—just as Snub let out a scream that nearly cracked his throat.

"Guv'nor!"

It was the Night Hawk—wingless and at the mercy of the element he had conquered so magnificently. Helpless now in the cool night air, with Silas Benton's aeroplane wheeling away from him, he threw out his arms, turned slowly and began to fall.

Snub Hawkins, wide-eyed and sobbing, tore through the air like a meteor, grabbed, missed, grabbed again, clutched his master frenziedly round the waist with fear-wracked arms—and held him safe!

It was some seconds before he dared look up. When he did so, it was to find Thurston Kyle staring at him with startled amazement.

"Snub!"

"Yes, guv'nor. I—are you O.K.?"

Not even his terrible adventure and escape could upset the Night Hawk's ice-cool brain, for long. Without a word he eased himself out of the lad's strong arms until he lay flat along Snub's back. Nobly the curved,

steel-feathered wings responded to the double strain. Snub headed for home.

That journey across London was a matter of minutes. The veranda of the laboratory came into sight, and as Snub swerved beneath it, the Night Hawk reached up and drew himself into safety.

"What happened, guv'nor?" asked Snub a few minutes later.

"I was too reckless, and Silas Benton caught me," replied Kyle. "He planned to drop me over London—a score to him which I shall wipe off very quickly!"

Slowly the Night Hawk's hand came out, and Snub grasped it tightly without a word.

"I suppose I ought to punish you for taking the wings, young 'un!" he scolded gently. "But, thank Heaven you did! And—thank you, Snub!"

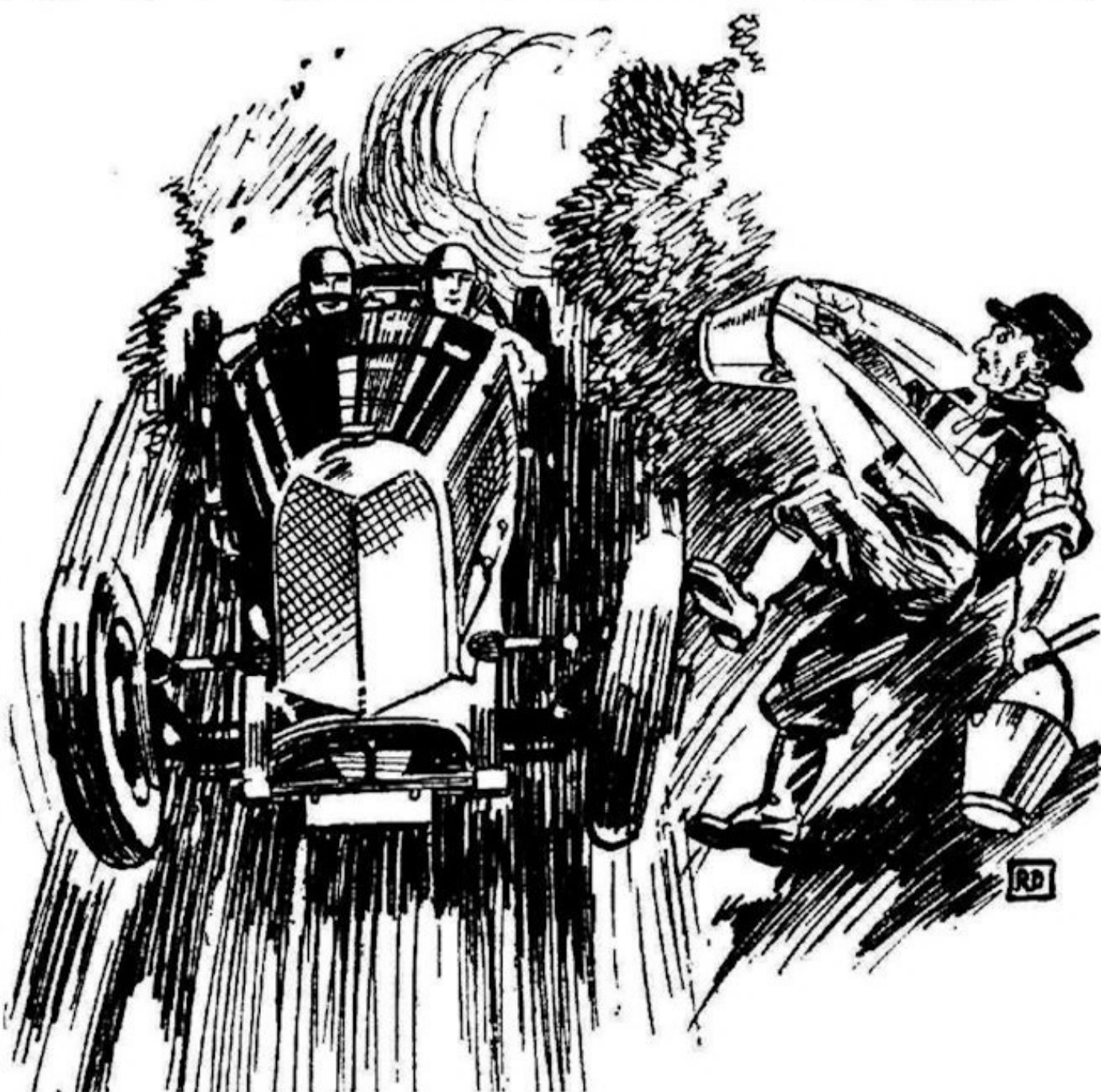
(Another exciting story featuring the Night Hawk next Wednesday, chums!)



THE IRON SPEEDMAN!

By
**ALFRED
EDGAR**

Jim and Joe are all out to get their own back against a ninety-per-cent rotter. The only fly in the ointment is, they haven't got a car with which to do it—but that doesn't deter our two hundred-per-cent chums for long!



Joe's Big Idea!

"I'M all right, thank you, Mr. Ryan!" Jim said, then took the engineer's hand as he offered it.

"I was down at Brooklands—you drove a wonderful race!" Mr. Ryan exclaimed. "Who taught you to handle a car like that?"

"Nobody," Joe cut in. "It comes natural to him. Didn't half shift, didn't he?"

"Some of the men down there thought you put up the finest exhibition in the race," the engineer said. "It surprised me! Well done, my boy—and wouldn't your old dad have been proud if he could have seen you?"

"Not when I crashed, sir!" Jim grunted.

"Yes, even when you crashed!" Mr. Ryan exclaimed. "We won't talk about whose fault it was that you went off the track; I've got my own idea about that. But you did keep your head. If you'd been thrown out, you'd have been killed!"

"When I knew I couldn't hold the car, I ducked down under the steering column," Jim answered. "Dad told me once that was the best thing to do."

"That's right," Mr. Ryan nodded. "Well, is the car much knocked about?"

"Steve says he can't repair it," Jim said.

Mr. Ryan whistled softly, then he asked:

"Oh, does he want me to come up and have a look at it? I made all the parts for it, you know."

"Matter of fact, sir, we were coming to see you," Joe cut in. "Jim wants to race in the Irish Grand Prix—he wants to get his own back on Stargie."

For a moment or so Mr. Ryan made no comment, then he nodded slowly.

"I see," he murmured. "The car's smashed up, and you want me to make the parts for another one in time for the race—is that it?"

"Yes," said Joe. "Only we haven't got the money to pay for it."

"Oh!" said Mr. Ryan, and glanced from Joe to Jim, then back to Joe again.

Slowly, Jim turned to his chum.

"Is this your big idea?" he asked.

"It is," Joe answered.

"You mean, your idea was to come and ask Mr. Ryan to do another car—and then we'd pay him later, is that it?" Jim asked.

"Yes," Joe answered coolly.

"Then I think it's a rotten idea!" Jim growled. "If we can't get the new car with our own work, then I won't ride at all, and——"

"Steady, Jim!" Mr. Ryan patted his shoulder. "You're as independent as your father—but I've got something to say about this. I know how he worked to design this car, and I know how keen Steve is, so I'd like to help now."

Jim looked at him, saying nothing. The engineer went on:

"Look here, I'll supply all the parts; I'll pay the entrance fee for the race, and finance things generally if you'll drive it—and if you'll call it the 'Ross-Ryan' car instead of the Ross-Eight, just to show that my little firm's had a hand in building it for you. I mean, making the parts for it is almost as important as driving it, you know. What do you say to that?"

"That's fine!" Jim grinned. "If Steve doesn't mind!"

"Steve will agree, I think," Mr. Ryan said. "As a matter of fact, I meant to look in and see him to-day, and suggest it. Let's go up and talk it over with him, shall we?"

Joe's Juggernaut!

THE engineer did not have to make his proposition twice to Steve. It was a very fair offer, and he accepted it. Mr. Ryan had something else to say then.

"Jim, this Irish Grand Prix is a road race—you've never done any road racing, have you? You'll find it a lot different from tearing round a track, like the event at Brooklands."

"I'll get in some practice!" Jim told him. "I can practise on the roads about here."

"You can—if you've got a super-fast machine to work on," Mr. Ryan said.

"We haven't got one," Steve told him, and they stood looking about the garage.

In the background were three or four ancient cars, which were not much good to anybody. There were one or two engines taken from wrecked machines, and shelves loaded with spare motor parts.

"Have you got a car you could tune up for him——" began the engineer; then Joe cut in on him.

"Leave that to me!" he exclaimed. "Steve, if you can spare me and Jim for two or three days, we'll build a practice car."

"I can spare you, there's not much work to do!" Steve said grimly.

"All right. Come out into the yard, Jim!"

Jim followed his chum to the yard at the back. Joe led the way to a wooden shed in one corner; a place which had become stacked up with all kinds of junk, and a spot where Joe had the habit of spending a lot of spare time.

Joe yanked open the door, and they stepped inside. The little building was full of rusty frames, old wheels, mudguards and axles. But right in the middle was a big engine. It had smears of rust on it, and it was very dirty, but it looked powerful.

"See that?" Joe jerked his thumb at it. "It's what we took out of that old 30-98 h.p. Vauxhall—you know, the one that got smashed up when they first opened the by-pass road. Well, I've been tinkering about with it, and she's nearly ready to run again now."

"My idea is that we build it into a light chassis, shove a body on it—and there's your practice car. It'll be more'n a hundred miles an hour, and that'll be all the speed you want for practising road racing around here!"

Jim inspected the engine, then stared at his chum. Joe was leaning against the door-post, whistling softly to himself as he eyed Jim reflectively.

Jim didn't say anything, but he was considering the fact that the mechanic was a pretty smart chap. Here, in no time at all, Joe had arranged for them to have an entirely new racing machine, and he had shown how Jim could secure a car on which to practise road work.

"Joe, I talked big last night about how I'd get another racer and——" Jim broke off as Joe waved a hand.

"That's all right!" he said.

"It isn't all right! I said I'd do it all—and you've fixed everything!"

"Well, that's what I'm for!" Joe grinned. "You're all right when it comes to scrapping or driving, but I'm the fellow with the brains in this little combine—after Steve, of course. Now, are you going to look at that engine all day, or are we going to begin work?"

They began work then and there, while Mr. Ryan sent down two men from his factory to look over the smashed Ross-Eight and secure all the information he wanted for the making of fresh parts.

Somehow, news spread through the village of what was happening. Before the day was out, people drifted round to the garage yard to watch the chums at work. One or two men who owned cars took their coats off, rolled their sleeves up and started to lend the boys a hand.

In the village was an old coach-builder. At one time—before the advent of motor-cars—he had built carriages for the gentry, gigs

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. 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. Stargie is unscrupulous, too—as Jim discovers to his cost during the race. Jim is winning, and then the Ace speedman deliberately makes him crash. The Ross Eight is completely wrecked, but fortunately Jim escapes serious injury. After the race Jim vows he will get his own back against Stargie in the Irish Grand Prix—until Steve points out that they haven't got a car, or the money with which to make a new one. Then Joe has a brainwave, and he takes his chum along to see Mr. Ryan, owner of the Ryan Engineering Company.

(Now read on.)

and dog-carts. Now, he only built farm wagons, and not so many of those.

He turned up, walked around the chassis, took a few measurements, and then offered to knock up a stream-lined body for the practice car.

"It won't be a proper professional job," he told Jim, "but if so be as you're wantin' it, I'd be proud to do it for 'ee. You're the talk o' the whole village, Jimmy—an' I like a rare plucked 'un!"

So he went off to begin work on a body for the car, and three days later he brought it along. By this time the practice machine was built, and Steve had lent a hand in tuning up the mighty engine.

When the body was fitted on, it was growing dusk, but there was still sufficient light to see the machine. The body had been painted grey, and along the side of it now ran a thick, heavy exhaust pipe. The machine was high, but it looked enormously powerful, and when Jim started up the engine its thunderous roar roused half the village.

"Hop in, Joe, and we'll take her through Woodburn!" Jim yelled, and soon the machine was rolling out of the garage.

They had no chance for speed—too many people wanted to see the car—but Jim let it go fast enough to discover that practice work would prove exciting when they started on it.

"We'll get up as soon as it's light in the morning, and take it out while the roads are empty," Jim told his chum.

"Cornering is the thing in road races," Joe said. "We'll find a lot of difficult corners, and you'll have to learn to go round 'em as fast as you can! There won't be anybody about and——"

"If there are, they'll hear us coming and get off the road," Jim finished.

Wild Work!

AT five o'clock the following morning the grey car stood at the front of the little garage, exhaust bellowing and engine roaring. A little crowd had turned out to see it, and they watched Jim and Joe climb in, wearing crash-helmets, overalls and goggles.

Steve stood by, listening to the healthy sound of the engine.

"Don't go too mad at it, Jim!" he called.

Jim grinned as he slid behind the wheel, with his palms resting on the cord-bound rim, while his feet reached out for the pedals.

The old coach-builder might have taken his measurements, because the car seemed to fit him so well. There was no wind-shield, and he looked down the long length of engine-cover, the little rivets on it just catching the morning sunshine.

The car seemed to shudder and tremble under the fierce power of the engine, then Jim reached overside and slid into gear.

"Ready?" he asked Joe.

"Let 'er go!" Joe replied, and the practice car went away with a thunderous roar which

drowned the cheer of the little group, the rear tyres tearing dust and stones from the road and smothering them.

Out of the village they shot, travelling like a shell ripping from the muzzle of a long-range gun. To the right, the road went towards the main arterial highway; to the left it forked for narrower ways which twisted between hedges, winding and turning in quick corners.

Over went the wheel, and the car stormed to the left. A moment later hedges rose on either side, echoing the shattering blare of the machine. Jim was touching eighty miles an hour already.

A curve loomed ahead like a green wall. Jim didn't brake. Road-racing drivers always take corners fast, and he was going to do the same!

He timed his approach, pulled the machine out, then wrenched the wheel over and flung the car into a wild skid. The outer hedge seemed to fall at them. They hit it, bounced off in a mad tangle of torn branches and flying leaves, skidded straight, and then shot on.

"If that had been a brick wall, you wouldn't have bounced off!" Joe leaned over and howled the words into Jim's ear. "That's not the way to take a corner. A bit steadier next time! Use your brakes and change down, you—— Whup!"

His last exclamation was a cross between a gasp of horror and a yell of excitement. They were hurtling around another bend, and at the far side of it appeared the massive shape of an empty hay-wagon, with a carter leading the horses and leaving what looked like insufficient room for even a bicycle to get through!

Jim didn't slow. He swung the car over with a twist of steely-muscled hands, kissed the hedge with his wheel-hubs, and shot by the cart with no more than the length of a fly's eyelash to spare—and with the carter so dumbfounded at the appearance of the grey meteor that he had no time even to open his mouth.

"Good! Nice bit of driving, that!" said Joe, and he meant it.

A straight bit followed. Jim flogged the machine towards the peak of its speed, and she began to bounce and leap on the rough country road. Another corner came up. This time he drove around it, as he should have done.

He waited until the last possible moment, then stamped on his brake-pedal. While the straining tyres were squealing and kicking on the road surface, while the brake-shoes were whining in their drums, he made a beautiful, straight-through racing change down to second gear and took the car around the corner with never a sign of a skid.

"Beautiful!" Joe yelled.

Jim had gone round that corner as fast as it was humanly possible for anyone to take that car around it. Lon Stargie himself could not have done better.

"Sit tight," Jim bawled. "I'm going up that lane!"

With these words, the car swung off the road into the entrance of a narrow lane barely wide enough to admit the car—and what had happened before was nothing to the way Jim drove now.

Luckily, they met nothing with the exception of a farm-hand coming out of a gate with two pails of milk. When he sighted the thundering juggernaut hurtling down at him he took one desperate leap backwards.

The chums, as they passed, had a fleeting glimpse of the man just clearing the gate, with white spray from spilled milk-pails flying all around him.

Jim took every corner as fast as he knew how, and he went through two water-splashes like a destroyer going into action, shooting water high and wide.

Gasping, with the perspiration trickling down his face, with his whole body jarred and shaken from the bumps, Joe clung on, and he panted in relief when Jim finally whirled the car on to a road which, both knew, would take them to the Great North Road, some six miles away from Woodburn.

"Now we'll have a burst of real speed to finish up with!" Jim said, and with a slashing skid he took the bellowing machine on to the smooth, black surface of the most famous road in the British Isles.

It showed wide and empty and straight before them. Jim let out a joyous yell as his foot stubbed the throttle pedal down to the floorboards, and the practice car wagged its tail as it put out the full power of its engine and started to eat up the road.

They had no speedometer fitted, so they couldn't tell how fast they were going. But they were still short of the limit of their speed when the wind was streaming past them like something solid.

It was then that Joe heard a sound behind him, and turned to look back. Coming up, close on them, were three racing cars, and a glance was enough to tell him that it was the Ace team!

In a flash, Joe guessed why they were there. These three machines were being made ready for the Irish Grand Prix, and were now out on preliminary tests—being driven in secret, early in the morning, when there was nobody much about.

Joe sighted Lon Stargie on the leading machine, with Sniff Dix handling the second car, and a man—whom neither of the boys knew—behind the little windscreen of the third machine. The trio of low-built speedsters were coming up hand over hand as Joe leaned across and shouted to his chum:

"Jim, there's the Aces behind—out on test. Stargie's driving—give 'em something to think about!"

Jim flung one glance over his shoulder and sighted the cars pulling wide on the road ready to swoop past him. He saw Stargie's goggled eyes regarding him, and Jim grinned. He trod on the throttle-pedal anew, giving

the engine the last fraction of power, then Stargie was level with him, and they were tearing neck and neck down the road.

Trouble Ahead!

STARGIE got the nose of his machine in front of Jim's car, but that was all. He glanced at Jim, and his head went down as he tried to find more speed.

The other two cars closed up a little until all four of them were careering down the straight course, travelling at mad speed, with the big practice machine juddering and shaking, roaring and howling like some over-stressed giant bellowing in torment against its rivals.

Jim knew that he couldn't keep up with the specially-built Ace racers for long, but he grinned as he saw Stargie's furious expression.

His Ace should have been able to pass anything on four wheels, but it was very slow in getting ahead. In half a mile, however, he drew in front, and then Sniff Dix came level. Sniff glanced at the grey car, astonishment in his eyes. Joe waved to him, then yelled:

"We built this ourselves—and we can keep up with you!"

Sniff Dix couldn't hear that through the blare of the battling exhausts, but he could see the grin on Joe's face. The Ace tester's expression became fiendish—especially when, in a last burst of reckless speed, the grey machine actually surged in front of him—actually left the super-tuned racing Ace behind!

Sniff stamped the long car's throttle wide open then, and went in front a moment after, with the third of the team close behind him.

"Gave 'em a run for their money!" Jim yelled. "My hat, how this old tub's shaking!"

It felt to Joe as though the practice car would fall to bits at any moment. Jim eased up, and the sun-lit roofs of Woodburn village whipped up to the left. They watched the Ace cars rip away out of sight, then Jim turned the car towards the village, and soon brought it to a stop outside the garage door.

Joe was looking very thoughtful after they had put away the practice car. Jim noticed this, and he tackled his chum.

"What's the matter, Joe?" he asked.

"To tell you the truth, Jim, I'm worried," the mechanic answered. "We've already had a taste of Stargie's crookedness, and, in view of what happened just now, I have a feeling that he'll get up to some more of his dirty tricks!"

"Don't you worry about Stargie," Jim said. "We can look after ourselves!"

The young speedman spoke lightly; but inwardly he was inclined to agree with Joe. Stargie *would* make trouble; Jim could feel it in his bones.

And that trouble was not to be very long in coming!

(The next instalment of this corking serial is packed with excitement—don't miss reading it, chums!)

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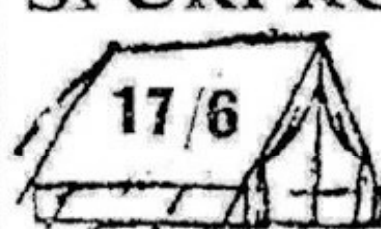
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