

"The Test Match Mystery!"

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By
**EDWY
SEARLES BROOKS.**

CHAPTER 1.

Test-match Fever!

THE difference in the appearance of two groups of juniors was remarkable. Edward Oswald Handforth and a number of other Old-Timers stood round the Ancient House steps, disconsolate and gloomy. Near West Arch, K.K. & Co. were chatting with cheery lightheartedness, and their faces were beaming.

Tea was over at St. Frank's, and although the evening was sunny and warm, none of the juniors seemed attracted by Little Side. Yet, one and all, their thoughts were on cricket.

"Friday the thirteenth!" said Handforth disgustedly. "I've never believed in that superstitious rot about Fridays and the thirteenth being unlucky—until now. This proves it!"

Kirby Keeble Parkington, the cheerful, red-headed leader of the Carlton Gang, strolled over.

E. O. Handforth's ideas are usually wild and woolly. On rare occasions he gets hold of a really brilliant one. This week is one of those rare occasions!

"Unlucky?" he repeated gaily. "Friday the thirteenth? My dear ass, it's the luckiest day in the year's calendar!"

The Old-Timers glared at him.

"It's just a point of view," growled Reggie Pitt, of the West House. "You lucky bargees are going off to see the Test-match to-morrow—and we're not!"

"It was this morning that I got the letter from Uncle Joseph," said Parkington. "A sportman, eh? He knows it's my birthday to-morrow, and for a present he's sending a motor-coach down—to take me and my pals to the Test-match at Nottingham."

"Jolly good birthday present," said Harry Gresham enviously.

"Now, let me see," murmured K.K. "Tea interval's over at Trent Bridge, and the players are on the field again. England versus Australia! The game ought to be in an interesting state when they draw stumps."

"And you're going to see the whole of the second day's play!" groaned Church.

"Right from the start," nodded Parkinson. "That giddy bus will be here at five o'clock in the morning, and we shall get to Nottingham easily before the start. What's more, my uncle has booked seats for the twelve of us—right in the pavilion."

"Don't!" pleaded Reggie. "You're only making it worse!"

K.K. grinned and strolled away. The depression descended more deeply over the group of Old-Timers. The situation, in their opinion, was deplorable.

It wouldn't have been so bad if they had been in funds; but what with buying new cricket-bats, pads, blazers and white flannels, etc., they were all passing through a time of exceeding leanness.

Even Archie Glenthorne, who generally rolled in money, was broke. During the last week he had purchased piles of unnecessary summer clothes. The Removites, who had been relying on him, had not only bumped him hard, but they had even bumped him in his latest and best suit.

The Carlton Gang had had no hopes of seeing the Test-match until this morning. That letter from K.K.'s Uncle Joseph had altered the whole situation. Unfortunately, the coach would only hold twelve; the invitation was confined to Kirby Keeble Parkinson and his eleven Carltonian brethren.

"We've got to do something!" said Handforth desperately. "Are we going to let these fatheaded Red-Hot chaps score over us like this?"

"We can walk to Nottingham, I suppose," said McClure, with sarcasm, "or we can use our bikes. We ought to get half-way there by the morning—"

"Fathead!" interrupted Handforth. "I can't even use my Austin Seven! It *would* be in dock this week-end, wouldn't it?"

The whole of St. Frank's was in a state of fever over this first Test-match at Nottingham. A number of seniors were going, of course. Mr. Suncliffe, of the Third, had gone already; nothing would satisfy him but to see the entire game—every breathless minute of the four days' play.

Jack Grey came into the Triangle from the direction of the playing fields. He was running. He was hot and excited. The other Old-Timers looked up without much interest as he burst upon them.

"I say! Heard the latest?" he panted breathlessly. "I just met one of the River House chaps. I told him about K.K.'s luck, and he grinned. Said that half the River House is going off to-morrow, too!"

"To the Test-match?"

"Yes, rather!" replied Grey. "He said they're hiring two or three coaches, and they're going to make a proper spree of it."

Handforth breathed wrathfully.

"And you come and tell us this?" he asked, glaring. "Do you think it's any consolation to us—"

"But you don't understand!" interrupted Grey. "This River House chap said that

there'll be heaps of room! Why couldn't some of us squash in with 'em? Hal Brewster's a sportsman. He wouldn't make any fuss—"

"Which is the quickest way to the River House?" asked Handforth wildly.

CHAPTER 2.

A Rash Business!

EDWARD OSWALD HANDFORTH and the Old-Timers bolted towards the River House School at top speed. Here was an opportunity they could not afford to miss.

Hal Brewster and Glynn and Ascott and a number of other cheery fellows were on the River House playing fields when the St. Frank's crowd came bursting through the hedge from the meadows. They had come across country; it was too far round by road.

"Hallo! What's this?" asked Brewster, staring. "Raiders?"

"Pax!" panted Handforth, as he and the other Old-Timers swarmed round. "Is it true, Hal, that you're going to the Test-match to-morrow?"

Hal Brewster sighed.

"Don't be funny!" he replied gruffly. "What chance have we got? Besides, I'm not feeling too well. I thought a bit of practice would do me good, but I believe I'm worse."

Handforth callously disregarded this tale of Brewster's indisposition.

"You're not going to the Test-match, then?" he asked indignantly. "Grey says that one of your chaps told him that you're hiring two or three motor-coaches, and that you'll have enough room left over for us to squash in."

"What rot!" put in Dave Ascott, grinning. "Where did you get that yarn, Grey? Who was the chap who told you?"

"Commerford."

"You can't take any notice of Commerford," said Brewster. "He's always kidding people like that. He was pulling your leg, Grey. We're not going to see the Test-match. The Head wouldn't let us go, anyway. Old Hogge's a hog. Some of the seniors wanted special permission, but he wouldn't grant it."

The St. Frank's fellows felt the gloom descending upon them again—a deeper gloom than ever this time. There were twelve of them here, and they stood round in moody silence. They even glared at the River House fellows—as though Brewster & Co. were responsible for their troubles.

"This is what comes of taking notice of a silly, idiotic, brainless River House chap!" said Handforth bitterly. "And you're an ass, too, Grey! You might have known that Commerford was only spoofing. He wouldn't have fooled me!"

Hal Brewster laughed cheerily.

"Never mind, Handy. Come along to the School Shop and drown your sorrows in some ice-cream sodas."

"Can't!" grumbled Handforth. "We're all broke."

"That's all right—we'll treat you," offered Hal generously.

The twelve St. Frank's juniors brightened up, and they all made a move towards the quad. Life, after all, had its little compensations. Ice-cream soda, on a hot day, was one of them.

"I can do with something cooling," said Brewster thoughtfully. "Don't know what's wrong with me, you chaps. I feel feverish."

Reggie Pitt looked at him closely.

"You've got a rash," he said. "Look at him, you chaps! He's got spots all over him!"

Dr. Molyneux Hogge, the headmaster, halted abruptly as he was entering Mr. Marshall's House. He had overheard those fateful words.

"You ass!" hissed Brewster. "I didn't want anybody to know——"

"One moment, Brewster," said the Head, striding up. "What was that I heard just now about somebody breaking out in spots?"

"I—I—— It's nothing, sir——"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Dr. Hogge, adjusting his glasses and inspecting Brewster more closely. "Brewster! What is this dreadful rash?"

"I—I'm hot, sir——"

"Go at once to the school hospital," ordered the Head sharply. "This is dreadful! Your appearance suggests measles."

"Measles!" went up a general dismayed chorus.

"Stand away from this boy!" ordered Dr. Hogge. "I am convinced it is measles! A case was reported in the village only yesterday. Brewster, obey my order! I will send for the doctor at once. You St. Frank's boys must leave. Good gracious! Why wasn't this reported to me earlier?"

He grabbed hold of Hal Brewster, and, in spite of the junior skipper's protestations, he marshalled him indoors.

"Measles!" said Travers, with a whistle. "My sons, we'd better scoot!"

They scooted.

Indoors, Dr. Hogge was busy. Having escorted Hal to the school hospital, the Head dashed to the telephone. Within a minute he was talking to Dr. Morrison Nicholls, the headmaster of St. Frank's.

"I am convinced, Dr. Nicholls, that this boy is suffering from measles," insisted Dr. Hogge. "It is unfortunate that twelve of your junior boys should have been in contact with him. I felt it my duty to warn you——"

"Quite right, of course," agreed Dr. Nicholls. "I am grateful to you, Dr. Hogge, for your thoughtfulness. You say these boys are on their way back to St. Frank's now?"

"Yes—I saw them hurrying away."

"Thank you. I will deal with them immediately they arrive."

Some little time later, when the twelve Removites entered the St. Frank's premises, they were met by Dr. Nicholls and half a dozen prefects, who barred their way like a cordon of police.

"Halt!" ordered the Head. "You twelve boys, I understand, have just come from the River House School?"

"Yes, sir," said Handforth, in astonishment.

"Are you all here? Has any boy who was with you at the River House gone elsewhere?"

"No, sir. We're all here."

"That, at least, is one thing to be thankful for, Fenton," said the Head.

"Perhaps some of our other fellows have been in contact with these boys, sir," suggested Fenton. "Have you spoken to anybody on the way, Handforth?"

"Not a soul," replied Edward Oswald, more bewildered than ever.

"Then we are indeed lucky," said the headmaster. "No, Handforth, don't come too near. You twelve boys are in quarantine from this minute! There is a suspected case of measles at the River House School, and you have been in contact with that suspect."

"Quarantined!" gasped Handforth blankly. "But—but——"

"Until you have been passed as free from all infection, you twelve boys must remain isolated," declared Dr. Nicholls. "You must not move out, or mix with any of your fellows, or attend ordinary school. Come! To the sanatorium!"

It was the final blow!

CHAPTER 3.

The Wheeze of the Century!

"QUARANTINED!" groaned Handforth. "What price the Test-match now? We can't even play cricket ourselves! Oh, my only sainted aunt! Life isn't worth living!"

The twelve Removites were disconsolately lounging about in the main ward of the school sanatorium. The whole thing struck them as ridiculous. They were as fit as fiddles.

The door opened and Dr. Brett came in, smiling and cheery.

"Well, well! This is a nice kettle of fish," he said brightly. "You boys have done a fine thing for yourselves!"

"Have we got measles, doctor?" demanded Handforth fiercely.

"As a matter of fact, I don't think you have," replied the school doctor.

"What! And we're being kept prisoners here like this?"

"That's not the point, young man," said Dr. Brett. "Even if Brewster has measles—which may not be determined one way or the other until Sunday—there's only a very small chance of your having caught it. But



Dr. Hogge adjusted his glasses and inspected Brewster closely. "You have got measles!" he announced.

there is that small chance, and in a great school like this, with hundreds of scholars, the only safe thing is to isolate you."

"Oh, my hat!" went up a dismal chorus.

"The headmaster is so worried about you that he means to take no chances," continued the doctor. "There's an ambulance coming for you in the morning. You'll have to be up early, because it'll be here at about seven."

"An ambulance!" gasped Handforth.

"Don't blame me, young 'un—it's the Head's idea!" chuckled Dr. Brett. "But it's not an ordinary ambulance, so you needn't worry. It's more like a private motor-coach."

"I say! Isn't that a bit thick?" protested Archie Glenthorne, pained. "I mean, don't talk to us about motor-coaches, dear old medicine-mixer! Rather like one on the raw, what?"

The doctor laughed.

"Thinking of those lucky youngsters who are going off to the Test-match, eh?" he said. "Sorry! You won't go to the Test-match—you'll go to the Helmford Isolation Home. And you'll stay there until you're certified as being free from all infection. It may be a couple of days, or it may be a week."

"What awful rot!" said Handforth.

"Oh, and by the way, here's a letter for you, Glenthorne!" continued the doctor. "Mr. Crowell asked me to bring it up to you. It came by the evening post."

The doctor went, and there was another outburst of indignation. He seemed to regard the whole thing as a joke—which it certainly

wasn't. To make matters worse, Archie's letter literally shed currency notes when he opened it.

"Quids and quids!" groaned Travers.

"Where did that wealth come from, Archie?"

"A tip from the pater," explained Archie.

"Twenty-five quid. Pretty good, what?"

"Good?" howled Handforth. "You call it good when we can't spend a penny of it? Why, you—you—— We could have gone to the Test-match if that money had come earlier! Oh, my hat! What a life!"

It was certainly exasperating. And the prisoners were by no means cheered when Kirby Keeble Parkington and his Carlton Gang collected outside the open windows and shouted sympathetic comments up to them.

"It won't last long, my dears," said K.K. soothingly. "I fancy you're coming out in spots already, Handy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They haven't got measles any more than we have!" declared Goffin, grinning. "It's all rot, keeping them in quarantine like this. I hope they'll think of us to-morrow, while we're enjoying the Test-match!"

This was more than Handforth could stand. He had been looking out of the open window, and the sight of the grinning Carlton Gang made him "see red." With a strangled cry he turned round, spotted a large jug of water on a nearby table, grabbed it and emptied the contents over K.K., who happened to be standing just beneath the window. The water descended in a deluge—right on to the upturned face of Parkington.

Swoooooosh!

"Groooo—gug-gug-gug—grooo!" gurgled the Carlton Gang leader.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Handforth and the Old-Timers.

Fearing further trouble, the Carlton Gang quickly made itself scarce, while the incident had done much to revive the drooping spirits of Handforth & Co.

"By George! I feel lots better now!" said Handy boisterously. "Look here, my lads, we're not done yet! Why not escape? Archie's got that money, and we can——"

"Easy, dear old fellow—easy!" said Travers. "What chance should we have? We should soon be rounded up—and it wouldn't be fair to the rest. The whole giddy school would be isolated if we mixed with the other chaps. We mustn't do anything rash like that."

Handforth's excitement evaporated, and for some time he brooded in silence. He sat on one of the beds, glaring into nothingness. Then, suddenly, he flushed deeply and sprang up.

"Look here," he said tensely. "Listen, you chaps! Remember what the doctor told us? There's an ambulance coming at seven o'clock—but it'll look like a motor-coach!"

"A sort of private ambulance, I suppose," nodded Gresham.

"I'm going to ring up that Isolation Home!" continued Handforth. "I'll pretend to be the Head, and tell 'em to send that ambulance earlier—so that it gets here on the stroke of five! Do you see the wheeze?"

"You mean that the Carlton chaps will mistake it for theirs?" asked Travers.

"Of course."

"But there'll be two coaches!" objected Church.

"No, there won't!" replied Handforth quickly. "K. K.'s already told us that his coach is being hired from Gibson's Garage in Bannington. I'll simply ring up Gibson's and tell 'em not to send that saloon bus until five-thirty."

Travers thought it out.

"So K. K. & Co. will get in the wrong bus and go to the Home, and we'll get in the right one and go to the Test-match!" he said dreamily. "My sons, this isn't a wheeze—it's the inspiration of a genius."

Handforth beamed.

"You think it's a pretty good wheeze?" he asked eagerly.

"I can only suggest one alteration," said Pitt. "I'll do the 'phoning instead of you, Handy—I think I'm a better mimic."

Handforth didn't like it at first, but he was persuaded. Without any loss of time Reggie Pitt stole out of the ward, got into the doctor's surgery without any trouble, and telephoned to the Helmford Isolation Home.

"You see, doctor, it will be better, I think, to have these boys removed a clear hour before any members of the household get up," explained Pitt, in an excellent imitation of Dr. Nicholls' tones. "You see the point, don't you?"

"Oh, quite," came the voice over the wire. "I will have the ambulance there at five o'clock to the minute."

The rest was A B C. Pitt 'phoned to the Bannington garage, and the half-hour's alteration was readily arranged. After that the twelve Old-Timers climbed into bed and dreamed of the joys that the morrow would bring.

CHAPTER 4.

Without A Hitch!

"GLORIOUS morning!" said Parkington happily.

"It's going to be better than yesterday, even," declared one of the others. "By Jove! We're going to have a day of days."

K. K. nodded.

"A day we'll remember for years," he said. "What's the time? Five to five. That bus ought to be here any minute now."

The twelve juniors were strolling about in the Triangle. The early morning sun was remarkably bright. Birds were twittering and insects were humming. A glorious morning, in all truth.

The rest of the school was still asleep. K. K. and his gang had never known St. Frank's to be so quiet. As they collected in a group, waiting for the motor-coach, their thoughts turned to the unfortunate who were quarantined in the school "sanny."

"Rough luck on those chaps," said Langley, with genuine feeling. "I wonder if any of them really caught the measles."

"I doubt it," replied Parkington. "Anyhow, we can't do anything for them, can we? By the time we get back——"

"Hullo! Hero she comes!" sang out Haddock.

The school clock was just striking five. The gates were already wide open, and a totally enclosed vehicle drove into the Triangle. The man at the wheel was in uniform, and the whole turn-out was smart. Yet there was something unusual in the appearance of this vehicle. It was a saloon, quietly coloured, and the windows were heavily curtained.

The juniors were rather disappointed. After what Parkington had been saying, the coach was not of exactly the luxury type they had anticipated. However, this was a detail. As the coach swung round and came to a standstill, the boys swarmed round.

"Good man!" said Parkington. "You're dead on time."

The driver nodded. He looked at the boys with interest. He, too, was just a bit puzzled. He had been told to collect twelve patients, and he had naturally assumed that they would be looking ill—or seedy, anyhow. Yet these boys were gaily attired in flannels, and they carried macintoshes and attaché-cases as though they were off on a holiday.

"Isn't there one of the masters with you, young gents?" asked the driver,



Handforth tipped the jug and a stream of water descended over K. K. Parkington. "Groo-gug - gug - groo!" gurgled that unfortunate junior.

into the road, a number of figures emerged from Big Arch. Until then they had been lurking in Inner Court.

"Phew!" said Handforth breathlessly. "I thought it was all up when they asked the driver about the Test-match."

"He thought they were kidding him," grinned Travers. "Anyhow, we're safe enough now. Rather a pity we didn't get Gibson's to have that saloon here at a quarter-past instead of half-past. Hopo nobody spots us."

"We'd better keep here—in the archway," said Gresham.

They chuckled afresh as they thought of the Carlton gang, riding in that ambulance-coach, serenely oblivious of the fact that they were on their way to the Helmford Isolation Home.

There really wasn't much risk. At this hour of the morning all the masters and

prefects were sound asleep. Not even the household staff began to stir until six; none of the workmen on the uncompleted buildings turned up until six-thirty.

Naturally, Dr. Brett himself had arranged to be on hand so that he could accompany the twelve patients to the Home—but Dr. Brett was under the impression that the ambulance would not turn up until seven. He was still in bed.

At five-twenty-seven the Old-Timers felt their hearts leap. The quiet purr of a motor vehicle sounded in the

lane. Then a luxurious saloon coach of the smaller type glided through the gateway.

It came to stop. Quickly and quietly the Old-Timers clambered aboard.

A minute later the twelve quarantined juniors, leaning back luxuriously in their seats, started off for the Test-match!

CHAPTER 5.

The Impatient Patients!

"WONDER what the game is?" asked Parkington, puzzled. "I say, driver! What are you turning into this place for?"

All the Test-match-bound (as they thought) juniors were intrigued by their driver's

"No fear," said Parkington. "Do you think we want our trip spoilt by having a master with us?"

"But isn't a master here to see you off?"

"Our St. Frank's masters aren't so kind-hearted and thoughtful as that," grinned Baines. "You don't catch them getting up at five o'clock in the morning to see us off to the Test-match."

"Test-match?" repeated the driver. "Oh, yes, of course."

"What time do you think we shall get to Nottingham?" asked Parkington.

"You're a caution, young gent," grinned the driver. "Hop in! There ain't much the matter with any of you, by what I can see."

They all entered the bus, the door was closed, and they drove out. As they vanished

strange manœuvre. They had sailed along smoothly and uneventfully nearly as far as Helmford. Now, before entering the town, the coach had turned into a well-kept drive, and was gliding up towards an imposing edifice which stood amid extensive grounds.

"Where are you taking us?" went on K. K. "This isn't the road for London—or Nottingham, either. What's the wheeze?"

"Here, chuck it, young gent," protested the driver. "You know as well as I do where you're going."

"Of course I do—we're going to the Test-match."

"The only match you'll see to-day will be one of Bryant & May's, sir," said the driver. "Can't understand why you were sent along without a doctor, or one of the masters. Still, I didn't make the arrangements."

He pulled up smartly in front of the wide steps which led up to the main door of the great building. Three figures emerged at once—an elderly gentleman in a white coat, and two smartly-uniformed nurses.

"We'd better get out and see what all this means," said Baines.

"Come on!" said Parkington.

They tumbled out, and the man in the white coat smiled upon them.

"Well, you look pretty lively, my boys," he said kindly. "I really don't think there's much the matter with you. Still, we shall have to keep you here. Come along inside."

A suspicion of the truth was beginning to dawn upon K. K., but it was not until he was actually inside, and the door was closed upon them all, that he found his voice.

"I say!" he burst out. "Who do you think we are, sir? Wait a minute, you chaps—leave this to me. There's been a mistake! Who do you think we are, sir?"

"You are St. Frank's boys."

"Yes, of course, sir——"

"And you have been sent here because your headmaster suspects that you might have contracted measles from——"

"Wha-a-at!" gurgled Deeks faintly. "Oh, my only sainted aunt! They've mistaken us for Handy's lot! We must have got into the wrong bus."

K. K. gave a groan. He began to suspect the full truth. This affair was a deep, sinister plot.

"We're not the measles crowd, sir," he said to the doctor. "We were expecting a coach to take us to the Test-match, and when yours came along we naturally thought it was the right one. Sorry, sir, but we shall have to be going."

"Oh, no!" said the doctor grimly. "You can't deceive me with that thin story, young man! Dr. Nicholls has already informed me that you are all perfectly well and that there is only a remote chance of your having contracted the measles. I was instructed to deal very drastically with you if you attempted any nonsense."

"But we're the wrong boys, sir!" said K. K. desperately.

"Of course—of course," said the doctor, nodding. "We know all about that. Nurse, separate these boys at once. Put them in different wards, and on no account must they be allowed out of sight."

"Ring up our headmaster, sir," urged Parkington, in despair. He'll tell you that we——"

He broke off in dismay. If this doctor rang up the Head, what would be the result? The Head would merely ascertain that the quarantined boys had gone, and there would be nothing to prove that they had gone in the wrong coach—for by this time K. K. was convinced that this misunderstanding was no mere accident, but a deliberately planned affair. The Old Timers had scored—and they had scored more heavily than ever before!

"Yes, ring up the Head, sir," pleaded Parkington. "Ask him to come over here—or to send Dr. Brett, or somebody who knows us. He'll prove that we're not your patients. Those rotters have dished us——"

He became incoherent. The thought of Handforth & Co. sailing along towards the Test-match made him see red. His coach—sent along as a special birthday gift by his Uncle Joseph—and those bounders had bagged it.

Meanwhile, Handforth & Co., serenely happy, were well on their way to the Test-match. When they stopped en route for breakfast, Handforth was thoughtful enough to send off a telegram.

The telegram was received about an hour later by K. K. Parkington, who, having been unable to convince the doctor that a ghastly mistake had been made, was still incarcerated in the Helmford Isolation Home. He read it with burning eyes:

"Thanks awfully for the use of your saloon, old man. Hope you and the rest are having anything but a measle-y time."

"HANDY."

"Dished, diddled, and done!" groaned K. K., passing the wire on to the others who were with him.

It was poor consolation, later, when Dr. Brett arrived and identified them as the 'wrong crowd'—and only a slight consolation to hear that Brewster wasn't suffering from measles at all, but a simple skin complaint which was not infectious.

They were all released at once. But it was too late! Even if they had the money to hire a coach, they couldn't get to the Test-match until mid-afternoon—when every turnstile would be closed. So they went disconsolately back to St. Frank's, vowing a dreadful vengeance.

They had been spoofed up to the eyes. Edward Oswald Handforth had scored heavily. It was certainly one up to the Old-Timers!

THE END.

(More fun at St. Frank's next week; more japes between the Carlton Gang and Handforth & Co. Look out for this rollicking yarn entitled, "Handforth's Talkies!")

THE COWBOY KID AND CO

Thrilling!

Adventure No. 4:

"King Loopy Shows His Magic!"

Exciting!



**"OOOLAH
BOOOLAH
WOLLAH!"**

That's the chappie with the large axe speaking, and he's telling Loopy Lane that he's after his blood!

Poo-Poo the Plotter!

FOR a whole day people had been streaming into the capital city of Bangalloola from all parts of the island, and in the morning the public square was packed to suffocation; they had come to see their king, Loopy Lane, the Cowboy Kid. They had been told how the little white boy had licked the great armour-clad champion of the Potakeetas and driven their enemies from Bangalloola; they had heard marvellous tales about Sheba, his pet tiger, a great striped beast which they regarded as a living god. And so, while horns blew and drums beat, they kept their eyes fixed upon the royal palace, where black guards, armed with spears and shields, squatted or stood two rows deep upon the veranda.

In the royal reception-room Loopy Lane was struggling into his hairy chaps and putting the finishing touches to his get up. At his feet sat Kiki, the black boy, who was Loopy's pal; and on a huge rug-strewn divan sprawled the wonderful tiger.

Loopy held his Stetson hat in one hand and the royal crown in the other.

"Which one of these ought I to wear, Kiki?" he asked. "The felt is softer."

The black boy shook his head.

"Keeng Loopy wear crown," he advised.

With a sigh the Cowboy Kid put the heavy gold crown on his head, adjusting it with the aid of a mirror of solid metal polished so that he could see himself in it. The jewels set in the gold headpiece glittered brilliantly, and the two ivory horns stuck out on each side like a viking's helmet.

"Ready, Kiki," he said.

Advancing to the door of the palace, Kiki drew a curtain back and stepped out into the blinding sunlight. On the steps of the raised platform in front of the palace a group of dignitaries and high officials were waiting, among them a withered-looking black rascal with long hair and a white beard who looked like a land edition of Father Neptune. He was leaning on the thick wooden handle of

a huge battle axe, and his eyes glinted so fiercely when Loopy looked at him that the Cowboy Kid said in a whisper:

"Who's that Guy Fawkes, Kiki?"

"Oley Poo-Poo," Kiki whispered back, his voice trembling a little. "Nastey oley witchey doctor, archey priest—huddled and seben years old."

"Well, I don't like the look of him," said Loopy as he advanced to the dais and took his seat on the royal throne. A whispered word and a gentle touch, and Sheba, crossing the dais, sat down within a spring of Poo-poo, the witch-doctor, who jumped back in alarm as the tiger licked her jaws and eyed him hungrily.

Then for minutes the drums beat, the trumpets and horns blew, and the people shouted or sang a wailing dirge, which made the she-cat howl mournfully. After that was finished all the officials and priests crowded round the throne and began a series of long speeches.

For three hours Loopy was forced to listen to these speeches, not one word of which he could understand. He stroked Sheba's silken head, waiting patiently for the pow-wows to finish, but at last he could stand it no longer.

"Tell 'em to ring down the curtain, Kiki," he cried desperately.

"They fineesh," answered Kiki, who was squatting by Loopy's side. "Only oley Poo-Poo left."

"All right. Tell the old wreck to get on with it."

Poo-Poo walked up to the dais with surprising vigour considering his years. He fixed his great cone shaped head-dress—which was smothered with feathers and tinkling bells—firmly on his head, and dumped the great axe down in front of him, the edge of the blade pointing at the king. At once the people began to murmur, and the Cowboy Kid saw Kiki shiver.

"What's he mean by that, Kiki?" asked Loopy.

"Oley Poo-poo do thatey when markey man for heady chopey off!" said the black boy in an awestricken whisper.

"H'm!" The Cowboy Kid blinked as he digested this cheery item of news. "The old josser's dangerous, then?"

"Veley muchey dangelous," groaned the black boy.

Pointing the axe at King Loopy, the witch doctor embarked upon a long winded discourse, his shrill voice ringing clearly through the public square where the awed people stood motionless, waving his arms and dancing about as he emphasised his points, gradually working himself up into a frenzy.

Kiki, who had been growing more and more frightened, crept to King Loopy's feet and crouched there, leaning against the yawning she-cat. Ex-king Wangaloola, who was among those present, began to shoot ugly glances at Loopy out of the slits of his half-closed eyes.

"Keeng," moaned Kiki, "witchey doctor telley people Keeng Loopy no can do magic, say Keeng Loopy impostor, say she-cat wicked spirit anaimal—killum with spears. Heem tellum people only one wizard on island do magic, heem witchey doctor oley Poo-poo."

The Cowboy Kid's boyish face hardened. There was just himself and the she-cat—for Kiki did not count in such a crisis—opposed to over 10,000 natives, to say nothing of the arch priest, his assistants, the ex-king, all the dignitaries and officials, and the entire royal guard of six-foot black giants armed with spears. The situation was serious. The Cowboy Kid's hand stole to the lasso which hung from a hook in his belt and he began to gather its loops up in his fingers. The people had broken the line of soldiers in the square and were pushing forward with frenzied shouts.

Old Wangaloola was bawling at the top of his voice and making signs to the guards, who began to creep nearer and nearer to their new white king. Kiki gave a scream of terror and hugged tight hold of Loopy's spurred boots. Sheba, the tiger, shot an expectant glance at Loopy as if expecting a command for action.

The witch doctor saw his chance. The dreaded she-cat was at his mercy. With surprising ease he swung the great double-edged axe above his head and drove a downward crushing blow at the tiger's head. The swarming crowd choked to an awed silence.

Kiki hid his black face, expecting the axe to crack Sheba's skull like an egg-shell. But they all reckoned without Loopy Lane, the Cowboy Kid. Though he could not understand one word of the outlandish language, Loopy had guessed old Poo-poo's intention, and even as the old josser swung the axe he flicked the lasso at the high priest's legs. Then he gave the leather cord a tug, and the old boy tumbled backwards off the edge of the rostrum to the sunbaked earth with a thud that could be heard at the end of the square. Missing Sheba's head by inches only, the blade of the axe crashed loosely on to the wooden platform and stuck quivering there. Old Wangaloola, who showed his true, treacherous nature for the first time, grasped it with both hands and swung it up again.

Then Loopy blew his whistle. It was a signal the she-cat understood. Leaping from Loopy's feet like a streak of lightning, she hurled herself at Wangaloola and butted him full in the middle, dropping him as if he had been shot. Still the Cowboy Kid was taking no chances. Seizing his stock whip he began to lay about him, driving the startled and terrified guards back to their places. The amazed crowd slunk away, awed by King Loopy's prowess. Even now the Cowboy Kid was not satisfied.

"If I've got to rule in Bangaloola, Kiki," he said. "I can't have an old fool like Poo-poo making trouble."

Loopy blew a prolonged blast on his whistle. Waiting for Poo-poo to rise and the guards to help the dazed Wangaloola away, he then raised his hand, and, through Kiki, delivered a royal message to this effect:

"That he did not care a hoot for old Poo-poo, who was nothing but a gasbag. That he was going to rule his Island in his own fashion. That he had more magic in his little finger than old Poo-poo had in all his straggly whiskers, and that if his people would not allow him to live a quiet life he would take his she-cat away and never come back any more."

After that, drawing in the lasso, the Cowboy Kid jerked Poo-poo inch by inch to the dais, and when the old rascal stood beside him Loopy added:

"I am King Loopy of Bangaloola. Poo-poo has said that I can do no magic. Tomorrow in the square I shall do magic that will shame him."

Kiki finished his interpretation with a bellowed "Whow!" which the people answered in kind. Then the Cowboy Kid released the arch priest and sent him flying off the platform with a well-planted kick in the appropriate place.



"Magic!"

RISING before cockerow the next morning, Loopy Lane, Kiki and Sheba, accompanied by a crowd of native bearers, made for the coast.

They came to the shattered hulk of the old *Lacoma*, and there Loopy found the cabin which he had occupied before the vessel had been wrecked, almost intact. Ordering the bearers to take from it a chest which contained most of the apparatus he used when doing his music-hall and circus turns, as well as a cane basket, they at once began the return journey, and Loopy was back in his palace before the sun had completed half its course.

From every direction people were swarming to the public square, where warriors guarded the approaches to the palace. Giving orders that nobody was to disturb him, Loopy retired to the royal room. He would do his magic in his own good time.

Suddenly Kiki came running in, his eyes rolling and his teeth chattering, bringing the news that the magic whip with which King Loopy had licked the Potakeeta champion and defeated the whole of the Potakeeta arm recently, was missing; gone also was the magic rope—Loopy's lasso—and worst of all Sheba, the royal tiger, was nowhere to be found.

A quick look round showed Loopy that Kiki's news was true. He had just finished searching the royal bungalow in vain when Poo-poo, followed by a train of minor priests, all of them looking smugly triumphant, forced their way in and told him that the clamouring people were waiting for him to do his magic, that unless he

As Kiki threw the coloured balls into the air, so Loopy smashed them to smithereens with his revolvers. The savages watched incredulously, awed by this "magic."

started soon there would be a riot, the royal palace would be razed to the ground and the king put to the sword.

"Come out into the square and bring that basket, Kiki," said Loopy calmly. "And after you have thrown up the glass balls you go and search for Sheba and set her free. But if Poo-poo has killed her—" Loopy's eyes grew dark at the thought—"I'll skewer the old rascal in front of the whole tribe!"

The people received their king with frantic shouts. Poo-poo, his wrinkled face puckered into a smile of triumph, stood beside ex-King Wangaloola in the centre of the public square.

"Snap into it, Kiki!" ordered the Cowboy Kid. Marching in front and going all round the square, the black boy hurled the coloured glass balls with which the basket he carried was filled, one after another high into the air. Loopy, with a revolver in each hand, fired at them, smashing every ball to smithereens, and as the balls burst little puffs of coloured smoke—red, blue, green and yellow—expanded and floated slowly away among the trees.

Kiki then dumped a collapsible table belonging to Loopy in front of the Cowboy

Kid, and on it he placed a number of boxes, cloths, and various articles.

After that was done he unobtrusively slipped away. Meanwhile, Loopy continued with his "magic."

He pointed at Poo-poo, the witch doctor, and pretended to throw something at him.

"Woh!" snarled the old rascal contemptuously, but when the Cowboy Kid stepped up to him, lifted off his conical plumed head-dress and drew out of it a row of sausages, a garland of artificial flowers, as well as a royal jewel—which Loopy had taken from Wangaloola and palmed when the ex-King wasn't looking—Poo-poo's face lengthened. Wangaloola scowled darkly as the Kid handed the jewel back to him.

Loopy motioned to Wangaloola to put the jewel in a box. He tied the box up in a handkerchief and gave it to Poo-poo to hold, though the frowning witch doctor would have refused if he could. Loopy then motioned him to open the box. Quickly he untied it, removed the handkerchief which covered it and opened the box. The jewel was not there!

"Now I'll show you where it is," shouted Loopy, and stepping up to the witch doctor, he seemed to take it out of Poo-poo's pocket.

Again the crowd shouted their applause, while Wangaloola began to threaten Poo-poo. It took minutes for the uproar to die down. Then the witch doctor, looking desperate, leapt upon the rostrum and pointed down at Loopy.

"All that you have seen," he told the people, "is mere trickery. I, Poo-poo, say the new white king is not king. Where is his she-cat devil? It has run away, abandoning him. What has become of his magic whip? It has gone—and the magic rope, too. I ask for his life! Let him be killed and eaten!"

Awed though they were, the people stirred restlessly and the royal guards drew nearer to the Cowboy Kid, who had no means of defending himself. Where was Kiki? Had Poo-poo killed his magnificent tame tiger? Loopy wondered?

Snatching a spear from the nearest of the guards, the witch doctor covered Loopy with it. The Kid dodged back, and then shrill above the shouting of the crowd sounded a whistle. Kiki had found the she-cat! Loopy whistled shrilly in reply.

"Poo-poo lies!" he shouted as he ducked the spear which the old witch doctor hurled at him. "The she-cat is alive."

Even as he spoke the tiger, leaping high above the heads of the startled crowd, dropped into the public square with magnificent grace and, bounding to Loopy, sat up before him.

Old Poo-poo had seized a second spear. Loopy Lane, the Cowboy Kid, pointed at him.

"Bring him down, Sheba!" he cried.

The tiger leaped forward in a mighty spring, her fangs bared, her bristles stiffened, her paws outstretched. She came at the witch doctor like a great stone

hurled from a siege catapult in olden times, and Poo-poo went down under her weight like a hoarding flattened by a hurricane. The she-cat lay across him, keeping him down.

Then Kiki came running up, exhausted and breathless.

"Kiki find she-cat tied up in forest," he panted. "Oley Poo-poo and Wangaloola do it. Mean to kill she-cat after kill you."

"Good for you, Kiki," said Loopy, his boyish face shining with delight. "Now you tell the guards that unless the man who stole my whip and lasso brings them back at once I'll have his head off before breakfast."

Kiki panted out the message. There was a stir and much murmuring among the guards. Then some of them went away, and returning a minute or two later prostrated themselves before the Cowboy Kid, giving back to him the stolen whip and the lasso.

Now King Loopy bade Kiki call Wangaloola to the dais. The slit-eyed, twenty stone, over-fed potentate, who had once ruled the Bangaloola nation, waddled up, his thick lips quivering with fear.

Loopy Lane then called off the tiger, and old Poo-poo, looking half dead with fright, leapt to his feet and ran. Not far though, for Loopy hauled him back with a throw of the lasso.

"Tell Wangaloola to take the witch doctor on his back and march with him round the square," said Loopy as he tested the stock whip with a cracking flick.

Wangaloola grovelled at the order.

"Him say death to touchey witchey doctor," explained Kiki.

"I'm the only witch doctor here who counts," said the Cowboy Kid. "Tell him to take Poo-poo by the wrists and hang him on his back, otherwise I'll set my she-cat on to him."

With eyes bulging in fright, Wangaloola seized the witch doctor by the wrists and dangled him behind, the old boy hanging on the ex-King's fat back. Then Kiki, at Loopy's order, told Wangaloola to march round the square.

Ten paces behind him came Loopy, plying his whip with gusto. He whipped off Poo-poo's conical hat, cut it to ribbons with the thong, he flayed the arch-priest's feathered robes from him, and tickled his naked flesh without really hurting him.

Only at the finish did Loopy Lane give the witch doctor one real good cut for luck. It ended the performance of "magic." The people saw Poo-poo leap about six feet in the air, and then race like a madman, almost naked, through the scattering crowd, to vanish humiliated and utterly disgraced.

The shouts of the people acclaiming King Loopy Lane of Bangaloola must have echoed from the city to the sea!

THE END.

(Another stirring yarn featuring the Cowboy Kid next Wednesday, chums.)



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.

WHAT DID THE COPPER SAY?

P.C. 49: "Shush! We're looking for a man with a monocle."

Old Lady: "Wouldn't it be better to look for him with a telescope?"

(R. Howell, Long Lane, Duxford, Cambs., has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HOW HE FIGURED IT.

Constable (to professor of mathematics): "So you saw the accident, sir? What was the number of the car that knocked this man down?"

Professor: "I am afraid I have forgotten it, but I remember that if it were multiplied by fifty the cube root of the product would be equal to the sum of the digits reversed."

(A. Tilley-Seaton, Lodge Road, Christchurch, Hants, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HARD TO FIND!

Hardup: "What are you doing, my man?"

Burglar: "I'm looking for your money."

Hardup: "Half a minute. I'll get a candle, and we'll both have a look!"

(E. Haddon, 39, Avon Street, Glynneath, Glam., has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

SLIGHTLY MUDDLED!

The young actor had at last received a speaking part. It consisted of four words: "Hark! A pistol shot!"

When the time came for him to make his dramatic entrance he was in the throes of stage fright, and, rushing on, bawled out:

"Hark! A shistol pot—nunno, a postol shoot—I mean a shostol pit!" Then: "Hang it all, did you hear that bang?"

(Miss M. Walker, 116, Lansdowne Road, Dalston, E.8, has been awarded a penknife.)

BEYOND HIM!

Hearing that a stable-lad was wanted at a certain racing establishment, one of the boys of

the village went to apply for the job. Outside the stables he met a jockey who, true to his profession, had bow legs. The jockey asked him his business.

"I've come to see the boss about a job," said the applicant.

"Right!" replied the jockey, turning and moving off. "Just walk this way."

The lad gazed in consternation at the other's legs.

"I might have known there was a catch in it somewhere!" he groaned. "I can't!"

(J. Wise, 14, Tournay Road, Fulham, S.W.6, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

DON'T BELIEVE IT!

Farmer (to small boy up apple-tree): "What are you doing up there, my lad?"

Small Boy: "Some apples fell off the tree, and I'm trying to put 'em back, sir!"

(H. Price, 6, High Lane, near Alsagers Bank, Staffs, has been awarded a penknife.)

"SORRY YOU'VE BEEN TR-R-ROUBLED!"

Binks: "A box for two, please."

Voice at other end of telephone: "We don't supply boxes for two."

Binks: "Isn't that the Jollity Theatre?"

Voice: "No, this is Graves, the undertaker."

(G. Holt, 4, Grindle Street, Deansgate, Manchester, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE SIDE'S SAVIOUR!

"Who's Tom Smiff?"

"Tom Sniff? Why, don't yer know? He's the chap what saved the Orient Footers from losing larst Sat'day."

"And did you go and see him play?"

"Play? He didn't play; he was the referee."

(M. Mees, Talbot Street, Brierley Hill, Staffs, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE BEST JOKE OF THE WEEK!



UNKIND!

Old Gent (to playful bull which has just tossed him): "You brute! You nasty brute! And I've been a strict vegetarian all my life!"

(G. N. Arnold, 13, Clissold Road, London, N.16, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

ECONOMY.

Shopkeeper: "The mouse-traps are good value for twopence, sir."

Scot: "Tuppence is too much for a moose-trap. Besides, Ah wants one that'll kill the moose afore he can get at the cheese."

(A. F. Thompson, 16, Barkstone Street, Harpurhey, Manchester, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

SHUT UP!

"John," asked the nagging wife as bed-time approached, "is everything shut up for the night?"

"That depends on you," growled Henpeck, "Everything else is."

(P. Russen, 5, Sir Thomas Whites Road, Coventry, has been awarded a penknife.)

The TEST MATCH



CHAPTER 1.

The Cubs' Day Out!

"GIVE him a cheer, boys!"
 "Hurrah!"
 "Play up, Stimson!"
 "Let's have a century, Stimmy, old man!"

Nelson Lee's Detective Academy cubs were not the only ones who cheered Walter Stimson as, bat under arm, he strode out of the pavilion at the famous ground at Trent Bridge, Nottingham. From every part of the packed enclosures a tumult of hand-clapping sounded. Stimson was a popular batsman; Stoneshire's star man. He wasn't a professional, being, in fact, a noted lawyer, but his cricket was a delight to watch.

It was a great occasion—the first Test match between England and Australia—and the game was in a very interesting state. Stimson's innings was looked forward to with

eagerness, for England's fate might rest upon his prowess.

"He'll score his century all right," said Nipper, with confidence. "Stimson's a great man in a big match. Never loses his head, plays confidently under all conditions, and he's a mighty hitter. We're going to see some classy cricket now, you fellows."

"We've seen some already, old boy," remarked Sir Montie Tregellis-West. "I regard this match as a red-letter day—I do, really. Something to distract us from the daily grind, begad!"

There were nine of the cub detectives sitting in a group—Nipper, Watson, Tregellis-West, Fullwood, Russell, Waldo—and the three senior cubs, Morrow, Browne and Stevens. Nelson Lee, their celebrated Chief, had granted them the day off, so that they

MYSTERY!

By
C. Hedingham
Gosfield



Stimson hit the ball; started running. Twenty seconds later he was dead. Nelson Lee is faced with the most baffling mystery of his career—and he solves it!

"I couldn't resist it, young 'un," replied Lee. "I thought I would at least spend the afternoon in Nottingham. I understand that there's already been some exciting cricket to-day?"

"Exciting, Chief, is hardly the word," said William Napoleon Browne. "It is no exaggeration to say that these Australian bowlers are, similar to Piccolo Pete, hotter than hot, and it is therefore gratifying to state that our batsmen have been punishing the leather sphere in no uncertain manner."

"And Stimson's just going in, sir," said Nipper. "You know what Stimson's like when he's in form."

"Dry up," put in Watson. "They're off again!"

A TENSE hush had fallen over that crowded enclosure. There had been three balls of the over delivered before the last man had been caught out.

Stimson now prepared to receive the fourth. It came down the crease like a bullet, and the famous amateur raised his bat.

Clack!

It was a fair hit, but the ball was instantly fielded and returned to the bowler. Stimson was looking rather uncertain. He dealt with the next ball in the same way, and this one went a trifle higher. An Australian slip man threw himself full length and only just missed the catch.

"Oh, well played!"

"Hard luck, Australia!"

could have a good look at this first Test-match.

Stimson had only just got to the wicket, and the Australians were resuming their normal positions in the field when a tall, upright figure in the pavilion caught Nipper's eye.

"I say, you chaps, here's the Chief!" he exclaimed eagerly. "This way, guv'nor!"

Nelson Lee smiled as he found a seat near to his young assistants.

"So you came, after all, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"Stimson gave a chance there," said Nipper. "Not like him at all! What's the matter with him?"

"Hasn't got set yet," said Watson.

Stimson was having a word with the wicket-keeper, and he half-turned towards the umpire. Then apparently he thought better of it. He grounded his bat, and was ready to face the last ball of the over.

Down it came, wickedly accurate and with devastating speed. But now it was the Walter Stimson of old who raised his bat in that familiar way.

Click!

The leather left Stimson's bat and went soaring far, far across the ground, over towards the boundary.

"Bravo!"

"Boundary!"

"Not yet—they're running!" said Nipper delightedly. "Oh, by jingo, that was a beauty!"

Suddenly the cheering crowd was hushed; a note of consternation sounded. Stimson, running hard between the wickets, was seen to stumble and sway sideways. The next second his bat went flying, and he sprawled over on the grass. His fall was extraordinary, for he appeared to make no attempt to break it or to save himself. He rolled over, a limp, loose heap of humanity.

The other batsman paused awkwardly, knowing not what to do. One of the umpires ran up, and the next second several of the Australian fieldsmen gathered round. In every part of the pavilion and the enclosure people were on their feet, staring, asking questions, looking bewildered. What had happened to Stimson? Suddenly one of the umpires raised a hand and signalled. Two ambulance men started off at once, carrying a stretcher.

"My only hat! It's serious, sir," said Nipper, with concern.

"It may be only a twisted ankle, young 'un."

"Only!" echoed Nipper, in dismay. "A twisted ankle will mean that he can't play again in this match!"

Then there was a fresh excitement. A section of the crowd, becoming impatient and unmanageable, broke through the barriers. Scores of people started streaming across the ground towards the wicket. Even those in the pavilion caught the fever, and a number went running out. Nipper glanced quickly round. All the cubs were on their feet.

"Come on!" he said briskly.

In a moment they were off, streaking across the turf. Nelson Lee had already run out, on the off-chance that his services might be useful. He was nearly stopped by an overworked police-constable.

"Can't come out here, sir!" he said impatiently. "Please get back—"

"All right, officer—I'm a medical man," interrupted Lee.

He was allowed to pass. It was true that he was a medical man—he possessed full degrees—but he seldom took advantage of

the fact. When he arrived at the wicket he found the white-clad cricketers looking anxious.

"Anything I can do?" asked Nelson Lee briskly.

"Hallo! Are you a doctor, sir?" said one of the cricketers. "You might give Stimson a look. Seems to have fainted, or something. He's in a bad way."

Nelson Lee went on his knees beside the still figure of the fallen Stimson. At the first glance the famous detective gave a slight, almost imperceptible start. He raised Stimson's eyelids, and glanced keenly at the eyes themselves.

"Yes!" he said, with a curiously grim note in his voice. "I am afraid that Mr. Stimson is in a very bad way. Better take him into the pavilion at once."

"No chance of bringing him round out here, doctor?" asked one of the Australians.

"None whatever," replied Lee definitely.

"Hanged if I can understand what caused him to collapse like that," said the other batsman. "He was running well enough a second earlier. It's not particularly hot to-day, either. Mystery to me!"

The cricketers formed themselves into a bodyguard. It was impossible to carry on the match yet. The white-clad figures moved off, surrounding the stretcher and its bearers. In the meantime, a few score of the ordinary public were swarming over the ground.

"By Jove! Look at that!" said Nipper suddenly.

He and the other cubs were there, anxious to be of some use. Nipper's keen eyes had detected a cunning move on the part of one of the spectators. In the general confusion and bustle this man had picked up Stimson's cricket bat, which, in the fall, had been flung some distance away, and which had been neglected and forgotten by the other cricketers in their concern for its owner. Nipper, always alert, had spotted the spectator in an act of deliberate theft. The man, in fact, had picked up Stimson's bat, and had hastily thrust it under his macintosh.

"Not likely!" said Nipper indignantly. "My only sainted aunt! What next will souvenir hunters be up to?"

"What bites you, brother?" asked Browne politely.

"Didn't you see?" retorted Nipper. "That fellow in the macintosh! Just picked up Stimson's bat and hid it! Thought he could get away with it in the confusion, I suppose!"

"A singularly unripe trick," remarked Browne. "Alas, that human nature could be so depraved! Let us look into this, brothers."

Stevens and Tommy Watson had heard, and they joined in the chase. The man was soon overtaken.

"Just a minute, sir," said Nipper grimly, pulling hard at his arm,

"What is it?" demanded the man, turning round. "What do you want, boy?"

His tone was half frightened, but he did his best to appear indifferent. Nipper could not see much of him owing to the fact that he was wearing motoring goggles.

"Thought you'd slip off without being seen, eh?" said Nipper. "I'll trouble you for Stimson's bat."

"I don't know what you mean!" retorted the other harshly. "I don't know what you're talking about! I've got no bat."

"I'm all in favour of collecting souvenirs—but I believe in doing it honestly, brother," said Browne. "There are several police present, and if you do not remember before it is too late that you are a gentleman, we shall be compelled to——"

"You can mind your own infernal business!" snapped the other, trying to move away.

"Well, it's got to be done," said Nipper resignedly.

He suddenly hooked his foot round the man's ankle. In a moment the fellow was tripped. Down he went, and the cubs swarmed over him. It was very short and swift. A cricket bat, after all, is not an easy thing to conceal. It fell out from the folds of the macintosh and thudded to the turf.

"You young rascals! How dare you?" panted the man furiously. "That is my bat! You have made a mistake——"

"Not likely!" interrupted Nipper. "I saw you pick it up—and I saw you put it under your macintosh. You can't do these sort of things at Trent Bridge."

"Now, then, what's the trouble here?" asked a policeman, hurrying up. "What are you boys doing on the ground?"

"It's all right, officer—we're Mr. Nelson Lee's cubs," said Nipper briskly. "We just spotted this man trying to take Stimson's bat—as a souvenir. We thought we'd better rescue it."

"Oh, so that's the game, is it?" said the constable. "Look here, sir, that's a bit too bad, you know!"

"All right—all right!" said the stranger hastily.

He turned on his heel and hurried away. Nipper looked after him in vague wonder. The man had gone as pale as a sheet. His former anger and his present agitation seemed too pronounced for such an apparently trivial offence. However, Nipper did not take much notice of the incident, and he dismissed the matter at once.

He and the other cubs hurried into the pavilion, and owing to the fact that they were carrying Stimson's bat, and also the fact that there was still a good deal of confusion, they were not hindered on their way to the dressing-room where the unfortunate cricketer was being tended.

They arrived just as a doctor was making a swift examination. Nelson Lee had already come to his own conclusions; but a prominent Nottingham doctor, who was in

the pavilion, had proffered his aid. This medical man, now looking grave and startled, turned to the crowd of cricketers and officials who had gathered.

"I am sorry, gentlemen, but I can do nothing," he said quietly. "Walter Stimson is dead!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Suspect!

FOR a few moments there was silence. Everybody seemed stunned by the tragedy. Then:

"Hadn't we better abandon the match?" suggested one of the Australians.

"We can't do that," put in an official quickly. "Tens of thousands of people have paid to see this match. And I am sure that Stimson himself, if he had his choice, would not have desired such an abandonment. The sooner we carry on, the better."

"Where's Lacey?" asked the England captain, looking round.

Lacey, another Stoneshire man, was quickly forthcoming. He was quite a youngster—a fair-haired, tall, pleasant-looking young fellow. He was twelfth man, and in these extraordinary circumstances he was called upon to bat, the Australians having given their consent.

"Then—then I'm wanted, after all?" asked Harry Lacey nervously. "I didn't think I was going to get a chance——"

"Never mind, Lacey, you've got your chance—and I expect you regret it more than any of us, considering the circumstances," said the captain. "Now, gentlemen, we'd better get out on to the field, or the crowd will be getting restive. And we don't want the truth of this unfortunate affair to leak out until the close of play at the earliest."

"Is—is Stimson very bad, then?" asked Lacey uncertainly.

"Don't you know, man?" said one of the others.

"Know what? I've only just come in," said Lacey.

"Stimson is dead," said the captain quietly.

"Dead?" panted Lacey, starting back, horrified. "Stimson dead! Oh, but—but——"

He paused, breathing hard.

"Don't take it too badly, sonny," said J. H. T. Meadows, the England captain, placing a hand on Lacey's shoulder. "Come along! The sooner you get out into the open air, the better. And remember, you're going in for England. I needn't say any more, need I?"

Lacey pulled himself together.

"I'll give the best that's in me!" he vowed.

"I don't ask anything more," said the captain quietly.

THE cubs went back into the pavilion—all except Nipper, who was allowed to remain with Nelson Lee. The great crowds were excited and tense, and when Harry Lacey came out in Stimson's place an encouraging cheer greeted him.

But Lacey, who had played such brilliant cricket for Stoneshire this season—his batting average was next best to Stimson's—now seemed to be in a daze. A groan of anguish went up from the packed enclosures when Lacey's wicket was shattered by the first ball which was sent to him. Amid a dead silence he went back to the pavilion. England's chances of winning this first Test-match were dwindling. First Stimson—now Lacey.

"I'm sorry—I'm devilish sorry," muttered Lacey, when he faced the captain.

"I am disappointed Lacey, but I can't say that I'm altogether surprised," said J. H. T. Meadows. "Perhaps we ought not to have gone on. This is a dreadful business."

He went back with Lacey into the dressing-room, where Stimson's body lay. There were now only one or two officials there in addition to Nelson Lee, Nipper and Dr. Stanhope.

"Overstrain, without a doubt," Dr. Stanhope was saying. "Weak heart, I dare say; must have been coming on for months. Pity he didn't have himself examined at the beginning of the season."

Nelson Lee, who had been making a re-examination of the body, now glanced round.

"I disagree with you, doctor," he said quietly. "This man did not die from overstrain."

"Indeed?" said Dr. Stanhope, who was a grave, dignified, elderly practitioner. "May I inquire, sir, what qualifications you have for making that statement?"

"This gentleman is Mr. Nelson Lee, the detective," explained one of the officials.

"Oh, really?" said Dr. Stanhope. "I am very pleased to know you, Mr. Lee; at the same time, I cannot quite—"

"This matter is so serious, Dr. Stanhope, that I shall be compelled to telephone at once for the police," said Nelson Lee grimly. "Not the ordinary constables who are on duty in the grounds—but the expert police detectives. Stimson died from acute poisoning!"

"Poisoning!" gasped Lacey, startled.

"One moment—one moment!" said Dr. Stanhope. "Really, Mr. Lee, I cannot possibly agree with you. There are no indications whatever of poisoning."

"There you are wrong, doctor," said Nelson Lee. "This is no ordinary case of poisoning, I will grant you. But I can claim, without boasting, to be something of an expert in poisons. Stimson died from an injection of a deadly poison which is sometimes used by certain South American Indian tribes for poisoning their darts and arrows."

"Good Heavens!" said the doctor, in amazement.

"This is a very serious thing you are

suggesting, Mr. Lee," said one of the officials, in a worried voice. "Do you mean that Stimson was poisoned just prior to going out for his innings?"

"That would have been impossible," replied Nelson Lee. "He was poisoned, roughly, about twenty seconds before he died."

"That's impossible, too," said Meadows. "How could he have been poisoned out there—on the field?"

"That I cannot tell you—I only know it to be a fact," replied Lee. "This poison is one of the most virulent known, and its effect is almost instantaneous. A needle prick is sufficient to cause death—and death, too, within twenty seconds."

"This is a ghastly mystery," said the captain. "Poisoned out there—on the field. I have never heard of anything more horrible—more baffling!"

"Couldn't it have been an accident, Mr. Lee?" asked somebody.

"Such a thing is possible, of course, although I cannot quite resign myself to the assumption that Stimson was carrying a poisoned needle on him—unless he was contemplating suicide," replied Nelson Lee. "And that, gentlemen, I think you will agree, is exceedingly unlikely."

"Then this leads to a terrible conclusion," said one of the officials, looking at Lee hard. "Come, sir, let us have the truth! Do you mean that Stimson was murdered?"

"It is my opinion that he was murdered," said Lee quietly. "It is for that reason that the police must be immediately informed."

AN inspector of police was on the scene within five minutes, and he was soon taking down all the details in his notebook.

"Of course, gentlemen, there'll have to be a post-mortem," he said. "Now then, I'd like to know who was last with Mr. Stimson before he left the pavilion?"

"I think Lacey was," said J. H. T. Meadows. "Weren't you talking with Stimson, Lacey?"

The young Stoneshire cricketer started.

"I? Why, yes, I—I think I was," he admitted, looking flustered.

"You couldn't tell us anything about this unfortunate business, I suppose, sir?" asked the inspector.

"What can I tell you?" retorted Lacey.

"This gentleman says that you were with Mr. Stimson last—"

"But that's nothing! You're not saying that I killed him, are you?" demanded Lacey frantically.

"Of course not, sir—and there's no need to get so excited," replied the inspector. "Only if you know anything—"

"I don't—I don't!" panted Harry Lacey.

"You're acting very strangely, my boy," said the captain quietly. "This doesn't look any too well for you—considering that you and Stimson quarrelled this morning."

"Oh, they quarrelled, did they?" asked the inspector sharply.

Nipper's foot hooked out. The man tripped over it; and a cricket bat fell from inside his macintosh.



"It wasn't much—we only had a few words," muttered Lacey.

"I think you were jealous because Stimson was selected instead of yourself, eh?" asked one of the officials. "You'd set your heart on playing for England, hadn't you?"

"And I got my chance to-day—owing to Stimson's death," replied Harry Lacey bitterly. "And look what I've made of it! Out for a duck!"

The inspector did not seem to hear his last words.

"You got your chance owing to Stimson's death!" he repeated. "H'm! I shall have to ask you a few questions soon, sir, if you'll

be good enough to hold yourself in readiness."

"But I know nothing—absolutely nothing!" protested Lacey indignantly.

He was appalled at the veiled accusation in the inspector's tone. Fortunately, a stranger came in just then, and created a slight diversion; so Lacey was given a respite.

The newcomer was an immaculately-attired, middle-aged man, and he was looking very anxious and worried.

"I have been permitted to come here, gentlemen," he said quickly. "I am told that Mr. Stimson is dead."

"That is unfortunately true," said Dr. Stanhope, indicating the still figure.

"I am shocked beyond measure," said the newcomer. "My name is Roper—Sir James Roper. Stimson was my lawyer, and to hear of his sudden death in this fashion is grievous. Heart failure, I suppose? Or sun-stroke?"

"Neither, Sir James," replied Nelson Lee. "Stimson was poisoned—probably murdered."

Sir James looked bewildered rather than shocked.

"Murdered?" he repeated. "I cannot think that you would joke at such a moment as this, but surely this is beyond all reason? Surely it is an outrageous suggestion?"

"I would like to see more definite proof myself," said Dr. Stanhope. "I do not pretend to be an expert on little-known poisons, such as Mr. Lee has mentioned, but as a medical man I see nothing whatever in Stimson's condition to indicate poison."

"Then, of course, Mr. Lee must be mistaken," said Sir James impatiently. "Who is there to murder Stimson? One of the finest men I ever knew. As straight as a die, and without an enemy in the world, as far as I know."

He paused rather suddenly, a startled look coming into his eyes.

"Well?" asked Lee.

"I was thinking," said Sir James, with a start. "I saw Stimson yesterday on business—and I promised him that I would be here to see his innings. I was just recalling something that he said to me yesterday. He was troubled, I believed, about the attitude of one of his colleagues."

"How do you mean—troubled?" asked the inspector.

"Well, Stimson was such a good fellow that he hated the idea of being at logger-heads with anybody," replied Sir James. "I don't know this colleague's name, or anything about him, for that matter, but Stimson was telling me that he had had a disagreement. Jealousy, I think, about the Test-match. Some youngster who badly wanted to play for England, and who had been ousted by Stimson. I gathered that Stimson was rather afraid that this youngster might do him some harm!"

It was a dramatic situation. Sir James spoke frankly—not knowing, of course, that Lacey, of Stoneshire, was the very man to whom Stimson had been referring; that Lacey was in the very room, listening, and understanding the underlying significance of this unconscious testimony.

CHAPTER 3.

Nelson Lee Demonstrates!

HARRY LACEY, white as a sheet, strode forward.

"Let's have this thing straight!" he said, trying to steady his voice. "If you think I killed Stimson, why don't

you say so? But it's a lie—a lie! I don't know anything about it!"

Sir James recoiled.

"Good gracious! Are you talking to me, young man?" he asked, startled.

"I'm talking to everybody—to Inspector Drake more than the rest of you," replied Lacey. "Do you think I'd murder Stimson just because we had a bit of a quarrel?"

"I think nothing at the moment," said the inspector as he closed his pocket-book. "I shall have to have a full statement from you later, Mr. Lacey. For the present, we'd better get to the bottom of this poisoning suggestion. There seems to be a difference of opinion."

"Yes, the sooner we can establish something definite, the better," said one of the officials. "You're not satisfied about this, are you, Dr. Stanhope?"

"Not entirely," replied the practitioner cautiously.

"I think we can settle the matter, gentlemen," said Nelson Lee. "Dr. Stanhope, perhaps you will help me to make an examination of the body? Let it be done now. If Stimson was killed in the way I have suggested, there will be a small puncture somewhere visible on his body. The prick of a needle-point. It ought not to be difficult to find, since the skin surrounding the needle-prick will be slightly discoloured."

"Oh, you haven't found this needle-prick, then?" asked the doctor, with some asperity.

"Not yet."

"Then how did you form your theory regarding this poison?"

"Because of the discolouration of the temples and the unusual condition of the eyes," replied Nelson Lee.

They went over to the body, and while the others talked in low tones, Nelson Lee and Dr. Stanhope made their careful examination. The elderly doctor was as unconvinced as ever; indeed, his very manner indicated that he was contemptuous of the whole thing. He was certain that Nelson Lee was mistaken. Privately he regarded the crime investigator as an interfering busybody.

"Ah!" came a sudden exclamation from Nelson Lee.

"What have you found?" asked the doctor quickly.

"What do you make of this?" said Lee, his tone even and calm. "Perhaps you can suggest a logical explanation of this wound?"

The doctor bent low over the body. Nelson Lee had turned the dead man's right palm face upwards. Stimson's batting gloves had been removed, and there, on the palm, plainly visible, was a small mark. In the very centre of it there was a tiny puncture, and all round the skin was discoloured. It had turned greenish, merging to blue, with a strange streaky effect.

"Upon my soul!" muttered Dr. Stanhope, amazed. "This is undoubtedly significant. Mr. Lee, I believe I owe you an apology."

"I believe you do," said Lee gravely.

"This is no ordinary puncture, such as might have been made by a thorn or a splinter, continued the doctor. "Indeed, I do not hesitate to say that there are indications here of virulent poisoning. But what an extraordinary place! How could it have happened? You say that this poison acts at once?"

"Within twenty seconds," replied Lee.

"At that rate, Stimson must have received the injection actually while he was batting!" said the captain, staring. "For twenty seconds before he collapsed, he made that boundary hit."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"The poison was injected, then, actually while he made that hit," he replied. "And since the puncture is in his right palm, and since it follows that he was holding his bat at the precise second, it might be a good move on our part to give Stimson's bat a very thorough examination."

Everybody was freshly startled—Nipper especially.

"By Jingo!" he ejaculated abruptly.

His tone was so strange that Lee looked at him sharply.

"Well?" he asked.

"Something's just occurred to me, guv'nor," said Nipper. "It didn't strike me as significant at the time—but now I'm suspicious. One of the spectators attempted to steal Stimson's bat by putting it under his macintosh, and I thought he was just an ordinary souvenir hunter."

Nipper described the incident fully.

"Very suggestive indeed," said Nelson Lee grimly. "And this man was enveloped in a macintosh, and wore goggles? Can you remember the rest of his dress?"

"I only know that he had leggings on, sir—brown leggings with black shoes, which struck me as being a bit out of place," said Nipper. "I thought it rummy, at the time, that he should turn on us so furiously."

"He wanted that bat badly—not because he was a souvenir hunter, but because he must have known something about it," said Lee. "Well done, young 'un! You used your eyes to good advantage. Now, where is that bat?"

"In here, guv'nor—up in the corner," said Nipper. "We brought it in, and—Hullo! It's gone!"

"Gone!" went up a shout.

The others had been listening intently—fascinatedly—to this conversation between Nelson Lee and Nipper. Not five minutes ago Nelson Lee had been regarded as something of a busybody. Now everybody was hanging on his words—knowing full well that here was a master expert who knew what he was about.

Nipper ran across to the corner where he had placed Stimson's bat. Naturally, neither he nor the other cubs had given that bat a thought. It was only now that it assumed such importance.

"I don't think it is very far off," said Nelson Lee.

He strode across the room, and the others moved aside. Lee made straight for the open window and leaned out. When he looked back, there was a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"Just run round, Nipper, and pick the bat up," he said. "It's below this window, lying in the long grass."

"How did you know—" began Nipper.

He said no more, warned by a quick glance from his chief.

He jumped out of the window, alighted easily, and then handed the bat up. It had been half hidden in the grass.

"This is extraordinary," said the inspector, looking worried. "Who could have dropped the bat out there? And why?"

"It must have been somebody in this room," replied one of the ground officials sharply. "And that somebody must have know the significance of this investigation. He was afraid of the bat being examined."

"It certainly looks like it," said Sir James Roper, glancing curiously at young Lacey.

Fortunately Lacey did not see this glance. He was staring at Nelson Lee, who was handling the bat with great care. All the men, in fact, gathered round with growing interest.

"That's Stimson's bat right enough," said J. H. T. Meadows. "I'd know it anywhere. It was a favourite of his, and—Wait a minute, though!" he added, in a changed voice. "May I look at it?"

"Be careful not to hold the handle," said Lee warningly.

The England captain took the bat, and a whistle escaped him.

"This bat is different!" he declared. "It's practically identical with Stimson's own bat, but it's a fake!"

"It is a fake in a way you little suspect," said Lee.

"I remember Stimson showing me a little blemish, and I laughed at him for being worried," continued Meadows. "That blemish isn't here. In every other respect the bat is the same—identical markings—same manufacture, and everything. This is getting more puzzling than ever."

"Stimson's real bat will be found somewhere on these premises, I dare say," said Nelson Lee. "But we can search for it later. What I would like, at the moment, is a saw."

"A saw?" repeated one of the officials, staring.

"An ordinary wood saw."

"I believe there's one on the premises somewhere," said the official. "I'll see."

He hurried away, and Lee found himself the centre of attention again. He was looking at the bat handle through a magnifying lens. Stimson had never used a rubber grip, and the handle was corded just as it had come from the makers.

"Look at this, doctor," said Lee quietly.

Dr. Stanhope took the magnifying lens, and stared.

(Continued on page 24.)



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To NELSON LEE
READERS

The Test Match Mystery!

(Continued from page 21.)

"I can see nothing," he said, after a moment.

"A tiny hole, no larger than a pinhole," said Lee. "It is quite invisible without the aid of a lens. Certainly, its presence could never be suspected unless we were definitely looking for it."

"Upon my soul! You're right," said the doctor. "But what does this mean? What are you implying, Mr. Lee?"

"As soon as I saw that puncture on the dead man's hand I formed a theory. That theory was enormously strengthened when I heard about the so-called souvenir hunter," replied the great detective. "And when we discovered that the bat had been surreptitiously dropped out of this window—with the obvious intention of removing it from the premises—the theory became a certainty. I'll show you."

The official came back with the saw, and Nelson Lee took it. Then, to the astonishment of everybody, he placed the bat on the table, and deliberately commenced to saw it in half.

CHAPTER 4.

The Secret of the Cricket Bat!

THERE was an absolute silence except for the steady rasp of the saw, and, occasionally, a tumult of applause from outside. While this dramatic little scene was taking place in the dressing-room the great game was proceeding, and the cheers indicated that England was making a strong recovery.

"I think that will do," said Lee, putting the saw aside.

He had made a clean cut through the base of the bat. Now, watched even more intently by the others, he drove a wooden wedge into the saw cut and forced the bat in halves. The upper part of the bat splintered and parted.

"I did not want to disturb the delicate mechanism," commented Lee grimly.

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated J. H. T. Meadows, aghast.

He and the others could hardly believe the evidence of their eyes. The interior of the bat was hollow! But the hollow was only small. At the bottom, where the bat was thickest, there was a metal plate, with a hinged ratchet; and extending right up the bat there was a gleaming spiral spring.

"Devilish—absolutely devilish!" muttered Sir James Roper.

"But even now I cannot understand," said Dr. Stanhope. "What of the handle? That is still intact."

"We will, of course, examine the handle later," replied Lee. "But it is quite obvious that this spring operates a slender rod up the handle—that rod connecting with a poisoned needle. Normally, this needle is

hidden and invisible. Let me explain more fully."

He held up the bat and pointed to the metal plate.

"This is exactly opposite the spot where a batsman normally makes a full drive," he said. "The contact of the ball is terrific in such a hit, and quite sufficient to bend the wood. Instantly, the catch is released, the spring operates, and the needle is shot through its tiny hole. As it is obvious that the batsman's hand is tightly gripping the handle at such a second, the needle must plunge into a fleshy spot. I have seen a few diabolical murder devices in my time, but this is certainly one of the cleverest and most ingenious that has come my way."

"Why wasn't Stimson killed at his first hit?" asked Sir James.

"Because it was necessary for him to score a full drive with the true face of the bat before the mechanism operated," replied Nelson Lee. "It is conceivable that he might have lasted several overs before the fatality took place."

"I see—I see," muttered Sir James. "But surely the murderer must be a madman? Why go to all this trouble?"

"For the simple reason that he wanted to commit his crime in a sensational way—with the additional advantage of safety," replied Nelson Lee. "If a man such as Stimson collapses ordinarily there is bound to be suspicion and inquiry—and any inquiry might lead to unsavoury disclosures. But if he collapses on the field, under a hot sun, while running hard, it is totally different. It is quite likely to be assumed that he died from overstrain."

Dr Stanhope had the grace to make a wry face.

"That's one against me, Mr. Lee," he admitted. "I was fooled—and I don't mind confessing that I should have had no hesitation in giving a certificate."

"Exactly," nodded Lee. "That's what the murderer was after. Owing to the quick-wittedness of my cubs, his plans went wrong. He thought he could easily smuggle this bat off the premises in the confusion. And once this evidence is destroyed, what case could be proved?"

"None whatever," agreed the doctor. "I rather think that the murderer failed to reckon, also, upon your presence, Mr. Lee."

"I was about to say the same thing," said Sir James Roper. "Upon my word! What an extraordinary lucky chance it was, Mr. Lee, that you were here! Only a brilliant poison expert could have detected this crime."

The police inspector coughed.

"Well, gentlemen, we've got to get somewhere," he said grimly. "Murder's been done, and we've got to find the murderer. I'd like to know who had the opportunity of changing Mr. Stimson's bat?"

"I had!" said Lacey bitterly. "Why can't you speak out plainly? You know that I was with Stimson last. Oh, yes! I could easily have changed that bat just before he

went out. But the fact remains that I didn't."

The inspector gave him a queer look.

"I should advise you, sir, to say as little as possible," he said significantly. "If you don't, you might find yourself in an awkward position."

Harry Lacey shrugged.

"It seems that I'm in an awkward position already," he retorted. "I don't care what I say—and I don't care what you take down. I'm more sorry than I can express that I treated Stimson so shabbily; but I didn't kill him."

One of the England players was looking at Lacey with open suspicion.

"I think it's my duty to tell you, inspector, that I heard Lacey having a row with Stimson not ten minutes before the tragedy," he said. "I was going down the passage, and this dressing-room door was open. I couldn't help hearing them."

"Was Mr. Lacey talking in a threatening way?" asked the inspector.

"I don't know—I didn't stop to hear what they were saying," replied the cricketer. "I only know that they were having a row. And, mind you, I already knew that they had been on bad terms."

"You don't think I killed him, do you, Whittaker?" asked Lacey bluntly.

Whittaker looked uncomfortable.

"I don't want to believe it, Lacey, but I can't help remembering your attitude," he said. "Then, too, there's your trade."

"His trade?" asked the inspector sharply. "What is his trade?"

"He works in a surgical instrument factory," replied Whittaker. "If I'm wrong about my suspicions, Lacey, I'll apologise to you—and no man will be more glad to give an apology. But, hang it, it's up to me to do my duty."

"Oh!" said the inspector, making some notes. "So you work in a surgical instrument factory, Mr. Lacey?"

"What has my work got to do with this affair?" demanded the young amateur.

"We won't discuss that now," said Inspector Drake. "But I'm afraid, sir, that I shall have to ask you to come with me to the police station."

"Do you mean that I'm arrested?" burst out Lacey.

"If you like to put it that way—yes," retorted the inspector. "I do hope, sir, that you'll be sensible about this, and come quietly."

Dr. Stanhope and Sir James Roper exchanged glances; Nipper looked hard at Nelson Lee. This disclosure was, indeed, important. A man whose daily task it was to assist in the manufacture of delicate steel instruments could very easily have contrived that diabolical device within the cricket bat.

"Just a minute, Lacey," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "It's all right, inspector—I shan't keep him long."

The detective had been closely examining the mechanism in the bat. Now he placed

the bat aside, and went with Lacey to the window.

"Let me look at your hands," said Lee, in a low voice.

"My hands? What for?"

"Never mind what for—let me look at them."

Lacey held them out, and Lee, after a quick, comprehensive glance, nodded.

"All right," he said. "That'll do."

"But I don't understand, Mr. Lee."

"I don't suppose you do—but you'll probably understand later," replied Nelson Lee. "Now, Lacey, the best thing you can do is to accompany the inspector quietly to the station. I can give you my assurance that you will not be there long."

"You mean that you believe in me, Mr. Lee?" asked Lacey eagerly. "You don't think I did this awful thing, do you?"

"I don't—now," replied Nelson Lee quietly. "In fact, I am absolutely convinced of your innocence—and I will prove it."

Five minutes later Harry Lacey had been taken away. The police had claimed the cricket bat, for it would be required in evidence. It was certain, too, that a Home Office pathologist would be sent down to make a thorough post mortem examination of Stimson's remains. But it was Nelson Lee who had put all this machinery into motion.

"Will you continue to work on this case, Mr. Lee?" asked Dr. Stanhope.

"I don't think that my services are required any longer," replied Lee. "The Home Office experts will merely substantiate my own conclusions, and I do not see how I can be of any assistance to them. As far as I am concerned, the case is over."

OUTSIDE, Nelson Lee was brisk and alert. He paid no attention to the game. Nipper, too, had lost his interest in cricket.

"You didn't mean that, guv'nor, did you?" he asked. "You haven't dropped out of the case?"

"Eh? Of course not," replied Lee. "But it is not my policy to tell my business to anybody and everybody, Nipper. Young Lacey is in a tight corner, and we're going to help him. Hurry round to the front of the pavilion and bring the other boys to me as quickly as possible."

"O.K., Chief," said Nipper, dashing off.

Browne and Stevens and Watson and the others were soon with Nelson Lee, and they were all looking eager. Nipper, in these brief minutes, had "put them wise" to how the position stood.

"If Lacey didn't do it, sir, who did?" asked Watson.

"That is what we have got to find out, young 'un," replied Nelson Lee. "For example, what of the man in the mackintosh and leggings? If Lacey is guilty, that man must have been an accomplice. And in my opinion there was no accomplice in this affair."



Nelson Lee fished about in the pond with the stick and brought to light a muddy length of material which proved to be a macintosh

"You mean that the man in the macintosh was the murderer, Chief?" asked Browne.

"Yes, I believe he was the murderer," replied Leo. "Now, boys, I want you to think carefully. Did any of you notice what that man did after you had taken the bat away from him?"

"Ah, here we can be of some use," said Browne smoothly. "It is seldom, Chief, that

I miss anything. My eyes, as you may know, are never at rest."

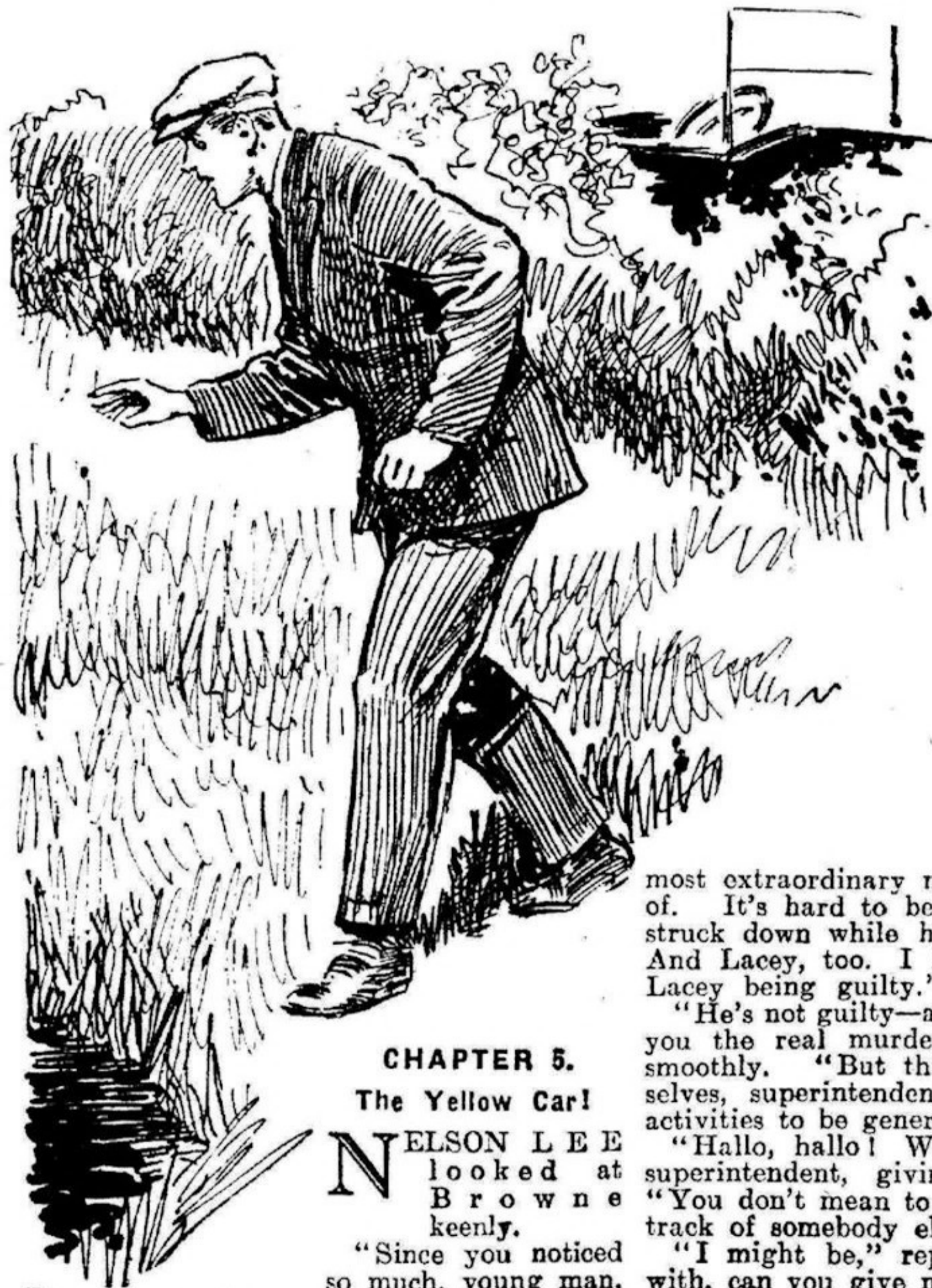
"I have also noticed that your tongue is similarly tireless," observed Lee dryly.

"With regard to this unripe merchant in the macintosh," continued Browne. "After we had forcibly removed the cricket bat, he legged it with considerable speed towards the car park."

"Oh!" said Lee. "Did you notice if he took any particular car?"

"To the best of my recollection, Chief, our friend leapt into a yellow sports two-seater," replied Browne. "It was his hasty departure, in fact, which attracted my attention."

"Well done, Browne," said Lee approvingly. "It's not much of a clue, but we have at least some line to work upon. That man was the murderer of Walter Stimson—and he left this enclosure in a yellow sports two-seater."



CHAPTER 5.

The Yellow Car!

NELSON LEE looked at Browne keenly.

"Since you noticed so much, young man, perhaps you noticed something else," he said. "Did this stranger drive off smoothly, or otherwise?"

"Decidedly otherwise," replied Browne. "Not only did he race the engine with positive cruelty, but he changed gear with atrocious lack of skill."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"I thought so," he said musingly. "And this yellow sports car, I take it, was standing

in such a position that it could quickly reach the exit? There were no other cars in front of it?"

"That's right, sir," said Stevens. "I noticed it, too."

"But where are we?" asked Nipper. "We can't get any further, gov'nor. The man might be a hundred miles away by now."

"He might be—but I don't think he is," replied Nelson Lee. "Come, we must be moving. But wait a moment! I shall only need Nipper with me. You others can stay here and continue to watch the match up till close of play."

"We would far rather assist you in this investigation, Chief," said Browne.

"I don't doubt it; but, really, there is nothing that you could do," replied Lee. "Even Nipper can stay behind if he desires."

Nipper did not desire. He went to the car park with Nelson Lee, and within a few minutes they were in the great detective's Rolls-Royce Special. They drove at once to the big central police-station, and Nelson Lee sought an interview with the superintendent.

"A bad business, Mr. Lee," said the superintendent as he shook hands. "The

most extraordinary murder I've ever heard of. It's hard to believe that Stimson was struck down while he was actually batting. And Lacey, too. I hate to think of young Lacey being guilty."

"He's not guilty—and before long I'll hand you the real murderer," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "But this is just between ourselves, superintendent. I don't want my activities to be generally known."

"Hallo, hallo! What's this?" asked the superintendent, giving Lee a close look. "You don't mean to say that you're on the track of somebody else already, do you?"

"I might be," replied Lee. "To begin with, can you give me any information concerning a yellow sports car which was stolen from the Trent Bridge car park this afternoon?"

Nipper pricked up his ears.

"Stolen?" repeated the superintendent. "How do you know it was stolen?"

"I don't know—but I have every reason to believe that the murderer fled hurriedly from the ground, and that he was in such a panic to get away that he jumped into the first

available car," replied Nelson Lee. "You see, he had not reckoned upon the activities of my cubs. They upset his plans completely—and, incidentally, precipitated him into taking a foolish action. It is fortunate for us that ninety-nine criminals out of a hundred do foolish things."

"You're right there," agreed the other feelingly. "Well, I'll go and inquire about that yellow car."

When he returned he shook his head.

"No report has come in," he said. "However, if you want us to look out for a yellow car——" He broke off as the telephone rang. He went to the instrument, and a moment later he gave Nelson Lee a startled look. "Talk of the devil!" he ejaculated. "Why, Mr. Lee, here's the very car!"

"That's fortunate," said Lee smoothly.

"A rural constable has reported that he has found a two-seater sports car, painted yellow, abandoned in a little lane near the village of Stanway," said the superintendent. "That's not more than six miles from here."

"Has the car been shifted?" asked Lee quickly.

"Not yet; these local police are asking for instructions."

"Splendid! Do you mind if I go out at once to Stanway?" asked Lee. "I'll take a police officer with me, if you like. I'd be very much obliged for the privilege of examining that car before it is moved."

They started off within five minutes, Lee and Nipper taking Inspector Drake with them. Stanway was not more than six miles distant, and the rural lane was reached in under fifteen minutes. The car proved to be one of a well-known make, and it was standing in the lane with a constable beside it.

"Found it here as I came round to my beat, sir," said the constable, after he had saluted the inspector. "There was nobody in it, so I thought I'd better telephone for instructions. Registration book says that it belongs to a Mr. William Jones, of Nottingham."

"I don't think we'll bother with Mr. William Jones," said Nelson Lee. "That gentleman is probably watching the Test-match with placid serenity, unaware of his loss. Not that he will be without his car for long."

Lee was already inspecting the car closely. "Let's know the details about this," said Inspector Drake. "You say you found the car abandoned?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw nobody at all?"

"Nobody, sir."

"Have you made any inquiries?"

"I've spoken to a postman and a lad with a milk cart, and they both tell me that the car was standing like this when they passed it," replied the constable. "They hadn't seen anybody, either?"

"Was any other car seen?" put in Nelson Lee abruptly.

"Not that I know of, sir."

"How far away is the village?"

"About half a mile, sir—just round the bend."

"There's a garage there?"

"Yes, sir."

"We'll make a few inquiries at the garage later," said Lee crisply. "Now, constable, I want to know if you've been inside this car? Or do you know if anybody else has been inside it?"

"Not while I've been here, sir," replied the rural policeman. "All I did when I found it was to look in the door pocket and take out the registration book. And when nobody came along I thought I'd best send for instructions."

"Then you left the car?" asked the inspector.

"No, sir," replied the constable promptly. "Young Tom Rogers, of the Elm Farm, came by on his bike, and I gave him a message to take to the 'phone."

Nelson Lee was pleased with the constable's report. This car, then, it might reasonably be presumed, had not been entered by anybody except the murderer since it left the cricket enclosure.

Nipper was rather intrigued. Why was Lee so keen? What did he hope to find? He watched his famous "guv'nor" with intense interest. Lee was sprawling half through the near-side door, closely inspecting the mat, the clutch and brake pedals, and the entire floor of the car.

"I wonder?" murmured the detective. "Nipper, when we meet Mr. William Jones, remind me to ask him if he wears rubber heels."

"Rubber heels, guv'nor?"

"I don't think he does—and if not, we're in luck's way," continued Lee. "Yes, young 'un, this little scrap may help us enormously."

He held, between his thumb and finger, a triangular fragment of grey-black rubber. It was a corner piece from a whole rubber heel—the type of heel which is fixed by brads, and not revolving.

"Look at this, Nipper," murmured Lee, as they bent over the floor-boards, Nipper at the driver's door. "You see this clutch-pedal? The edge is considerably worn, and so sharp that anybody unaccustomed to driving the car might well cut his shoe. This scrap of rubber heel was just below this pedal."

"By jingo, that's important, sir," said Nipper eagerly. "It's ten to one against the car's real owner jaggng a bit out of his heel like that."

Lee carefully placed the fragment in a little metal box, and stowed it away. He was glad that Inspector Drake was busily making notes with the constable. Drake was apt to regard Lee's activities with an indulgent eye. Personally, he saw no need for all this story-book inch-by-inch investigation.

"Finished, sir?" he asked, with a grin, as Nelson Lee assumed the upright.

"As a matter of fact, inspector, I've only just commenced," replied Lee crisply.

"Nipper, be good enough to get this little thing ready."

He pulled a folding camera from his pocket. It was so small that Inspector Drake grinned more widely than ever. He didn't know that that camera had been specially made to Lee's orders, and that it had cost no less than fifty-five pounds. In appearance, it looked worth about twelve hand sixpence.

Lee's next move was to blow some fine dust on to the steering-wheel, steering-column, and driver's door. He used a little instrument with a rubber bulb, not unlike a miniature scent-spray.

"What's his game, sir?" murmured the constable, staring.

"Leave him alone—he enjoys this sort of thing," chuckled the inspector.

Lee blew gently on the powdered parts, and all the dust disappeared except in well-defined places. These places were now revealed as clear-cut finger-prints. The inspector was so interested that he came nearer, and bent forward.

"Well, I'll be bothered!" he ejaculated. "They're fingerprints!"

"What did you expect them to be—foot-prints?" grinned Nipper.

Nelson Lee took the camera, made a final adjustment, and then he clicked the shutter. Altogether, he took eight exposures, and he was looking well satisfied when he refolded the camera and slipped it back into his pocket.

"Thanks very much, inspector, I think we've finished here now," he said pleasantly.

NELSON LEE and Nipper left the inspector and drove into the village of Stanway—a mere hamlet. They soon located the one rural garage, with its prominent petrol-pumps on the roadside.

"Have you seen anything of a gentleman wearing a macintosh and gaiters about here this afternoon?" asked Lee of the proprietor.

"No, sir. The only stranger who's been here was a tallish, elderly, smartly-dressed gentleman. He told me he wanted to get into Nottingham as quickly as possible—said he had to catch the London train. I understood his car broke down somewhere up the main road, and he left it with the chauffeur."

"Oh!" remarked Nelson Lee.

"He offered me a quid to take him to the station, so I brought out the old Ford and drove him down in that. I suppose that wouldn't be the man you were enquiring about, sir?"

"I hardly think so," replied the detective. "However, thanks very much for your information."

After they had driven off, Nipper gave Lee a curious look.

"Do you think that the man who hired the car is the one we're after, guv'nor?" he asked.

"I don't know—but it's quite likely," replied Lee. "He was a man who wanted to get into Nottingham as quickly as possible—to catch the London train. Our man was agitated by you cubs wrenching that bat away from him; it completely upset his carefully-thought-out plan. In a panic, he was idiotic enough to jump into the first car he saw—believing, probably, that he was being pursued."

"Guilty conscience," nodded Nipper.

"Exactly," agreed Lee. "Well, after he had got out of Nottingham, he recovered his balance, and knew what a fool he had been. He had to get back. What did he do? He abandoned the car near enough to a village, so that he could quickly walk back, and he hired that fellow's Ford, after spinning a plausible yarn."

"But the man in the yellow car was wearing a macintosh and gaiters—and the man who hired the Ford wasn't," pointed out Nipper.

"A macintosh and gaiters, Nipper, form a really excellent disguise," explained Lee. "It was only the work of a moment for our unknown friend to remove those outer garments—including the motoring goggles." The famous detective looked thoughtful for a moment, and then went on: "I think we'll run back to the spot where the yellow car was abandoned, young 'un."

They returned to find that Inspector Drake and the constable and the yellow car had gone. Lee reversed the Rolls-Royce Special—a ticklish job, in that narrow lane—and then he drove at a snail's pace back towards the main road, keenly watching the hedges and banks on either side.

Twenty yards from the junction, he brought the car to a standstill. Leaping out, he broke through the hedge, and stood on the brink of a deep ditch, the bottom of which was filled with muddy water. Breaking off a sapling branch, he jabbed about in the water for a time, and was soon rewarded by a catch. A muddy length of material came to the surface, which soon revealed itself to be a macintosh.

"Now for the leggings," murmured Lee, gratified.

"But how the dickens did you know, sir?" asked Nipper, amazed.

"My dear boy! What a question," replied Lee reproachfully. "Where else could the fellow have disposed of his simple, but effective, disguise? I looked for a gap, and a handy ditch. This is the first gap we have encountered that has a ditch in close proximity. There's nothing clever in this, young 'un. It's simply working on a certainty."

They soon fished up a pair of brown leather gaiters and a pair of motoring goggles. Lee wrung the macintosh free of water, and examined it. The pockets were empty,

and the maker's tab had been torn off. The mysterious criminal had not been careless enough to leave any clues as to identity.

Back in Nottingham, Nelson Lee handed over his find to the police, and he was lucky enough to run into Mr. William Jones, an excited young man, who had come to the police-station to claim his car. Lee only wanted one thing from Mr. Jones.

"Do you mind if I examine your heels, Mr. Jones?" he asked smoothly.

"My heels?" ejaculated the startled young man.

"I shan't keep you a moment."

Lee examined the heels, and they were innocent of all rubber.

"Do you always drive your own car, Mr. Jones?" asked Lee.

"Always—until to-day," said Mr. Jones. "Until this confounded sneak-thief——"

"Yes, yes, exactly," interrupted Lee. "You can assure me that no friend of yours has driven the car?"

"Of course."

"And you never wear rubber heels?"

"I hate them," replied Mr. Jones promptly.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Jones," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "Come, Nipper, I think we can spend our time more profitably in London."

CHAPTER 6.

Nelson Lee—Burglar!

DURING the journey back to London Nelson Lee animatedly discussed the Test-match and the possibilities of England's success. Nipper and Tommy Watson and Tregellis-West were in the Rolls, too; William Napoleon Browne was driving the rest back in his own Morris Oxford.

Lee steadfastly refused to make any comments upon the murder. He had apparently dismissed the whole matter from his mind. It wasn't until eleven o'clock that night that he referred to the subject. He sent for Nipper just as the latter was on the point of going to bed. All the other cubs had retired half an hour earlier.

"I shall want you, Nipper," said Lee briefly.

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

"In connection with the Stimson affair?"

"Yes; be here in exactly half an hour."

Nipper presented himself at the appointed minute, and he was rather startled upon seeing a shabby, ill-shaven tramp of a man sitting in Nelson Lee's easy-chair. He didn't recognise Lee until he took a second glance.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked. "I haven't changed into any old togs——"

"The ones you are wearing will do," put in Lee dryly. "You are generally so careless about your attire, Nipper, that you look habitually shabby. I'll soon do everything else that is necessary. Off with that collar and tie."

Within five minutes Nipper was transformed. He had a choker round his neck, his face was smudged, and a low cap, with a greasy peak, had an excellent effect. He looked a fit companion for the disguised Lee.

NIPPER was as puzzled as ever after they had sallied out. Lee gave no explanations, and Nipper knew better than to ask for any. He could tell, by all the indications, that Lee was on a hot trail; and he was only too glad that he had been included in this adventure.

They arrived, finally, at a big block of respectable flats in a quiet backwater in the West End. Lee did not approach the main entrance, but scaled the wall at the rear, and soon stood beneath the iron emergency staircase.

"There is always the chance, young 'un, that my conclusions are wrong," he confided. "If such turns out to be the fact, and we are surprised, our arrest as commonplace burglars will be to our advantage."

"I'm not hankering after doing twelve months' hard, guv'nor," whispered Nipper.

Cautiously they mounted to the third floor. Lee was so certain of his movements that Nipper knew that he had been here earlier, scouting. Lee had vanished for a couple of hours during the late evening—and now Nipper knew why.

"Here we are," murmured the detective.

With the skill of a practised cracksman, he forced a window, and they crept in. The darkness was pitchy. Nipper's heart was beating hard.

"Give us a chance, guv'nor!" he breathed.

"Is there somebody in this flat? Must we be as silent as mice?"

"To the best of my knowledge, this flat is empty save for ourselves," replied Lee. "It is a service flat, and the owner, at the present time, is away from home. If we work rapidly, we may conclude our examination without interruption."

His electric torch was now gleaming, and Nipper saw that they were in a bed-room. Lee passed straight through, crossed the narrow hall, and entered a sitting-room. Here, after carefully closing the curtains, he switched on the electric lights.

"We'll start here, old son," said Lee. "What I chiefly want to find is a pair of black shoes. See what you can do."

Lee busied himself at the desk. It was of the roll-top variety, and locked, but it only took Lee a minute to conquer the lock and roll up the desk-top. Nipper, meanwhile, searched.

"This is the only pair I can find, guv'nor," he said, coming back into the sitting-room after a three minutes' absence. "They were in a cupboard in the bed-room. There are some other shoes there, but two pairs are brown, and the other pair is so covered with dust that I know they couldn't have been used for weeks."

"Good man," said Lee. "Let's have a look."

He turned the shoes over, and they took one look and exchanged glances.

"Very interesting," said Lee smoothly.

He took the little tin from his pocket, removed the scrap of rubber, and fitted it to the heel of the left shoe. It fell into place accurately.

"This is vital evidence, Nipper," said Lee. "Inspector Drake can testify that the scrap of rubber was found in that stolen car, and the ownership of these shoes is not in doubt."

"It is with me, sir," growled Nipper. "Whose flat is this, anyhow? And how did

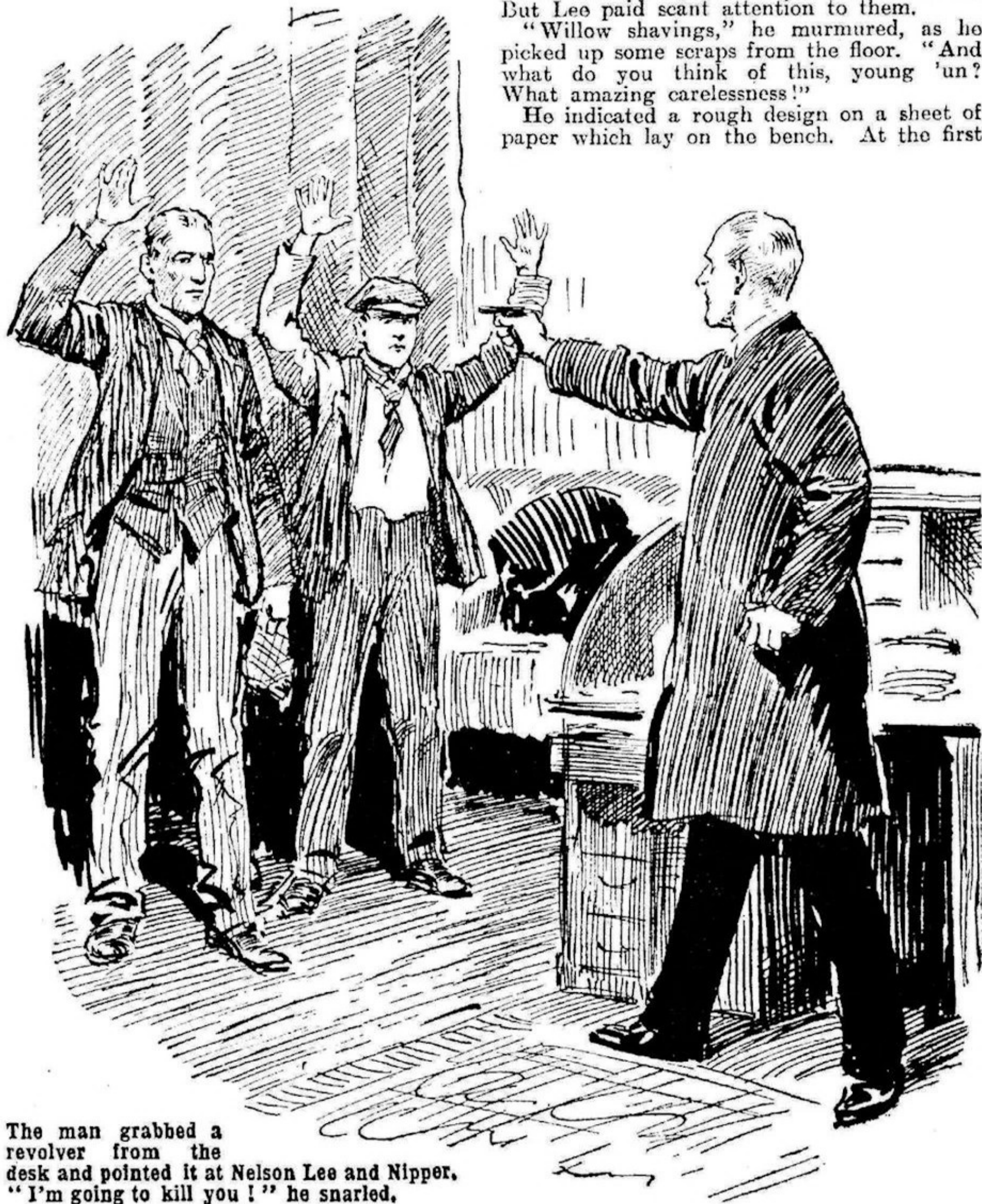
you know that we should find the shoes here? You're more like a giddy magician than ever."

"Nonsense," retorted Lee. "It merely means that I have been using my eyes. We'll take these shoes with us, Nipper. And now we'll have another look round."

They made an important discovery in a small room at the rear of the flat. It was a curious room, with a bench along one wall. There were fret-saws, drills, and all manner of other tools. Obviously, the workshop of an enthusiastic amateur woodworker. All sorts of nicknacks were dotted about—pipe-racks, letter trays, calendars, and so forth. But Lee paid scant attention to them.

"Willow shavings," he murmured, as he picked up some scraps from the floor. "And what do you think of this, young 'un? What amazing carelessness!"

He indicated a rough design on a sheet of paper which lay on the bench. At the first



The man grabbed a revolver from the desk and pointed it at Nelson Lee and Nipper. "I'm going to kill you!" he snarled.

glance Nipper recognised it as a plan of the interior mechanism in the fatal bat.

"I don't know about carelessness, sir," he replied. "How was the man to dream that his premises would be examined like this?"

"A murderer, Nipper, in order to be successful, must cover up every trace of his crime," replied Lee.

"How did you first get on to him, guv'nor?"

"You had as many opportunities as I had," replied Lee tantalisingly. "You may remember, Nipper, that I examined young Lacey's finger-nails."

"Yes, I remember. But what of it?"

"Think it over," replied Lee. "And think, not only of Lacey's finger-nails, but of other people's."

He continued his examination, and Nipper grunted. There was enough evidence in that workshop alone to convince any jury. Not only the diagram of the mechanism, but half a cricket bat, carefully hollowed, which had obviously been used as a preliminary sample. Careful examination showed that the bat had been prepared for gluing. The hollowing had been done while the bat was in two sections. The mechanism was then fitted, and the whole thing carefully glued together.

"This man is a remarkably clever mechanic," said Lee. "It was evidently his hobby which put the diabolical idea into his head. So you see, Nipper, even a man's hobby may lead to his undoing."

"Look here, guv'nor, whose flat is this?" asked Nipper bluntly. "Who is the murderer?"

"I rather fancy that he is outside the front door at this very moment," replied Nelson Lee, lowering his voice. "Quick, young 'un."

He hurried out, dashed down the hall, and Nipper heard a key turning in the lock of the front door. In the nick of time they got into the sitting-room, and Lee sped towards the window. This, too, led out on to the fire-escape. But the window proved obstinate, and in spite of Lee's frantic efforts the catch refused to budge.

"What's wrong, guv'nor?" panted Nipper desperately.

Before Nelson Lee could answer, the door burst open, the lights were switched on, and Sir James Roper stood on the threshold!

CHAPTER 7.

The Trap!

"LUMME! That's done it!" groaned Nelson Lee, spinning round.

Sir James was startled and furious.

"You infernal hounds!" he shouted. "What are you doing in my flat? Stand away from that window! You'd better obey!"

He advanced, his cane raised threateningly.

"All right, governor, we'll take it easy," said Lee. "I know when I'm done. We thought you wasn't comin' back for another half-hour. When I 'ad a casual chat with the porter he told me that you allus stayed at the club until one o'clock. 'Tain't 'arf-past twelve yet."

Sir James stood there, his face expressive of mingled anger, consternation and relief. Relief, in fact, was his chief emotion.

"So you're just ordinary burglars, are you?" he said, controlling himself. "Well, I'm not the kind of man to get you into trouble. What have you taken out of this flat?"

"Nothing. We ain't 'ad the chance."

"Turn your pockets out—and if you've been telling me the truth, I'll let you go," said Sir James, breathing hard.

Nelson Lee removed his peaked cap and gave a grim little laugh.

"I think it's time this farce ended, Sir James," he said smoothly. "There is no need for me to introduce myself—we met this afternoon in the cricket pavilion at Nottingham."

Sir James reeled back, more startled than ever.

"Lee!" he panted. "What the—— What are you doing in here? You interfering busybody! I'll have you locked up for housebreaking!"

"I am well aware that I transgressed the law in breaking into your premises, Sir James," replied Lee. "But I am also aware that any fair-minded British jury will consider that the end has justified the means. I came here to secure evidence against the murderer of Walter Stimson—and I have found that evidence."

Sir James was as pale as a sheet.

"You lie!" he croaked. "I know nothing of Stimson's death! You can't prove anything against me! You've no status—you're only an unofficial detective, at best. You can't bluff me into saying anything incriminating!"

"Such a thing is entirely unnecessary," replied Lee. "The evidence that I have already obtained is incriminating enough. It is merely unfortunate that you returned home prematurely."

"I did—thanks to the night-porter," panted the other. "It was he who 'phoned to the club, and told me that lights were burning in my flat. You're not so clever as you think you are, my friend! You haven't got away with your precious evidence!"

"We are all apt to be too optimistic," replied Lee, with a shrug. "We are all capable of making mistakes. I can mention several of yours, Sir James. For instance, it was a grave mistake on your part to leave a fragment of finger-nail in that ingeniously-designed bat."

Sir James gasped, and stared at his fingers. Nipper clearly saw the uneven nail of the first finger on the left hand.

"You're mad!" panted Sir James hoarsely.



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"It was that finger-nail which helped to put me on the track," said Lee. "While I was examining that bat I found the fragment caught in the spring. You were already under suspicion, Sir James, and when I saw your broken finger-nail I knew that the rest was merely a matter of obtaining the necessary evidence. Your trousers, too, were considerably rucked where they had been enclosed in the leather gaiters. Small points, but significant ones."

"The whole thing is fantastic!" shouted Sir James Roper. "What reason had I to kill Stimson? You've blundered, Lee, and unless you get out of this flat at once I'll call the police! You fool! You can't put this thing on me like this!"

"You say you had no reason to kill Stimson?" asked Lee, with a relentless persistence. "I have here a letter, taken from your desk, which Mr. Stimson wrote to you five days ago."

Nipper was fascinated. He knew that there was some reason for Nelson Lee's

strange attitude in telling everything to Sir James. Lee was goading his victim into panic—and panic might lead to confession.

"You've been rifling my private papers?" snarled Sir James. "You—you interfering scoundrel! So this is how you conduct——"

"This letter, Sir James, gives you a week's grace," interrupted Lee with deadly calmness. "For years you have been blackmailing one of England's noblest families. Stimson, in his capacity as lawyer of that family, was informed of your activities. Rather than prosecute, and bring the whole matter into unsavoury publicity, he gave you a week to clear out of the country. You retaliated by murdering him. Do you think you have an earthly chance of escaping the gallows?"

Sir James' face was ghastly.

"You're wrong—wrong!" he croaked.

"For years you have been making a practice of blackmailing rich people," went on Nelson Lee. "I know your history, Sir James, for I have taken the trouble to look it up. Ten years ago you were smuggled out

of England by your family after a scandal at Oxford. Through the death of your uncle and nephew in the Great War you unexpectedly came into the title. You used that title to get you into the best circles—and since then you have been preying on society."

"It's false—false," panted the wretched man, tortured by this relentless exposure.

"They say that familiarity breeds contempt, and at last you went too far," continued Lee. "You drained one of your victims until ruin stared him in the face—and he had the courage to place the whole matter in the hands of his lawyer. Your hobby, and your knowledge that Stimson would be playing in the Test-match, led you to adopt a diabolical form of murder. When your plan for regaining the fatal cricket-bat went wrong, you cleverly and cunningly took advantage of Lacey's quarrel to throw suspicion on him. But the other evidence is too strong."

"I deny everything—everything!"

"It will be for you to deny it in the witness-box," said Lee quietly. "It was easy enough for you to enter Stimson's dressing-room, and easier for you to seize an opportunity of changing his cricket-bat. It may further interest you to know, Sir James, that I have taken the trouble to learn that you spent at least three of your wandering years before the war in Brazil and Peru."

The net was closing grimly, and Sir James felt it.

"What can you prove?" he asked huskily. "Nothing—nothing! This is all fanciful poppycock! You know that you can't prove any case against me."

"You left a portion of your rubber heel in that stolen car, and you were foolish enough not to destroy your shoes," said Nelson Lee. "Every scrap of the evidence against you is here, Sir James—in this flat. The shoes—the documents—the designs for your evil contrivances—the willow shavings—everything!"

Sir James seemed fascinated.

"Everything is here?" he repeated, in a whisper. "You mean that the police have no evidence at all?"

"Not until I place it in their hands."

"Then—then I can defy you!" snarled the murderer. "It's only your word against mine." A flush of relief came into his face. "Why, you fool, you can't do anything! I tell you, it's only your word against mine!"

"My word—plus the evidence," said Lee, nodding.

"And that evidence won't be in existence ten minutes from now!" panted Sir James, making a sudden leap to the desk.

"Stop him, Nipper!" shouted Lee.

But Sir James had already wrenched open the drawer, and a gleaming automatic pistol was in his hand. His eyes burned like fire as he faced the pair.

"Hands up!" he said gloatingly. "Now, my fine detective! It's you who must admit that mistakes are fatal! It was fatal for you to come here, believing that you could trap me. You are in the trap—not I!"

Lee breathed hard.

"You'd better be careful, Roper!" he said tensely.

"I'll be careful!" promised Sir James. "That evidence is going to be destroyed—and then you will be helpless! Do you understand? What's more, I'll destroy you, too, and make doubly sure."

"Murder us as you murdered Stimson?" asked Lee, in horror. "You fiend! You can't do that!"

"Yes, I'll kill you as I killed Stimson!" snarled Sir James.

His voice rose to a frenzied scream of triumph, and he pulled the trigger. Nipper gulped. There was a click, and Lee withdrew a number of cartridges from his pocket.

"I thought it better, on the whole, to remove these trifles from that gun," he explained calmly. "I had half an idea that you might get playful. Sir James Roper, you have lost!"

"Lost!" snarled Roper. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that for the last ten minutes the telephone receiver on the desk has been off its hook," said Nelson Lee. "I mean that Scotland Yard officers are in the lobby, listening at the other end of that 'phone. The game is up, my friend. This trap is for you, after all."

At that moment the door burst open, and Chief Detective-inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, entered, followed by two constables. Handcuffs were clicked over Sir James' wrists.

"I arrest you, Sir James Roper, on the charge of wilfully murdering Walter Stimson," said Lennard formally.

Two minutes later Sir James was on his way to the police station.

"Good work, Lee," said Lennard approvingly. "We heard everything on the 'phone, of course. He'll hang as sure as crab-apples are uneatable."

"It was a first-class stunt to fool Sir James like you did, guv'nor, and make him confess," commented Nipper. "And I suppose it was you who arranged with the night-porter to 'phone to the club?"

"Naturally," answered Nelson Lee, with a smile. "I admitted that I had been careless, but that was only a little bluff."

THE rest of the case was a foregone conclusion.

Harry Lacey was released in the early morning, and he not only turned out for England, as Nelson Lee had prophesied, but he played a splendid game.

The evidence against Sir James Roper was overwhelming. Once the police started their investigations regarding his blackmailing activities, they made many incriminating discoveries, and he paid the penalty for his wrong-doings on the gallows.

THE END.

(Another gripping mystery and detective yarn featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper next week entitled, "The Vital Clue!")

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

W. H. Miller, 21, Como Avenue, South Yarra, S.E.1, Victoria, **Australia**, wants members for his Philatelic Correspondence Club.

Ian Watson, Hope Cottage, 1, Granville Street, **Peterborough**, Northants, desires correspondents in foreign countries.

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Thomas W. Hutt, 58, Union Street, West Kogarah, Sydney, **Australia**, requires members for the All Nations Correspondence Club.

S. J. Humphrey, 132, Farmer Road, Leyton, **London**, E.10, wants members for his club.

Lester Henry, 42, Hambrook Road, Caulfield, S.E.7, Melbourne, **Australia**, requires members for his correspondence club.

Walter A. Mason, 17, Avoca Street, South Yarra, S.E.1, Melbourne, **Australia**, wants correspondents in Japan, China, India, etc.

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Wilfred Harrison, 28, Scalegate Road, **Carlisle**, wants members for the English and Colonial Naturalists' Club; age limit 17.

A Kemp, 29, Barclay Road, Fulham, **London**, S.W.6, wants members for the British Empire Correspondence Club.

Miss Ethel Coates, 49, Denison Street, Mount Pleasant, **Batley**, would like girl correspondents in South America and South Africa.

Saul Vecker, 337, Bury New Road, Hr. Broughton, **Manchester**, (age 14½), wants correspondents.

G. Summerton, 25, Tenby Street, Anfield, **Liverpool**, wishes to join a club.

C. Bancroft, 19, Grant Street, New Clee, **Grimsby**, Lines., wants correspondents interested in hobbies.

Philip G. Rogers, 27, Heath Street East, Toronto, Ontario, **Canada**, wants members for his club.

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Jack Stewart, 349, Anzac Parade, South Kensington, Sydney, N.S.W., **Australia**, wishes to correspond with readers.

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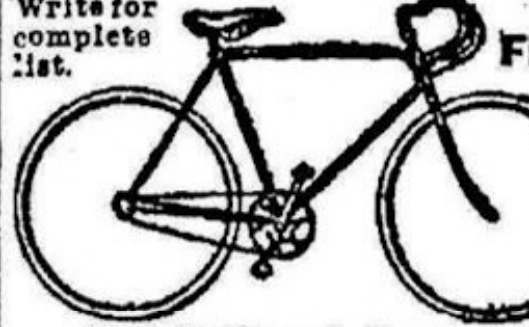
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THE TROUBLE TRIPLETS!



A "Waiting" Matter!

"GRUB first, before work or enjoyment!" said Posh Trooble firmly.

"That's the ticket!" agreed Sam Trooble, whilst Nippy, the third member of the cheery trio known as the Trouble Triplets, gave an emphatic "Hear, hear!"

It was late afternoon, and the wanderers had tramped into the seaside town of Mudsplosh in search of adventure, grub, enjoyment, and perchance work. Work for them meant the giving of wayside entertainments, for Posh was a wonderful ventriloquist; Sam, his twin brother, a clever juggler and acrobat; while Nippy was a skilful conjurer and hypnotist.

The last wayside entertainment they had given had been most successful, and they had collected fully two-and-ninepence from an appreciative audience, before being moved on by an unappreciative bobby.

Now, after a good ten miles tramp, they were anxious to obtain rest and refreshment. Afterwards they hoped to gain another fortune by entertaining the visitors of Mudsplosh-on-Sea.

"Here we are!" observed Posh, calling a halt outside a gorgeous café painted in white and gold, calling itself the "Elite Café." "This looks a likely place for

bloated millionaires like us. What's it to be—sosses and mash, or fish and chips?"

"Better wait, and see what they charge first!" said the more cautious Sam. "I'd like both for myself, and then some lemonade for the sosses and fishes to gambol in."

They entered the café with the air of lords, smiling genially at the lady in the cash-box, who returned their cheery smiles by looking the dusty and travel-stained wanderers up and down haughtily, and then sniffing audibly.

Naturally the triplets rather resented this.

To teach her better manners, Posh immediately exercised his ventriloquial skill by causing a series of squeaks to proceed from the floor of the pay-box.

The lady cashier gave a stifled scream, and began to hop about, her horrified eyes searching for the squeaking mice that did not exist.

Leaving her thus engaged, the triplets selected one of the tables, and sat down. The nearest waitress, who was serving an old gent with malted milk, eyed them with distinct disfavour.

"Seems rather a posh place, Posh!" remarked Nippy uneasily. "Hadn't we better ask for pâté de foie gras, instead of fish and chips, old man!"

"Fish and chips for me" said Posh firmly.

*Mudsplosh-on-Sea needed
waking up—and Posh & Co.
oblige!*

"And sosses and mash for me!" said Sam.

That settled it, and they settled down to wait. Ten minutes passed, while the snub-nosed waitress went on serving fresh customers who came in, seeming to ignore the existence of the hungry trio.

"Getting a bit thick!" said Posh warmly, after another five minutes. "Here, I say, Miss, we've not come here to grow whiskers, or to pinch your waiting job."

And Posh rang the bell on the table loudly.

The waitress glared at them, and elevated her snub nose.

"What are you making that row for?" she snapped. "What do you want?"

"We want a little civility, reasonable attention, fish and chips for two, sausages and mash for one, and lemonade for three, Miss, please!" said Posh.

"Oh, you do, do you?" said the waitress snappily. "Well, you can wait!"

"Yes, let the scrubby little bounders wait, Mary!" said the young man she happened to be chatting to, who wore green socks with white spots. "Or turn the cheeky cads out!"

"Impudence!" said Mary. "Civility and attention, indeed!"

"Chuck 'em out!" advised green and white-spotted socks. "And then come and kiss me, Mary!"

The last words, needless to say, were added by Posh, and the young lady flushed a deep red with sudden anger, knowing the young man was married.

"Wha-at?" she gasped. "How dare you, Mister Jinks?"

"I—I never said that; I swear I didn't!" gasped the young man faintly. "What I should have said was, I'd rather kiss that hot-water geyser than you, my dear!"

Posh was responsible for the latter sentiments, of course, but not knowing a ventriloquist was at work, Mary flamed and tossed her head.

"I suppose you think that's funny, Mister Jinks!" she retorted indignantly. "Just clear out—I won't be insulted by you, regular customer or no regular customer. I refuse to—"

She was interrupted by a sudden barking that seemed to come from the plate of sausages and mash she had just laid before Mister Jinks, and the barking was followed by a subdued squeaking.

"Hallo!" remarked Posh, winking at Nippy. "So this is what they make the sosses from here! No sosses for me! Dogs—"

"And rats!" gasped Nippy, following Posh's lead.

The youthful conjurer's hand hovered for a moment over the plate, and then he produced a lively, wriggling, tame rat, which he held out to the dumbfounded Mary for inspection. Mary gave a wild shriek, and fell back against a chair behind her. Un-

fortunately it was the old gent's chair, and he happened to be drinking his malted milk at the moment.

Instead, he poured it over his whiskers and shirt-front, and leaping up with a wild howl, he upset the table with his knees, tipping a plate of steak and kidney pie and potatoes into the lap of the gentleman opposite him, who instantly leaped back sending his chair with a thump into the chair of another customer, causing him to bury his face in a dish of stewed plums and custard.

Instantly that peaceful establishment was in an uproar of angry argument and recrimination, while Mary added to the confusion by fainting and collapsing into the lap of the young man in green and white-spotted socks, who, falling back against a table and clutching at it for support, succeeded in bringing it and its contents over himself and the waitress.

Just then the manager came rushing up to the scene, and only pausing for a moment to slip an ice down the back of the young man as he sat on the floor supporting the shrieking waitress, Posh led his fellow wanderers out, having decided that it was time for them to go.

"I'm not waiting a minute longer for my fish and chips!" he said firmly. "Sides, who knows what they are made of!"

Somewhat hastily they passed out, the lady cashier being still too busy searching for mice with an ebony ruler to see them go. Out in the street, Posh chuckled.

"You were right about it being too posh for us, Nippy!" he remarked. "Let's find a place not so posh—and more peaceful!"

"Yes, let's!" agreed Nippy and Sam, and arm-in-arm they went along the promenade in search of one.

By the Briny!

"THAT'S better! Now what about a bathe?" said Sam Trooble.

"Mustn't bathe after a hearty meal!" said his brother, shaking his

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head. "Sides, we're spent up, old fruit! Got to earn some cash first, and I vote we start now."

The Trouble Triplets had found a decent little café, after a short search, where they were greeted with a smile by a cheery-faced young girl, who served them quickly and well. Now, after a satisfying feed, they were strolling along the beach, alongside the shimmering sea, in search of adventure.

But business came first, as Posh now pointed out, and being the leader, his word was law.

Selecting a spot just under the wall of the prom., the three got busy, Sam exercising his acrobatic skill, Nippy going through his repertoire of conjuring tricks, while Posh prepared to go round with his cap for much-needed coppers.

The beach was beginning to fill up now, and they anticipated brisk business. What they had not anticipated was professional jealousy from other beach entertainers. Angered by the growing crowd round the clever boys, the proprietor of the nearby Punch and Judy show left his pitch and approached them angrily.

"Ere, you kids, clear hoff!" he snorted. "You're spoilin' my pitch, blow you! And what about your—"

"We're not interfering with you!" said Posh warmly.

"Of course you are! You clear hoff, afore I call the beach inspector!" bawled the Punch and Judy man heatedly. "I bet you ain't paid rent—"

He paused as a sudden commotion came from his tall Punch and Judy box. First came Punch's squeak, then Judy's shrill cries, followed by the barking of Toby. It sounded like trouble in the home, and with a startled cry, the proprietor rushed off to see what his family of puppets were quarrelling about.

"That's settled him for a bit!" chuckled Posh, whose ventriloquial skill had caused the commotion. "Go it, chaps! I fancy—thank you, marm!"

Jingling the coppers in his cap, Posh moved about the happy crowd, while Sam and Nippy went on with the show. But not for long. Through the corner of his eye, Posh suddenly sighted a lanky individual in uniform striding along accompanied by the donkey-man. The latter gent had been glaring jealously at the boys for some time, their clever tricks having attracted all the children in the vicinity. Business for the donkey-man, as a result, had been bad.

"Now what's all this?" demanded the uniformed individual. "What are you kids doing 'ere? Clear off at once—pack up and clear, d'you 'ear?"

"We're only giving an entertainment, Mister!" protested Posh. "We're doing no harm!"

"What about renting that pitch, eh?" bawled the lanky man, who was the beach

inspector. "You ain't been to me, and I knows nothing about you! Clear off, before I call a policeman!"

"That's it, clear 'em hoff, inspector!" snapped the donkey-man viciously. "Us has to pay—"

"I didn't know we had to pay!" said Posh glumly. "Come on, chaps."

And the triplets, followed by the sympathetic looks of the crowd, were obliged to pack up and clear.

"Blowed if I knew we had to pay rent!" grunted Posh again. "Still—Hallo, here's that mean rotter that gave us away! Watch me make him jump!"

The donkey-man, after leering triumphantly at the chums, had returned to his weary-looking mokes, and, at the moment, happened to be whacking one of them, which had strayed, with his big stick. The sight angered Posh, and he felt the moment opportune to pay the man back. Next second the squealing donkey seemed to say in a husky voice:

"Here, let me alone, you big, bottle-nosed brute! You hit me again and I'll hoof you into the middle of next week!"

"My heye!" gurgled the donkey-man, backing away in a fright.

He blinked at the donkey, who was shaking his head at the moment, and then he backed still more as the donkey, thinking possibly that his master wanted him to follow, and fearing the stick again, ambled after him.

"I'm coming, boss!" came the voice again. "I'll teach you to hit a dumb animal!"

The donkey-man gasped and backed again, treading on the foot of a stout, fierce-looking old gent seated in a beach chair, and then falling backwards on top of him. This proved too much for the canvas chair, which promptly collapsed under the double weight.

"Yarroooop!" shrieked the old gent, and scrambling up, he started to hug his foot, which happened to be a gouty one, his features twisted with anguish. For a moment he hopped about; then, grabbing his stick, he laid it about the back of the terrified donkey-man.

The latter jumped to his feet, and, shrieking wildly, pelted blindly away—full into the Punch and Judy box, bringing the whole show down on top of himself, whereat he was "set about" for a second time by the very annoyed proprietor.

Laughing hugely, the Trouble Triplets went off in search of another part of the beach, where they divided the proceeds of their brief entertainment. Then they approached the bathing-machines, eager for a dip in the sea.

"I'm quite enjoying our stay here, after all!" chuckled Sam. "It's so peaceful, and makes one want to be kind to everybody!"

But everybody didn't want to be kind to them. The bathing-machine attendant, a fat, retired longshoreman, eyed them scowl-

THE IRON SPEEDMAN!



Burst Tyre!

DOWN the straightaway scuttled Jim—and he drew away from Stargie! He left him and the rest behind.

He opened up a gap that grew wider and wider as he hurtled onwards.

"You're getting away—losing 'em!" Joe yelled to him. "You've got 'em beat already, Jim!"

Jim smiled behind his mask, then braced himself in his seat as the first corner came up. He saw a grand-stand, buildings, coloured advertisements and crowds. His exhaust-note died, the brakes screeched, the car dived into the turn and then went wheeling around it, rock-steady.

On he went, into the bends around the turn, downhill and moving fast, losing the others. The machine began to jump on the road, and Joe had to brace himself in his seat. It was as Jim rocketed into the last of the S-bends that he braced himself anew.

The road was full of holes here; although they were only inch-deep depressions, they could make a car moving at the pace of the racer dance like a pea on a plate. Jim steadied the machine as he pitched it into the curve, and held it as one front wheel kicked from a bump.

Joe was shot half out of his seat, then came another mad leap which sent the speeding machine full to the side of the road, half-skidding. One rear wheel hit the edge of the footpath, sent loose flints flying wildly behind, and, as the car straightened, that rear tyre burst.

Jim heard it go. Instantly he eased the machine, holding it as she tried to slide, and two hundred yards beyond brought it to a stop at the roadside—just as Stargie came out of the curves with the rest at his heels.

Two cars are hurtling round the French Grand Prix circuit—Jim and Stargie, duelling in a race to the death!

They were travelling at a mad pace, streaking through the dust that Jim had raised, using the whole of the road. Their wheels seemed to stamp the course, their tails were wagging as they half-skidded—and then they

went past with a wild roar.

Twenty seconds later came the remainder of the cars, howling like fiends and packed together. They hurtled ahead with a blattering roar, just as Jim pitched himself from one side of the cockpit and Joe leaped out at the other, both springing to where a spare wheel was carried in a compartment of the racer's tail.

"Rotten luck!" Joe gasped, as he stared down at the burst tyre.

"Never mind about the luck," Jim panted, "get the spare wheel on. Stargie'll be about three miles ahead of us by the time we get going again!"

They dragged the wheel out, with the jack and tools, and they were lifting the damaged one clear when Joe asked:

"Jim, you're not really going to make Stargie crash, are you?"

For a moment the boy speedman did not answer. Joe saw that his jaw was set and his whole body was tensed when he answered:

"I'm going to make Lon Stargie crash so hard that they'll have a job to sort him out of his car! And I'm going to do it on Gadaret Corner—where he killed my dad!"

Dogged by Bad Luck!

"I'M going to crash Lon Stargie on Gadaret Corner—where he killed my dad!" Jim Ross gasped the words as he wrenched away the wheel with its battered, burst tyre, while a racing car screeched past them, showering them with dust and small stones.

Joe slammed the spare wheel on to the hub, and there was no time for more talk as they smashed the hub-cap home, tossed the lamed wheel and tools into the tail of the quivering racer, which had stopped with its engine still running.

A glance at Jim's face told Joe that he meant what he said. Joe had known all along that Jim meant to do something mad during this fierce French Grand Prix race, and the way in which he sent the car off again showed the spirit that was in him.

He stamped the throttle-pedal right down to the floor-boards, and the car screamed on a furious note as it flung itself round the bends—now running last in the race when it should have been first! Jim knew that the delay to change the wheel must have put him almost three miles behind Lon Stargie, and he'd got to make up that distance somehow.

Over the winding, sinuous road the machine hurtled, wheels stamping a surface all dappled with the shadows of the roadside trees, while dust hung mistily, kicked high by the machines which had gone ahead.

Dancing, weaving, leaping from the bumps; screeching, howling, shifting in a torrent of sound, the car stormed to the hair-pin turn.

Joe saw it come up. He saw the buildings

there and the flaring coloured advertisement banners which draped their walls. He saw a stand, sandbanks, palisades, faces, and officials standing immobile.

To him, clinging with both hands to the furiously-driven machine, it seemed as though they'd never get round. He heard the whine of the brakes as they took hold, and felt the car slide; he saw Jim's hands shift on the wheel, and then they were whirling round the corner, with the engine roaring as Jim changed down to second gear.

Next moment the squab thrust in Joe's back as Jim stamped the throttle wide open once again, and they were roaring on at full speed once more.

The road swung left and lifted to a short hill. The hill might not have been there from the way the car went at it, to leap from the crown and go down the slope beyond like a diving seagull.

Joe saw the road ahead, switchbacking between tress on the way to Gadaret village. At the top of each switchback the car actually left the ground as it jumped, daylight showing under its spinning tyres, and the engine screeching as it over-ran.

The village itself whipped up, and the echo of the car was like thunder as they dived between the buildings, to shoot out at the other end, with brakes screaming as Jim shaped for the corner. They took it, skidding and, just beyond, Joe saw the plain white stone which marked the spot where Lon Stargie had crashed Jim's father.

The sun was shining down on it and on the flowers which had been placed about it in memory of a wonderful racing driver, and as they passed Jim gave his engine full throttle, so that the exhaust spat back flame and bellowed furiously, as though repeating Jim's own vow of vengeance.

Three laps they travelled, with Joe trying to brace himself against the awful bumps which the hard-driven car gave him. They cleared the hairpin again—to see people running across the road in front. A car had just crashed. They could see the machine on its side, with smoke spurting out, but the people split to let them go on.

It was as they crossed the strip of road where the machine had overturned that there came a sudden report from one of Jim's front tyres. A jagged bit of metal from the wrecked racer had pierced the rubber.

The car wobbled, skidded madly, and came straight as Jim drove into the slide. His

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

JIM ROSS, iron-nerved, 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. The boy again comes up against him in the Irish Grand Prix, and once more Stargie wins by foul means. Jim vows that he will get his revenge in the French Grand Prix; that he will deliberately make Stargie crash—for it was on this course that the Ace speedman killed the boy's father, who was also a famous racing driver. The day of the race comes, Jim's car hurtles off the starting-line like a rocket, followed closely by Stargie. The French Grand Prix has begun—and for Jim and his rival it is to be a race to the death!

(Now read on.)

foot came off the throttle pedal, and his voice was almost a snarl as he yelled to Joe: "Tyre burst—and we haven't got a sound spare!"

"Don't stop; run on the bare rim to the pits!" Joe answered.

"That's the only thing I can do!" And at 80 m.p.h.—which seemed slow after their former speed—Jim sent the machine on.

He would have to call in at the replenishment pits to change the wheel. He would have to run slowly over the course, and be still further delayed before he could get moving fast again.

"Jim, steady!" Joe howled the words.

You'll smash the wheel at this pace!"

Jim did not answer. He was leaning over the side of the car. Bits of blackened rubber were flying still from the wheel, but its rim was bright where it scored the road surface.

Jim was eager not to lose a split second. He knew he was travelling at dangerous speed. Ordinarily, with a lame wheel he would have travelled at less than 30 m.p.h. He was notching up to three times as fast now.

They roared on. Up the hill and over the switchbacks. Every moment Joe expected the nose of the machine to drop as the wheel gave. Round Gadaret Corner and into the grand-stand straight, and still the wheel was holding.

The stands loomed up. They saw the pits. Joe picked out their own—and in that moment the wheel collapsed, but still Jim didn't stop. As the wheel went, he changed down, trod the throttle open and sent the machine skating to its pit on the brake-drum, to come to a screeching halt as Joe tumbled out.

No Petrol!

MINUTES of mad work with jack and tools, changing the wheel, and they were off again, with the news that Lon Stargie's Ace was almost a lap ahead of them—ten miles in the lead, at any rate.

The Ross-Ryan seemed to settle down now. It was as though the car regretted the way it had been delayed. The engine gave out a sonorous, perfect roar of power, the super-charger droned and whined, and the machine seemed to hold the road as though it was glued to it.

For twenty laps they hurtled on, always travelling as fast as Jim knew how, and always gaining on Lon Stargie. The cockpit became full of blown oil and engine fumes.

Overhead the sun climbed in the sky and blazed burningly down, so that Jim and Joe seemed to be travelling in a bath of heat from which there was no respite. The pit signalled them each time that they passed, telling them that they were gaining on Stargie.

Jim knew that Stargie's mechanics would be signalling him in just the same way, and that the other pace-makers in the race would all be travelling as hard as they knew how.

At the end of the twenty laps, Jim learned that he was barely a minute behind the roaring Ace, and that news made him travel harder than ever.

Coming out of the hairpin turn he overtook one of the low, snub-nosed French machines which had been challenging Stargie for the lead. The blue car was holding the centre of the road as it rocketed at the hill.

Joe heard Jim shout, and his eyes glittered behind his goggles as he pulled his machine over to the side of the road, where the surface was broken and rough, trying to pass the other.

Stones flew like hail from the Ross-Ryan's wheels. Bits of grass and chunks of earth were gouged out and slung wide as they drew level with the French machine.

Leaping, jolting, bouncing madly, they surged by it—and then, very suddenly, the booming of their engine died away to a spluttering, choked, gasping sound, and they slowed. The engine note died out altogether. The blue car shot ahead of them again, and Joe gasped:

"What's happened? She's conked out!"

Jim did not answer. He trod on the brake-pedal and, as the machine stopped, both jerked out and ripped at the straps over the hot engine-cover. They lifted it up, and Jim's hand went to the twin carburettors at the side.

He lifted the two needles, then panted:

"Look in the tank, Joe! I think we've run out of juice—and we're about six miles from the pits!"

(No petrol—and Stargie well away in the lead. Jim's chances of licking his scoundrelly rival seem slim now—but Jim's not beaten yet. He's determined to win at all costs; he does win! How, you will read in next Wednesday's concluding chapters of this thrilling serial.)

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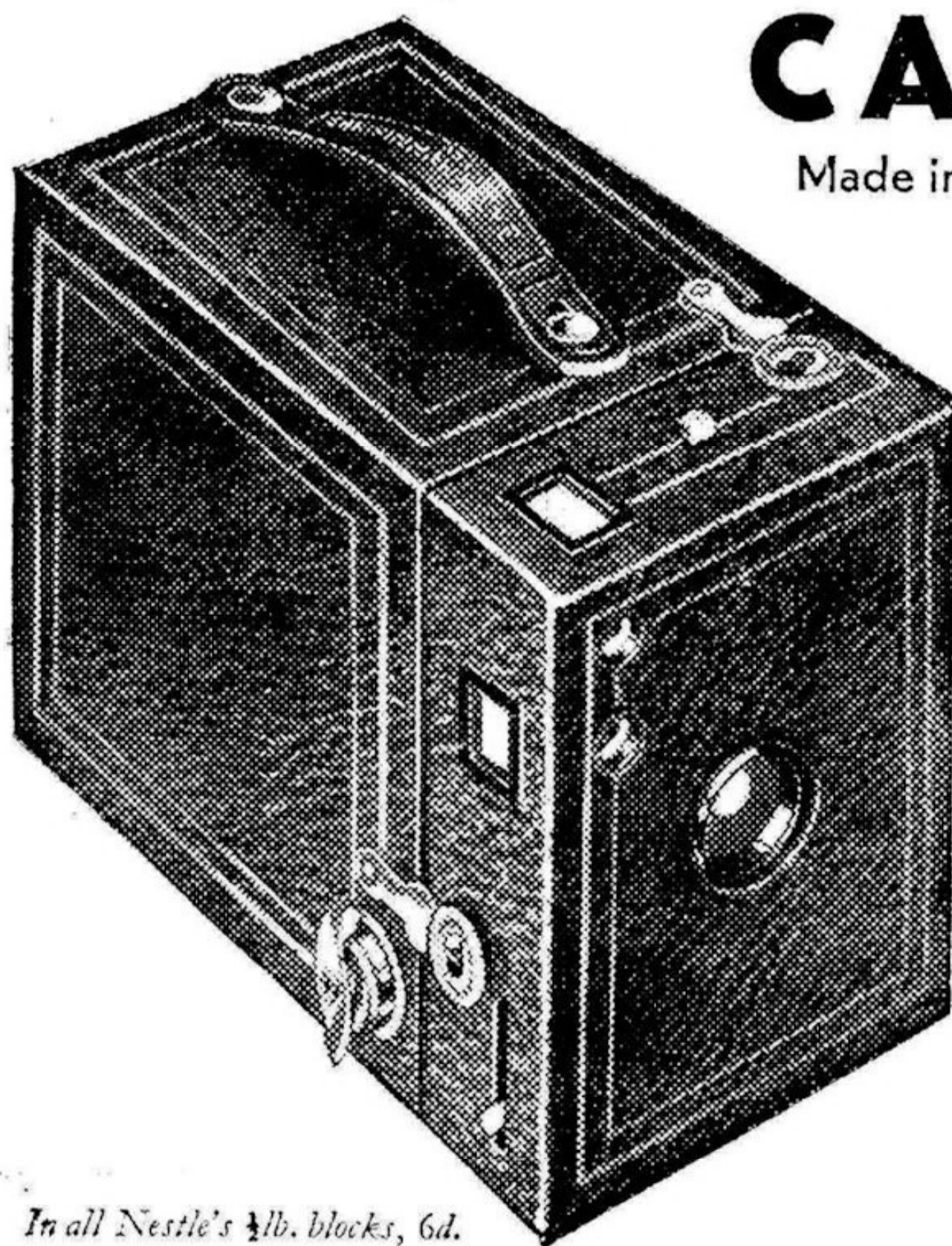
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