

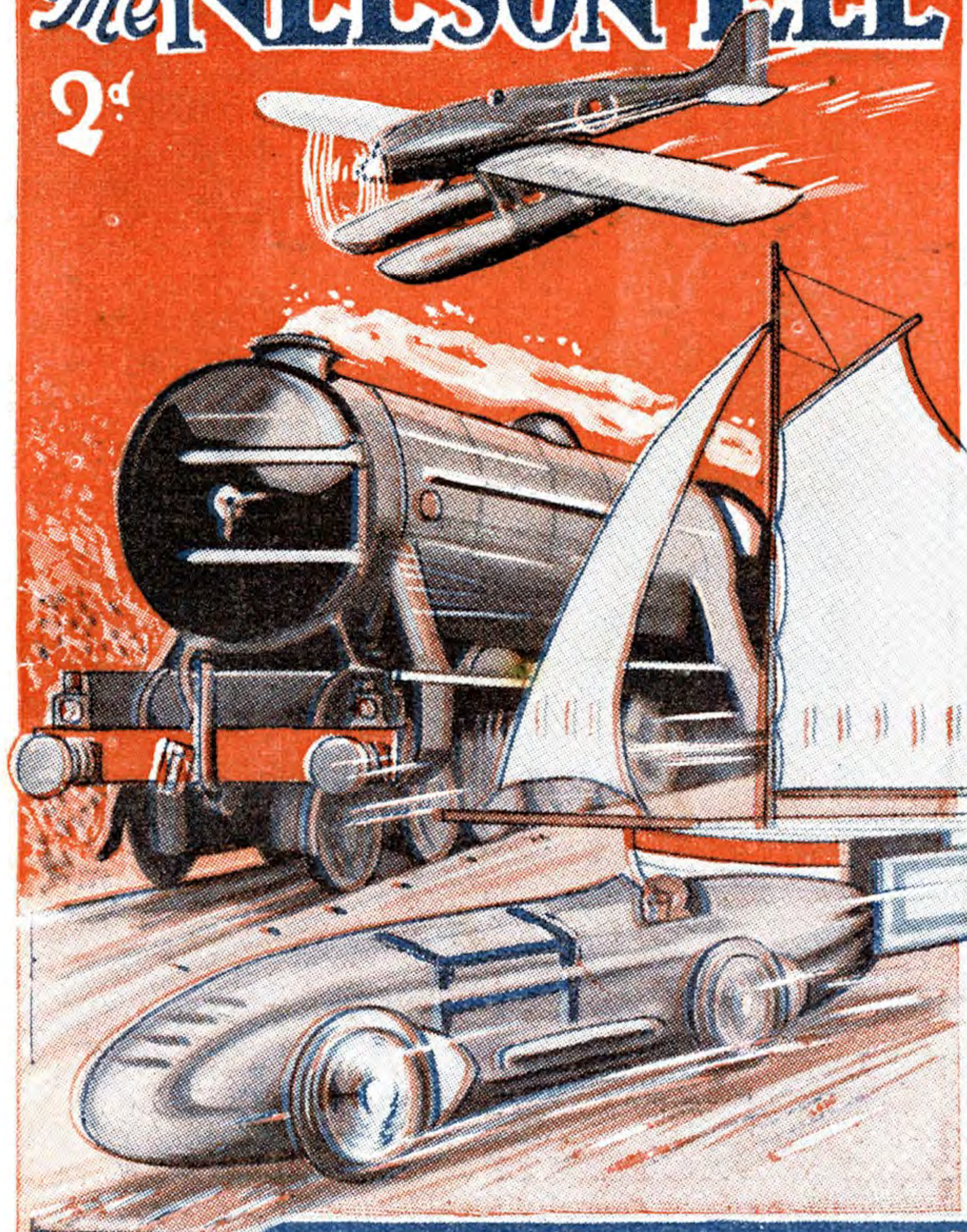
Yarns
for All
Tastes

**ADVENTURE, DETECTIVE, SCHOOL,
SPORT**

—in
this
Issue!

The **NELSON LEE**

2^d



**WONDERFUL WORKING
MODELS — FREE!**

New Series No. 19.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

May 31st, 1930.

The COWBOY KID & Co.



Meet Kiki!

LOOPY LANE, the Cowboy Kid, might have slept for a week had not Sheba the tiger, who he was using as a pillow, slipped away and let his head down on the hard deck of the wrecked and stranded *Lacoma* with a bump that made him see umpteen stars.

As he sat up and blinked his tired eyes he heard the tiger roar, and knew there was something wrong. Yesterday a horde of savages had attacked the wreck, and when he had dropped asleep because he was too dog-tired to carry on, he had been haunted by the drumming of tom-toms somewhere on the island. He half-expected to hear them now, but Sheba's snarling roar was followed by a whimpering squeal, and Loopy leapt to his feet in a flash. He soon saw what the trouble was.

The half of the broken ship which had been hurled by the waves slap into a palm grove had embedded itself deep in the earth in a slanting position, and on the top of a sloping deck-house sat a nigger boy who was as black as coal. Sheba the tiger was sitting on the deck, looking up at him with her fine white teeth bared and her whiskers bristling hungrily. Every other second she let out a roar, and her tail was swaying ominously. The boy's eyes, which looked as big as eggs, were rolling in terror, and he was holding up his spreading bare toes out of reach of the she-cat.

No. 2 KING LOOPY.

*Hats off, chums,
to his Majesty
King Loopy of
Bangaloola!
Hip-pip—Fun
and thrills in this
breathlessly excit-
ing yarn.*

Loopy did not mind having to deal with a black boy no bigger than himself, but he expected to see the palm grove full of hostile savages, and he took a good look around before he seized Sheba by the rope which served as a collar and dragged her back.

Then he made a sign to the black boy. "Come down!" he cried.

The black boy hesitated for a bit, rolled over on to his hands, shivered as he looked at Sheba, and finally set a leg over the edge of the deck-house and tumbled down. He wriggled away to the safe side of Loopy.

"Now," said Loopy, "what's your name? Who are you? And what are you doing here?"

Loopy spoke like that because he had to, never dreaming for a moment that the black boy would understand and be able to answer.

But the funny-looking nigger, whose feet were twice as big as they ought to have been, with hands to match, stretched his face in an enormous grin and clashed his teeth as he said in a deep voice:

"Me Kiki"—he pronounced it kickey. "Keeng Wangaloola, he send me. Savey life—keepy big stripey cat—mighty strongey whitey boy—Wangaloola makee whitey boy keeng!"

At every word the black boy clashed his teeth together. The words came in a rattle from his throat. His big eyes rolled in time to his gestures as he pointed down the palm grove. Loopy had no difficulty in making out his meaning.

"So you're Kiki, are you?" said he. "And they're going to make me King. Who's

going to? The men I cut loose in the palm grove last night?"

"Yaas!" Kiki set his head on one side, winked knowingly, and then stared in awe at Sheba the tiger.

"Sheba," said Loopy, letting the tiger go, "make friends with our new pal."

Sheba sidled up to Kiki, sat down, and held out a paw. Kiki looked doubtful.

"Me rubey the nosey," he said, wagging his head.

"All right," said Loopy. "Rub noses, then, but don't blame me if she swallows you."

Kiki stretched out his head slowly, cautiously, and the tiger closed its eyes as it sat in the sun. Then the black boy solemnly rubbed his nose against the tiger's, shivering with fright all the while. When he found he still had his head on his shoulders he started to do a step dance up and down the deck, which made Loopy decide to take him on as dancing partner should he ever get away from the island and start out in a vaudeville show again.

Then Kiki streaked to the deck rail, stretching his arm and pointing with his finger.

"Keeng Wangaloola breeng the crown!" he cried.

"All right," answered Loopy. "But, I say, where did you learn to speak English, Kiki?"

"Wunst," gurgled the black boy, "sheep come, seenk; one man saved, rest all eat up. LEEVE a long time, teechea me speak!"

"I see. And did the shipwrecked sailor die?"

"He die. Too tough boil—too tough roast. Keeng Wangaloola say heet him on head too latey. Oughta hev keel heem before—"

"Crikey!" yelled Loopy. "They killed and ate him, Sheba!"

Kiki nearly wagged his head off, and held his stomach with his huge hands.

"No good," he cried. "Makey beeg pain—too tough!"

"And what was his name?" asked the Cowboy Kid.

"Call heem Billee Dunn," said Kiki, and then, letting himself drop sheer down from the deck level to the ground below, he leapt into the air, waved his arms wildly, and cut into the palm grove, where a moment later he vanished among the trees.

"Well, Sheba," said Loopy, as he stroked the tiger's ear, "that's a nice thing. They're going to make me King of the Island, and they eat up white men here. Seems to me I'm lucky in having you as my pal."

The Coronation!

LOOPY awaited the coming of the savages with mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension.

It might have been an hour later when he first heard the drone of horns and the thumping of drums. The sound came from far away, but approached nearer every

minute. Then he heard the clash of cymbals, and finally the procession appeared.

It was headed by a regiment of natives who marched eight abreast, each with a spear slanting on his right shoulder. They were followed by the band, horn blowers in front, drummers next, and cymbalists last. The horns were fashioned out of wood and highly polished, the drums were so long they almost touched the ground, and the cymbals were made out of rounded sheets of solid metal beaten into shape.

Then came more natives with plumed head-dresses and whose bodies were clothed in many-hued garments. The King himself marched under a canopy borne by four stalwart pall-bearers. Following him came some more dignitaries—this bunch of men carried baskets on their heads—and finally another regiment of warriors. Kiki, the black boy, was dancing in the front of the procession.

As they reached the ship's side they opened out and formed up in orderly array, the basket bearers placing their burdens on the ground and bowing their foreheads to the earth.

The King stepped from under his canopy, and, raising his right hand, started to talk in an outlandish gibberish, which sounded in Loopy's ears something like this: Oo! Kiwi hookaloo mangorada ah techabacha lareeda em jeema. Laka! Laka! Ooocheroomba! Only it didn't stop at that, but went on for a long while.

And all the time the black king—an enormously fat man—was talking, Kiki was making signs to Loopy to come down.

Sheba had her head thrust through the twisted deck rail and was peering down at the bunch of natives as if she would like to eat them.

At a sign from the King the spearmen marched away, put down their spears, and came back without them.

Not until then did Loopy sling a rope over the side of the vessel and climb down it hand over hand to the ground, while Sheba, with a mighty leap, cleared the rail and dropped full thirty-five feet to the earth. As the tiger opened her mouth and uttered a roar the natives scattered, only to come back again as Loopy set his hand on the tiger's head and signed to them that it was all right. Next Kiki did a bit of talking to the King, after which, at a word, the bearers opened their baskets.

In a moment the ground was littered with presents of all kinds, which included fruits and nuts and jars of native wine, and ranged from a broken pair of hob-nailed boots—a relic, perhaps, of the unlucky sailor who had taught the black boy, Kiki, English, and had finished up by providing tough meat for the cannibals, Loopy thought—to a bejewelled crown which the King set solemnly on Loopy's head, the Cowboy Kid removing his Stetson for the purpose.

It was the strangest crown Loopy had ever seen, with a pair of horns branching out from its metal base. The metal was pure

gold, he supposed, for it was untarnished, and it was studded with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies.

Having crowned Loopy, a high priest or some sort of dignitary wailed over the Cowboy Kid for a good ten minutes, whilst the kneeling natives set up a monotonous chant. And when all was over the King made a sign to Kiki, who, sticking out his big feet, wagged his funny black head and said:

"You keeng of Bangaloola! Whow!"

"Whow!" roared the King, lifting both his hands above his head in a royal blessing.

"Whow!" roared the assembled natives.

"Some of these chaps are the ones I cut free in the palm grove last night, Sheba," said Loopy, addressing himself to the she-cat, "and they're evidently grateful. Still, I think I'd better butt in with a bit of a noise on my own account."

Whipping his revolvers out of their holsters, he raised them above his head and let fly all six chambers of each with lightning-like rapidity. Evidently the natives had never heard a revolver before, and as they saw the spits of flame and the puffs of smoke, and heard the noise, they all flopped down on the ground, the King in front of Loopy. Now when he was a tiny kid Loopy Lane had read "Robinson Crusoe," and recalled how, when Crusoe found and rescued Friday, the grateful savage had set Crusoe's foot upon his head; and he reckoned if he was to stay top dog as King of Bangaloola he had better put the late King in his proper place. So he set his right foot on the back of the King's head, successfully restraining a desire to tickle Wangaloola's head with the spurs on his boot. The action worked like a charm, for the King raised his head and kissed Loopy's foot.

Attacked!

IT was a great idea being King, but soon Loopy began to get heartily sick of it, for there was no peace. He made the deck of the broken wreck his court, and allowed nobody to walk on it unless he summoned them to an audience. Sheba saw that there were no intruders! Kiki, having been adopted by King Loopy as his personal servant, was always there, of course.

The ex-King, who seemed to do nothing but eat all day, had rigged up a bungalow village among the palms, and all the native inhabitants of Bangaloola foregathered in the neighbourhood. The soldiers or spearmen had a camp of their own. It was all pretty sickening to Loopy Lane, for he realised that for his royal position he was virtually a prisoner. Not only that, but he could not sleep properly at night, for the band would drum and strum and blow from dark till dawn, owing to Kiki's misinterpretation of the royal orders.

"Tell 'em to stop it, Kiki!" growled the Cowboy Kid, who had just made himself comfortable on deck and was feeling drowsy. "No band."

But "No" in Kiki's reading of the English language meant "Yes," and, do what he would, Loopy could not rid him of that impression, and so the wretched band drummed and strummed all night.

Loopy got so fed up with this that he was seriously contemplating doing a bolt with Sheba, when a native runner arrived with the news that an army of natives from the biggest of the near-by islands had arrived in a hundred canoes, and was marching to the palm grove where the half of the wrecked Lacoma lay.

In a moment there was panic in the King's camp. The royal bungalow was packed up, and the ex-King vanished with half his spearmen. Most of the others followed suit, the band departing with them after serenading Loopy with a mad Bangaloola kind of jazz for ten minutes. Dawn revealed the fact that about thirty spearmen, who were all shivering with fear, had been left behind to take care of the new King.

Kiki did a lot of explaining while he danced excitedly on the deck, with Sheba the she-cat watching him hungrily. It seemed that, just before Loopy had been flung upon this island by the storm, the warriors from Potakeeta, a great island over thirty miles away across the seas, had raided the island, slain many of the inhabitants, captured the King and his chief officials, and were about to stew and eat them in the palm grove when Sheba the she-cat burst upon the scene. Scared, the invading army had followed the she-cat and attacked Loopy on the ship, only to meet with utter defeat; afterwards Loopy had freed the King and his men, and as a reward had been made King of Bangaloola. Now it seemed that the warriors from Potakeeta, who had taken the news home to their island, had returned with reinforcements and were going to kill and eat Loopy and his she-cat first, and devour the ex-King of the Island afterwards.

"Crumbs!" said Loopy when he had digested this bit of information. "We'll have to get ready for a rare old scrap, Sheba. And I don't suppose we'll get off so easily this time."

He slept on the canting deck of the wreck that night, using Sheba as a pillow, with the stars twinkling above him, and the palms swaying musically in a warm, tropical wind. Kiki, who was nervous and shaking like a jelly, kept close to them.

"Whatever happens, Kiki," said Loopy as he loaded his revolvers with cartridges of spreading shot instead of bullets—for he had no proper cartridges—"we've got to be prepared."

Laying a big stock whip beside him, he waited for the dawn. While he waited strange sounds echoed in the palm forest. He heard distant cries, the swish of paddles in a calm sea, and a murmur of voices dimmed by the soft tumble of surf upon the reef.

Then the sky lightened, changing swiftly from black to grey, from grey to blue, and from blue to a golden radiance which almost blinded him. And no sooner had the sun



The Cowboy Kid roped in the savages, rolled them along to Sheba who, with a flick of her huge paw, sent them whizzing over the side of the boat.

risen than the forest was alive with war-painted warriors, who came tearing towards the ship from all directions.

With a howl of terror Kiki dived for the gangway stairs and vanished from sight, leaving the swing door open. And out of the hold came wreaths of smoke, for the wreck had never ceased to smoulder since it had been thrown up high and dry. The Lacoma had been wrecked by three explosions at long intervals, and there was still explosive matter confined in the glowing depths of her.

Loopy had only time to give a thought to that before the natives reached the broken hulk and began to scale it. They had brought grappling irons, which they hurled deftly over the ship's rails, and then, catching hold of the rope, came up in a double line.

Abandoning his crown, Loopy stuck on his Stetson hat to shield his eyes from the blinding sun, and, stock whip in hand, waited by the higher rail. The deck slanted below him, being on the tilt, and he waved Sheba to the lower rail, near which the tiger sat on its haunches, watching and waiting with its left forepaw raised.

Two rows of savages were scaling the steel plates of the ship's slanting side. Others were climbing up the exposed lower decks and cargo holds of her broken end. Each of the climbers held a knife tightly gripped in his teeth. Their faces were hideously painted, and those who waited for their turn

below encouraged the storming party with a raucous war chant and began to dance.

Loopy bared his rounded forearms and waited, his stock whip grasped in his right hand.

He could hardly believe that he had a chance, even with Sheba to aid him, and he was wondering how to counter the attack when inspiration came to him.

It came just as the foremost of the boarders stepped over the deck rail and, with knife raised, rushed at him. Loopy lashed the heavy stock whip at him and wound its thong round his middle, jerking him off his feet on to the slanting deck with a pull of the wrist. As the savage fell so the thong unwound, and he rolled head over heels down to where Sheba waited for him. Loopy watched breathlessly as Sheba raised her left paw to strike. Then he howled with laughter, for as the nigger bounced near her the tiger did not tear him with her claws, but gave his rolling body a flick with her paw and sent him flying over the deck rail to the ground some thirty feet below.

Loopy swung the thong of the whip round the second savage with precisely the same result. The men who were scaling the wreck halted with cries of terror as they saw the tiger bounce the second man over. Still the attackers came on, however. Cleverly the Cowboy Kid whipped the savages over with his whip and sent them rolling down to Sheba, who, in turn, patted them over the

(Continued on page 43.)

THE TROUBLE TRIPLETS!



Wayside Entertainment!

"GOSH, but I'm hungry!" groaned Sam Trooble, patting his waistcoat pathetically and grinning feebly at his twin brother Posh. "My inside's so empty it's sort of flapping about like a brace of kippers doing the Charleston!"

"Hungry and tired!" added Nippy Trooble—having lost, or mislaid, his own name, Nippy had adopted that of the "Trouble Twins" since joining them in their wanderings—somewhat dismally. "But don't mention kippers, old man!"

"And the shades of night are falling fast!" sighed Posh, the third member of the triplets. "Still, keep smiling!" he added with a chirrup. "My eyes behold a village in the offing, messmates, with an inn, and some yokels outside on a bench, quaffing foaming tankards of cider. We'll give an entertain-

ment and thuswise earn the wherewithal for grub and, perchance, shelter for the night!"

As usual, Posh's unbounding optimism restored his fellow-wanderers' cheerfulness, and they stepped out bravely towards the rural inn just outside the village.

"BOW WOW!"

says Posh. That's the start of a lot more trouble for the Trouble Triplets—and a lot more laughs for you.

With hopeful eyes on the happy, contented-looking yokels, the Trouble Triplets trudged, tired and travel-stained, towards the tavern, Nippy untying the handkerchief in which he stored his rather meagre conjuring apparatus, Sam loosening his braces in readiness for a juggling and acrobatic display, while Posh coughed and cleared his throat in preparation for exercising his wonderful ventriloquial powers.

As they reached the inn, mine host—who, to judge by his nose and circumference, was his own best customer—came out with a heavily-laden tray.

Sighting the three dusty wanderers, he scowled at them.

"Ere, you tramps clear hoff!" he ordered. "I wants no dirty tramps 'angin' round my 'ouse!"

"Bow-wow!" replied the insulted Posh; but he replied with his ventriloquial voice, throwing it behind the innkeeper's fat legs, and finishing up with a series of blood-curdling snarls.

The effect on the innkeeper was extraordinary. He gave a convulsive leap, jerking the tray of glasses with their contents over his own head, while his prominent tummy butted into the back of a burly, bandy-legged farmer's son, who was in the act of drinking from a full tankard.

Instead of quaffing his cider in the orthodox manner, the farmer's son, rather a disgruntled-looking individual, emptied it in a frothy flood over his rugged, honest features.

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the yokels. "That be funny-loike, that be!"

"Seems to me they wash in cider here!" observed Posh, in surprise. "Let's get busy while the giddy audience is interested."

"What-ho!" murmured Nippy, the conjurer. "Hallo, just look at the snails and things in this spilt cider! No wonder that gentleman refused to drink it—wonder to me he washed his face in it! Look!"

One after another Nippy picked—or seemed to pick—from the half-full tankard of cider, first a large toad, then a few snails, a whopping blackbeetle and finally a mouse, pretending to throw them away in disgust.

The eyes of the assembled countrymen nearly started from their heads.

"My heye!" ejaculated one hoarsely. "I allus perspected the cider at this 'ouse was not clean-like! But toads and beetles—groogh! No more cider 'ere for me!"

"Ugh! Nor for me, Garge!"

Old Garge shuddered and emptied his cider away, and the yokels followed his example in disgusted indignation.

By this time both mine host and the bandy-legged farmer had recovered somewhat from their unwanted baths, and were glaring at each other in speechless fury.

"You—you clumsy idiot!" hooted the farmer's son at last, almost foaming at the mouth with rage. "You did that on purpuss, dang you!"

"Of course I didn't, you bandy-legged can of watered milk!" howled mine host wrathfully. "Weren't it that pest of a dorg of yours as made me jump?" he added, glaring about for the invisible dog. "The brute nearly bit me the other night when you brought 'im 'ere!"

"I ain't brought no dorg, dang you!"

"You won't bring no more agen, anyway! You 'op it! Take your custom elsewhere!" bawled the host.

"That I jolly well will!" vowed the farmer's son. "Me drink your blinking rotten cider—no fear! Think I wants to swaller frogs and snails and beetles—"

"Hey? Who says—"

"I seed 'em with my own eyes!" roared the irate son of the soil. "That cider was swarming with snails and things—"

"You bloomin' liar!" howled the innkeeper, insulted in his tenderest spot. "My cider—"

"Wot's that—a bloomin' liar, ham hi?" The farmer's son fairly shook with rage as he finished mopping his features and jammed his hanky away. Then he took off his coat and began to roll back his sleeves.

That was enough for the raging innkeeper. Being a retired pug, it was like a red rag to a bull. Instantly he tucked his stained apron round him, and shoved back his own sleeves, revealing a pair of huge arms and fists.

The two combatants began to dance round each other, and Posh frowned. This was bad for business. A sudden brain-wave occurred to him as he sighted the farmer's son's ancient nag browsing near a tree just by the horse-trough. Next moment a deep, husky voice came from the horse.

"None of that, boss! I'll tell your father when we gets home! I'm ashamed of you, fightin' in public, Joe Jenks!"

There was a sudden silence. The yokels went white, and the two would-be warriors blinked open-mouthed at the speaking horse.

"G-good lor'!" gasped Joe Jenks. "Was—was that old Bess a-speakin' to me?"

"Of course it was!" snorted the old nag. "Come along home this minute, Joe!"

The old mare happened to be looking at the farmer's son at the moment, but the illusion was spoilt for just then Joe Jenks caught sight of a dilapidated gentleman with a patch over one eye, whose whole appearance suggested one accustomed to living by ingenuity rather than work, skulking round behind the horse.

"It weren't old Bess at all!" ejaculated Joe, in great relief. "It were that bloomin' tramp! How dare you talk to me, you—"

"It weren't me, strike me pink!" gasped the tramp, edging aside guiltily. "It weren't—"

"Of course it weren't!" assented old Bess, and, having finished drinking at the trough, old Bess gave a playful flick with her hind heels, just catching the tramp in the tummy and depositing him in the horse-trough. Then she trotted over to her master, evidently taking his sudden attention as an order to advance.

It was enough for Joe Jenks. The farmer's son gave a fearful howl and bolted for his life, leaving his coat lying by the tree. He was followed instantly by the frightened yokels, as they stampeded with yells of alarm. A talking horse was too much for them!

"Oh, crikey!" groaned Posh. "That's done it—there goes our audience!"

"And here comes a bobby!" gasped Sam, nearly weeping with merriment. "Hark at the tramp!"

The tramp scrambled from the horse-trough, yelling wrathfully; but he stopped as he sighted the man in blue advancing

with ponderous strides. With water dripping from his garments, he hastily made himself scarce.

"Here, what's all this?" demanded the constable. "Mister Bloggs——"

"Blowed if I knows!" gasped the still astounded and bewildered innkeeper, mopping a heated brow and glaring suspiciously at the laughing Trouble Triplets. "This 'ere 'ouse seems suddenly bewitched, though it's my belief as 'ow them bloomin' kids there——"

He got no further, for just then old Bess butted him in the rear, sending him with a terrific jolt full into the ample embrace of the constable, who collapsed backwards with a startled howl into the horse-trough.

Splash!

"Well, our audience has gone, and it's time we went, too!" choked Posh. "Who'd have thought it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And, yelling with laughter, the Trouble Triplets made themselves scarce, thus following the wise example of the tramp.

Honest Alf!

"HALLO, here comes that giddy tramp again!"

Posh Trooble chuckled as he glanced along the dusty road.

Dusk was falling rapidly, and it was an hour since the wanderers had shaken the dust of the village from their feet. In that time they had not travelled far, however, for they had had a bit of luck in getting a job of chopping wood from a kindly-disposed cottager just the far side of the village.

As payment the cottager had given them a whacking package of bread-and-cheese, and they were just starting work on the feed with voracious appetites when the patch-eyed tramp hove in sight again.

He paused and eyed the three seated on the bank at the side of the road.

"Warm day, lads!" he ventured, with one glittering orb fixed on the bread-and-cheese.

"It is, old sport!" agreed Posh.

The tramp was obviously very hungry, and Posh felt rather sorry for the dilapidated gentleman—especially as he was responsible for the man's unexpected half-wash in the horse-trough. He whispered to his chums, and, as they nodded, he called out: "Care to join us with the grub?"

"By hokey, you've said it!" sighed the dingy gentleman, seating himself on the bank. "Ain't 'ad a bite this day, I ain't—strike me pink if I ain't!"

"Here you are, then, old sport!" said Posh, and he handed over a chunk of bread and a slice of cheese, while his two pals did likewise.

"Not a bloomin' bite!" went on the tramp affably. "'Ard lines—'ard lines!" he mused. "'Ere's me with money in me pocket and I can't buy a bite of grub or a drink!"

"Why not?" demanded Sam, staring.

"Why not?" exclaimed the tramp huskily. "Why not, hindeed! 'Ere's me, Honest Alf Snooks, daren't go into no shop and arsk for grub. 'Cos why? 'Cos if I shows me ten-bob note they'll call in a bloomin' copper. They'd conspect me of stealin' it—me, mind you, what's called Honest Alf! And the copper would want to know where I'd got it from! It's 'ard—cruel 'ard!"

The Trouble Triplets said nothing.

"Cruel 'ard!" said Honest Alf. "Now, if I was to ask one of you gents if you could change a ten-bob note, I know you wouldn't conspect a man—bein' kind-hearted gents, like, you'd change it and trust a man's face."

And he eyed the chums a trifle anxiously.

Posh chuckled.

"Sorry, old nut," he explained, "but we haven't a bean between us!"

"Not a brass farthing!" assented Nippy cheerfully. "Here's that bobby comin' again—better ask him, old scout!"

"Eh? What bobby?" ejaculated Posh.

He glanced back along the road and sighted a constable racing along on a bicycle towards them.

"Gosh, it's the same bobby!" snapped Posh. "After us, I bet! Come on!"

Luckily the constable hadn't seen them, and they scudded round the corner, dived through a gap in the hedge, and slipped back along it, not wanting to lose sight of their bread-and-cheese. Through the hedge they spotted the bobby dismount and address Honest Alf, who looked ready to bolt himself.

"Seen three kids along this road, mate?" asked the constable.

"Three—three kids?" gasped Honest Alf.

"Yes—I'm arter them!" explained the bobby briefly. "Joe Jenks, from the farm yonder, had a bit of trouble at the Black Bull and left 'is coat behind. When he got back for it he found as his gold watch and a wallet with notes in 'ad gone. Them kids must 'a' took 'em!"

Honest Alf fairly panted with relief as he pointed round the bend.

"I seed 'em!" he said huskily. "They've jest 'opped it. You'll nab 'em nicely, hoffer!"

"The ungrateful rotter!" breathed Posh, as the constable mounted his bike and raced away.

Having no desire to fall into the hands of the Law, the Trouble Triplets took to their heels across two fields until, sighting a barn, they went inside, closed the door, and took refuge in the loft.

Darkness was falling now, and scarcely had they settled down for the night when they heard stealthy footsteps in the barn below. Looking down through the trap-door, they sighted the dim figure of Honest Alf. Little dreaming that three pairs of sharp eyes were watching, Honest Alf lit a black clay pipe, and then by the light of his match began to gloat over a gold watch that he drew from his pocket.

"The thieving rotter!" breathed Posh. "That's Joe Jenks' watch for a—— Oh, my—— Yarroooop!"



The Triplets hurtled down through the loft and fell in a heap on top of the tramp.

Posh ended with a wild yell of alarm as he suddenly overbalanced, and Sam, who was leaning over his shoulder, followed his example.

Together they nose-dived through the trap-door, and, amidst a shower of hay, dropped plump on top of Honest Alf. Nippy, not to be outdone, followed them gracefully. The tramp gave a fiendish howl, and next moment all four were mixed up in a struggling, yelling heap in the dark barn.

Just then hasty footsteps and voices sounded outside. The door opened wide, revealing Joe Jenks, a farm-hand, and the constable.

"I told you so!" yelled the farm-hand excitedly. "I seed them kids come in here, and that there tramp, too!"

"It's them!" said the constable grimly. "Here, stop that, and come along wi' me, me lads!"

He hooked a hand in Posh's collar and made another grab at Sam. Honest Alf was just sneaking out when Nippy dodged forward and collared him.

"Hold on!" he gasped. "This is the chap who pinched the things! Look, he's got the watch in his dirty paw now, and he's got the wallet in his pocket, I bet!"

"Is that so?" snorted the constable. "Here, my man, let's have a look at you!"

And he rammed a hand into Honest Alf's inner pocket, bringing to light a leather wallet which proved to hold several ten-shilling notes.

"And I thought them kids had took 'em!" gasped Joe Jenks, giving the triplets a grateful look. "Good for you, kids! I s'pose you tracked him down——"

"Sort of did!" assented Posh solemnly. "And then we fell on him. He wanted to pay for our bread and cheese, and now," he added with a groan, "I s'pose he's pinched it and scoffed the lot!"

"Taken your grub, too, has he?" snorted Joe Jenks. "Regular bad 'un, and no error! I owe you kids summut for this——"

"You can pay us back by allowing us to sleep in your barn, Mister Jenks!" said Posh hopefully.

"That I will, and welcome!" said the farmer's son heartily. "And, what's more, I'll see you have some supper, and some breakfast in the morning afore you goes on!"

He did. Five minutes after Honest Alf had been escorted off to the village lock-up, the farm-hand returned with a broad grin, a big jug of steaming cocoa, and a plate piled high with ham and cheese sandwiches.

"Well, our giddy entertainment was a success after all, chaps!" quoth Posh, when the last sandwich had vanished. "What say you?"

Sam and Nippy, both nearly asleep, yawned their agreement.

THE END.

(More about the Trouble Triplets next Wednesday. Amusing? You've said it. Next week's yarn is a perfect scream!)

NELSON LEE and
NIPPER investigate
the mystery of

The ROOM



CHAPTER 1.

The Haunted Room!

"TWADDLE!" snorted Admiral Gregory Herbert, his short-clipped, iron-grey hair seeming to bristle. "Arrant twaddle! I never heard such nonsense in all my life! Haunted, indeed!"

"You're very frank, Gregory," said Lord Welleston dryly.

"I'm your brother, aren't I? I can be as

frank as I like!" retorted the admiral. "And when you tell me that this bed-room is haunted, and that anybody who sleeps in it is liable to sudden death—well, I think you're becoming senile."

One of the other men who were listening to this heated conversation, laughed.

"Don't you think we'd better change the subject?" he suggested dryly. "What about that fellow who started flying across the Atlantic yesterday? Do you think he'll—"

of DEATH!

By
**ROBERT W.
COMRADE.**



~~~~~  
*Weird and amazing is the mystery of this haunted room. Men sleep in it and are found dead. No solution; baffling. Nelson Lee sleeps in it; and then——!*  
~~~~~

and the gentlemen of the house party had accepted their host's invitation to indulge in a final drink before going up to their rooms.

Exactly how the subject of the Monk's Chamber cropped up nobody could remember. Lord Welles-ton was frankly unwilling to talk, but the admiral, in his usual boisterous, almost domineering manner, insisted upon keeping to the subject. The other men were mildly amused; they were youngsters, for the most part, and it rather tickled them to see these elderly brothers engaged in this duel.

"After all, pater, Uncle Gregory is justified in asking one or two questions,"

remarked the Hon. Clarence Herbert, as he festooned his long limbs over the edge of the desk. "And if it comes to that, I'm hanged if I know much about this Monk's Chamber. What exactly is the history of it?"

"I'd rather not discuss the matter, Clarence," said his father.

"There you go again!" snapped the admiral. "Always trying to shelve the whole infernal business! I know that one of your guests died in that room some years ago, but I'm hanged if I can see the reason for all this mystery."

"Hilda prefers the whole matter to be—well, undiscussed."

"Hilda isn't here," retorted the admiral. "And, with all due respects to my sister-in-law, it's my opinion she's interested herself far too much, of late years, in spiritualism

"Sorry, Cope, but you can't put me off like that," interrupted Admiral Herbert. "I want to hear more about this haunted room—this Monk's Chamber. I've known about it for years, of course, but I'm hanged if I suspected that there was any danger attached to it. I thought it was locked up because it was damp, or some trifling reason of that kind."

Lord Welles-ton, in spite of the smile on his face, had a grave look in his eyes. He was an elderly man, grey-haired and bent-shouldered. His brother, the admiral, was some ten years younger, and looked only middle-aged. There were several other men lounging in the easy chairs, or standing about the room.

It was practically eleven p.m., and Welles-ton Hall was quiet. The ladies had retired.

and psychic research and such-like nonsense. By gad! That must be the reason for all this secrecy, eh?"

"You're a sceptic, Gregory—and always have been," replied Lord Welleston. "Heaven knows, I'm not going to try to convert you! You were always too much of a hard nut for me to crack, anyhow. I'll merely tell you that Sir Pickering has examined that room, and it is his considered opinion that it is charged with menace."

"Charged with fiddlesticks!" retorted the admiral bluntly. "We're getting down to it now! So Sir Pickering Brett has put these ideas into your head? I know he's a clever fellow, but his views on the occult are fantastic."

"I shouldn't like you to abuse my oldest friend, Gregory," said his lordship quietly. "Sir Pickering is a great thinker—in many ways, a genius. He has studied the subject of psychic research for thirty-five or forty years, and, frankly, I value his opinion more than I do yours. You're a confirmed agnostic on the subject of occult research, and that, I think, bars you out."

"Nothing of the sort," said the admiral. "I'm certainly a disbeliever, but I've still got my common sense. And when you tell me that this Monk's Chamber is haunted by an evil spirit, I simply don't believe it. For years you've tabooed all talk about this room. It's time we knew more about it."

Lord Welleston sighed.

"My dear Gregory, you're making a most ridiculous fuss over nothing," he said impatiently. "The Monk's Chamber is merely an ordinary-looking bed-room. It stands by itself at the end of the East wing, and is, indeed, completely isolated from all the other bed-rooms. It has been locked up for the last fifteen years."

"Has anything ever been seen in the Monk's Chamber? Any phantom?" asked the admiral.

"No."

"Any uncanny sounds heard?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"And yet you maintain that the room is haunted!" ejaculated the admiral incredulously. "My dear Arthur, you're almost funny! And why is this room called the Monk's Chamber? Can you tell me that?"

"You know as well as I do that Welleston Hall stands on the site of a monastery—in fact, part of the original building is incorporated in this one," replied Lord Welleston. "The East Wing is the oldest relic, and that particular room, I believe, was at one time used as the Abbot's bed-chamber."

"Just as I thought!" said the admiral. "A whole tissue of legend and rumour and fanciful superstition! Well, I'm going to sleep in this so-called haunted room—and I'm going to sleep there to-night!"

A CHANGE came over the quiet, artistically-illuminated old library. The atmosphere became more tense; men put down their glasses, and ceased smoking their cigars or cigarettes. All eyes were turned upon Lord Welleston.

There was very little change in him, except that his expression had become more set.

"You're not going to do that, Gregory," he said quietly. "I forbid it."

"Afraid I shall be found dead in the morning?" asked the old sailor, with a snort. "Nobody need know—except us. Hang it, Arthur, it's up to you to agree. I want to prove that these ideas of yours are preposterous."

"They are not preposterous," said his lordship, almost harshly. "Brett was down here only last week; he examined that room; he gave it as his solemn, considered opinion that it contains a ghastly menace. A spirit haunts the Monk's Chamber—an elemental. That is to say, an evil spirit which is capable of assuming tangible form."

"Tangible rubbish!" growled the admiral impatiently. "You're getting worse and worse, Arthur! In fact, after this, I'm more determined than ever. I'm going to sleep in that room to-night."

"Good man!" grinned Ponsonby Cope. "Looks as if we're going to get a bit of excitement out of this party, after all."

"I didn't ask you to interfere!" snapped Lord Welleston angrily. "If you're not satisfied with my hospitality, Ponsonby, you can go! I didn't invite you here to give you any thrills or excitement."

Cope cynically shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose I can consider myself duly told off, eh?" he said, with a trace of a sneer in his voice. "That's good enough for me, uncle! I'm off to bed."

He lounged out of the library, and Lord Welleston breathed more freely.

"It's no good—I don't like Ponsonby—never did," he muttered. "He's too infernally self-possessed, too much of a rake. I'm sorry I invited him here."

"He's our only nephew, so we must put up with him," said the admiral. "Now, if you'll show me this Abbot's Chamber, I'll —"

The door opened again, and Cope looked in.

"Just occurred to me," he remarked. "I'll bet you a hundred, level money, Uncle Gregory, that you don't stick the night out in the Monk's Chamber."

"Done!" boomed the admiral. "You reckless young idiot! I'll take that hundred pounds at breakfast-time to-morrow."

Cope chuckled, and vanished again.

"You shouldn't have done that, Gregory," said Lord Welleston. "Ponsonby knows more about that room than you do. He was down here some weeks ago, and he spent a lot of his time in the chamber with Sir Pickering Brett. He professes to scorn the occult, but I think it is just a pose."

"All the more reason for me to show him up and take his hundred pounds," retorted Admiral Herbert. "Now, then, let's have no more of this haggling. I'm not a child, Arthur, and I tell you I'm going to sleep in that room to-night."

He was absolutely insistent, and in despair Lord Welleston finally gave way to him. Thereupon the small company left the library, and proceeded towards the east wing to have a look at the remarkable bedroom which had invoked all this discussion.

CHAPTER 2.

Tragedy!

THE Monk's Chamber proved to be a sombre, depressing-looking bed-room. Although Welleston Hall was wired throughout, and provided with its own electric light, this one bedroom had been left unprovided.

Everything connected with it was drab. The carpet was old and faded; the tapestries which hung upon the walls were of exquisite quality and probably worth a lot of money, but they gave one the impression of unfriendliness; the furniture was antique and stiff, the old-fashioned four-poster being particularly ugly. In every aspect the room was cheerless.

Lord Welleston had set light to the two candles on the mantelpiece, and this dim radiance, after the soft glow in the library, seemed particularly eerie. The room struck a chill into everybody.

"By Jove! You're welcome to it, uncle," said the Hon. Clarence, with a shiver.

"I wish you'd forsake this absurd idea, Gregory," said Lord Welleston.

It was unwise of him. His brother, an exceedingly obstinate man, was all the more determined to carry on with his project.

"Think I'm frightened by this place?" he asked. "What's the matter with the bedroom? You're allowing your imagination to get the better of you, Clarence!"

"Why not leave it until to-morrow night?" asked Lord Welleston. "The place is damp, Gregory. Can't you feel the chill in the air? I'll have a fire lit to-morrow, and the room can be thoroughly aired and dried."

"And to-morrow you'll try to persuade me to give up the idea, eh?" retorted his brother. "Oh, no! I've made up my mind."

"But the bed might be damp——"

"Clarence, my boy, just dash to my bedroom and bring my own sheets and blankets, will you?" asked the admiral briskly. "That point's soon settled, Arthur. As for the chill, that can be remedied, too."

He strode forward, bent over the quaint old fireplace, and chuckled. The fire was laid in readiness—as it had been apparently

for fifteen years. Lord Welleston bit his lip, but said nothing. The fire was slow in getting under way after the admiral put a match to it; but after one or two bursts of smoke into the room the chimney cleared itself, and the wood began to crackle.

"Better already," smiled the admiral. "What about some more candles? Plenty of light and a cheerful fire and we'll be comfortable enough. I'll guarantee, Arthur, that I sleep like a top."

Lord Welleston shrugged his shoulders.

"All I hope is that nothing tragic comes of this," he said, with concern. "It's all very well for you to grin, Gregory. I'm serious. Promise me that you'll call for help at the first sign of anything—unusual."

"I'll do more than that," smiled his brother. "If I really do see a ghost, or become aware of anything occult in this room. I'll leave it at once and go back to my own bed-room."

"If you do that you'll lose your bet, uncle," grinned the Hon. Clarence.

"By gad, yes!" said the admiral. "But, as nothing will happen, what does it matter? While you're fetching those blankets and things you might bring my pyjamas, there's a good fellow. And my dressing-gown."

"I shan't tell Hilda about this," said Lord Welleston, after Clarence and the others had gone. "Upon my word, Gregory, I'm sorry you're so pigheaded——"

"Don't start all over again," interrupted his brother. "As for Hilda, it's just as well that she should know nothing. I don't want her bothering about here in the middle of the night, beseeching me to come out. We'll tell her at breakfast."

Even Lord Welleston was beginning to feel more comfortable five minutes later. The Hon. Clarence had returned with a vast bundle of pillows and sheets and blankets. Another four candles were burning, and the fire was blazing up into a cheerful, radiant glow. Coals were piled on, and the chill of the room had already given place to a soft warmth. The Monk's Chamber was converted. Its sinister appearance was no more.

"I'll come along and give you a call at seven o'clock sharp, uncle!" promised Clarence. "Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Don't be a young idiot," retorted the sailor. "Tea, indeed! What do you take me for—an old woman?"

"How about a tot of grog, then?" grinned Clarence.

They departed, and Clarence, at all events, felt no qualms whatever about his uncle's security in the Monk's Chamber.



YET the Hon. Clarence did not sleep as soundly as usual.

Perhaps the thing was on his mind.

When six o'clock came the young man decided that it would be a bright scheme to go along and see how his uncle had fared. He needn't necessarily awaken him.

It was a perfectly glorious early summer's morning. Yesterday there had been dark clouds, and the temperature had been low, but now the sun was shining and the birds were singing.

The Hon. Clarence draped a bath-robe round his tall figure, lit a cigarette, and sallied forth. The great country mansion was only just awakening; some of the domestics were beginning to stir. But in this part of the house—where Clarence wandered—everything was still quiet.

He peeped into the Monk's Chamber cautiously. The fire was out, the curtains were drawn, and only a dim light trickled in. The air seemed warm and stuffy after the freshness of the corridor. Admiral Herbert was apparently sound asleep.

"Better not rouse the old chap as early as this," murmured Clarence. "What an idiot I am—"

His thoughts ended abruptly. His eyes were more accustomed to the gloom by now. And it seemed to him that there was something unnaturally rigid about the figure beneath the bedclothes. It was absurd, of course, but— He tip-toed forward. It would be just as well to satisfy himself. Then, as Clarence came near to the bed, his heart nearly stopped beating.

"Great Heavens!" he muttered, horrified.

He did not need telling that Admiral Gregory was dead. The old man's face was distorted with terror; it was waxen in its whiteness; and the eyes were staring straight upwards, fixedly and glassily. His hands were just outside the bedclothes, and they were half-clenched; even in death he seemed to be warding off some terrible danger.

Clarence gripped himself hard. A feeling of unaccountable fear came over him; he looked round at this sombre room as though expecting some monstrous thing of evil to leap out upon him.

He touched nothing, but turned to the door, reached it, and got out into the corridor once again. Out there he felt better; he could breathe more freely. What should he do? His mother and father would be grief-stricken. And then there were the guests—

A figure appeared at the other end of the corridor, and Clarence glanced up sharply. Lord Welleston was coming along, attired in his bath robe. He, too, it seemed, was anxious concerning the admiral.

"Clarence," said his lordship sharply as he came along, "what are you doing here? How is your Uncle Gregory?"

Clarence faced his father and took him by the arm.

"Better not go in, pater," he said quietly. "Something's happened."

"Clarence! You don't mean—"

"Looks like it, pater," nodded Clarence. "It's horrible! I've only been here two minutes myself—"

He got no further, for Lord Welleston had pushed past him. Clarence stood out in the corridor, waiting. His father came out a minute later, his shoulders bowed down, his face ghastly. During this brief period he seemed to have aged ten years.

"I warned him!" he was muttering tremulously. "Didn't I, Clarence? Warned him! What are we to do? Poor, poor Gregory! If only he had heeded—"

"Steady, pater," said Clarence quietly. "We've got to keep our heads, you know. There are all the guests to think of. We must send for a doctor at once—and the police, too."

"Police?" asked his father, horrified.

"I'm afraid so. The police will have to be informed, anyhow, whether they come or not," replied the young man. "You'd better leave everything to me. I'll get busy on the telephone, and I'll send some wires, too."

"Yes, yes," said Lord Welleston. "Send a telegram to Brett! Send it at once! Urge Sir Pickering to come down immediately! If there is one man in this world who can solve this mystery, it is Sir Pickering Brett!"

But the Hon. Clarence had his own ideas on that point, and when he sent the telegram off he included another, and that other one was addressed to Mr. Nelson Lee, the celebrated criminologist, of Gray's Inn Road.

NELSON LEE only took Nipper down with him. This didn't seem to be a case where a number of his cubs would prove useful. They travelled in the Rolls-Royce Special, and arrived at the fine old Surrey mansion soon after nine o'clock; in fact, before breakfast was over.

The Monk's Chamber was now in the possession of a police-inspector and a constable. Nelson Lee was fortunate enough to run into the doctor in the hall, just after Clarence had come out to welcome him.

"This is Dr. Melford," said the Hon. Clarence. "The police don't seem to make much of the affair, and we're hoping that they'll soon clear cut. I mean, it's a bit frightful having police on the premises."

"Any more frightful than having detectives?" asked Nelson Lee dryly.

"Oh, well, you're different, Mr. Lee," replied the Hon. Clarence. "I'm a great pal of Bertie Glenthorne, the air chap, and I know that Bertie's brother is—or was—with your academy. Sort of family friends, as you might say."

Dr. Melford was looking at Lee thoughtfully.

"I appreciate Clarence's enthusiasm, of course, but I'm really afraid he's brought you down here on a wild-goose chase, Mr. Lee," he said. "My examination of Admiral Herbert leaves no doubt whatever in my mind that he died a natural death. There'll be an inquest, of course, but the result is a foregone conclusion."

"I'm sorry if I've been too hasty," said Clarence. "But what with this talk about ghosts and all that I thought I'd better get an expert on the job."

"I think I'm the only expert needed," replied the doctor. "There's no sign of foul play whatever. There's little doubt that the admiral's heart was affected, and his arteries were considerably hardened."

"You think he might have died of fright?" asked Lee.

"Well, of shock, anyway," said Dr. Melford. "And when I say shock, I mean in the sense that he knew that the Monk's Chamber was a room of evil repute. It was all very well for him to be blustering and to make a show of bravado in front of a crowd, but when he was alone in that room, with the whole night facing him, it was different."

"What do you think happened, then?" asked Clarence.

"We can, of course, only make the wildest guess," said the doctor. "Probably your uncle went to sleep. Something may have awakened him—a falling coal from the fire, or possibly a rat in the wainscoting. He awoke with a start, remembering where he was. The flickering of the fire may have created grotesque shadows. Just a question of the subconscious mind. Undoubtedly the admiral received a big fright, and died on the spot. But there's absolutely nothing to prove that there was any occult manifestation. I'm a materialist, and refuse to believe it!"

"May I see the body?" asked Lee.

"Certainly. I'll take you up."

"Tell your parents I'll be with them very shortly, Mr. Herbert," said Nelson Lee. "I

Nipper heard a cry and, looking up, he saw a hand appear out of the window—only to vanish almost immediately.



think I'd better get this unpleasant business over at the start. Oh, and by the way," he added, indicating a trunk or two in the hall, "why these?"

"Some of the guests getting ready to go, I suppose," said Clarence.

"The house party is breaking up?"

"Well, hang it, after what's happened——"

"I shall advise your father to urge his guests to remain," interrupted Lee. "You might give him a hint to that effect before I come."

The Hon. Clarence opened his eyes wider.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated, lowering his voice. "You don't suspect——"

"I've only just arrived, Mr. Herbert, and I don't suspect anybody," broke in the great detective, his voice crisp and concise. "Or, to be more accurate, I suspect everybody. With all deference to you, Dr. Melford, I must satisfy myself that this is genuinely a case of natural death. If it is, all well and good; if it isn't, then somebody in this house must be responsible."

"Gad!" muttered Clarence. "That's a nasty possibility."

The doctor was inclined to be a bit stand-offish for a while. Nelson Lee's suggestion had rather offended him. It was all the more impudent on Lee's part because he was a mere layman. Dr. Melford wasn't aware of the fact that the great Gray's Inn Road criminologist was entitled to place several letters after his name, and that he was, in fact, a fully-qualified medical man.

The body had been removed to the admiral's own bed-room, and Nelson Lee made a very thorough, careful examination. When he came out Nipper looked at him closely, but his face was as inscrutable as ever. Dr. Melford, however, was not looking anything like so calm and confident as formerly.

"Well, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"We stay, young 'un," was all Nelson Lee replied.

CHAPTER 3.

The Challenge!

LADY WELLESTON was in a state of partial collapse when Nelson Lee was introduced to her. Her husband was only in a little better condition. The tragic death of Lord Welleston's brother in such peculiar circumstances had bowled them both over.

"I fancy we owe you an apology for dragging you down here, Mr. Lee," said his lordship wearily. "It was my son's doing; he sent for you on his own initiative. I am delighted to have you in my house, of course, and it is good to have somebody capable and reliable by my side. I hope you will remain—as my guest."

"I thank you, Lord Welleston, but there is yet a possibility that I may be required in my professional capacity," said Nelson Lee quietly. "There are certain features of this case which are distinctly unusual. In the first place, I do not agree with Dr. Melford's

opinion. Your brother did not die of fright."

"If it comes to that, I am just as certain of it as you are," replied Lord Welleston. "My poor brother was killed by that diabolical presence which haunts the Monk's Chamber!"

Ponsonby Cope, who was lounging in an easy-chair, rose to his feet.

"If I'm allowed to join in this discussion, I'd like to say that I regard the whole ghost yarn as so much poppycock," he said, with more than a touch of contempt in his voice. "No offence to you, uncle—or to you either, aunt. But I simply don't believe it. The Monk's Chamber is no more haunted than this library is!"

Lord Welleston tightened his lips as he glanced at his nephew.

"I didn't ask for your opinion, Ponsonby, and neither do I ask for your comments," he said coldly. "Your attitude since this tragedy was revealed has been grossly unsympathetic. I'm not at all pleased with you."

"I'm sorry about that," said Cope. "But, after all, I'm not far from forty, my dear uncle, and I think I'm entitled to my own opinion. I don't quite see why I should be bottled up and snubbed——"

"Let the matter drop," broke in his uncle. "Heaven knows we don't want any unpleasantness. But when you urge my own son to sleep in that same room I feel that my only course is to order you out of the house!"

Cope smiled, and gave Lee a sly wink.

"I don't see anything wrong in that, uncle," he protested. "Clarence is just as unbelieving as I am, and I merely suggested that it would be a good way of putting an end to all these wild stories of hauntings if he slept in that room himself."

"An outrageous suggestion," said Lady Welleston indignantly.

"But I only proposed that after Clarence had forbidden me to sleep in it," continued Ponsonby Cope, with justifiable warmth. "Both of us are strong, healthy men, and there's not a chance in a thousand that we should die of heart failure like Uncle Gregory. And you must admit that it *would* scotch, once and for all, these stories about the room being haunted."

"If Clarence or you slept in that room you would die, too," declared Lord Welleston harshly. "We'll drop the subject. As for your statement, Mr. Lee, that my brother did not die of fright, I should like to know your exact meaning. Do you agree with me that he was killed by occult means?"

"I would prefer not to commit myself to any definite opinion just yet, Lord Welleston," replied Lee. "With your permission, I will go to this chamber and examine it."

NELSON LEE'S investigations in the Monk's Chamber were apparently futile.

The room was devoid of any secret devices. Nelson Lee, being an investigator, was compelled to look at the mysterious death from every angle; and it would have

been absurd to dismiss the theory that the admiral had been murdered.

There was no evidence of such a crime, however. Lee and Nipper tested the walls, the floor, the ceiling, and every inch of the room. Nothing had been tampered with. The Monk's Chamber stood in an isolated position; hidden passages were impossible, since the room formed a jutting wing, with outer walls on three sides and a corridor along the fourth. There were two windows in the chamber. The fireplace was exactly opposite the door. Overhead there was nothing but the roof, while underneath there was the butler's pantry and a store-room—both of which were not nowadays used. There was no trace of a trapdoor.

"If somebody entered the room during the night—which I only regard as a slender possibility—he must have done so either by the door or one of the windows," said Nelson Lee. "We can dismiss the windows because there are flower-beds immediately beneath, and they are exceedingly wide. They don't reveal a trace of any footprint or disturbance, and it is certain that no ladder was placed against the wall."

"What about the door, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"If somebody entered by the door, and Admiral Herbert was murdered, that somebody must be a member of the household, or a guest," continued Lee, "unless, of course, an outsider broke in, like an ordinary burglar—which is very unlikely."

"You're keeping something back, guv'nor," said Nipper. "You know jolly well that the poor old chap was murdered."

"Do I?"

"You say he didn't die of heart failure in the ordinary way?"

"He didn't die of fright, if that is what you mean," replied Lee. "Remember the character of this man. He wasn't a quiet, superstitious country gentleman—but a hardened sailor; a man who had sailed to every part of the world, who had spent his life afloat, and had proved his sterling courage in more than one naval battle. Is that the kind of man to die of fright, Nipper?"

"He wouldn't do it, guv'nor," agreed Nipper. "But if you don't admit the possibility of a ghost, what's the explanation?"

"If we are patient—if we display caution and lie low—we might make a few discoveries," replied Lee smoothly. "We're Lord Welleston's guests, young 'un. Don't forget that. We came as investigators, but we remain as guests."

"What do you think of that chap Cope?" asked Nipper, lowering his voice. "He strikes me as being several kinds of a rotter. And don't forget that he advised the Hon. Clarence to sleep in this room."

"What of it?" asked Lee innocently.

"Come off it, guv'nor!" said Nipper. "Now that the admiral's gone, Cope will inherit the title if Clarence pops off, too. It's a certainty that the old boy wouldn't stand the shock of losing his son—and I

fancy that Lady Welleston would crack up, too. It's horrible, but I can't help thinking——"

"The less you think in that direction, the better," broke in Lee admonishingly. "My dear young ass, it's only a wild theory—and we'd better leave theories alone. I don't care for Cope myself—he's the type of man I instinctively distrust—but there's a wide gap between a cad and a murderer."

THE next event of interest was the arrival of Sir Pickering Brett. He proved to be an extraordinary personality.

Nelson Lee had never met him personally, although he had once or twice heard him lecturing. He was a very famous man—not so much a spiritualist as an investigator of occult phenomena. He was regarded as one of the greatest experts on such subjects in the world.

He was a small, weedy, middle-aged man, somewhat younger than he really looked. His frame gave a hint of wiriness, and his ill-assorted clothing hung upon it loosely. But it was his head which attracted the most attention. His head was nearly bald, and his forehead was enormously high, bulging outwards over his deep-set eyes. One felt, upon meeting him, that here was a great mind—a masterly personality. His voice was as surprising as the rest of him, for instead of being deep, as one might have supposed, it was thin and reedy.

"I warned you, my dear Welleston—I warned you," he said, after the greetings were over. "My previous investigations convinced me that the Monk's Chamber is definitely haunted by a dangerous and vindictive elemental. This Thing resented your brother's intrusion, and killed him."

"I'd like to put you alone with Mr. Lee for an hour or two, Brett," said his lordship.

"Mr. Lee is no believer in the occult."

"No?" said Sir Pickering, gazing at Nelson Lee coldly. "What is he doing here? I always understood that he was a detective? This is not an inquiry in which he should be meddling."

"My dear Pickering!" protested his lordship.

"If I offend Mr. Lee, I can't help it—I'm a blunt man," retorted Sir Pickering. "Men of Mr. Lee's type do more harm than good. They laugh and scoff at genuine phenomena, and bring ridicule upon a great science. I might as well say at once that Mr. Lee and I will not be friends."

Nelson Lee laughed.

"Because we hold different opinions, Sir Pickering, there is no reason why we should be at loggerheads," he said dryly. "You do me an injustice when you suggest that I scoff at a great science. I will admit that I have an open mind on such matters, and if you can succeed in convincing me that your own point of view is correct, I shall be a ready convert."

Nelson Lee, Nipper, Lord Welleston and the Hon. Clarence accompanied Sir Pickering to the Monk's Chamber. Sir Pickering

entered and then halted abruptly, an expression of acute tension on his face.

"I feel it!" he said, in a whisper. "It is here—in the air. This room is full of stark danger. I have investigated too many cases of this kind not to know."

"But not danger in broad daylight?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Danger always," retorted the other sharply. "It is a fatal and idiotic mistake to assume that a haunted room is only dangerous at midnight, and during the hours of darkness. This room is the lurking place of a poltergeist—in other words, a spirit which is capable of materialisation at any moment. Do not dare to cross the threshold."

"Mad as a hatter!" murmured the Hon. Clarence into Nipper's ear.

"He gives one a creepy feeling down the spine, all the same," whispered Nipper.

Lord Welleston had hastily retired beyond the threshold, and they now watched while Sir Pickering moved about on tiptoe, as though fearful of disturbing some hidden presence.

powerless against us. Those who disbelieve—such as your brother—are inevitably doomed. They may come into this room a hundred times and escape. The poltergeist does not always strike. But when he does strike, death is certain."



"You had better come out, Pickering," said his lordship. "If it is dangerous for us, it is equally dangerous for you."

"I am in no danger—and you would be in no danger, Welleston," said the other curtly. "This elemental spirit is only antagonistic towards its enemies. It is

A laugh came from the corridor, and Sir Pickering swung round, excited and angry.

"Who was that?" he demanded. "Who is daring to jeer at me?"

"Not at all, my dear sir," said Ponsonby Cope, lounging into the doorway. "I was only amused. I wouldn't dream of jeering."

"Stay out!" commanded the occult expert. "This room is full of danger."

"I'd like to sleep in it to-night, all the same," said Cope. "Surely I can take the risk if I want to? Or what about you, Clarence? Supposing we sleep in it together?"



Nipper and Nelson Lee rushed into the room. Lying on the floor were the inert figures of Ponsonby Cope and Sir Pickering Brett.

Or you alone? It doesn't matter a bit—as long as we prove our point."

The Hon. Clarence looked uncomfortable.

"Better drop the subject, Pons, old man," he said.

"Hallo! Getting the wind up?" asked Cope, with a sneer.

"No, confound you, I'm not!" retorted Clarence.

"Sounds like it, old boy; anyhow, I'll guarantee that you wouldn't sleep in this room to-night, all by yourself," drawled Ponsonby Cope. "And, after all, it is a bit

tall, isn't it? Enough to test anyone's courage."

The Hon. Clarence clenched his fists; his fresh young face became suffused with colour.

"You infernal cad, Ponsonby!" he shouted. "Are you trying to goad me? I will sleep in this room to-night—and alone, too."

"Good man!" chuckled Cope. "No offence at all—I was only hoping to get you up to the scratch. I'm as keen as you are on proving that this ghost yarn is a lot of bunkum."

He strolled away chuckling. And Nipper gave a quick glance at Nelson Lee. Cope had succeeded in egging on the Hon. Clarence to follow the example of Admiral Herbert! There was something grimly significant in that fact.

CHAPTER 4.

What Happened to Clarence!

"YOU won't allow this, Welleston?" asked Sir Pickering Brett sharply.

Lord Welleston looked helpless as he shrugged his shoulders.

"What can I do?" he asked wearily. "These youngsters rule us nowadays, Pickering. I haven't the strength to protest. But, by gad, I do protest!" he added, with sudden fire. "Clarence, you shan't be such a young fool!"

There was a determined look in the young man's eyes.

"My delightful cousin has dared me, pater," he replied. "I've never turned down a dare in my life—not at St. Frank's or at Oxford. I'll sleep in this room to-night, and I'll sleep alone. And frankly, pater, I'm glad of the opportunity, because I haven't the slightest sympathy with you in your 'ghost' theories."

"Young man, you don't know what you are doing" said Sir Pickering Brett harshly.

"I forbid you to sleep—"

"I'm sorry, Sir Pickering," interrupted the Hon. Clarence, looking determined. "May I remind you that you are a guest in this house? What you forbid, or do not forbid, is of no interest to me. You forget yourself!"

He strode down the corridor, and Sir Pickering breathed hard.

"All our tempers are on edge, Pickering," said Lord Welleston uncomfortably. "I'm

sure I don't know what to do. The boy is determined."

"Let him sleep in this room—and you will have no heir," said Sir Pickering, with conviction. "It is madness! Heavens! What folly!"

Nelson Lee, who had taken no part in this conversation—although he had missed nothing—took Lord Welleston by the arm and led him back to the library.

"Do your best for me, Mr. Lee," pleaded the old peer. "Get Clarence by himself and talk to him. This thing must be stopped—"

"On the contrary, I shall do everything in my power to further it!" interrupted Lee.

His lordship halted and stared at Lee in amazement.

"I don't understand!" he exclaimed.

"Let me tell you at once, Lord Welleston, that the menace of the Monk's Chamber is not occult," said Nelson Lee deliberately.

"If I can induce Clarence to let me sleep with him, all well and good. I had intended

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spending the night alone in the Monk's Chamber, but after what has happened that is impossible—and perhaps it is better that Clarence should do this thing by himself.”

“He is my only son,” muttered the old man. “I am frightened, Mr. Lee!”

It was significant that Lord Welleston, in his agitation, should turn to Nelson Lee for advice and support. Sir Pickering Brett was a friend of twenty years' standing; but Lee's personality was the greater in spite of Brett's eminence.

“As regards being frightened, you can make your mind easy at once,” said the detective gently. “I would like this to be strictly between ourselves, Lord Welleston; but you can rest assured that your son will be fully protected to-night. I shall take such measures as will safeguard him from any danger.”

Lord Welleston clasped Lee's hand; the assurance was enough.

“I may tell Hilda—Lady Welleston?” he asked eagerly.

“Of course,” agreed Lee. “But I should like all the guests to believe that Clarence is duplicating your brother's escapade of last night. Leave this to me, and I guarantee that your son will come to no harm.”

THE rest of the day passed quietly. The guests, at Lord Welleston's request, remained at the Hall. Most of them went out for the day, and Lord and Lady Welleston kept very much to themselves. Ponsonby Cope lounged in a hammock all the afternoon, reading. Nipper found time hanging heavily on his hands, for Nelson Lee seemed content to move quietly about, apparently doing nothing.

Sir Pickering Brett scarcely moved out of the Monk's Chamber. He was making careful investigations, and his sincerity could not be doubted. He was a confirmed devotee of the occult, and it wasn't often that he came across an authenticated case of an active elemental.

He was much in evidence when Clarence prepared to spend the night in the fatal room. Ponsonby Cope was there, too. If there had been any ill-feeling, it was now patched up. Clarence was determined, and he was being allowed to have his own way. He refused all offers of company.

“You will, at least, permit me to take certain safeguards?” asked Sir Pickering eagerly. “If you are so foolhardy about this thing, let me take one or two simple steps which will help to protect you from the evil spirit.”

“Oh!” said Clarence. “So there *are* ways of beating these Johnnies?”

“I regret your flippancy, Clarence,” said Sir Pickering sternly. “I propose that we move the bed into the middle of the room. I will then chalk a pentacle on the floor around the bed, and that will ward off the elemental's attack.”

“A chalk mark?” asked Clarence, staring.

“My boy, you don't understand these things,” said the other. “It is not the chalk mark—but the pentacle itself which will protect you. In this instance, however, I doubt the efficacy of such a measure.”

“So do I—very much,” murmured Clarence.

“This elemental is the most active I have ever encountered; its power is entirely evil,” said Sir Pickering. “However, if I draw this five-pointed star with care, and take other precautions, I think you may be safe. I have taken the liberty of bringing some garlic, and if I smudge this round the floor, just within the pentacle, the protection will be much stronger.”

“I'll bet it will!” said Clarence. “Any ghost that could get past a barrage of garlic is worth fighting. But what about me, in the middle? Am I supposed to use a clothes-peg on my nose?”

“Foolish boy!” said Sir Pickering angrily. “Why will you persist in treating these subjects so jocularly? Do you not realise that you are in danger—stark danger? Let me make this pentacle. Within it I will mark a circle, and then I will make the Second Sign of the Saaamaaa Ritual.”

“If it's all the same to you, old boy, I'd much rather do without all these fixings,” said Clarence gently. “I think we can particularly say good-bye to the garlic.”

The Monk's Chamber was looking more cheerful to-night. A powerful lamp had been provided, and the fire was burning merrily. One window was slightly open, and altogether a less haunted chamber could not have been imagined.

Sir Pickering was not only disgusted, but alarmed. He talked darkly about the evil that would follow Clarence's refusal to accept his help. His sincere belief in his own fantastic protective measures was touching.

“I am deeply offended, Mr. Lee,” said the occult expert. “Why do they ridicule me? You, too! I believe you are just as bad!”

“Gentlemen of your belief are generally scoffed at, Sir Pickering,” said Lee gently. “And, really, I fancy that we need to afford Clarence greater protection than your five-pointed star. If you are earnestly anxious to help, I should like you to keep watch in this corridor.”

“Nothing shall shift me!” vowed Sir Pickering. “Clarence has been foolish enough to lock himself in, and that alone is alarming.”

“Cope will keep you company,” said Lee. “At the first sign of any disturbance within the haunted chamber I want you to shout—loudly.”

“You may rely upon me,” promised the other.

“Unless we both fall asleep,” put in Ponsonby Cope, with a yawn. “Personally, I think that Clarence will spend an entirely peaceful night.”

(Continued on page 24.)



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THIS
TO-DAY!

THE ROOM OF DEATH!

(Continued from page 21.)

THE Hon. Clarence was well guarded, at all events. In addition to the two men in the corridor, two other watchers were outside—one beneath either window. Nelson Lee and Nipper were on the job.

It was now impossible for any human intruder to enter that room without being observed. If Ponsonby Cope had any evil designs, the presence of Sir Pickering Brett would keep them in check.

Nothing happened until well after midnight. By this time the rest of Welleston Hall was sound asleep, and everything was quiet. The light had gone out in the Monk's Chamber; only the flickering of the fire could be seen from outside. And then, suddenly, at about twelve-thirty, Nelson Lee stiffened. Standing motionless beneath the slightly open window, he had heard something. A low, gurgling cry—so low that Nipper heard nothing of it. But it was enough for Lee.

"Come, Nipper!" he muttered tensely as he ran round.

Nipper followed, startled. They raced in through a side door, and tore upstairs. Sir Pickering and Cope were standing at the angle of the corridor, near a light, talking in low voices. They looked round sharply as Lee and Nipper came running up.

"Did you hear?" asked Lee sharply.

"Hear? We heard nothing," replied Sir Pickering. "Good heavens! You don't mean—"

Nelson Lee did not wait. Reaching the door of the Monk's Chamber, he tapped on it. He knocked harder. There was no answer.

"This is appalling!" panted Ponsonby Cope, his face twitching. "Nothing can have happened to Clarence! We've been here all the time. What are we going to do? The door is locked on the inside!"

A startled look came into his eyes as he saw what Lee was doing. The detective had produced a pair of slender, long-pointed pliers. Quick as thought he inserted them into the keyhole. With sure touch he found the key, and with one twist of the pliers he turned it.

"Keep back!" he muttered as he flung open the door.

His electric torch flashed into the dim, fire-lit apartment, and there, on the floor beside the bed, lay the contorted, motionless figure of the Hon. Clarence Herbert!

CHAPTER 5.

The Mystery Deepens!

A HALF-CHOKING cry came from Ponsonby Cope.

"It's got him!" he gasped, horrified.

"Clarence is dead!"

"How do you know that?" demanded Lee sharply.

"Eh? I—I— But look at him!" ejaculated Cope.

Lee did not delay. He entered the haunted room, and in three strides he was bending over Clarence's still figure. But before Lee could touch it he experienced a sensation of shock. He looked up suddenly, incredulously. Some appallingly strong influence had gripped him.

The room seemed to be charged with some uncanny force. It was unutterably horrible. It was invisible, intangible, and yet it gripped Lee like a vice. Something was affecting his very brain, and he imagined he could see horrid shapes in the shadowy corners. With a supreme effort, he seized Clarence, rose to his feet, and strode out of the room.

"Lock the door, Nipper!" he said thickly. "Put the key in your pocket."

"But, Mr. Lee—" began Sir Pickering.

"I am beginning to believe that your fears were right, Sir Pickering," snapped Lee. "This room is ghastly! The second victim within twenty-four hours!"

"Clarence is—dead?" asked Cope hoarsely.

"Dead—yes!" retorted Lee, his voice full of reproach and sorrow. "I was one minute too late! This will kill Lady Welleston!"

With the body in his arms, Lee hastened away, leaving Nipper to follow with the key. Lee went straight to Clarence's own room, and by the time he had laid the still figure on the bed Nipper had arrived—with Lord and Lady Welleston at his heels.

"What has happened?" asked her ladyship faintly. "Oh, Mr. Lee—"

"Clarence is dead!" broke in the old peer harshly. "Fools! What fools we were to permit this! First my brother—now my son! What curse is on this house?"

His voice was raised in anguish, and out in the corridor several of the guests, aroused by the commotion, heard. Nelson Lee glanced at the half-open door, and he quickly gave a sign to Nipper.

"Guard it, young 'un," he murmured. "Keep outside, and do not let anybody approach."

"O.K., Chief," whispered Nipper as he vanished.

"Lady Welleston, take this calmly," said the detective, as cool as ice. "I have deliberately taken steps to give out a false impression. Your son is not dead—and within five minutes I'll have him awake!"

"Oh!" cried Lady Welleston.

The shock was considerable and she half swooned. While her husband was attending to her, Nelson Lee gave his whole attention to the Hon. Clarence. He whipped out a research case from under the bed, selected a tiny hypodermic syringe, and plunged the needle into Clarence's arm. He lifted the young man's eyelids and then he felt his pulse. Clarence's face was waxen white, but gradually a trace of colour began to return. Within five minutes he stirred and his eyes opened. By this time his mother had recovered, and her cry of joy was stifled at its inception by a warning gesture from Lee.

"I don't understand," whispered her ladyship. "Why are you acting like this, Mr. Lee?"

"Because there is a murderous enemy in this house!" replied the detective grimly. "It must be thought by all your guests that Clarence is dead. Only by this deception can I capture the assassin of Admiral Herbert."

"Assassin!" ejaculated Lord Welleston. "Good heavens! Then—then there is no ghost? It was no case of heart failure? What are you saying, Mr. Lee?"

"For the moment I can say nothing more," replied Nelson Lee. "I can only tell you that it is essential that your son should be thought dead by everybody else in this house. I promise you, however, that the ordeal will not be of long duration."

A feeble protest came from the bed.

"I say! What's all this rummy business?" asked the Hon. Clarence plaintively. "Where am I? What's happened?"

"It is for you to tell us your own experience, Clarence," said Lee, sitting on the edge of the bed. "How do you feel now?"

"Sort of shaky and as weak as a rat."

"That will quickly pass," promised Lee. "A few hours' sleep will restore you completely. You have had a nasty experience—"

"The Monk's Chamber!" interrupted Clarence, with sudden horror. "I remember now! Gad! I've been thinking it was a dream, but it must have really happened. I was in the Monk's Chamber, wasn't I? Mr. Lee, that room is haunted!"

"What makes you so sure?"

"I'll tell you," said Clarence, his eyes full of sudden fear. "I was sceptical at first—I regarded the whole thing as superstitious nonsense. Everything was all right when I put the light out. The fire was cheerful, and I calmly went off to sleep. Then, I believe, I woke up."

"You only believe?" put in his father.

"It's all so vague—so unreal," replied Clarence. "I awoke with an extraordinary sensation of horror on me. There were fiendish figures dancing up and down in the room—one particularly horrible. Then they attacked me, and I believe I tried to shout."

"Do you remember getting out of bed?" asked Nelson Lee.

"No, I don't think— Yet I believe I do," said Clarence slowly. "Yes, I jumped up to ward off those attacks. But I can't remember anything after that. Did somebody come in and take me out?"

"Mr. Lee was there," said Lord Welleston.

"I was outside—beneath the window," explained Nelson Lee. "There were two other watchers in the corridor; they heard nothing, but that is easily explained. They were talking, and they were some distance from the door. If I had not heard that faint cry there would certainly have been a second tragedy."

Lord Welleston looked at Lee sharply.

"You were expecting that cry?" he asked.

"I was," agreed Lee quietly. "And, you see, if no watch had been kept, Clarence would have been found in just the same way as your brother was found. There would have been no clue. Even as things are, Clarence would have died but for my prompt measures. Let me repeat, Lord Welleston, that you have an implacable enemy in your midst. It must be given out that Clarence is dead—that he died in the same way as his uncle."

IN the morning there was something approaching a panic. Consternation reigned among the guests. Some of them were beginning to fear that the "ghost" would extend its influence.

At Lee's suggestion, the host and hostess advised the majority of the guests to leave. Their departure was more like a flight. Cars were rolling away continuously, and throughout all the bustle the shadow of tragedy hung over the old mansion. Neither Lord nor Lady Welleston appeared. It was given out that they were stricken down. His lordship, in fact, had apparently had a stroke, and when Dr. Melford came downstairs, after visiting the patient, he was looking grave.

Only a few guests now remained, and these were staying on—Lee and Nipper, Sir Pickering Brett, Ponsonby Cope, and perhaps half a dozen others, most of these being distant relatives, who felt impelled to remain to attend the double funeral.

"I am afraid this will be the end of Lord Welleston," said the doctor sadly. "I very much doubt if he will recover from this appalling blow."

"It's too awful!" said Cope huskily. "First my uncle—now my cousin! You're not telling me, doctor, that Uncle Arthur will go, too?"

"I'm afraid so. And there can be little doubt that Lady Welleston will not survive a month beyond his lordship," said the doctor gravely. "A shocking tragedy—the worst in my experience. Literally, it will be the wiping out of a whole family!"

Sir Pickering Brett pressed his hands to his temples.

"And it could all have been avoided," he groaned. "By heaven, this vile spirit shall be laid! I will not leave this house until I have exorcised it! It shall take no more precious lives!"

THE police were there, of course, but their visit was only formal. After the doctor's pronouncement that Clarence had died a natural death—that is to say, from heart failure—there was little they could do. They did not, of course, accept the evil spirit theory. In their view it was a plain case of Clarence having been frightened to death.

Nelson Lee talked privately with the police inspector, and he succeeded in inducing that worthy to leave the case entirely in his hands.

Nipper was more or less bewildered,

"I haven't been able to get a word with you yet, guv'nor," he said, as he caught Lee alone for a minute on the terrace. "How did he do it?"

"What, exactly, do you mean?"

"Look here, guv'nor, this isn't playing fair!" protested Nipper. "You know as well as I do that Cope tried to murder Clarence. If he didn't, why have you spoofed him, and everybody else, into believing that Clarence is dead?"

"Hush!" warned Lee.

"We're alone, sir, and I don't see why you shouldn't be frank with me," went on Nipper. "I suppose you're waiting to get your evidence? Cope must think he's on velvet now. With Clarence dead, he's the heir."

"That's true enough," agreed Lee.

"And as soon as Lord Welleston pegs out he'll inherit the title and estates," continued Nipper. "I've never heard of a more fiendish plot. Can't you get enough evidence to have him arrested?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"That's the whole trouble in this case, young 'un," he replied slowly. "Getting the evidence is one of the stumbling blocks. Our criminal is a very cunning fellow. But I am hopeful that I shall meet with success to-night."

Later Lee surprised everybody by announcing that he intended to spend the night in the haunted chamber. In spite of what had

happened he was willing to take the risk. Sir Pickering was nearly frantic.

"But it is madness—suicide!" he protested. "You mustn't do it, Mr. Lee. This is a plain case of an elemental haunting, and you are insane to suppose that you can discover some material explanation. If you sleep in that room to-night, you'll go to your death! I warn you of that in advance."

"My mind is made up, Sir Pickering," said Nelson Lee decisively.

Sir Pickering went off, agitated and worried.

Nipper spent most of his time watching Cope; not that there was anything suspicious in Cope's movements. He was taking the whole affair with his usual cynical indifference. He even professed himself wholly converted to Sir Pickering's theory.

"Hang it all, there's no sense in sticking out any longer," he said. "I was as sceptical as anybody at first—but after two deaths I'm ready to change my mind. I could believe that Uncle Gregory died from fright, but Clarence was so much younger and stronger. The room must be really haunted!"

He manifested a great interest in the Monk's Chamber, and even accepted Sir Pickering's invitation to help in a fresh investigation. Lee knew nothing of this, for he had taken the car, and had told Nipper that he would be absent for at least an hour.



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.

IMPOSSIBLE!

Mrs. Butterworth (to Jane): "This knife is dirty, Jane."

Jane: "It didn't ought to be, ma'am, for the last thing I cut with it was a bar of soap!"

(S. Lowe, 18, Station Road, Ironville, Codnor Park, Notts, has been awarded a penknife.)

WORTH WATCHING!

The old lady up from the country was being shown round London by her niece. She had heard vaguely about the wonders of the great city, but she had never realised what they were like in fact. Presently, they came to a huge building in the Strand.

"Whatever is that place?" she asked breathlessly.

"That's the new idea from America," ex-

plained her niece. "It is called a skyscraper."

The old lady stared up at the building in amazement.

"I would love to see it working," she said.

(J. Lamb, 36, Front Street, Consett, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TOO TRUE!

The schoolmaster was showing his pupils round the picture gallery.

"This," he said, pointing to a painting, "is the work of that genius, Joshua Reynolds. Why," he added enthusiastically, "with one stroke Reynolds could change a smiling face to a frowning one."

"That's nothing remarkable," said a small boy. "So can my mother!"

(I. G. Rowe, Kimberley Cottage, Timsbury Road, Farmborough, nr. Bath, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TEMPTING!

The angler was deeply intent on his float when the tramp, whose interest had been captured by the promising appearance of the sportsman's lunch basket, approached.

"I ain't 'ad a bite all day, sir," rumbled the vagrant.

"Wrong bait, I expect," said the fisherman absent-mindedly. "Try a worm!"

H. H. Frost, 38, Capri Road, Addiscombe, Surrey, has been awarded a penknife.)

Nipper had no particular instructions, and he couldn't very well butt in on the investigations which Sir Pickering and his latest convert were conducting in the fatal room.

"Mr. Lee is extremely rash in his decision to sleep in this room to-night," said the occult expert. "He is a materialist, and I am afraid no argument of mine will prevail against him."

"But he's hardly likely to share the fate of the others, surely?" asked Cope. "I mean, Mr. Lee is a pretty useful sort of chap, and he'll be well on his guard."

"Foolish boy!" retorted Sir Pickering impatiently. "Mr. Lee's usefulness, as you call it, will not avail him against this supernatural Presence. No matter how much he is on his guard he cannot possibly fight the forces of evil which this room contains. Even you and I are not safe."

"In broad daylight?" asked Cope sceptically.

"How many more times must I say that the hour is of no importance—or very little, at all events?" replied the other. "It is true that these elementals have greater power at night, but they are dangerous, too, at high noon. Before we commence this investigation thoroughly, we will safeguard ourselves."

"Not at all a bad idea," agreed Cope.

He watched with a cynical sort of interest while Sir Pickering chalked a big circle in the middle of the carpet. Then he took a bunch of garlic—which apparently had some

mysterious power over the supernatural—and smudged it all round the chalk circle. After that he drew the pentacle, with the defensive stars just touching the circle.

"Now we will make the Five Signs of the Saaamaaa Ritual," murmured Brett, as though speaking to himself. "There are really Eight Signs, but during daylight I think the five will be a fully protective measure."

"But surely this—er—jiggery-pokery won't protect us from anything?" asked Cope dubiously.

Sir Pickering looked round angrily.

"What do you mean—'jiggery-pokery'?" he demanded.

"Sorry!" said Ponsonby Cope, with haste. "You know best, of course, but it does seem to me a lot of—well, nonsense. No offence, Sir Pickering."

"You will be well advised, young man, to treat this subject with greater gravity," retorted Sir Pickering. "And let me explain that—No, no! Step back!" he added with sudden alarm. "Good heavens, boy, what are you doing?"

"Nothing!" gasped Cope, startled.

"You were stepping beyond the Defence!" snapped the other. "While you remain within the pentacle, we are protected. It is my intention to recite the Ritual. By that means this poltergeist, or anything of that sort, may be induced to manifest itself. I am hopeful of destroying it, once and for all."

OPTIMISTIC!

A salesman called on an old-fashioned farmer and after much explanation and persuasion booked an order for a tractor. In due course it was delivered, and shortly afterwards the salesman called again, expecting payment.

"Well," he said, "can you pay me for the tractor?"

"Pay for the tractor?" asked the farmer in astonishment. "Why, man, you told me that in three weeks the tractor would pay for itself!"

(C. Sinfield, 2, Bungalow, Bitton Road, Keynsham, nr. Bristol, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

TAKING IT EASY!

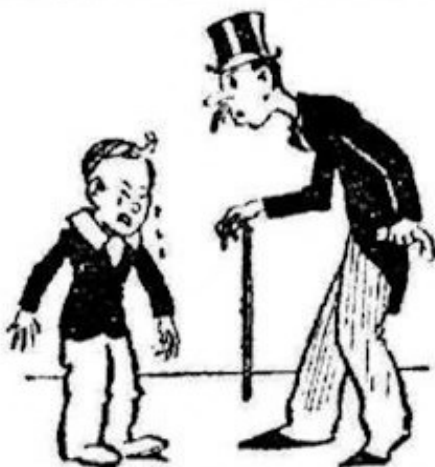
The boys were in the gymnasium, and the master had told them to lie on their backs and kick their legs in the air as if they were pedalling a bicycle. Suddenly one of the boys stopped.

"Why have you stopped, Green?" demanded the master sternly.

"Well, I'm feeling a bit tired so I'm free-wheeling," came the reply.

(P. Gauntlet, 20, South Park Road, S.W. 10, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THIS JOKE WINS A WATCH!



A BAD MISTAKE!

Old gent: "Dear, dear! What are you crying for?"

Small boy: "I've been playing truant, and I've just remembered it's Saturday!"

(Albert Ellis, 30, Walgrove Avenue, Boythorpe, Chesterfield, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

A PROBLEM!

Yokel: "How fast will your car go, mister?"

Owner: "Sixty miles per hour if I care to push it."

Yokel: "And how many if we both shove?"

(S. Fletcher, 200, Fletcher Street, Bolton, has been awarded a penknife.)

NOT HIS FAULT!

R.A.F. official: "Do you know anything about an aeroplane which dropped near here?"

Small boy (holding up catapult and trembling): "No-o, sir. I've only been shooting at sparrers."

(F. R. Pedley, 1, Portland Place, Ashbourne Road, Leek, Staffs, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE NEW ARITHMETIC!

Teacher: "Johnny, if your father could save half-a-crown a week for four weeks, what would he have?"

Modern child (promptly): "A five-valve set, a new suit and a lot more furniture."

(J. Martin, The Cottages, Castle Hill, Inverich, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

"Oh, I see," said Cope, although he was far from seeing.

"Mr. Lee is determined to commit suicide to-night," continued Sir Pickering grimly. "If I can render this room safe before then another useful life will be saved from destruction. Two have gone—needlessly. There has been enough of this appalling slaughter."

Ponsonby Cope waited and watched, fascinated in spite of himself.

CHAPTER 6.

Another Startling Development!

NIPPER was strolling along the terrace in the sunshine when he heard a peculiar sound from one of the upper windows. It was a sort of half-scream, half-gurgle. He looked up sharply, and saw that the window of the Monk's Chamber was half-open. The cry had come from that window! Next moment a frantically waving hand appeared—only to vanish almost immediately.

"What the dickens is happening now?" he muttered, frowning.

He started moving towards the front of the house, and at the same time he noticed Nelson Lee's Rolls-Royce Special gliding up the drive. Nipper ran up, and leapt upon the running-board.

"Glad you've got back, guv'nor," he said urgently. "Sir Pickering and Cope are in the haunted room—"

"Cope?" interrupted Lee, with sharp inquiry. "I expected Sir Pickering to potter about in there, but Cope should not have — How long have they been there?" he asked quickly.

"Getting on for half an hour, guv'nor—and just now a rummy sort of cry attracted me, and I saw a hand appear out of the window," said Nipper. "I was dashing indoors when I spotted you."

"Come!" shouted Lee, his voice charged with alarm.

Nipper was astonished. He had not expected that Lee would receive the news with such a display of perturbation. They raced indoors, ran upstairs to the East wing, and Lee flung open the door of the Monk's Chamber.

"This is appalling!" he said hoarsely.

One look was enough. Sir Pickering Brett was sprawling on the floor, half within and half outside that Defence. His face was contorted, and his eyes were wide open. Well beyond the Defence lay Ponsonby Cope, and the attitude of the two men suggested that the elder had been in the act of guarding the youngster when they were both struck down. The room, except for the chalk marks, was normal. The window stood half-open, and the warm sunshine was streaming in.

"Help me, young 'un," said Lee quickly. "You take his feet."

They carried Cope outside into the corridor. Then they returned to the Monk's

Chamber, and carried out Sir Pickering Brett. Lee closed the door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. His eyes were full of fury, but he remained as cool as ice. He bent over Cope, felt his pulse, raised his eyelids, and took other measures. At last he looked up.

"This man is dead, Nipper!" said the great detective.

"Cope—dead!" gasped Nipper. "Then—then that proves that he didn't—I mean, we were all wrong!"

"You were wrong, perhaps—and I've been careless," retorted Lee bitterly. "Heavens! If I had suspected for a moment that any danger could have come in broad daylight, I would never have left the premises. Our murderer is more desperate—more brazenly daring—than I suspected. This is a ghastly development, Nipper."

"But who's the criminal, sir?" asked Nipper, bewildered.

"By to-night I hope you will know."

"And Sir Pickering?" went on Nipper. "Is he dead, too? I say, this is getting a bit too thick, guv'nor! Nobody seems to be safe!"

"I fancy that Sir Pickering has just escaped," replied Lee. "With careful treatment, we may be able to pull him round."

Nipper felt hot and shivery in turns. This thing was beginning to scare him. Could that Monk's Chamber be really haunted? Was there actually some supernatural Force in there, after all?

Ponsonby Cope was dead; and his death proved beyond doubt that he had not had any hand in the killing of Admiral Gregory Herbert or in the attempted killing of the Hon. Clarence. Nipper found himself baffled. Who was the assassin?

TWO hours later Sir Pickering Brett was sufficiently recovered to give a partial account of what had happened. By this time Lord and Lady Welleston had been informed, and they were freshly horrified. But they made no appearance. Nelson Lee was rigidly keeping up the story that they were both prostrated. The Hon. Clarence knew, too, and he chafed abominably at being kept hidden away. There were others present, however.

Sir Pickering was lying among a pile of cushions on the library couch. Nelson Lee was sitting near him. A police-constable stood by the door, and an inspector, note-book ready, was taking all particulars.

"This thing is so serious, Mr. Lee, that the chief constable has already telephoned to Scotland Yard, and action is being taken," the inspector was saying. "The death of Mr. Cope carries this thing beyond the range of mere coincidence."

"Perhaps Sir Pickering will help us?" suggested Lee gently.

"I? What can I do?" asked Sir Pickering, in anguish. "When will you realise that this is not an affair in which the police can be of any use?"

"Unfortunately, Sir Pickering, the police take a more materialistic view of these



The man made to rush across to the window, but Nelson Lee barred his way and held him in a vice-like grip.

mysterious deaths," said Lee. "You will declare that they are not mysterious—so please don't excite yourself."

"They are not!" snapped Sir Pickering. "I expected them—I gave full warning—"

"Just a minute, sir," interrupted the inspector. "Weren't you in this room when Mr. Cope was killed?"

"I do not blame myself for that young man's death," replied the other. "While he was with me, he was safe. I took every possible precaution. But he stepped out of the Defence at the very moment the elemental manifested itself. His death was inevitable.

I tried to save him. I even left the pentacle myself—and by so doing nearly shared his fate. Had I stepped out completely, no power on earth could have saved me."

The inspector pursed his lips, and looked dubious.

"You seriously say, Sir Pickering, that Mr. Cope was killed by a—a ghost?" he asked. "Didn't you tell us, some time ago, that a believer such as yourself stood in no danger? How is it that you were nearly killed? Without wishing to offend you, sir, I believe that there's some enemy at work in this house."

"A relentless enemy," agreed Sir Pickering gravely. "But not an enemy that you can arrest and put into the dock. As for my own danger, even I have no protection when a foul thing such as this elemental has materialised and is actually present."

"Did you see anything—or hear anything?" asked the inspector.

"I saw the elemental materialise," replied the other dreamily. "I had almost finished reciting the Saaamaaa Ritual, and gradually a grotesque, horrific shape materialised near the bed. Cope was frightened, and he gave a strangled cry; he tried to get to the door, but the Thing was on him in a flash. I half-stepped beyond the Defence, and then that vile monster seemed to envelop me. I knew no more until I awoke on this couch."

The inspector grunted, and made some notes.

TWENTY minutes later, Chief Detective-inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, arrived. He listened with frank disbelief as the local inspector outlined the details.

"An infernally funny business," he commented at length.

Nelson Lee had very little to say to the Chief-inspector when they met.

"But for Cope's death, you wouldn't have been called in, Lennard," he declared. "And Cope's death was absolutely a bolt from the blue."

"You don't believe this ghost yarn, I suppose?"

"I don't."

"You think these men were murdered?"

"Unquestionably they were murdered—brutally and foully," said Nelson Lee. "And to-night, Lennard, we'll have the murderer. That much I can definitely promise you!"

"But you're not saying anything in the meantime?"

"Until I can give you definite evidence, I prefer to keep silent," replied the great detective. "I am going to spend the night in the haunted room myself with Nipper and Sir Pickering Brett—he implored me to let him do so, and I have agreed—and I can safely predict that none of us shall be found dead!"

CHAPTER 7.

Exposed!

NELSON LEE, Nipper and Sir Pickering entered the Monk's Chamber soon after eleven p.m., and they took their seats in three of the chairs, Sir Pickering being granted the easy one. But he was restless, and hardly remained still for a minute.

"Tell me," he said bluntly. "What is your theory, Mr. Lee?"

"Briefly, I am convinced that a deadly enemy of the Welleston family is at work in this house," replied Nelson Lee. "That enemy neither desires your death nor mine, and for that reason we are safe. You will have noticed that only members of the Welleston family have died."

"By Heaven! That's true," muttered Sir Pickering, frowning.

"Cope, the last to go, was the heir," continued Lee. "His death leaves no heir at all. And if Lord Welleston dies because of this shock—as he may very well do—there will be no male representative of the family in existence."

"Appalling."

"When I say that Lord Welleston may die, I need hardly add that Lady Welleston might not long survive him," continued Lee sombrely. "Indeed, there is some justification for thinking that she will be the first to go."

"I am afraid you are right," said Sir Pickering. "Her son's death has been a terrible blow to her."

"And my own safety is not, perhaps, so certain as I just intimated," went on Lee slowly. "This secret enemy knows, perhaps, that I have not revealed my suspicions. If he could efface me, so much the better."

Sir Pickering looked at him strangely.

"Yes, I see—I see," he muttered. "So much the better! Quite so!"

He went and sat down. Nelson Lee moved across to the fireplace and piled on some more coal. It was another chilly night, with a cold wind blowing. Yet Nipper thought it remarkable that Lee, who was a great believer in fresh air, should have tightly closed the windows and drawn the curtains. It was all the more remarkable that he should pile the fire higher and higher.

"It's getting pretty hot in here, guv'nor!" protested Nipper at length.

Lee glanced at his watch.

"Nearly midnight," he commented. "Hot, Nipper? Yes, it is inclined to be stuffy. We'll take off our dressing-gowns."

Sir Pickering was looking anxious and worried. He rose unsteadily to his feet and moved across to the door.

"On second thoughts, Mr. Lee, I prefer not to remain," he said. "Since you are opposed to my own methods of protection, it is idle for me to stay here. That being so, I will bid you good-night—and may Heaven preserve you from your own folly."

Lee smiled.

"I am sure you won't desert us like that, Sir Pickering," he replied. "I'm afraid the door is locked, and I do not feel inclined to unlock it. I have every reason to believe that the enemy will soon make himself known. The temperature is getting hotter very rapidly."

"The temperature!" gasped Sir Pickering. Perspiration was streaming down his face already, but the very mention of the word "temperature" had a startling effect upon him. Panic leapt into his eyes. He ran to the door and tore at the handle.

"Open this door!" he croaked. "How dare you keep me here against my will? I insist upon being allowed to go!"

"Very soon, Sir Pickering—but not yet," said Lee quietly.

Nipper suddenly gave a strange cry.

"Guv'nor," he ejaculated, "I—I can see things!"

"See things?" repeated Lee sharply.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Nipper. "Everything's swimming before my eyes, and I fancy I can see horrible shapes! There's one over in that corner," he added, pointing. "Look! It's coming over this way——"

"Steady, young 'un," broke in Lee. "Here, put this on."

He whipped out a curious little contrivance from the pocket of his dressing-gown, which he had hung over a chair. Nipper took it in a dazed way. He saw that the thing was a special kind of gas-mask, which fitted over the mouth and nostrils. Dimly he now knew where Nelson Lee had been when he made that trip in the Rolls.

"Put it on," ordered the detective.

Nipper did so, and Lee himself donned a second mask. The mouthpiece was not closely-fitting, but bulged out well over the lower part of the jaw. Nipper was aware of a curiously aromatic odour, and he felt a tingling sensation in his lungs when he breathed through the gauze.

"What—what does this mean?" croaked Sir Pickering.

He stared at the two figures—and they looked grotesque enough now in their masks. Nelson Lee spoke; it was quite possible for him to do so through the mask, and although his voice sounded muffled, it was perfectly clear.

"I regret, Sir Pickering, that there is no mask for you," he said, with a curiously satisfied note in his voice. "I also regret that I cannot open the door of this room. And it is getting uncomfortably hot."

"There is the window!" shouted Sir Pickering madly.

He was about to dash across, but Lee stepped in his way and held him in a vice-like grip.

"No, my friend—you stay here!" he said grimly.

Sir Pickering uttered a wild scream.

"You—*know*?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Yes, I know—and this little scene is the result," said Nelson Lee. "It was very clever of you, Sir Pickering, to urge that you should keep this vigil with us; very disarming. But you've failed."

"Open the door!" shrieked Sir Pickering. "This will kill me!"

"You have yet several minutes," said the detective. "Your only chance of life now is a full confession."

"Confession!" panted the other. "I don't know what you mean!"

"By your cunning devices you murdered Admiral Herbert—and by more direct methods you murdered Ponsonby Cope," came Nelson Lee's relentless voice. "A confession from you, Sir Pickering, will lead me to open the door immediately."

"You're mad—mad!" screamed the trapped man. "Open the window! Let me have air! I'm choking! My brain is burning like a furnace! Let me have air!"

"After your confession you shall have all the air you desire," retorted Lee.

With a supreme effort Sir Pickering controlled himself. He suddenly gave a wild, maniacal laugh.

"Of what use is my confession to you?" he jeered. "It is only your word against mine—and I am not afraid of the outcome. Yes, I killed Gregory Herbert—and I killed Clarence, too! I killed Ponsonby Cope——"

The door was flung open, and Chief Inspector Lennard strode in.

"That's good enough, Lee!" he said crisply.

"Better use strong handcuffs," advised Nelson Lee. "This man is not merely a murderer, Lennard, but a homicidal maniac!"

It required three police officers to hold the frenzied wretch, but he was finally handcuffed and dragged out.

LORD WELLESTON looked at Lee in wonder and admiration.

"How did you discover this thing, Mr. Lee?" he asked.

It was a family conference in the library. Lord and Lady Welleston were present with the Hon. Clarence. Lee and Nipper were there, of course, and Lennard, of the Yard, was also in evidence.

"I suspected Sir Pickering at once," admitted Lee. "At least, as soon as I learned that he had previously spent some days at the Hall 'investigating' the haunted room. Sir Pickering was the one man who had had access to that room—and therefore the one man who could have made preparations."

"But what preparations?" asked the Hon. Clarence.

"It so happens that I have a slight reputation as a poison expert," continued Lee quietly. "I have made a lifelong study of poisons——"

"There's no man in Europe to equal Mr. Lee on the subject, my lord," put in Lennard gruffly. "If ever we are in trouble at the Yard we generally go to him on questions of poison—and he hasn't failed us yet."

"I suspected that Admiral Herbert had been murdered," went on Lee. "The next point to solve was—how? I recognised a curious dilation of his eyes which put me on the right track. The particular poison employed was an Eastern drug known as Agyar-Agyar, and the great peculiarity about this drug is that it is innocuous in any ordinary temperature, but vapourises and becomes deadly above seventy degrees. This poison can be soaked into a handkerchief, for example, and, being odourless and colourless, its presence is entirely unsuspected. But if that handkerchief is warmed the poison immediately emerges in the form of vapour."

"Horrible!" commented Lord Welleston.

"Another point which convinced me that I was on the right track is that this drug causes its victims to have grotesque hallucinations," said Nelson Lee. "Men who have escaped from it—and it is by no means deadly unless prolonged breathing

(Continued on page 44.)

HANDYMAN HANDY!



CHAPTER 1.

Handforth's Wheeze!

"IT'S set in for the afternoon, I'm afraid," said McClure.

"The afternoon!" snorted Handforth in disgust. "It looks like raining for a week!"

"There's a blue spot over there beyond the gym," remarked Church, pointing.

"That's only there to fool us!" retorted Handforth. "Why must it rain on half-holidays? What are we going to do with ourselves this afternoon? No cricket—no boating—no motoring! We're diddled!"

The weather was certainly unkind. The sky was grey over St. Frank's, and rain was falling with that steady persistence which has such a depressing effect. The indications were that it would keep on like this for hours.

Handforth & Co. were not the only juniors who were fed up. Kirby Keeble Parkington and his celebrated Carlton Gang were in Study C, wondering what kind of jape they could get up against the Old Timers.

A wet afternoon such as this was an excellent opportunity—but ideas wouldn't come.

"Who's that funny-looking merchant who keeps dodging across to the gates and looking down the road?" asked Handy irritably.

"Does he worry you?" asked Church. "If so, you had better go and tell him so."

The man in question was at the gates now. He was a smallish, middle-aged individual, with a drooping, straggly moustache.

He was wearing a white apron under his overcoat.

"Only one of the men from the new building," said Church. "A painter, I expect."

"Yes, but what's his idea in dodging out of the gates every now and again?"

Handforth was interested. Usually he would not have given this man a second glance; but as there was nothing else to do he followed the workman's movements with close attention. Over on the other side of the Triangle the Modern House was nearly completed; the East House was still festooned with scaffolding, and it would be many a week before it would be habitable.

R-r-r-ip! Bang! Crash!

E. O. Handforth's trying his hand at paper-hanging. A screamingly-funny school yarn

written by

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

"Hi!" sang out Handforth suddenly. The man with the drooping moustache was on his way back. At Handforth's call he came over to the Ancient House and mounted the steps. He was a sad-eyed, melancholy-looking man.

"Can we do something?" asked Handforth. "What's the trouble?"

"Ain't exactly any trouble, young gent," said the other. "The fact is, the young rip ain't turned up yet."

"Young rip?" repeated Handforth.

"My mate."

"Oh, I see! Your mate? Then you must be a plumber?" asked Edward Oswald. "I thought that Ebenezer Skeets was the plumber."

"Oh, him?" said the man. "I'm Sam Smithers, but I ain't no plumber. Not likely! I'm a paper-hanger. Ought to be starting work on one o' them rooms over there," he added, jerking a stubby thumb over his shoulder. "But I can't get properly started without my mate."

"Well, I'm a bit of a hand at paper-hanging," said Handforth brightly. "What about it? I'll help until your mate comes along, if you like."

Mr. Sam Smithers regarded him dubiously.

"Thanks all the same, young gent, but it don't really matter," he said, with some haste. "You might get paste over your nice new clothes. My old mate left me for another job, and I don't know what this new kid is like. Youngster named Bob Wash."

"That's a funny name," said Handforth, staring.

"Which ain't my fault," protested Mr. Smithers. "I didn't give him his name, did I? Bob Wash was what the agency told me, and I don't see no reason to doubt them."

"And you've never seen this chap?" asked Handforth, with a sudden gleam in his eye.

"Never. But when I do see him I'll give him the length of my tongue," said Mr. Smithers darkly. "He won't be much good if he can't be on time on the first afternoon. But there! I'm allus having trouble with my mates."

He wandered away towards the Modern House disconsolately. Church and McClure were relieved. They had been fearing that he would accept Handforth's offer.

"A wheeze, my sons—a gilt-edged wheeze!" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Eh? Look here, Handy—" began Church.

"Why shouldn't I give this chap a hand!" demanded Edward Oswald. "It won't take me five minutes to disguise myself."

"Disguise yourself?" gasped McClure.

"Of course!" said Handforth. "Then I'll go across to the Modern House, and introduce myself to Smithers as Bob Wash. He's never seen the chap, so he can't possibly twig me. Then I'll help him with the paper-hanging. I believe in doing a good turn!"

His chums stared at him in dismay.

"A good turn?" repeated McClure. "Why, you ass, you'll be doing the very opposite!

You'll mess everything up—you'll probably get Smithers sacked!"

"Rats!" said Handforth. "I can paper a room as good as anybody. Come on! You chaps had better lend me a hand in disguising myself."

Church and McClure exchanged glances. There was no help for it. When Edward Oswald Handforth made up his mind, he was like a mule. Nothing short of dynamite would shift him. But, after all, why worry? It was a wet afternoon, and Handforth in the guise of Bob Wash would probably be a scream!

CHAPTER 2.

Lending a Hand!

"HOW'S that?" asked Handforth triumphantly. "Wonderful!" said Church in a weak voice.

McClure was too dazed to make any audible reply. They gazed at Handforth fascinatedly. How on earth he imagined that he would ever fool Mr. Smithers was beyond their comprehension.

He had donned an ancient tweed suit, and in lieu of a collar he was wearing a knotted scarf. He had appropriated an apron from the boot-boy, and he had ruffled his hair—not a difficult task this, as his hair was seldom in any other condition. There were smudges on his face, and a pair of huge horn-rimmed glasses—borrowed from the Dramatic Society's props—rested on his nose.

"Well, I'd best get across to my work, mates," said Handforth, in a thick, forced voice. "No good wasting time 'ere."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Church. "What's wrong?"

"What do you mean—what's wrong?"

"I thought you were choking, old man."

"You silly fathead! I was only disguising my voice."

"Eh? Oh, sorry!" said Church hastily. "My mistake!"

Handforth gave him a withering glance and strode out of the doorway. Downstairs in the lobby he came across a group of Removites. They regarded him curiously at first, and then with concentrated interest.

"Excuse me, young shavers, but which 'Ouse is the Modern House?" asked Handforth, as he joined them. "You see, I'm looking for a paper-anger. I'm 'is mate. My name's Bob Wash, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Handforth suspiciously.

"Well, well! So our poor old Handy imagines that he's disguised himself," said Vivian Travers, shaking his head.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You rotters!" roared Handforth indignantly. "You don't recognise me, do you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

He strode out into the rain, and it was left for Church and McClure to explain the

situation to the crowd. Evidently Handforth intended to carry on with his scheme in spite of this initial set-back.

"It's worth watching, dear old fellows," said Travers cheerfully. "Supposing we steal across and watch the fun?"

"Good idea," grinned Harry Gresham.

HANDFORTH found Mr. Smithers in one of the back rooms of the nearly-completed Modern House. There were rolls of paper on the floor, a big trestle table, steps, and all the paraphernalia of the paper-hanger's art. Mr. Smithers glanced round and looked at the new arrival through his steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Well, I'm 'ere," said Handforth.

"About time, too!" retorted Mr. Smithers sternly. "You're Bob Wash, I suppose? What's the idea of turning up at this time? I thought you was to be here at two o'clock sharp?"

"I—I was delayed a bit, sir," said Handforth hurriedly.

He was delighted to find that Mr. Smithers accepted him as Bob Wash without question. As a matter of fact, the paper-hanger was unfamiliar with Handforth, and he was a bit short-sighted, too. The arrival of a youngster in an apron was enough.

"Well, now you're here, we'd better get to work," said Mr. Smithers. "I want to get this room finished to-day. There's a lot to be done. You'd best be starting on this pasting."

"Rather!" agreed Handforth eagerly. "I—I mean, yes, sir!"

He seized the paste-brush with enthusiasm, slopped it into the pail, and withdrew it with such energy that a huge blob of paste flew off the brush and struck Mr. Smithers in the neck.

"Here, mind what you're doing, me lad!" he protested.

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Handforth.

He started in earnest. Pasting wallpaper was great fun. Unfortunately, it wasn't so easy as it looked. Handforth pasted a portion of the paper all right, but when he turned it back and pulled the cumbersome sheet along, it got folded in the wrong place. He struggled valiantly to get it straight, and there was an ominous sound of rending.

"What do you think you're doing?" demanded Mr. Smithers impatiently. "Let's come and have a look at that. Why, what the——"

His speech gave place to a fiendish yell. He had trodden on the paste-brush, which Handforth had carelessly dropped to the floor before straightening the paper. The paste-brush converted itself into an imitation skate; and Mr. Smithers, with one leg high in the air, skidded from one side of the room to the other.

This wasn't the worst. He crashed against a wall, rebounded, and sat down on the end of the trestle table. The table reared up, toppled over, and thudded on to Mr.

Smithers with considerable force; and the great sheet of pasted wallpaper enveloped him in a wet, clinging embrace.

"My only sainted aunt!" gasped Handforth.

"Great stuff, this!" remarked Travers, from the window. "Watching these paper-hangers at work is an education, dear old fellows."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The other juniors at the window howled with laughter. Handforth gave them one look and attempted to "shoo" them away. Then he dashed to Mr. Smithers' rescue.

"Sorry, sir!" he panted. "Don't know 'ow that 'appened."

"I do!" growled the paper-hanger ferociously. "You young idjit! I'm hurt! What do you mean by leavin' the paste-brush on the floor? The pail's the place for the paste-brush—not the floor! Ruined four or five yards o' wallpaper, you 'ave! And me half-dead, too!"

He picked himself up, groaning, and between them they got the table straight again. Handforth was full of energy. The other fellows might regard this as a joke, but Handy was in real earnest. He actually believed that he was lending the paper-hanger a hand.

"I s'pose I'd best show you how to do it," growled Mr. Smithers. "Can't understand why you was sent. You're worse than Ted Slugg was!"

He demonstrated. With the skill of long practice he pasted another cut length of wallpaper. Handforth watched intently. It looked easy enough.

"Now you can 'and it up to me," said Mr. Smithers, as he mounted the steps. "And while I'm busy on this strip you can paste the next. An' no more droppin' the brush on the floor, me lad!"

"Yes, sir! I mean, no, sir."

Handforth seized the pasted paper, and he coughed loudly in order to cover up the rending tear as he grabbed too hurriedly. At last he got it off the table, and it clung to his chest like sticking-plaster. He forgot all about the pail, and there was a terrific clatter as he stumbled over it, reeled against the steps—and the audience were provided with another free show.

Mr. Smithers repeated his fiendish yell, and this time he excelled himself. The steps collapsed, Mr. Smithers bumped to the floor, and his face completely vanished in the paste-pail.

In the guise of Bob Wash, Handforth was a washout!

CHAPTER 3.

K.K. On the Warpath!

IT took Mr. Smithers about five minutes before he could recover himself sufficiently to speak. And when he did speak he proved that he had a surprisingly eloquent command of the English language.

Mr. Smithers paused at last.

"You can clear out!" he concluded hoarsely. "You're no more good than a monkey! Ted Slugg was bad enough, but you——" He stared at Handforth at close quarters. A sudden light of recognition came into his eyes. "Why, you're the young gent who spoke to me not long ago!" he ejaculated. "You ain't Bob Wash at all!"



Handforth stepped into the pail of paste, skidded, and sat down with a terrific bump.

"Eh? I—I—— Well, as a matter of fact, no," confessed Handforth lamely. "You see, Bob Wash didn't turn up, so I thought——"

"Thought you'd have a game with me, eh?" snorted Mr. Smithers. "You young rip! It may be funny to you, but I've got my work to do."

"I know!" gasped Handforth. "Honestly, I've been trying to help."

"Well, the less help you can give me, the quicker I shall get on," retorted Mr. Smithers gruffly. "I've finished! I can't do no more work to-day—not without a mate, any'ow. I allus said you schoolboys was worse than a pack of himps. I knew something would happen if I came to work in this school!"

He refused to listen to Handforth's frantic explanations. Having wiped himself down, the paper-hanger bundled on his overcoat, and took his departure.

"That's what you get for making an ass of yourself, Handy," said Church. "Better go and get yourself cleaned up. There's a letter here for you—from your pater. There's probably some cash in it," he added casually.

Handforth brightened up.

"That'll be useful," he said. "We're broke. I was expecting that letter this morning. Open it and see if there's any money. I'm too pastey."

Church obliged, and there was a general gathering round of juniors as three greenish bank notes came into view.

"Three quid, eh?" said Handforth, his good-humour fully restored. "Good old pater! He's come up to the scratch! This'll mean some of Mrs. Hake's special meat-pies for tea!"

"They're fresh this afternoon, Handy," said Jimmy Potts, licking his lips.

"We'll have a spread," declared Handforth, who not only possessed a forgiving nature, but was the soul of generosity. "What price a big feed? I'm flush, so I'll stand treat!"

"Good old Handy!" grinned Travers. "You may not be much of a paper-hanger, but, by Samson, you're a sportsman."

"Who's not much of a paper-hanger?" retorted Handforth. "I'll show you!"

"Don't!" pleaded McClure. "Haven't you shown us enough?"

"It's my duty," said Handforth firmly. "Poor old Smithers has gone off in a huff, and it's up to me to make things right. When he comes back, I'll have this room completely papered—just to show him that I can do it!"

K. K. PARKINGTON witnessed the departure of the disgruntled Mr. Smithers. He also witnessed something else. He and Deeks and Goffin—known as the Red-Hot Trio of Study C—were lounging in the Ancient House doorway, hoping that the rain would stop.

Most of the Old-Timers were either in their studies, or watching Handforth's efforts. So K. K. & Co were the sole witnesses of the incident in the gateway. Mr. Smithers, in fact, had met a bright-looking young fellow who had arrived on a bicycle. After a brief talk they both vanished.

"There ought to be some way of spoofing those asses," K. K. was saying, as he ran his fingers through his mop of red hair. "We know Handy's been trying to fool that paper-hanger—and he's failed."

"That young chap who just came up must be Bob Wash, the mate," said Deeks.

"Yes, and they've both gone off," nodded Parkington. "Looks as if Smithers is calling it a day. That's a pity, because we might have wangled something."

The Red-Hots and the Old-Timers, although perfectly friendly in a general way, were deadly rivals. They spent the bulk of their leisure hours in contriving japes against one another. Baines came running up, looking excited. Baines was one of the Carlton Gang, and K. K. eyed him with interest.

"Heard the latest?" asked Baines breathlessly. "That ass, Handy, has decided to do that paper-hanging job himself! He's upset old Smithers, and he reckons it's up to him to put things right."

"Poor chap!" said K. K. sadly. "Does he really imagine that he can put things right? Handyman Handy, what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A sudden keen look came into K. K.'s eyes.

"By Jove! A wheeze!" he said tensely. "I've just thought of it! No one spotted Bob Wash except us. My sons, Handy failed in the character of Bob Wash—but what about your humble?"

"You?" ejaculated Deeks. "But—how?"

"Easy, sweetheart," grinned K. K. "Handy doesn't know that this giddy Wash merchant has been and gone—and when I turn up, suitably transformed, he won't suspect a thing! And I'll give him a hand with the paper-hanging!"

"Oh, my only Aunt Jane!" gurgled Goffin. "What a chance! I can imagine what sort of a hand you'll lend him!"

"That," replied K. K., "is just the point."

CHAPTER 4.

The Spoofer Spoofed!

VIVIAN TRAVERS was the first to spot the newcomer as he cycled into the Triangle. He was a young fellow in a mackintosh, with a big tweed cap, several sizes too large for him, completely enveloping his head.

He dismounted, looked round, and then approached the East House, where a number of workmen were engaged in plastering,

and other such building tasks that could be performed under cover. After a moment the new arrival came along towards the Modern House.

"Just a minute, young gents," he said, glancing at the group of Old-Timers. "Do you 'appen to know where old Sam Smithers is workin'?"

"Bob Wash!" ejaculated the Old-Timers in one voice.

"That's funny!" said the newcomer. "How do you know my name?"

Without doubt, K. K.'s make-up was effective. Unfastening his mackintosh he revealed soiled overalls. His face was ruddy, and a bit smudgy. A small moustache adorned his upper lip—and he looked at least eighteen. His voice was cleverly disguised; two pads of cotton-wool in the nostrils so altered the shape of his nose that his own mother would have had difficulty in recognising him.

"You want Sam Smithers, do you?" said Travers thoughtfully. "Now, let me see. Where's Sam Smithers?" he added, turning to Jimmy Potts and winking. "Perhaps you'd better run along and see."

"All right," agreed Jimmy.

"On second thoughts, I'll go," added Travers. "Keep this chap here until I come back."

The latter words were uttered in a mere whisper as he passed Jimmy Potts, but Jimmy heard—although he didn't understand. Travers hurried into the building, and found Handforth arguing hotly with Church and McClure. The astute Travers, it must be admitted, had been spoofed up to the eyes by K. K.

"It's no good—I've made up my mind!" Handforth was saying. "If you chaps won't help, I'll jolly well do the paper-hanging myself!"

"No need to, old man," said Travers. "You've got a helper. Bob Wash has just turned up—and he's looking for Mr. Smithers."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Handforth, in dismay. "That's done it!"

"I should think it has," agreed Travers. "This chap's a proper paper-hangers' mate, and he's bound to cut up rusty when he finds you on the job. He's never seen Smithers, of course, but I don't quite see how we can turn that to account," he added casually.

"Never seen Smithers?" breathed Handforth. "By George! That gives me an idea!"

"Really?" said Travers innocently.

"Where's this chap, Bob Wash?" demanded Handforth. "Keep him back for a bit—detain him—take him to the tuck-shop, and treat him—anything you like! Give me five minutes, and I'll be ready for him!"

"What the dickens is the idea now?" asked McClure blankly.

"Why, you ass, I shan't be able to do this job at all if Bob Wash finds out who I really am!" said Handforth. "He'll refuse to work, or something."

"I wouldn't blame him," commented Church.



Looking through the window, the juniors shrieked with laughter. Handforth's ideas on paper-hanging were weird and wonderful!

"But if he finds Smithers here—or somebody he takes for Smithers—it'll be all serene," continued Handforth triumphantly. "You'd better come and help, Church—you, too, Mac! I'm going to disguise myself as Smithers."

"Help!" gurgled Church. "I always thought he was mad—and now I know it!"

AT the end of five minutes Edward Oswald was transformed. He was thoroughly satisfied as he surveyed himself in the mirror. Church and McClure weren't, but as he did not value their opinion they refrained from giving it. Perhaps it was just as well to let Handy go his own road; he'd soon be disillusioned.

He cut an extraordinary figure. The suit, to begin with, was several sizes too large for him. The baggy trousers lay in festoons round his ankles. His whiskers were black and fuzzy, and he looked more like a comic-picture anarchist than anything else.

"Come on!" he said briskly. "We've been too long already."

They hurried down, and the crowd of Old-Timers, waiting in the lobby, gave forth a prolonged yell of merriment.

"Shut up, you fatheads!" hissed Handforth. "You'll have old Pieface on my track!"

"What does it matter?" asked Trotwood. "You're disguised, aren't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right—Travers has got Bob Wash in the tuck-shop," said Gresham. "You'd better pop across to the Modern House quick. Potts is on the look-out, and he'll give Travers the wire."

"Good egg!" said Handforth, dashing out.

The Carlton Gang, casually lounging in the gymnasium, missed nothing. The jape was going far better than they had expected. Handforth was disguised, too, and the fun promised to be hectic.

"We can't miss this, my lads," said Jepson, grinning widely. "All those Old-Timers are going over, so we might as well join 'em!"

Thus, by the time Handforth had removed his coat and had rolled up his sleeves, the passage was filled with watching juniors, and another crowd stood outside the window, careless of the rain.

"Go it, Smithers!" grinned Singleton. "Do your stuff!"

"You young rips 'ad best clear hout!" said Handforth in a thick voice—putting in a bit of rehearsal work. "I don't want none o' your sauce!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It won't last long—but it'll be funny while it does last!" murmured Brent. "Look out! Here comes the mate!"

CHAPTER 5.

Handy the Paper-Hanger!

KIRBY KEEBLE PARKINGTON had the utmost difficulty in keeping his face straight when he first caught sight of the imitation Mr. Smithers. He had expected something funny, but this almost knocked him off his feet.

"Ho!" said Handforth, gazing at the new arrival in a ferocious way. "You're Bob Wash, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, please, sir."

"Well, what do you mean by turnin' up in the middle o' the afternoon like this?" demanded Handforth. "Take your coat off, an' get to work! We've got to have this room papered before tea-time."

"Yes, sir," said K. K. humbly.

A vacuous expression had come over his face. The watching juniors were rather staggered. Astoundingly enough, Bob Wash had accepted the disguised Handforth as the genuine article! They could only conclude that he was short-sighted—or else as brainless as a turnip.

"It ain't all my fault, sir," said K. K. "Some o' the young gents kept me in the tuck-shop, an' before that I was——"

"Never mind," broke in Handforth sharply. "I don't want to 'ear no excuses. You've come 'ere to work. I'm the paper-hanger, and you're my mate. Understand? And the sooner we start on the job, the sooner we'll be finished."

"Yes, sir," said K. K. meekly. "Where do we start, sir? Will you do the pastin', or shall I?"

"You will," retorted Handforth. "And me these scissors!"

He lugged one of the rolls of paper on to the table, and held out his hand. K. K. obligingly put the paste-brush into it, and Handforth jumped as he felt the wet, sticky mass in his fingers.

"Paste-brush, sir," said K. K. brightly.

"I don't want the paste-brush, you fat-head!" roared Handforth, throwing it on the floor. "I asked you for the scissors!"

"Sorry, sir! Here you are, sir."

He bent over and moved the pail nearer to Handforth, and the next second the pail was over. Handforth stepped into the paste, skidded, and sat down with a terrific bump. A yell of laughter went up from the onlookers—particularly from the Carlton Gang. Their end of this joke was much the funnier.

"Shouldn't do that if I were you, sir," said K. K. gravely. "Might injure the spine—an' besides, I shall 'ave to make some more paste."

Handforth picked himself up, breathing hard.

"You—you dense chunk of cauliflower!" he panted. "I told you to hand me the scissors, didn't I? What do you think you're playing at?"

"Playing, sir?" repeated the mate. "I thought we was workin'!"

"All right—we're workin'!" said Handforth thickly. "Put this paste back in the pail: Don't bother about the scissors—I'll get them myself!"

K. K. was thoroughly enjoying himself. This was unquestionably his afternoon out—and it would be a jape up to the Red-Hots.

He industriously cleaned up the sticky mess. Some of the paste he got back into the pail by means of the brush, and the rest he wiped up. Handforth gave a sudden start as he noticed what his assistant was doing.

"What's that you've got there?" he asked, forgetting to disguise his voice. "You silly ass! What are you wiping up that paste with?"

"Old bit of rag, sir," said K. K. brightly.

"Old bit o' rag!" howled Handforth. "That's my coat!"

"Why, so it is, sir," said the mate, a feeble grin coming over his features. "That's funny, sir! Fancy me not seein' it was a coat."

He flung it into a corner, and then got to work in earnest. Swiftly, skilfully, he pasted a huge strip of wallpaper.

"You'd best get on the steps ready, sir," he chirruped. "Shan't be a tick now, sir. It won't take us long to finish this room, I'll bet."

Handforth got on the steps, and in some miraculous manner he managed to hold the length of pasted paper until he was at the top. He leaned forward towards the wall, and the watchers held their breath.

"Is it straight?" asked Handforth.

"Lovely, sir," said K. K. "Bung it straight on, sir."

The steps, resting on the slippery floor, commenced to skid.

"Hi! Hold 'em!" roared Handforth.

"Yes, sir!" said the mate, leaping forward.

His idea of holding the steps was unique. He clutched at them, and they skidded violently. Handforth groped wildly at the air, and caught the top of the wallpaper. He collapsed to the floor, with the paper festooned all round him in shreds and tatters.

"Afraid it won't do, sir," said K. K., shaking his head. "That bit up there is on the skew. P'raps you'd best let me do the 'angin'?"

"Hangin'?" gurgled Handforth, struggling to his feet. "If I 'ad my way, I'd have you drawn and quartered, too. Gi'me that paste-brush! An' if you can't 'elp any better than this, I'll give you the sack!"

HOW it was done the watching juniors hardly knew, but at the end of half an hour the room was at least half-papered. Even Handforth wasn't quite satisfied, but as Bob Wash seemed to think that everything was going swimmingly, it didn't matter. After all, Bob Wash was a professional paper-hanger's mate.

There wasn't one strip true. The pattern was at sixes and sevens, and at least two of the strips were upside down. They reposed on the wall, slanting this way and that, with great jagged tears in some and air bubbles in others.

"Cave!" went up a sudden shout.

Handforth twirled round, and was just in time to see Mr. Sam Smithers entering the doorway. Bob Wash was with him. They both stood there and gaped. Indeed, Mr. Smithers nearly collapsed. His jaw sagged, and he turned pale.

"I think," murmured K. K., "that I will retire now. Cheerio, Handy!"

He pulled off his big cap, revealing his mop of red hair. Handforth's eyes nearly

bulged out of his head, and a wild yell of indignation arose from the Old-Timers.

"It's K. K.!" roared Travers. "Upon my Samson! Spoofed! No wonder he accepted Handy without a blink!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled the Carlton Gang.

"Ere, 'old on!" said Mr. Smithers darkly.

"This is what 'appens when a man goes down to order some materials! Look at 'all this, Bob! Look at what these young rips 'ave been doin' while my back's bin turned!"

"But I've been helping you!" snorted Handforth indignantly.

"I shall 'ave to see your 'eadmaster about this, young gent, I'm afraid," said Mr. Smithers, gazing sternly at Edward Oswald.

"Playin' these tricks—disguisin' yourself, an' meddlin' wi' my materials! Of course, if you pay for the damage——"

He paused significantly.

"Oh, rather," said Handforth, with a gulp. "For goodness' sake don't tell the Head! How much will it cost to put things right?"

"Well, supposin' we say two quid?"

"Good egg!" said Handforth. "I've got three quid, so——"

"And a quid for my mate!" added Mr. Smithers firmly.

So the dismayed Handforth was obliged to pay up, and it made matters no better when he was seized by his disappointed would-be guests and bumped in every puddle in the Triangle.

THE END.

(The Carlton Gang has scored heavily this time—but just wait until next week. Handy's hot on the warpath! Look out for this amusing yarn, entitled: "Boys of the Bald Brigade!")

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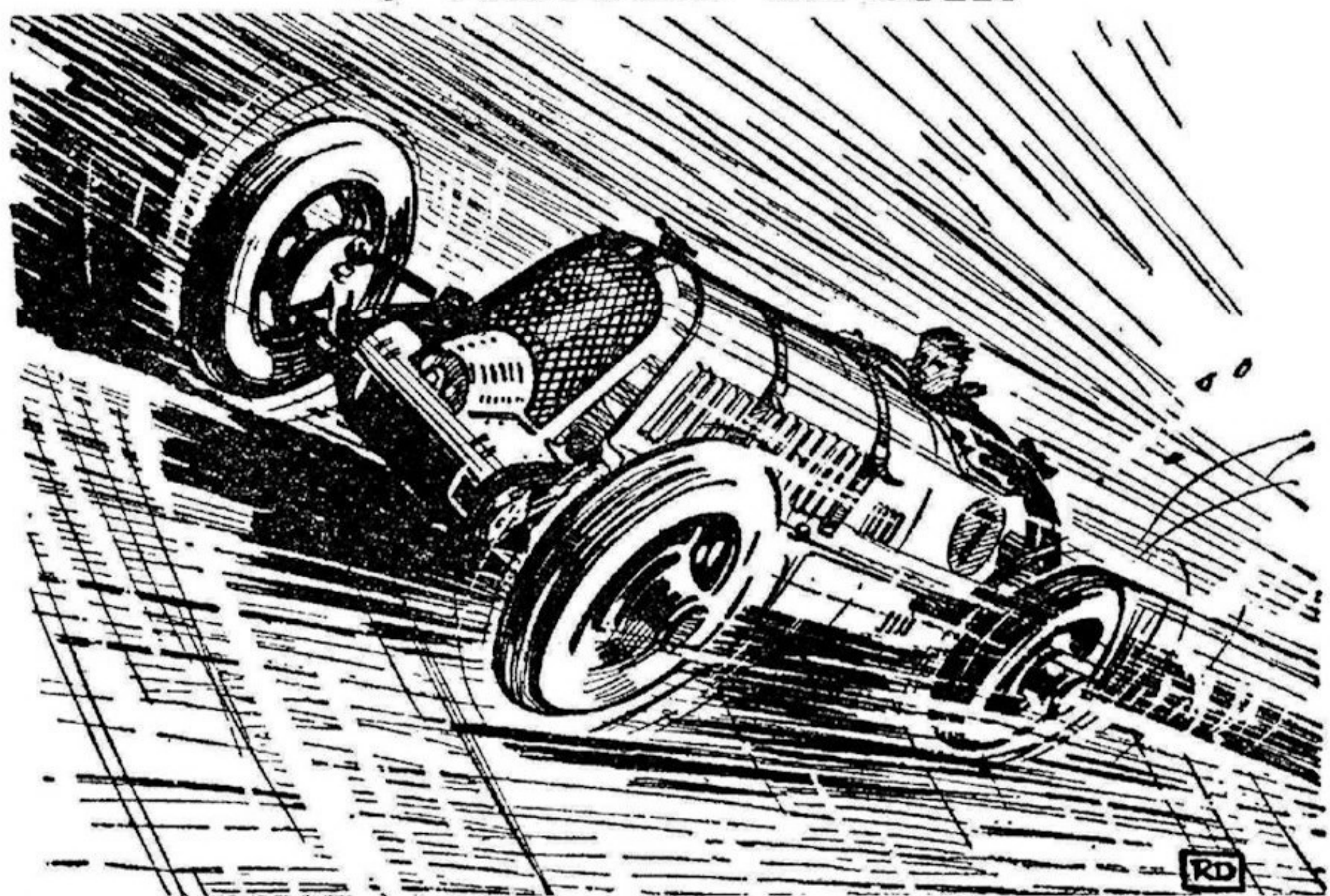


E.K.45

A FULL OF THRILLS INSTALMENT OF OUR POPULAR MOTOR-RACING SERIAL!

THE IRON SPEEDMAN!

By ALFRED EDGAR



Crash!

JIM'S wheel slammed over. He himself was sliding, but he missed the car's blue tail. He saw Stargie do the same thing, miss in the same way, then the two had left the corner and the gasping crowds behind.

Neck and neck they went down the road. The cars were matched, speed for speed. Neither gave the other an inch. They were far in front of the rest. Every record had gone by the board, and no road race had seen such speed as they were setting up!

Side by side, engines screaming, exhausts spanging like machine-guns, they went on with throttles kicked wide open, leaving behind them the smoking wreck of the blue car, which was still smashing itself to a stop behind them.

Jim saw the road opening wide and straight in front of him, and he thrust at the throttle pedal until it was flat down on the foot-grid, giving every last fraction of power to his leaping machine.

His face was set, and his eyes were narrowed behind his goggles. The road streamed

to meet him, with everything blurred at its edges. His gaze was focused far ahead, to where it bent by white-walled houses. From the tail of his eye he could see Stargie, dead level with him.

The man's head was thrust a little sideways, while he peered around the edge of his wind-shield, his gauntleted hands black against the kicking steering-wheel, flinging his machine on in a desperate effort to get ahead.

Jim Ross hurtling along at terrific speed. Stargie edging nearer; wheel hubs almost touching. Nearer, nearer——!

The rival cars made a mad thunder of sound on the morning air. They slung dust behind them, and stones flicked like bullets, popping from the spinning tyres.

The machines weaved under their speed, tails wagging as they jumped from little bumps and pot-holes. The watching crowds of spectators craned to see them come, and then hastily backed farther away as they hurtled towards them.

Now and again a bump would send Jim to the very edge of the road, where his tyres nipped the grass and skated dust high and wide. Then he would lurch towards Stargie, with death waiting for them if their wheels should lock.

No racing machines had ever travelled faster down that road. The crowd had expected the first lap of the Irish Grand Prix to be desperate, but not so desperate as this. Three cars lay wrecked behind these two leaders—and these two could not go on very far like this.

One must crash, that was inevitable!

The white-walled houses swooped to meet Jim. He saw the road where it curved, and he went into the bend without slowing.

Both cars skidded. Their tails slung round until the machines were sliding at an angle, juddering and quaking and booming, both drivers fighting against the skid, battling over the wheel until the bend eased off and the machines came straight.

A quarter of a mile ahead Jim saw another bend. It was the last on the course. Beyond it was the grandstand straightaway, two miles long. On that straight, if at all, he could get in front of Stargie.

Jim knew that he would have to slow for the bend, but he wouldn't do it until the last possible moment.

He saw a long sandbank and the raw, yellow wood of a palisade there, with the faces of spectators above it, and trees behind. Every nerve tensed as he timed his approach to the corner. He was almost on it when he cut out and reached for the brakes.

He crashed them on, and in that moment Stargie's car lurched towards him.

They were into the turn then. Instantly Jim slung his steering over to miss the other machine. His front wheels locked at an angle for a moment—and in that moment Stargie twitched his own steering.

His Ace seemed to jump at the low-built green car. Clearly Jim saw the hub-cap of one of Stargie's front wheels touch his own tyre.

The nicked hub-cap was spinning at a terrific rate, its glittering bosses whirling like steel knives as they snapped against the rubber.

The impact lasted only for the fraction of a second, but the force behind it was enormous. The steering was knocked from Jim's hand, and the tyre burst.

He saw the torn rubber shoot out from the rim. He saw Stargie's Ace leap ahead, and then his own car was whirling on the road.

A palisade came at him, looking like a yellow wall, and he felt the tail of the

Ross-Ryan hit it. Wood sprayed out like water all around him, and the back of the car bucked high.

In that instant—while the corner, the crowd, the fences and the trees whirled dizzily about him—even while he fought to regain control—Jim knew that Lon Stargie had played the same trick as he had played on Jim's father years before.

That touch had been deliberate. It was meant to wreck the machine which was challenging him so gamely.

With his Ross-Ryan half off the ground, Jim had a glimpse of Stargie skidding the corner. Clearly he saw the lamed front wheel break off at the stub axle and bounce away, then his machine was heeling on to its side, and he saw Joe slung out!

Jim flung himself down into the cockpit, ducked until he had the steering-wheel above his shoulder, and then braced himself for the crash.

He felt the car hit the road sideways. There was a mad, clattering crash. The car slid on in a welter of strident sound, leaping and shuddering and spinning.

It seemed to Jim that it was an age before there came one last colossal impact which made his brain reel, then the car stopped!

Third Time—Unlucky!

JIM lay huddled in the cockpit. Hot oil-fumes and the reek of spilled petrol flooded his nostrils, but everything was strangely silent after the uproar.

He did not feel hurt, only half-stunned, and he tried to resist when hands reached at him and began to drag him out. He had a glimpse of flame beyond the foot-grid, then saw the stream of chemicals from a fire-extinguisher come and blot it out.

The hands continued to drag at him, then he found himself lifted from the car.

"I'm—all right!" he gasped. "I'm all right!"

Blurred faces came all around. Beyond them he saw yards of smashed fencing and people running forward. Then he saw the car.

Broken wood was plastered over the shattered radiator. The engine cover had been ripped clean away, revealing the engine beneath. Jim saw enough to tell him that the car was completely wrecked, then everything

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 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. After the race Jim vows he will get his own back against Stargie in the Irish Grand Prix. The Ross Eight having been wrecked, Mr. Ryan, owner of the Ryan Engineering Company, builds another car for the brothers. The day of the race comes. The first lap is terrific. Within a few minutes two cars crash. This leaves Jim and Stargie and a blue Delage in the lead. They are hurtling round a hairpin bend, when the latter car skids right across the track—full into the path of the other two machines!

(Now read on.)

started to spin as the shock of the crash gripped him, and what followed was very hazy.

When, finally, he did come round properly, he found himself in a tent back at his own racing camp. Steve and Mr. Ryan were there with a doctor and two ambulance men, and Jim heard the doctor saying to Steve:

"It's just shock that's knocked him out, there's no other damage. It's a marvel about that other boy; he was pitched on to a sandbank and slid along it with his fall broken—got up with hardly a scratch. This youngster here may be a bit shaky, but a rest will soon put him right!"

"Will he have lost his nerve?" Mr. Ryan asked quietly.

"I hope not," the doctor said. "You can never tell. It's—Hullo!"

He looked down at the stretcher, and saw that Jim's eyes were opened. The doctor gasped when Jim tried to sit up, one of the ambulance men helping him.

Jim grinned round at them, gulped a little, then asked:

"How's the car, Steve?"

"Don't worry about that. How are you?"

"Fine!" Jim swung his legs off the stretcher, grabbed Steve's arm, and came upright. For a moment the tent seemed to swing around, then it steadied and he smiled again. "Fine!" he repeated. "Sorry I—sorry I came a cropper, Mr. Ryan."

"That's all right, boy—if you're all right! Joe's not touched."

Jim felt Steve's arm come round his shoulder, and his brother was gasping in relief. The doctor stood staring at Jim, then he said quietly:

"You've got plenty of pluck, son," and he smiled at Jim. "Listen, now: don't try and over-do it, you understand me? You ought to rest quietly for the remainder of the day, but I know you don't want to do that. Just take things easily, and you'll be right as rain by the evening. You've no pain anywhere, have you?"

"Not a mite," and Jim tried to make his voice cheerful, but actually he was feeling very groggy.

The doctor knew it, and he admired Jim's pluck in fighting against it. He shook hands with the boy speedman, then left the tent. Jim moved out into the sunshine, and in the distance he heard cars still hurling themselves around the course.

"How long has the race to go, Steve?" he asked. "Was I knocked out for long?"

"A good while," his brother answered. "Stargie's still leading—"

"Where's the car?" Jim cut in.

"Joe's bringing it in," Mr. Ryan told him quietly. "It's knocked about a good bit, Jim, but I think we can get it running again—but it'll never do for anything other than a practice car. If you want to drive any more after this, it'll mean building a new racer."

He stared at Jim for a long moment, then made his tone off-handed as he said:

"You'll be finished with speed work after that crash, eh?"

"No," Jim said bluntly.

He was sitting on a packing-case, and to him came memory of Stargie's wheel-hub shattering his tyre. He knew it had been done deliberately. He was sure that Stargie had tried to play the trick which had killed Jim's father.

"No," he said again. "You bet I'm not finished! We started out to make my dad's racing design famous—and we'll do it!"

"Except that we haven't money enough to build another car," Steve cut in, and there was a kind of gulp in his voice.

"Don't let the money worry you," Mr. Ryan said. "I'll build the car, and pay for everything. Because, you see, I want Lon Stargie licked, just as much as you fellows do! I know what happened to 'Big' Ross on the Sarles circuit—and Stargie did the same thing to Jim just now."

Before Jim could make any comment, the lorry which had gone to fetch the wrecked racer drove up. Joe fairly flung himself from the seat beside the driver, his eyes shining as he dashed at the group.

"Good!" he gasped, as he saw Jim, and leaped at him to grip his fist. "Everybody said you were jolly well dead, I fell soft—on a sandbank! You're not hurt?"

"I feel a bit wobbly," Jim grinned. "How's the race going?"

"Stargie's two clear laps in front, and has only got five more to do to win," Joe answered.

"Then he'll win," Mr. Ryan said grimly.

"I hope he does," Jim told them. "He's had to drive hard for it! He may be a rotter, but he's a thundering fine driver."

His chum stared at him, then said quickly:

"And you'll prove you're a better one when you lick him, Jim. And you'll lick him in the French Grand Prix, won't you—that's the next big race, isn't it?"

"If Jim will drive, we'll have a car in it," Mr. Ryan said. "Well, d'you feel fit enough to ride down to the grand-stands and see the finish, Jim?"

"Yes, the boy answered, and Joe tucked a hand under his arm to support his shock-weakened legs as he moved towards Mr. Ryan's car.

In a little while they were down at the finishing-point, in time to see the black-and-white winner's flag slash on the air as Lon Stargie brought his victorious Ace across the line.

"That's twice he's licked us," Jim said slowly. "But the third time he'll be unlucky!"

(Third time unlucky for Stargie—thus votes Jim, and he means it! In the French Grand Prix the young speedman is going all out to win. Win or bust—that's Jim's motto now. More rousing chapters of this exciting serial next week. chums!)

THE COWBOY KID & CO.

(Continued from page 5.)

side with mighty sweeps of her right paw. The tiger had been taught to play air-ball by Professor Lorenzo in precisely this manner, and loved doing it.

Hearing the cries of the routed savages, Kiki looked out of the companion-way door, and his black face registered a tremendous grin.

But Loopy's right arm was tiring, and the day might have gone against him yet had not a rumble from below shaken the Lacoma's deck, foretelling the explosion which occurred a moment later.

Bang! Gases imprisoned in the hold for days suddenly blew the whole end out of the stranded wreck, taking with it every one of the savages who were clinging to it. As their black figures soared in the air amidst a cloud of debris, the rest of the storming party slid down the iron plates to safety and never stopped running.

Caught by the force of the explosion, Loopy took a catherine wheel over the end of the ship and landed on soft grass, dazed. As soon as he had recovered sufficiently to see and understand, he found himself alone.

Presently Sheba the she-cat joined him. Then came Kiki, limping badly, with his black face extended in a huge grin. Apart from him there was not a soul in sight, for the savages had taken the wounded with them in their panic-stricken flight.

Kiki held the bejewelled and horned crown in his big black hands, and this he solemnly placed on Loopy's head.

"Massa Loopy, Keeng!" he cried in an ecstasy of hero worship.

THE END.

(The Cowboy Kid is sure some guy, isn't he? And now that he's King of Bangalloola—well, you can guess that he's going to make things hum! There will be another rousing complete yarn featuring Loopy and his pet tiger, Sheba, next week—don't miss it!)



"I guess I'm going to count three..."

"Say, you've got a nerve for a schoolmaster guy!" . . . The Head of Greyfriars was sitting in his chair, and Slick Flick, the notorious Chicago gunman, was bending over him, with a pistol levelled at his face. "I guess I'm going to count three," said Slick menacingly. "If you ain't doing what I want when I've counted 'em this school will sure want a noo headmaster!"

"One . . ." "Two . . ."

Then Harry Wharton came in. What's Slick Flick doing at Greyfriars? What possible object can a Chicago gunman have at the peaceful old English school in Kent? These questions are vividly answered in the nerve-tingling school and adventure story of Harry Wharton & Co. told by FRANK RICHARDS in this week's

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THE ROOM OF DEATH

(Continued from page 31.)

of the vapour is maintained—have told of the nightmare-like shapes that have appeared before their eyes. Actually, of course, an optic affection caused by the drug. I examined the Monk's Chamber very carefully and soon found that the tapestries were literally soaked in the poison!"

"Good Heavens!" said his lordship. "Sir Pickering's doing?"

"Of course," said Lee. "Ordinarily that room was harmless. Now, here's the significant feature of this affair. Sir Pickering Brett was one of your oldest friends, Lord Welleston. He knew of the house party that you were preparing—and he took care to have a lecture elsewhere so that he could not be present. But he knew that your brother would be here. Perhaps you have mentioned to Sir Pickering that your brother was susceptible to cold?"

"I have."

"He therefore made a fairly safe assumption that if Admiral Herbert slept in the haunted room he would have a fire," said Nelson Lee. "Another point: he knew that the admiral was a great scoffer as regards ghosts. It was more than likely that he would insist upon spending a night in the haunted room. If so, he would die. In the morning the fire would be out, the temperature down, and there would be nothing to indicate how death had been caused."

As a matter of fact, Lee afterwards learned that Sir Pickering had met Admiral Herbert in a London club, and at that meeting the admiral had boasted that he would spend the night in the haunted room—egged on, no doubt, by Sir Pickering himself.

"As for the rest, you can imagine it for yourself," concluded Lee. "Sir Pickering knew that he would be urged to come down, and he was certain that he would be able to engineer the apparently natural deaths of Clarence and poor Cope. He thought he had succeeded. I have no doubt that he killed Cope by forcing a heated handkerchief, reeking with the drug, over his mouth. Naturally, Sir Pickering was also affected by the fumes, but he wanted this to happen to divert suspicion from himself. He knew that in his case the results would not be fatal."

"But why all this fiendish plotting?" asked Lord Welleston.

"Obviously he was anticipating that you and Lady Welleston would soon die—and if Clarence had been killed I dare say his assumption would have been right," said Lee quietly. "I rather think that Sir Pickering figures in your will?"

"By Heaven! He does," exclaimed Lord Welleston. "And but for you, Mr. Lee, I should have been completely hoodwinked by this diabolical scoundrel."

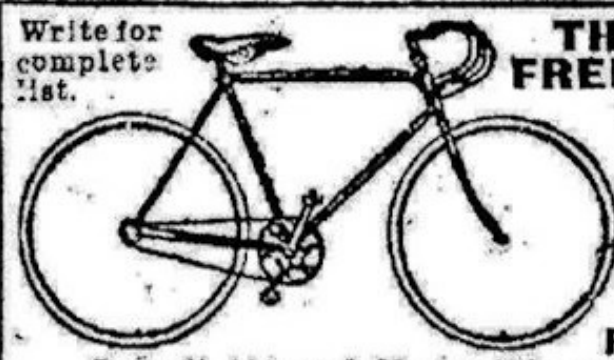
"I am convinced that Sir Pickering is quite mad—and that he has been hovering on the border-line of insanity for years," concluded the great detective.

Nelson Lee's shot proved to be a bull's-eye. Sir Pickering Brett never stood his trial, for the shock of discovery converted him into a raving maniac, and he had to be removed to a criminal lunatic asylum.

THE END.

(Another corking long complete yarn featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper next week, entitled: "The Man from 'Mars'!" Breathlessly exciting and thrilling—make sure you read this stunning story, chums!)

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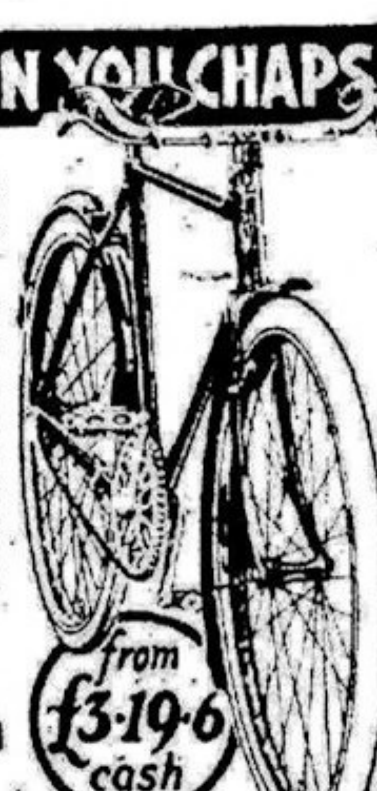
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