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New Series No. 22.

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HANDFORTH'S TALKIE



CHAPTER 1.

The Schoolboy Inventor's Latest!

"FUNNY!" said Church, frowning. "What the dickens can it be?"

He and Handforth and McClure were in the Junior passage of the West House at St. Frank's, and they were just passing Study O. Weird and wonderful sounds were proceeding from behind the closed door.

"Sounds like somebody dying," said Handforth, in alarm. "Who's in this study, anyhow?"

"Levi and Goodwin and Evans," replied McClure.

They stood outside the door of Study O, listening. It was unusually quiet in the passage, for most of the juniors were at a Form meeting, over in the Ancient House. Handforth & Co., in fact, had come along to round up a few absentees.

The sounds from within the study were startling. Somebody seemed to be talking in a deep voice; then it would fade to a whisper, and suddenly burst out again in a totally different key.

"We'd better go in," said Handforth, looking worried.

He tried the door, and, to his surprise, it opened. The mysterious sounds ceased as he stood on the threshold. Dick Goodwin, the Lancashire boy, turned a startled face in the direction of the newcomers. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and he appeared to be wrestling with a large cardboard cone, which was slung by strings from the ceiling. Near by was a wireless set, and next to the wireless set

stood a strange-looking instrument with a revolving cylinder.

"Here, I say!" protested Goodwin. "I thought that door was locked!"

"Well, you thought wrong," said Handforth. "What was that horrible noise we heard?"

Reggie Pitt makes a charming girl, and K. K. Parkington and Mr. Pycraft are completely spoofed! This full-o'-laughs comedy is "shot" by

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

Dick sighed.

"Better come in and close the door," he said. "I must be getting careless. Fancy leaving it unlocked with you about the house! I suppose there'll be no satisfying you until I've explained!"

"There won't," agreed Handforth grimly. "I'm the captain of the Remove, and I want to know what all this paraphernalia is. Another of your giddy inventions?"

"Yes, but don't talk so loudly," replied Goodwin. "It isn't quite perfected yet; I'm making the final experiments now. It's an apparatus for making talking pictures!"

"My hat!" said Church. "I thought it sounded pretty awful!"

"You ass! You mustn't take any notice of that," replied Dick. "I was only testing the amplifier."

"You don't really mean to say that you can take genuine talking pictures—and show them?" asked Handforth sceptically. "I know you're a bit of a genius at inventing things, but these talkie things cost thousands of quids."

"This one didn't," grinned the schoolboy inventor. "Look here, I'll show you. I've got a cine-Kodak here. Birthday present, you know."

"Yes—we've seen it before," agreed McClure. "You took some shots of the First Eleven match last Saturday, and you got in that big hit of Fenton's. But it wasn't a talkie."

All the juniors were interested in Goodwin's home projector. He had shown a number of interesting short films on his tiny apparatus, which he had elaborated upon with numerous gadgets of his own invention.

"This is the talkie part," said Dick, pointing to the thing with the revolving cylinder. "It's an old Dictaphone. I spotted it cheap in Bannington last week and bagged it. Since then I've been making experiments with a special synchronising attachment."

"By George!" said Handforth. "Does it really work?"

"Well, of course, it could be a lot better," admitted Goodwin. "These Dictaphones use wax records, and they soon get worn out. Still, they're good enough for one or two showings. You see, I can take a picture and start the Dictaphone at the same time. I've invented a special microphone, joined up with my wireless set, so that the sounds are all recorded on the wax cylinder."

"It sounds pretty clever," admitted Handforth.

"And I've made an amplifier, too," proceeded Dick, with a certain amount of pride. "These Dictaphones, as you know, are only supposed to be used with earphones. Typists transcribe letters from them, you know. But with my amplifier the sounds can be made as loud as real life. Just a minute. I'll give you a demonstration."

He fiddled about for some minutes with his projector, and then he rested a screen in front of the cone-like apparatus. He started the Dictaphone, and the same switch operated the little projector.

The study light was already switched off, and now the picture of Solomon Levi appeared on the screen. He was grinning right at the audience, and suddenly he clapped his hands. The clap sounded thickly, but naturally enough.

"You're an ass, Dick," said Solomon Levi from the screen. "I believe this experiment of yours is going to be a flop. You can't kid me that you can really take talking pictures. Still, you asked me to stand here and gas, so——"

The film came to an abrupt end, and the talking ceased at the same moment. Dick Goodwin switched off the projector, turned on the lights, and looked at his visitors.

"Well?" he asked anxiously.

"My dear chap, it's marvellous!" gasped Handforth. "That was the real talking picture! Are you sure Levi isn't in this room somewhere? By George! He's been spoofing us, you chaps!"

"I haven't!" grinned Dick. "You can hear the record by itself, if you like."

Handforth & Co. were soon convinced, and within a minute Handforth was looking eager and excited.

"I'll tell you what!" he said, grabbing Goodwin's arm. "Let's make a real talkie! A proper play! I'll write a Trackett Grim story, and I'll play Trackett Grim myself——"

"Not just yet!" interrupted Dick hastily. "I don't think my apparatus is perfect enough yet for making a real long talkie."

But once Edward Oswald Handforth was started off on an idea, nothing short of chloroform was capable of holding him in check.

CHAPTER 2.

Spoofing K.K.!

THE Remove meeting was over. Handforth had been singularly abstracted at this important conference, seeing that cricket was the subject under discussion. He had even agreed to a proposal that Kirby Keeble Parkington and Harvey Deeks and Clement Goffin should have places in the next Remove Eleven match. And the Red-Hot Trio were Handforth's deadliest rivals.

The Carlton Gang—as K.K. and his eleven companions from Carlton College were called—had not yet forgotten how they had been dished out of seeing a full day's play of the recent Test-match at Nottingham, and they were still trying to think of some super-scheme to get their own back. It needed something super to wipe out that extensive defeat.

It was later, in Study D, that Handforth revealed the reason for his abstractedness. A few kindred spirits were invited, including Vivian Travers, Jimmy Potts, Reggie Pitt, Trotwood—and Dick Goodwin.

"First of all," said Handforth, looking round, "we mustn't let those silly Red-Hots know that we're holding this meeting."

"Then don't talk so loudly," said Church.

"I'm going to tell you about something wonderful I saw this evening," continued Handforth. "I've always known that Dick Goodwin was a bit of a marvel, but he's surpassed himself. He's invented something that surprised even *me*."

And Handforth, amid an interested silence, and with many modest blushes from Goodwin, told of the talking apparatus.

"There's nothing new in this," said Pitt. "We knew about it yesterday over in the West House."

"And you didn't think of a wheeze?" asked Handforth reproachfully. "My idea is that we should make a talkie. I don't mean a few shots of some of us just fooling about, but a genuine talkie. A full-length comedy."

"You could be the comedian," said Pitt, nodding.

"Then we can show the film in the Lecture Hall—Goodwin can fake up a big screen—and do the thing in style," continued Handforth. "We can invite the school to the show, and we might even charge a bob for admission and give the proceeds to some charity."

"The lad has brains," commented Travers. "Handy, you surprise me—Hullo, why the grin, Reggie?" he added in polite inquiry.

"An idea has just struck me," said Pitt, his eyes twinkling. "Why not make a different kind of talkie? Half a tick! Does this apparatus of yours make much noise, Goodwin? I mean, when you're taking a film?"

"It's practically silent."

"Then it'll be easy," chuckled Pitt. "Look here, supposing we hide the apparatus in the bushes behind the shrubbery. And supposing a pretty girl sends somebody for K.K., and K.K. comes out and goes to her?"

"Look here—" began Handforth.

"And supposing this charming young lady falls on K.K.'s chest and generally makes him dithery?" went on Pitt coolly. "I rather think that the concealed apparatus would get hold of a talkie of exceptional merit—with K.K. doing most of the acting without even knowing it!"

There were many loud chuckles.

"It's a brilliant wheeze, and K.K. would fall for it," admitted Travers. "But, dear old fellow, where's the girl? Parkington knows all our delightful chums of the Moor View School."

"The girl's here—on this chair," said Pitt modestly. "I've done it before, and I can do it again. We'll call her Phyllis Pitt, my cousin. To-morrow's a half-holiday, and she pops along to see the lads. K.K. has heard something about her coming, and so he won't be surprised if he sees a slight resemblance—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pitt was interrupted by the roar of laughter which rose as the juniors grasped the full possibilities. Thereafter the plotters congregated and plotted.

NEXT morning somebody casually mentioned that Reggie Pitt's cousin was coming down. Kirby Keeble Parkington heard it and thought nothing. He wasn't much interested in girls, anyhow. Just before luncheon he heard that Phyllis was actually at the Moor View School, visiting her Cousin Winnie first.

Again K.K. thought nothing. All this was by way of preliminary preparation. But Parkington was certainly astonished when a diminutive fag buttonholed him in the Ancient House lobby and informed him that he was wanted behind the shrubbery.

"Who by?" asked K.K.

"A girl," said the fag. "Says her name is Phyllis. Pitt's cousin, I think. Says she particularly wants to speak to you—alone."

"My only hat!" said K.K. "All right, kid! I'll go!"

He proceeded towards the shrubbery with excessive caution, fully expecting an ambush of Old-Timers. He broke through the bushes—and then gulped. Sitting on a tree-stump was a really remarkably attractive young lady. Parkington caught a vision of slim, silk-clad legs, of a smart tailor-made summer frock. He saw the girl's wavy, shingled hair peeping out from beneath her attractive hat. Without doubt, a stunner.

He stepped forward, feeling absurdly awkward.

"Di—did you want to see me, miss?" he asked nervously.

The girl jumped up and ran lightly towards him.

"Oh, thank you so much for coming!" she said, in a voice which fairly cooed, and with her eyes full of gratitude. "My name is Pitt, you know—"

"Yes, I can see the resemblance," said K.K. "You're awfully like your cousin—only a lot better-looking, of course."

"I think you're wonderful!" murmured Phyllis.

Kirby Keeble was tongue-tied. He had never had a girl looking at him in this way before. She certainly did look a bit like Reggie, but never for a moment did he suspect the truth.

"Oh, I say!" he protested. "I—I—"

"I admire you tremendously," went on Phyllis softly. "I've heard such a lot about you—how strong you are—how brave! I've heard how you came to St. Frank's and made all the other boys toe the line. Please come closer."

"Clo-closer!" stammered K.K.

"Take me in your arms!" whispered the "girl."

"Oh, really, I—"

"Kiss me!"

"I—I— Here, I say, aren't you making a mistake?" babbled Parkington. "I think you must believe that I'm your cousin, or somebody else. My name's Parkington."

Suddenly the girl backed away, and an expression of hot indignation came into her eyes. She went right out into the open, where she knew that both the camera and

the talkie apparatus would record everything. So far Pitt had only indulged in the "leading up" work.

"How dare you?" he cried indignantly. "Oh, you wretch! How dare you kiss me like that!"

The unfortunate K.K. nearly collapsed.

CHAPTER 3.

An Unrehearsed Effect!

EVERYTHING was happening so swiftly that Parkington had no time to collect his thoughts. He hadn't even time to be suspicious. He was bewildered. First this girl had asked him to kiss her.

"No, no!" she cried. "You mustn't do it again! I don't allow boys to kiss me——"

"Good Heavens!"

K.K. spun round, and even the spoofer was so startled that his powdered jaw sagged. Mr. Horace Pycraft, the master of the Remove, the St. Franks busybody, had burst through the bushes. The film-makers, so near at hand nearly fainted. Here was an unrehearsed—an undesired—development.

"Parkington!" thundered Mr. Pycraft, advancing. "What are you doing to this young lady? Did I hear her accusing you of kissing her?"

"Oh, I'm sure you'll save me, you look so kind!" exclaimed Phyllis, running up and clinging affectionately to the startled Mr.

Pycraft's arm. "You look so strong and brave and noble!"

The schoolboy film-makers almost stopped the apparatus in their delight. Reggie was making capital out of Mr. Pycraft's unexpected arrival! The talkie promised to be



"Grab that camera!" yelled K. K. Parkington wildly to his henchmen, and the Carlton Gang charged to the attack.

Then she had angrily scolded him for doing it, although he hadn't kissed her at all!

"But—but I didn't!" he exclaimed, running towards her. "I say, don't cry out like that, you know! People will hear!"

In their concealment behind the bushes the amateur film-makers were hugging themselves with glee. The great film was working up wonderfully! Everything that Parkington did, and every word he said, was being recorded.

"Don't dare to come near me!" cried Phyllis, sobbing. "Oh, I've never been so indignant! You kissed me!"

"Look here, what's the game?" asked Parkington, almost roughly. "You know jolly well that I didn't kiss you, Miss Pitt."

Reggie thought that things were getting a bit tame. He backed away as K.K. advanced and uttered a scream of terror.

a hundred times funnier than any of the plotters had anticipated!

In no circumstances could Mr. Pycraft be described as strong and brave and noble. He was round-shouldered, weedy, and as unpleasant-looking as a dying walrus.

"Young lady!" he ejaculated. "Kindly release me! Who—who are you? And please tell me if this boy has annoyed you in any way."

"Did you hear me scream?" asked the girl coyly. "He didn't really try to kiss me, but——"

"Parkington, go indoors!" ordered Mr. Pycraft hastily. "Go to my study and wait there until I come."

"Yes, sir," gasped K.K., glad to escape.

"Now, my girl, let me know precisely how that boy offended you," continued Mr.

Pycraft, when he had made sure that he and the girl were alone. "I—er—shall make it my duty to punish him severely——"

"Oh, but you mustn't," she protested, laying her head on Mr. Pycraft's shoulder. "You are so big and strong, you might hurt him."

Mr. Pycraft quivered from head to foot.

"Really, this—this is most embarrassing!" he said, terrified. "My dear young lady, you really must not——"

"Call me Phyllis!" she said encouragingly.

"I—I—— Really, I cannot do that!" faltered the Form-master. "I have not even been introduced, and this sort of thing is most undignified. However," he added, with a gulp, "if it is soothing for you to rest in this fashion, I—er—have no objection."

"If that boy had kissed me I should have screamed," said Phyllis, looking up at Mr. Pycraft with fond eyes. "But if you kissed me——"

Mr. Pycraft reeled giddily.

"I!" he panted. "I kiss you!"

"We're alone!" she said demurely.

"Ah—er—quite so!" gasped Mr. Pycraft. "I—er—believe we are. But really, I—I——"

"Oh, come on!" she urged. "Chance it!"

Mr. Pycraft chanced it—and the wonder of it was that the juniors behind the film apparatus did not give themselves away. The sight of Mr. Pycraft, with a strained, set expression, bending down and kissing the disguised Reggie Pitt was too ripe for words.

"It's our secret!" said Phyllis softly, as she nestled closer. "Are you doing anything on Sunday afternoon? Supposing we meet on the towing-path, near the rustic bridge, and go for a walk?"

Mr. Pycraft had not yet recovered, and he was speechless.

"I'll be there, anyhow," she promised. "At half-past three sharp. Do turn up!"

Gently she drew herself away and tripped off. In fact, Pitt began to realise that the length of film in the camera was not excessive, neither was the Dictaphone record everlasting. Enough was as good as a feast.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Pycraft breathlessly, when he found himself alone. "What an extraordinary young girl!"

Dick Goodwin, who was about to stop turning, kept on.

"Half-past three—by the rustic bridge!" continued Mr. Pycraft. "After all, why not? A most charming girl! Dear me! I confess I was most embarrassed—but certainly a very charming girl."

He wandered away, and as he walked somewhat unsteadily across the Triangle Reggie Pitt dodged back into the clearing behind the shrubbery. Dick Goodwin and Handforth and two or three others literally fell out of the bushes, doubled up with helpless laughter.

CHAPTER 4.

Not So Good!

"HA, ha, ha!" "Pycraft was a scream!" gurgled Handforth. "Oh, my only topper! What a film! What a talkie!"

"Well, well!" beamed Travers. "I must say, Pitt, dear old fellow, that you were marvellous. And old Pieface never guessed a thing."

"He's going to meet you at the rustic bridge on Sunday!" sobbed Church.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Kirby Keeble Parkington, near the Ancient House, pricked up his ears. He hadn't gone to Mr. Pycraft's study, as ordered. The rest of the Carlton Gang had met him, and they were still with him—and so far K.K. hadn't dared to breathe a whisper of his recent experience. But now his manner changed.

"Great jumping grasshoppers!" he ejaculated. "Do you hear that you, chaps?"

"Behind the shrubbery," said Deeks. "Sounds like a menagerie let loose."

"It's the Old-Timers—howling with laughter," said K.K. thickly. "My stars! Then I was spoofed!"

"Spoofed?" gasped Baines. "What do you mean——"

Parkington didn't wait. He ran at top speed for the shrubbery. Bursting through, he had the full truth before him in one glance. There stood the "girl," wig in hand—Reggie Pitt! There stood Goodwin with his cine-camera, and there was Levi, with another queer apparatus.

"A film!" yelled K.K. hoarsely. "It was a jape—and I acted the goat in front of the camera! Oh, my hat!"

"Cave!" ejaculated Dick Goodwin. "The Red-Hots! Solly, get that camera and talkie thing indoors! Quick! They'll bag it if you don't!"

"Leave it to me," said Levi promptly.

The rest of the Carlton Gang burst into view, and K.K. was frantic.

"Don't ask questions!" he shouted urgently. "Grab that camera! Get the film and destroy it! For goodness' sake be quick!"

But the Old-Timers were ready. Levi and Pitt were smuggling the apparatus away—Reggie deeming it advisable to make himself scarce. The rest formed themselves into a solid phalanx, and barred the Carlton Gang. At all costs these fellows must be held back until the talkie mechanism was safely indoors.

"Never mind these idiots!" roared K.K. "Go after those other chaps with the camera."

It was easier said than done. The Old-Timers considered that the best form of defence was attack. They charged solidly. K.K. & Co. retreated in utter disorder. They blundered out into the open Triangle, and in about ten seconds a free fight was in progress. Perhaps Parkington would have won free but for a further unfortunate



Mr. Pycraft groaned as the film proceeded—and he nearly had a fit when he saw himself succumbing to the charms of “Phyllis.”

circumstance. Mr. Pycraft arrived on the scene.

Having hastily escaped from the “girl’s” presence, he had recovered some of his balance. It must be recorded that he was even now skirting the shrubbery in the hope that he might catch sight of her again. But he caught sight of a crowd of juniors instead. He halted. A disorderly riot! A gang of boys fighting in the Triangle!

“Stop!” shouted Mr. Pycraft, rushing up. “You—you abandoned young rascals! How dare you behave in this hooliganly manner? I am amazed! What is the meaning of this disorder?”

The combatants separated, flustered and dishevelled. It was just like old Pieface to butt in when he wasn’t wanted!

“You will all take five hundred lines each!” snapped the Form-master. “Your next half-holiday will be forfeited. Every boy here will attend an extra lesson on Saturday! You may all dismiss!”

They dismissed, their feelings too deep for words.

“WELL, anyhow, we’ll get our own back on the rotter when we show our film,” said Handforth gruffly, an hour later, when they had all

cooled down. “Thank goodness those Carlton chaps didn’t bag the film.”

“Goodwin’s developing it,” grinned Church. “He reckons it’s going to be a huge success.”

After tea Goodwin himself came into Study D.

“It’s a knock-out!” he declared. “Film’s perfectly clear, and the talking is first class. You can hear every giddy word.”

“Have you shown it yet?” asked Handforth eagerly.

“Only a bit of it—but it’s enough,” replied the schoolboy inventor. “Why shouldn’t we have our show to-night? We’ll invite K.K. & Co. and give them a treat. I particularly want to see K.K. go green.”

“Why not invite Pycraft, too?” grinned McClure.

Dick Goodwin started.

“That’s given me an idea,” he said. “We may not have that show, after all—I can give you something better. We don’t want to be gated on Saturday, do we?”

“I should think not!” roared Handforth. “We’ve got a fixture against Helmford College on Saturday, and it’ll be awful if we have to cancel it.”

Dick Goodwin nodded cheerfully.

“All right!” he said. “Leave it to me.”

CHAPTER 5.

Mr. Pycraft Thinks Again!

"COME in!" called the acid voice of Mr. Pycraft.

It was half an hour later, and the Form-master was sitting in his easy-chair, thoughtful and self-satisfied. Perhaps he had been thinking about the forthcoming Sunday afternoon, and the rustic bridge by the river. At all events, he had started guiltily as the tap had sounded on the door.

Dick Goodwin entered, looking very respectful.

"Can I have a word with you, sir?" he asked.

"I wish you wouldn't disturb me like this, Goodwin," said Mr. Pycraft peevishly. "You know perfectly well that I don't like being interrupted at this hour of the evening. I have been—er—pondering over some intricate mathematical problems. What do you want?"

"I was wondering if you would like to see my new film, sir."

Mr. Pycraft impatiently shook his head.

"No, certainly not," he replied. "I cannot be bothered with trivialities. My time is of greater value. You may go, Goodwin."

Dick had been prepared for this.

"Oh, well, all right, sir—as you say," he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "But as you appear in the film we thought—"

"I?" ejaculated Mr. Pycraft. "What was that? Did you say that I am in the film?"

"Yes, sir—we happened to film you without your knowing it."

"In that case," said Mr. Pycraft, "perhaps I had better come along. I may not grant you permission to show this film."

"That's what we thought, sir," murmured Dick. "So we want you to act as a sort of censor."

Mr. Pycraft's weak spot had been touched. His curiosity was aroused. Without further demur he accompanied Dick Goodwin to Study D, and when they arrived they found everything ready. Only Handforth & Co. were there. The screen was in position, and the projector and the Dictaphone were fixed up.

"Here's your seat, sir," said Dick calmly.

Mr. Pycraft sat down, and a moment later the talkie started. Mr. Pycraft started rather violently when he beheld a slim, attractive-looking girl flash on the screen. And as he watched, and as he listened, he became more and more alarmed.

"Please come closer," came the girl's voice from the screen.

"Clo-closer," stammered the boy, whom Mr. Pycraft recognised as Parkington.

"Take me in your arms!"

"Oh, really, I—"

"Kiss me!"

Mr. Pycraft sagged in his chair. He remembered how he had dashed behind the shrubbery. That girl had actually

encouraged Parkington! It wasn't the boy's fault at all. Then he remembered how she had urged *him* to kiss her, too. He went hot and cold in spasms.

He saw himself come on the screen; he heard himself ordering Parkington to go indoors. And as the film proceeded Mr. Pycraft became more and more like a half-dissolved jelly. When, indeed, he heard the girl telling him to "chance it," and when he saw himself actually kissing Phyllis, he gave a low, anguished moan.

The film came to an end, and the lights went up. Mr. Pycraft was wilting in his chair, giving a good imitation of a wet sock.

"Well, sir?" asked Goodwin brightly. "Not so bad for a first attempt at a talking picture is it? Have we your permission to show it, sir?"

Mr. Pycraft came to himself.

"Show it!" he gurgled. "Why, you—you— Upon my soul! How dare you? Of all the impertinent, insolent effrontery—"

"How do you mean, sir?" asked Handforth. "We were only spoofing Parkington. We didn't know you were coming into it."

Mr. Pycraft, who knew that this was true, rose dizzily to his feet.

"Destroy that film!" he croaked. "I command it! How many boys have seen it?"

"Only us, sir."

"Thank Heaven for that!" breathed Mr. Pycraft. "Boys, I—I take back what I just said. If you will destroy this film, and say nothing about it, I will let the whole matter drop."

"Why, certainly, sir—anything to please you," said Handforth generously. "After all, we can make a better film than this. Oh, and by the way, sir," he added, as an afterthought. "There's that question of five hundred lines and next Saturday's gating. Do you think you could let us all off, sir?"

Mr. Pycraft was not brilliant, but he could see clearly enough that he was in the trap.

"If you destroy this film—and that appalling record—I will say no more about the punishment," he bleated.

Before Mr. Pycraft's eyes the fateful film and the incriminating wax record were burnt up in the Study D grate. He fairly tottered out into the passage when the ceremony was over.

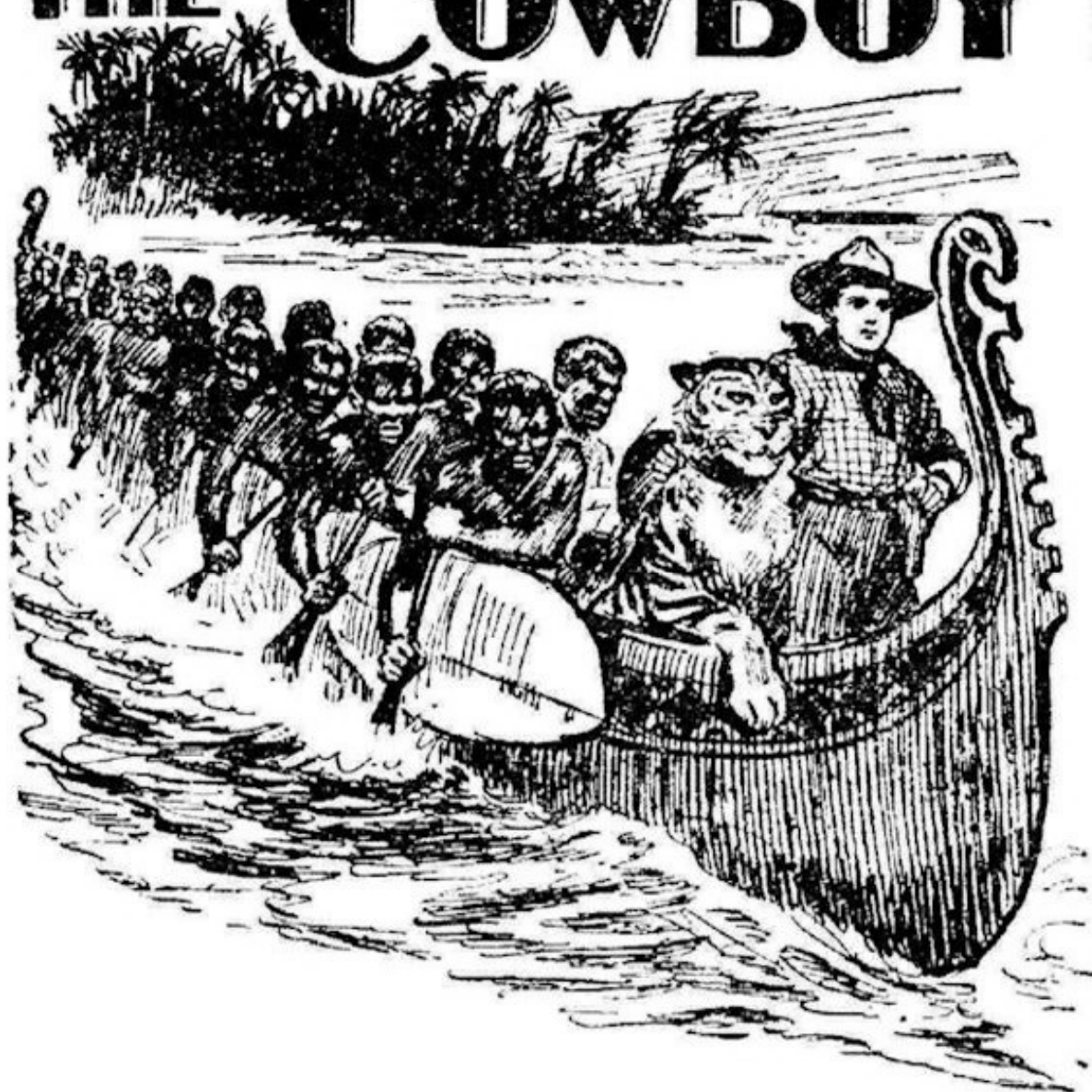
And that was the end of Handy's first talkie. An inglorious ending, perhaps—but what a success! For hadn't it been the means of Handforth & Co. escaping a five-hundred line imposition and a gated half-holiday? It had! Yes, a success—a wonderful success—without doubt!

THE END.

(The St. Frank's juniors at the Test-match next week—in a lively complete yarn entitled, "The Test-match Truants!" Order your NELSON LEE in advance, chums!)

Thrills in the Tropics!

THE COWBOY KID & CO.



Adventure No. 5:

"TREACHERY!"

KING LOOPY, of Bangaloola, pays a visit to a neighbouring island — and wishes he hadn't!

Loopy Makes an Enemy.

LOOPY LANE, the Cowboy Kid, and King of Bangaloola Island, sat sunning himself on the veranda of his royal palace. On one side of him sprawled his magnificent pet tiger, Sheba; on the other hand sat Kiki, the black boy who was his pal and general factotum.

Everything was very peaceful. Loopy found himself dozing. Then abruptly the silence was shattered.

A deafening clamour of voices echoed from a large hut on the right-hand or west wing of the palace. Instantly the royal guards below the veranda gripped their weapons and sprang erect. It sounded as if somebody was being murdered, and as Loopy looked out into the public square he saw ex-King Wangaloola come out of the hut, followed by a crowd of shouting servants. These were men of lower caste, but they showed no respect for Wangaloola now as they ran after him, brandishing sticks and wooden bowls and jugs and jars of earthenware, which they hurled at the waddling figure of the twenty-stone black man.

Ducking and dodging, Wangaloola managed to escape injury, and mounting the veranda with amazing agility for one of his girth, he went down on his knees before Loopy.

"What's he say?" asked Loopy, turning to Kiki.

"Heem say alley servant strike, wantey muchee bletter food, not likey workey for Wangaloola now heem not keeng."

palace and were screaming threats at Wangaloola.

The fat giant sat back on his haunches and spread his hands.

"Bookala muchacarancha!" he cried, shooting a cunning look at Loopy through the half-shut slits of his eyes.

"Heem say he want Keeng Loopy to let heem havey beeg whip," said Kiki.

Loopy held his great stock-whip in his hand.

"All right, you can have the loan of it, Wangaloola, if you think you can use it," he said, as he gave the handle into the ex-king's fat right hand.

In a flash Wangaloola was transformed from an abject kneeling coward into a relentless savage. He began to shout as he stood with the whip swung back ready to strike, and his left hand pointing at the trembling black men whose courage oozed away, for they had seen Loopy defeat the Potakeeta champion and put a whole army to flight with the magic whip.

Wangaloola sprang to the ground and bounded towards them, bringing the thirty-foot lash of the whip round with all the strength he could muster. The black servants dropped their missiles and ran. But they had scarcely taken a dozen strides before they turned and came back again. Wangaloola was lying on his back upon the sun-baked ground, for in swinging the whip he had brought the great thong round, and it had landed hard upon his jaw and knocked him out.

The servants stretched for their sticks and pots and jars. Once again they began to pelt the fallen king, and their aim was good.

"Half-time, there!" shouted Loopy Lane, as he leapt clear of the veranda. "Come on! Scatter 'em, Sheba!"

The Cowboy Kid seized the whip which Wangaloola had dropped, he cracked the lash at the crowd of native servants, and he sent the tiger flying among them. Shrieking with terror, they darted in all directions, disappearing round the walls of the native huts that enclosed the square.

Loopy helped Wangaloola to his feet. There were bumps upon the ex-king's head. He swayed unsteadily as he peered at Loopy. Then he began to mutter, and finally waddled in the direction of his hut, reeling slightly.

Kiki blinked.

"Massa keeng," he whispered in a frightened voice, "late Keeng Wangaloola say magic whip no good, and he gettee own back on Keeng Loopy one day."

The Cowboy Kid picked up his whip and went back into the cool shelter of his palace.

"We needn't be afraid of him, Kiki," he said. "He can't even keep his servants in their places."

Kiki did not answer. He looked worried.

From that day onward, whenever Loopy Lane met ex-King Wangaloola, whose lumps and bumps and bruises took a whole fortnight to heal, the great fat native potentate looked at Loopy as if he hated him!

The Deputation!

DAYS passed, during which Wangaloola stayed inside his hut, and Loopy noticed that officials and dignitaries of the island visited the ex-king constantly. Poo-poo, the witch doctor, who hated the Cowboy Kid, was a frequent visitor.

"Oley Poo-poo makey mischief," said Kiki.

"I guess I don't care two straws for Poo-poo!" retorted Loopy, as he lolled on the veranda stroking the tiger's silken head.

The next day Wangaloola left his hut, the first time for two weeks, and waddled off across the square. That day Bangaloola natives began to pour into the city from all parts of the island, and Kiki, who had gone in search of news, came back to report that a deputation from the Island of Potakeeta had arrived in Bangaloola under a flag of truce and would come to-morrow to see King Loopy.

"What should you think they want, Kiki?" asked the Cowboy Kid.

Kiki did not know. For years a state of war had existed between the peoples of Bangaloola and Potakeeta.

"P'raps come to make peace," said the black boy.

The next morning Chi-Chi-Coo, the lord chamberlain, arrived wearing his court robes

and a conical hat smothered with tinkling bells. Bending double on the floor, he told Loopy through Kiki, who acted as interpreter, that after thirty years of never-ceasing war Potakeeta had sent a deputation from their island begging for peace, and asking that King Loopy Lane and Sheba should visit them.

Chi-Chi-Coo had a face like a wrinkled toad. Long, white hair streamed down over his shoulders, and his straggly beard hung over his chest like a mat. With his bony left hand upraised, he talked for ten minutes without stopping, and then pointed dramatically to the square.

Loopy went on to the balcony with Sheba. Marching into the square, under an escort of a hundred warriors armed to the teeth, was the deputation from Potakeeta, consisting of about fifty fine-looking savages wearing glittering robes of state. Their leader carried a white flag, and they halted in front of the royal palace.

Then the talking began in earnest. First the lord chamberlain shouted to the cheering people who had congregated. Next Wangaloola, who had turned up looking fatter than ever, had a go. Then one after another the spokesmen of the deputation had a long talk. Kiki, the interpreter, boiled the whole chat down to this:

That the Potakeeta nation longed for peace. The coming of the little white king with the magic whip, who had beaten their champion, had convinced them that they could never hope to capture Bangaloola. The people of Potakeeta had heard of the great striped cat which was a living Spirit, and if King Loopy and his she-cat would only pay a visit to their island they would acknowledge him as their king as well, so that the two nations, who had always been at war, would become one and peace would reign forever.

Presents were borne to the veranda and laid at King Loopy's feet. The Cowboy Kid blinked as he looked down upon vessels of beaten gold, bowls studded with precious stones, strings of wonderful beads, and marvellously fashioned cloths and fabrics threaded with gold.

"What am I to do about this, Kiki?" asked Loopy, when it was all over and the deputation from Potakeeta knelt with bowed heads in front of him, waiting for his answer. "Ask the lord chamberlain."

The question was asked and answered. It would be madness for Loopy to refuse, the lord chamberlain said. He could be king of two great nations instead of one for the asking, if only he would visit Potakeeta.

The Cowboy Kid stepped forward. Sheba, the tiger, took her place beside him. Loopy fired a revolver in the air, and raising his hand for silence, gave his answer.

"People of Bangaloola," he cried, "I will go to Potakeeta!"

Potakeeta Plotters!

HURRIED preparations were at once made for the royal visit to the neighbouring island of Potakeeta. Loopy, Kiki, the she-cat, the lord chamberlain, Wangaloola and others were borne shoulder-high by native bearers to the lagoon where the fleet was waiting. The Cowboy Kid embarked in a great war canoe manned by forty paddlers, twenty aside. Each man had his shield draped over the side and his spear ready to his hand, so that the canoe resembled a viking ship.

Other canoes almost as large bore Wangaloola, Chi-Chi-Coo and other high officials across the smooth seas to Potakeeta, and

shouting natives to the palace he was to occupy during his visit, not a single royal guard was to be seen.

The Cowboy Kid had to stand on the steps of the palace for an hour, listening to the pow-wowing of a group of Potakeeta chiefs, before he was allowed to go inside and rest and eat. And as he tossed his stetson aside and pulled up a chair to a roughly made table, he saw the armed Potakeeta guard close in four rows deep around the royal bungalow. Kiki faced him with rolling eyes, and he was trembling like a leaf.

"Do you think there's danger, Kiki?" Loopy asked.

"Velly muchey danger. Keeng Loopy

Using his stock-whip, Loopy swung himself from branch to branch to elude the pursuing savages.



forty light small craft packed with soldiers formed the royal escort.

The sea was like glass, the whole fleet making fine progress to an accompaniment of tom-toms and horns, the natives singing as they swung their paddles.

Soon after land was sighted a fleet of Potakeeta war canoes came out to meet them, and the whole lot turned into a sheltered bay where thousands of people waited to greet them.

Then began the march inland. Potakeeta warriors, their faces hideously bedaubed with what Kiki said was war-paint, hemmed in the royal bearers, and as they proceeded the Cowboy Kid noticed with alarm that the Bangaloola soldiers fell away. When at last Loopy was carried through a dense crowd of

shut-ey up. No can get away, eben with she-cat," answered the black boy.

Loopy made for the front door just to try, but as he opened it so the guards, four rows deep, lowered their spear-points and grinned.

Loopy went thoughtfully back.

"Kiki," he said, "you've got to get out of this and take a peep round. You know the language. They were going to make me King of Potakeeta. Find out what's the matter."

Loopy found a board in the floor which was loose and, raising this, Kiki slipped through.

Three hours later he returned. Kiki was looking thoroughly scared.

He had stripped off his clothes, put on a loin wrap and mixed with the people. He

had passed out of the crowded city and made his way to a hilltop which overlooked the ocean. And there he had seen the entire Bangaloola war fleet paddling back to Bangaloola as fast as the crews could urge their canoes.

"People talk much in city," moaned Kiki. "They say kill she-cat, then kill Keeng Loopy and me. After that they sacrifice us in market square in morning. Wangaloola and Poo-poo cause of trouble."

"I guessed that," commented Loopy. "Do you know when they are going to kill us, Kiki?"

"Kill us while we sleep!" moaned the black boy miserably.

"Then we shan't have to go to sleep, that's all," said Loopy. "And we'll get away from this prison somehow."

He hurried to the front of the hut, taking Sheba with him on a lead and carrying his stock-whip. The moment he appeared the guards sprang at him, spears and knives pointed at his breast.

Their faces were painted into hideous masks, and they uttered threatening cries. Loopy felt certain that they would have killed him if he hadn't had the tiger with him. Flicking his stock-whip, he drove them back, Sheba dashing after them with her teeth bared in a snarl. Then Loopy went back to the inner room and waited for night to come. The air fairly shook under the loud and continuous beating of countless drums. He could hear the murmuring of the crowds in the square and market place. He heard soldiers go marching by to the tune of a war-chant.

When darkness had fallen Loopy made a hole in the mud wall of the hut and looked out. He could see hundreds of savages huddled up on the ground, all fast asleep. He could see the guard of warriors nodding as they sat cross-legged with their spears slanting over their shoulders. There was no moon, just a black stretch of sky above in which stars sparkled like diamonds. He went to the front of the hut and looked out. The guards were sprawling on the veranda, fast asleep. It was the same at the rear.

Loopy tiptoed silently back to the big room where he had left Kiki and Sheba.

"Kiki," said Loopy, "come on! We're going to get out of this packet of trouble—now!"

He led the she-cat to the front of the hut, tied his beloved whip about him, settled his stetson hat, and then got astride Sheba. He told Kiki to take a seat behind and hang on for all he was worth. Then, gripping the tiger by hands and feet, with Kiki doing the same, Loopy gave the word.

With a rush the magnificent tiger passed the four rows of guards, leapt clean over the common soldiers who were sleeping in the open, and guided by Loopy's touch, she turned out of the square and threaded her way among the natives who lay huddled in heaps, waiting for the morning and the sacrifice of King Loopy of Bangaloola.

From the palace frantic shouts and cries

pealed in clamorous echoes, and then began a loud beating of innumerable drums.

Bearing her double burden as if she were carrying a straw, Sheba dashed into the heart of a forest where they soon found shelter. There, with the tethered tiger keeping watch over them, Loopy and Kiki slept.

They were awakened by the loud roaring of the tiger, and as they sprang up they saw a ring of painted savages surrounding them. A spear stuck quivering in the earth where Sheba had been crouching, the she-cat moving in the very nick of time. Another crashed into a tree against which Loopy was standing.

In a flash Sheba bore down the giant Potakeetan who would have killed her, then sprang full-tilt against another, bowling him over like a ninepin. Laying about him with his stock-whip, the Cowboy Kid lashed or tripped half a dozen men. Then as Kiki vanished among the undergrowth, he flung the thong of the whip at a branch ten feet above his head, and as it coiled round and held, he hauled himself quickly up amid a screen of leaves. A whistle which Sheba understood sent the tiger to cover. With shouts of triumph, the Potakeeta warriors began to climb up the tree after Loopy.

Up and up climbed the Cowboy Kid, with the pursuing savages gaining fast. When he was near the top he lashed out with his whip, caught the branch of a neighbouring tree and swung himself right over into it. Then he slid down to earth.

The savages followed, but lost ground here. Again Loopy whistled, Sheba bounding out of the forest in answer to the call. As the Potakeetans came down they saw the tiger waiting, and with cries of terror began an upward climb again.

"After them, Sheba!" cried Loopy.

With a mighty spring Sheba leapt into the tree. Loopy waited, cracking his whip expectantly. The terrified warriors came tumbling down through the leaves like a shower of falling coconuts, and as they reached the ground they were whipped out of the grove by the Cowboy Kid.

"Magic! She-devil! He-devil!" they howled as they ran.

Keeping to narrow tracks that wound onward through the forest, Loopy and Kiki and Sheba managed to reach the sea just before sundown. In a sheltered cove they found a canoe rocking at anchor.

Kiki swam out to it like a fish and brought it in. Loopy and the tiger climbed aboard. They found a sail made of matted reeds and steeped it. And as the sun went down Kiki, who knew how to handle this sort of craft, steered through gently tumbling breakers into the open sea.

Wangaloola's treacherous plan of revenge had failed and they were free!

THE END.

(Another breathlessly exciting yarn featuring the Cowboy Kid and Sheba next Wednesday.)



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.

AND NO WONDER!

Doctor: "Have you kept strictly to the diet I prescribed—eating children's food?"

Patient: "I have. I've eaten a handful of mud, four toffee apples, a piece of string, some marbles, two pencils and a few peardrops—and I feel worse, if anything!"

(R. Yule, 36, Boundary Road, Middlesbrough, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

NOT INTERESTED!

"I'm a little stiff from bowling," said the commercial traveller as he eased himself into a chair.

"I don't care what you are or where you come from," snapped the busy business man. "What have you got to sell?"

(L. Bradley, Conerick, Ballinamallard, co. Fermanagh, Ireland, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE REASON WHY!

A cricket match was being played between the veterans and the youths of the village. The veterans were batting, and old Farmer Jakes was at the wicket. The first ball clean bowled him, but the umpire shook his head; the second ball he poked into first slip, but again the umpire shook his head; the third ball got him l.b.w., and the umpire hesitated. Just then a yell sounded from the distance.

"S'all right, Dickey. You can give him out now—we've got all the apples we can carry."

(V. Chaffey, Antwerp House, High Street, Keynsham, near Bristol, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

EASILY DONE!

Tramp: "Would you please subscribe half-a-crown to my fund for beautifying the village?"

Vicar: "But, my good man, how are you going to beautify the village?"

Tramp: "By moving on to the next."
(D. Donnelly, San Remo, Stroud Road, Gloucester, has been awarded a penknife.)

BOW-WOW!

They were fishing in the canal.

"I say, Harry," said one youth, "what kind of bait are you using?"

"Meat bones," replied the other.

"Meat bones!" exclaimed the first. "What kind of fish do you hope to catch?"

"Dogfish, of course," was the reply.

(M. Beddingham, 2, Council House, Crays Hill, Billericay, Essex, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

WHY HE WAS WORRIED!

A little boy was sobbing bitterly in the street.

"What's the matter?" asked a kindly gentleman.

"We've got chicken for dinner," blubbered the lad.

"Well, that's nothing to cry about."

"I know," sobbed the youngster, "but I can't find the way home."

(I. Murdock, 4, Eastbourne Road, Chiswick, W.4, has been awarded a penknife.)

POOR OLD PROFESSOR!

Footman: "What's wrong with the professor this morning? His face is all bandaged."

Butler: "Absent-minded, as usual. Lathered himself with his safety razor."

(S. Martin, 8, Beacon Hill Road, Newbank, Halifax, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

NOT SO GOOD!

Mother: "You are a good boy not to throw your banana skins on the

floor of the train. What did you do with them?"

Tommy: "I put them in the pocket of the man sitting next to me."

(E. Abes, The Bungalow, Ewelme, Oxford, has been awarded a penknife.)

AGAINST THE RULES!

Foreman: "Wot's up, Bill? Hurt yourself?"

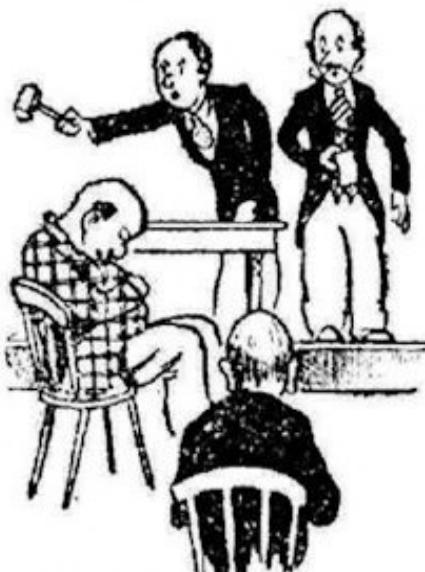
Bill: "Got a nail in my boot."

Foreman: "Why dontcher take it out, then?"

Bill: "Wot! In my dinner hour?"

(S. Harrison, 18, Windmill Lane, Sneinton Road, Nottingham, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE JOKE OF THE WEEK!



FORWARD, CARNERA!

After the speaker had been droning on for nearly half an hour a guest sitting near the chairman started to nod. A gentle tap from the official hammer upon his head roused him a little, but a few minutes later he started to snore in real earnest. The chairman hastily leaned over and wielded his hammer again.

"Harder!" murmured the dreamy one. "Hit me harder! I can still hear him!"

(A handsome watch has been awarded to J. Whiteman, 7, St. Christopher Street, Nottingham.)



CHAPTER 1.

The Man With the Dagger!

MADAME MARTINEAU was agitated. With short, nervous strides she paced the *salon* on the first floor of the old-world house on the outskirts of Richmond. The windows were open, and

the garden, typically French in style, was bathed in the warm evening sunlight.

It was close in that quietly furnished apartment, in spite of the open windows. The June day had been oppressively hot, and even now there was little or no relieving breeze. Once or twice Madame Martineau

Keep Your Eyes Open For—

CLUE!

By

E. SINCLAIR
HALSTEAD.

A Man's Life at Stake.

Nelson Lee, the famous detective, in a nerve-ling story of mystery and deduction.

The good lady sighed as she thought of Paul's extravagances, of the big gambling debts he was always incurring. In many ways he was a troublesome son, and it was not to be supposed that his stepfather would extend the same forbearance as his mother. The pity was, she had so little money of her own. Always he came to his stepfather, and at last

halted near the window and stood tense and rigid, as though listening.

"*Mon Dieu!* This wait! This suspense!" she murmured anxiously.

Downstairs her son Paul was in the library. Monsieur Martineau was in the library, too. Monsieur Martineau was madame's second husband—and Paul's stepfather. Only with reluctance had madame permitted her son to seek the interview.

Instinctively she felt that it would be useless. Only a week ago her husband had declared with much excitement, and with much gesticulation, that for the last time he had paid Paul's bills. Not another sou would he get!

the generous, easy-going Frenchman was losing his patience.

Madame knew well enough that her son's gambling propensities had brought him here again now. He was down in the library asking for more money. This time his stepfather would be firm. Madame knew it; and she feared the consequences.

Pausing near the open window, she could hear the murmur of voices floating up from the open French doors of the library. She was relieved. Occasionally she could hear her husband's laugh; and Paul's voice was almost continuous. There were no indications of quarrelling.

"Perhaps he has succeeded," murmured madame hopefully.



Then, as she halted near the window again, her fears increased. Her husband's voice was louder now. Either he was nearer the window, or he was raising his tones. She listened breathlessly. She could tell that Paul was protesting, and she could also tell that her husband was excited. His voice rose almost shrilly.

She stood irresolute. In spite of monsieur's warnings, she felt inclined to hurry down and intervene. Then, abruptly, she heard a fresh sound—a strange, gasping, gurgling cry.

It was followed by a horrified shout from Paul.

Twirling round, madame sped to the door, ran out, and fled downstairs with the agility of a young girl. She burst into the library—and then halted as though rooted to the spot. What she saw almost caused her heart to cease beating. She uttered a wild scream.

Between her and the open French-windows lay her husband, prone on the carpet, face downwards. Paul was standing over that ominously-still form—and in Paul's left hand, gripped tightly, was a long-bladed dagger!

A HEAVY tread sounded on the gravel path outside. The blue uniform of a police officer came into view in the summer's dusk.

"Anything wrong here?" asked the officer steadily, as he halted opposite the open French-windows. "Why—hallo! What the —"

He broke off, startled. He not only saw the still form on the floor, but he saw the dagger which was still in Paul's hand.

Without hesitation the policeman pulled out his whistle and blew shrilly. He could see that this job was bigger than he could tackle single-handed. Madame, who was kneeling beside the still form of her husband, sobbing now, gazed in terror at the stern-faced constable.

"Go!" she panted. "You intrude, is it not so? Leave these grounds——"

"Sorry, madame, but I can't do that," said the policeman grimly. "I heard screams as I was passing your gates, and I thought I'd better come inside and inquire. Looks as if I'm needed."

He didn't look at the lady at all; he kept his eyes concentrated on the young man with the dagger. Instinctively his hand drifted round towards his truncheon. There was something ugly about the look of that dagger.

"Better put that thing down, sir," he said quietly.

"What—what thing?" asked Paul, like a man in a dream.

Until that moment he did not seem to realise that his fingers gripped anything. Now he looked at his hand, shuddered, and his fingers convulsively opened. The dagger dropped with a thud to the carpet.

"No, no!" he shouted hoarsely. "You don't understand! You don't think that

I—— It's a lie! I didn't do this! I'm bewildered—I don't understand what happened! I don't understand anything!"

Much to the constable's relief, a stout sergeant appeared at that moment, and less than two minutes later a doctor arrived—having been telephoned for by Jacques, the butler. By now madame was standing back, clutching at Paul's arm. Her former wild hysteria had given place to a dreadful calmness.

Dr. Wilson, who had attended the Martineaus for many years, was very swift in his examination.

"I'm sorry," he said in a blunt way which was characteristic of him. "Monsieur Martineau is dead. The wound penetrates the heart."

"Stabbed from the back, eh?" asked the sergeant gruffly.

"It is an appalling thing, but there can be no other explanation," replied Dr. Wilson. "How did it happen? Does anybody know?"

He looked at Madame Martineau and her son.

"It's not true!" burst out Paul. "You think I did it, don't you?"

"I don't think anything," replied the doctor. "I haven't the faintest idea how this tragedy took place, Paul."

"Is your name Martineau, sir?" asked the sergeant, looking at Paul.

"Yes; my stepfather preferred me to use his own name," replied Paul steadily.

"Then I'm afraid, Mr. Martineau, that I shall have to ask you to come with me to the police station," said the sergeant formally. "This officer tells me that when he came up you were holding that dagger in your hand——"

"I know," broke in Paul. "But I'd just pulled it out of the wound! I thought perhaps I could help——"

"Better say nothing, sir," interrupted the sergeant.

"But I will!" persisted the young man. "Mother! You don't believe this? It's horrible—ghastly! Father and I were talking, and he got a bit heated. He started pacing up and down, and then——"

"You mean that you were quarrelling?" interrupted the doctor.

"Not exactly, although we were both a bit angry," said Paul. "Then, suddenly, father gave a strange cry and collapsed. When I looked down at him I saw that there was a dagger sticking out of his back."

"Just a minute, sir," said the sergeant. "I've warned you that you'd better not talk, but if you're set on it I can't stop you. Are you saying that there was nobody else in this room?"

"Not a soul."

"And there was nobody outside on the lawn, or on the path?"

"Nobody at all!"

"And your father suddenly fell forward with a dagger in his back?"

"Yes."

There was an awkward silence. The story was, of course, ridiculous. Paul's statement that nobody else had been present was significant in the extreme. The sergeant was busy making notes, then, using his handkerchief, he picked up the dagger, touching only the upper part of the blade. A keen look came into his eyes.

"Ever seen this before, sir?" he asked sharply.

"Never!" retorted Paul, with a gulp. "Take it away!"

"What are your initials, sir?"

"P. M."

"Oh!" said the sergeant. "I suppose you didn't know that your initials are engraved on the handle of this dagger?"

"I tell you I have never seen it before!" shouted Paul. "I don't know how it happened. As Heaven is my witness, I swear I was standing on the other side of the room when my father fell. Mother! You believe me, don't you?"

He looked at her almost in panic, and his eyes were steady as he gazed fixedly into hers. Perhaps she saw the stamp of truth in his eyes, or perhaps it was merely an expression of blind mother love. She nodded.

"Yes, Paul," she whispered. "I do believe you."

CHAPTER 2.

Rival Detectives!

PAUL MARTINEAU was arrested forthwith. In the circumstances, the police officers could do nothing less. It was not until after he had been taken away that his mother's false calmness deserted her.

She found herself alone except for Dr. Wilson. He had persuaded her to go into the *salon*, where she sat like a figure of wax—at first. Then, with true French impulsiveness, she sprang up.

"We must do something!" she cried. "Who can we get to help us, doctor? Don't you know anybody? A clever man—a man who can save my boy!"

The doctor stroked his chin.

"There is Mr. Nelson Lee, the great detective, of Gray's Inn Road," he said. "I believe that Mr. Lee specialises in——"

"*Eh bien!* Yes, yes," broke in madame. "Get Mr. Nelson Lee, *mon ami*. At once—at once! I have heard of him. He is even more famous than our great Girard. Ah! And Girard is now in London, too. But, Mr. Lee—he is the man."

Dr. Wilson went to the telephone, and he was soon talking to Nipper, Nelson Lee's "star" cub.

"Very sorry, but Mr. Lee is out of town just now," said Nipper. "I'm not sure when he'll be back—might not be here until to-morrow."

"That is a pity," said the doctor.

"Still, you never know, sir," went on Nipper. "The gub'nor is always springing surprises on us—he may walk in within a

minute or two. So it might be as well if you just gave me a few details."

The doctor did so. He gave all the details possible, and Nipper rapidly took them down in shorthand.

"If I can get hold of Mr. Lee, I'll tell him, sir," he promised. "It seems to be a pretty clear case against the young chap, though, doesn't it?"

"I am but acting for Madame Martineau," replied the doctor cautiously.

Madame was frantic when she heard of Nelson Lee's absence.

"Then you must find Girard!" she cried. "He is of my blood—he will understand better, perhaps. Girard is clever—*tres* clever! He is the great detective of Paris. He is staying at the Apollo Hotel. Get Monsieur Emile Girard on the telephone."

The doctor rang up the Apollo.

"Sorry, sir, but Monsieur Girard checked out some hours ago," came the voice of the reception clerk. "He has returned to Paris by the evening boat. By now he is half-way across the Channel."

The doctor was not particularly grieved; for, privately, he had no hope of either Nelson Lee or Monsieur Girard, or, for that matter, anybody else, helping Paul Martineau. However, Madame Martineau was not the kind of woman to accept defeat.

"You will send a telegram," she declared. "You will wire to Monsieur Girard, begging him to return without delay."

"But I do not know his Paris address——"

"*La, la*, what matters?" broke in madame. "Telegraph to the train, doctor. He will get the message many hours before he reaches Paris. And he will come. Tell him who I am, and what my trouble is. He is of my nationality, and he will not fail me."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said resignedly. "If you think it will do any good——"

"Quick—quick!" broke in the lady. "You waste the time—the precious time."

After all, it was better to placate the agitated, grief-stricken woman. Her faith in her son was pitiful. On his own admission, he was the only man who could have thrust the dagger.

Dr. Wilson knew Paul well—had known him for years. He did not believe that the young man could have deliberately killed his stepfather. He was hot-blooded, like most Frenchmen—prone to excited outbursts—but murder was not in keeping with his character. There must have been some very severe provocation, and in a blind rage the boy might easily have struck the blow without realising it.

When Chief Detective-inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard, arrived on the scene, he heard this theory of the doctor's, and he bluntly dismissed it.

"Doesn't hold water, doctor," said the Yard man.

"But this young man would not deliberately murder——"

"Just a minute," interrupted Lennard. "If he didn't mean murder, why did he bring the dagger? It couldn't have been a sudden brain storm, as you try to make out. People don't carry long-bladed daggers unless they're out for mischief."

The doctor was startled.

"I had forgotten," he admitted. "But are you sure that Paul *did* bring that dagger with him?"

"I'm not sure, but I understand that it's got his initials on it," replied Lennard. "And when that policeman came to the window he saw friend Paul with the dagger still in his hand. We don't need to look much further, do we?"

"It is dreadful," muttered the doctor.

"You never saw that dagger before, did you?"

"Never."

"And yet you have visited this house for years?"

"That does not prove anything," said Dr. Wilson promptly. "I'm not the kind of man to observe ornaments and trinkets and things. For all I know, that dagger may have been on monsieur's desk for years."

"Well, it's a point we'll clear up later on," said Lennard.

There were other Yard men present—expert photographers and other such men. Lennard was rather surprised that he had been called over. The guilt of the arrested man was obvious.

While the Scotland Yard experts obtained their evidence, Madame Martineau waited. She had little hope of Nelson Lee turning up; but Monsieur Girard would not fail her. Sure enough, a telegram arrived stating that M. Girard was already on his way back.

NELSON LEE went into the private 'phone box and gave a number. He was in a hotel at Ipswich, in Suffolk.

He had been investigating a minor, but intricate case of forgery, and had met with some success.

"Hallo!" he called, as he heard a familiar voice at the other end of the wire. "I want you to get me some data, Nipper. Go to the 'D' file and look up Joshua Daniels. I'll hang on."

"O.K., Chief."

Nipper was back at the 'phone within two minutes. Crisply and clearly he gave Lee the details he required.

"That's all I want to know, thanks," said Lee. "I needed this information to verify certain facts which have cropped up here. I'm in Ipswich at present, Nipper, but I expect to be home by about eleven."

"I suppose you couldn't come earlier, guv'nor?" asked Nipper. "There's been a murder at Richmond, and a Frenchwoman has rung up begging you to help her. Her doctor actually put the call through."

And Nipper gave the precise details as he had heard them.

"Lennard rang up not long ago, and I believe he's gone to Richmond on this case," continued Nipper. "Madame Martineau

begged for you to investigate. Not that you could do much, guv'nor. That son of hers seems to be guilty all right."

"You can never be sure," Lee said briskly. "I'll speed things up here and drive straight to Richmond."

"Can I meet you there, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly.

"If I need you I'll 'phone for you," replied Nelson Lee. "In the meantime, hold yourself ready."

Lee was out of Ipswich and speeding along in his Rolls-Royce Special within fifteen minutes. He reckoned to be in Richmond before the end of two hours.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Emile Girard, the great French private detective—the Nelson Lee of Paris—was taking similar brisk steps for a quick arrival at the scene of the tragedy.

Girard was a man of action. Immediately upon receiving Madame Martineau's wire he pulled the communication-cord of the Calais-Paris express and caused the train to be brought to a standstill at a small wayside station. He made short work of the train officials' protestations; he gave them his card, advised them to acquaint him with the appropriate charges, and hurried into the village and hired a car.

In the evening dusk he drove to the nearest aerodrome, to which he had previously wired. A 'plane was awaiting him, and without a moment's delay he flew direct to Croydon, landing there in the red glow of the mid-summer evening.

There was something virile in M. Girard's snappy methods. He was a small, wiry man, extremely dapper. His clothing was exquisite, his hair was as glossy as silk, and his waxed moustache was a model of perfection.

It was rather curious that these two great detectives should both hasten to madame's aid, and independent of one another. It so happened that Nelson Lee drove his Rolls-Royce into the short drive of the old-fashioned Richmond home only ten seconds before the high-speed car which had carried Girard from Croydon.

Lee watched the Wolseley Hornet as it came to a standstill behind his own car. A small figure popped out like a rabbit, and for a moment the two gazed at one another with polite inquiry.

"Good-evening, Monsieur Girard," said Lee.

"*Mon Dieu!* Who is it that knows me so well in the semi-darkness?" asked the French detective, peering forward. "*Tiens!* Is it not Mr. Nelson Lee?"

"Madame Martineau has evidently made certain that this investigation shall be ably conducted, monsieur," said Lee generously. "I doubt if my own services are in any way required."

"But no!" exclaimed Girard. "It is I who must withdraw. Would I presume to intrude upon your—how you say it?—preserves? Better for me to leave the case in your own able hands."

The detectives flashed on their torches. Revealed on the ground was a number of clearly-defined footprints.



A cough from the porch interrupted them. There was a constable on duty there in the gloom, and he thought it about time to intervene. Then the door opened and Chief-inspector Lennard looked out.

"Why, hallo!" he said, as the hall light fell upon the figures on the steps. "You're late this time, Lee. In any case, there's nothing here for you to do. Who's your friend?"

"This is Monsieur Girard, of Paris," replied Lee. "Monsieur, let me introduce Chief-inspector Lennard, of Scotland Yard."

"This is a great honour," said Girard, regarding Lennard with admiration.

They all went in. Madame Martineau appeared on the stairs.

"But you have come!" she said gladly. "*Bien!* You are Monsieur Girard?"

She was rather disconcerted when she learned that both her appeals had borne fruit; not only had Girard answered her call, but Nelson Lee had come, too. She had certainly not expected this.

"With your permission, madame, I will withdraw," said Nelson Lee. "I only came in response to a message passed on to me by my assistant, and I was not then aware that you had sought other advice."

"No, no—but no!" protested madame. "Since you are here, monsieur, I beg of you to remain. Could you not both help in this terrible affair?"

"Why not?" put in Lennard good-humouredly. "I'd like to point out, madam, that there's nothing much they can do."

"You are wrong," said madame, almost fiercely. "They can do much. My son, he is not guilty of this. Never will I believe it!"

"*Sacre!* Let us not waste the valuable time," said Girard. "I, Girard, am willing that Monsieur Lee should collaborate with me. Is it not said that two heads are better than one?"

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Very well," said the great British detective. "Let us agree to join forces, Monsieur Girard, and get something done."

CHAPTER 3.

Footprints!

CHIEF-INSPECTOR LENNARD was inclined to be gently sarcastic. He had already made up his mind about the case, and he couldn't see that any earthly good could come of a further investigation. Lennard worked by rule of thumb, and this case, in his opinion, was clear-cut. He profited nothing by previous experiences, for time and again Nelson Lee had dumb-founded him by showing an apparently clear-cut case in a new light.

It was madame who told the two private detectives the exact facts. Composedly, she gave them the full truth concerning Paul; she did not spare him in any way, frankly admitting that he was wild and irresponsible. She told of the interview that had culminated in the tragedy.

"I came down and found my son with the dagger in his hand," she concluded; "but when I am told that he killed my husband, I do not believe it. Never would my son be an assassin!"

"This dagger," put in Girard. "It was your husband's?"

"The dagger was brought here by young Martineau," interrupted Lennard.

"It is not true!" burst out madame. "How can you say that? Where is your proof?"

"I am very sorry, madam, but all my inquiries in this house lead me to that conclusion," said Lennard. "None of the servants ever saw that dagger before. They didn't like admitting it, but they had to.

You say you have never seen it before, either."

"My husband may not have shown it me," faltered the lady.

"You see?" said Lennard, glancing at Lee. "Of course, we've searched young Martineau's flat, and I'm ready to admit that we found nothing that helped us; but that dagger must have been brought into this house by him. His initials are on it, and there's nobody else who could have owned it."

"This is bad—what you call ugly," muttered Girard. "Since he came armed with such a weapon it indicates that he was prepared to strike. Wait, madame, I beg of you. I only say it indicates. Perhaps things are not as they seem."

"You can't get away from the fact that if Martineau brought that knife here, he came with murder in his heart," said Lennard grimly. "I hate speaking bluntly in this way, but facts are facts. Monsieur Martineau was alone with his stepson at the time of the murder. Paul was found with the knife in his hand, and not another soul was present."

"But this is nothing!" cried Girard excitedly. "The fact that nobody saw a third person does not prove that no third person existed. You were at the window, madame? But the window was round the angle of the house. *Sacre!* You see! Madame could see nothing."

"But Paul could," Lee reminded him quietly. "And if there actually was a third party, Paul would have told the police."

"Perhaps, *mon ami*, perhaps!" said Girard, tapping his nose. "But how do we know that Paul has not some reason for keeping—what you say?—mum? Perhaps a woman. He shields her. We are but starting this inquiry."

Lennard looked impatient.

"It's all very well for you to talk like that, monsieur," he said bluntly; "but it won't wash. Come and look at the gravel path outside the French windows. It's soft gravel, and there's not a footprint except those of the constable and the people we know to have been there. Certainly there's no woman's footprint."

"It is only a suggestion," said Girard, somewhat damped.

"Then, again, there's the wound," went on Lennard. "Only a strong man could have plunged the dagger in so deeply. Forgive me for going into these details, madam, but you insisted upon this investigation—"

"Do not spare me," said madame. "I am brave. I steel myself."

"That wound, as the doctor will tell you, extends from the lower left-hand side upwards towards the heart—from the back," said Lennard. "That blow could only have been struck by a left-handed man—and a strong man."

"Paul, I assume is left-handed?" asked Lee.

"That's just it—he is!" said Lennard triumphantly.

"Then let me advise you to be very careful, old man," said Nelson Lee. "Are you sure you're not making things fit to suit your own case? I'm not questioning the doctor's statement, but it's rather a serious thing definitely to declare that any knife wound could only have been struck in a certain way. There are so many ways."

"It is what I have said!" exclaimed madame eagerly. "You are clever, Monsieur Lee! There are, indeed, so many ways!"

"But your son was found with the knife in his hand!" growled Lennard impatiently.

"A point which seems incriminating, but which may be merely circumstantial," declared Lee. "If there was a third party—and we can prove that it existed or not—then this evidence against Paul will fall to pieces, or, at all events, become considerably weakened."

"Hang it, there wasn't any third party!" said Lennard, getting hot. "So what's the good of trying to fake up a defence when no defence exists?"

"There was a third party!" said Madame Martineau quietly.

Lennard jumped.

"What!" he almost shouted.

"Monsieur Inspector, there was a third party—not in the library, but in the grounds," said madame, with deadly intensity. "Marie, my maid, told me that she saw somebody in the garden."

Lennard was on his feet now.

"Why wasn't I informed of this before?" he asked, really angry.

"I instructed my maid to tell you nothing."

"This is too bad of you," said the Yard man indignantly. "Really, madam, you can't keep things back like this! Don't you realise that this is a very serious matter?"

Madame Martineau remained perfectly composed.

"It is because I realise the seriousness that I have waited for Monsieur Lee and Monsieur Girard," she replied. "You, Monsieur Inspector, have already made up your mind that my son is guilty. Of what use to speak with you? I tell what I know to those who are willing to help—not to those who are against me."

"*Pauvre femme!*" murmured Girard, with a sympathetic glance at madame. "We understand, Monsieur Lee, *n'est-ce pas?* We progress admirably. I have the little idea that all is not as it seems! *Voilà!* Let us proceed further."

"We'd better!" grunted Lennard, pulling out his notebook. "Do you mind ringing the bell, Lee? It's just behind you. We'll have this girl in and question her."

Marie, the maid, was soon brought in.

"I understand that you were at your window at the time of the murder?" questioned the chief inspector.

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"You heard the quarrel?"

"*Oui, monsieur.*"

"And, naturally, you heard the fatal cry," said Lennard. "Now, tell me exactly what you saw in the garden."

Marie's eyes rolled.

"A big man," she replied. "*Tres* tall. Dressed, he was, in a long cloak, and a hat which shadowed his face. I caught but a glimpse as he moved from one bush to another."

"And this was actually at the time of the murder?"

"*Oui, monsieur.* At the time *precisement.*"

"I shall have to go and have a look at the garden from your window," said Lennard bluntly. "I don't believe you can see behind the bushes, anyhow. A man in a long cloak, eh?" he added, with scepticism. "Peculiar, wasn't it, that he should wear such a distinctive attire? People don't go about nowadays in long cloaks. They're out of fashion—especially on a hot summer's evening."

"I but tell you of what I saw, monsieur!" protested Marie.

"Did this figure come any nearer to the house?"

"I only saw him for that one second, monsieur," replied the girl. "Then, when I heard my master's cry, I went downstairs."

"One little moment, *cherie*," said Girard softly. "But one question I ask. One *petite* question. You love this Paul, is it not so?"

The girl coloured deeply.

"Monsieur!" she protested.

"Ah-ha!" roared Girard, leaping out of his seat like a Jack-in-the-box, and pouncing on her. "You love this Paul? Speak! Answer!"

"I—I cannot tell you, monsieur."

"You shall tell me!" thundered the French detective. "*Sacre!* Is it that you trifle with justice? Did you love this Paul?"

The girl shrank back, terrified.

"Yes, monsieur!" she sobbed faintly.

"You see?" cried Girard, leaping round. "And Paul?" he added, twirling once more on the girl. "Did he encourage you?"

"No, no!" panted Marie. "Monsieur Paul knew nothing. Never did I let him see—"

"*Voilà!*" interrupted Girard, with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders. "Your witness, Monsieur Lennard, is of no use."

"Don't be too sure," cut in Nelson Lee quietly. "However incredible this story may appear, it must be thoroughly investigated. Marie, you must show us the exact spot where you saw this man. We have electric torches, and we can make a close examination."

"That's not a bad idea," said Lennard. "If we find footprints there—"

"You are too absurd!" protested Girard excitedly. "Have I not proved that this girl's story is but a fabrication to shield the man she secretly loves? It is not so easy to deceive Girard! *Mon Dieu!* The girl sees

(Continued on page 24.)



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K. J. Parker, 7, Cressfield Road, Lindley, Huddersfield.
R. Perry, 32, Cardinals Road, Stowmarket.
S. Pike, 5, The Square, Knowle Park, Bristol.
F. M. Richardson, 11, Pantywyder Road, Uplands, Swansea.
W. Ricketts, Stable Cottage, Longworth, Hereford.
L. Saunders, 71, Manners Road, Portsmouth.
A. R. Shaw, 2, St. Mary's Road, Luton, Beds.
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S. Smith, 22, St. Peter's Row, Great Yarmouth.
G. Tosh, 138, Castle Street, Glasgow, C.4.
W. Traynor, 16, Poole Road, Coventry.
W. Watkin, 16, Broadway, Barton, nr. Northwich, Ches.
I. Watson, Hope Cottage, 1, Granville Street, Peterborough.
A. Watts, 37, Bolton Road, Leicester.

The VITAL CLUE!

(Continued from page 21.)

her lover taken away, and so she tells madame of a lurking figure in the garden. And madame believes—which is but natural, since she is so anxious to believe anything that is in favour of her son."

Nelson Lee quietly smiled to himself. He was already suspecting that Monsieur Girard was becoming a rival rather than a collaborator. At Lee's first definite suggestion, Girard contested it. Plainly, the Frenchman was jealous—he was desirous of conducting this case in his own way. But it was Lennard who held the reins—since the inspector, after all, was in official command.

There was no delay. A move was made for the garden, and both Lee and Lennard produced their powerful electric torches. With Marie nervously showing them the way, they crossed the lawn opposite the French windows of the library.

"It is here, monsieur," said Marie, taking hold of Lennard's sleeve and pointing to some dark bushes just on the border of the lawn.

Girard bounded forward like a rabbit, and plunged amid the bushes. Nelson Lee again smiled to himself. So Monsieur was not so sceptical as he pretended to be! Quick as he acted, however, Lee was quicker. He dodged round the bushes, and arrived on the indicated spot just a moment ahead of Girard.

"*Ma foi!* The girl spoke the truth!" ejaculated Girard excitedly. "See! The footprints! Someone has stood here recently."

"Yes, we are getting on, monsieur," agreed Nelson Lee, nodding.

CHAPTER 4.

The Scrap of Human Skin!

CLEARLY defined in the soft ground round and about the bushes was a number of deeply-impressed footprints. Nelson Lee was interested in them at once. The impressions were particularly pronounced at the heels, which was an unusual feature. In some respects, these marks were really heelprints rather than full footprints.

"H'm! Peculiar!" remarked Lennard, as he flashed his light upon the marks. "Never seen any like 'em!"

Girard shrugged.

"Perhaps the gardener," he scoffed. "Are we not wasting time? Even if this girl is right, what can it prove?"

"You are admitting, then, that the girl might be right in her story?" asked Lee dryly.

"The footprints—they do not lie," replied Girard. "But what else? A man stood here. As I say, perhaps a gardener—perhaps an intruder who came for some trifle—flowers. Who knows? He hears a cry, and he is

startled. He flees. What is there to connect this man with the crime?"

"Nothing at all," said Lennard promptly. "You've got to admit that, Lee. Monsieur Martineau was stabbed to the heart. It might have been a different thing if he had been shot. A man with a revolver could easily have potted him from here. I think it's quite likely that Monsieur Girard's suggestion is correct, and that this man, whoever he may be, is not connected with the murder."

"Yet you admit that he must be found?" asked Lee.

"Oh, of course—we've got to find him," replied Lennard. "His evidence will probably be of vital importance. He might have seen the actual crime."

Lee made very careful measurements and notes. He even asked Marie if there was any plaster-of-Paris in the house, so that he could make casts. He seemed far more interested in the footprints than either Girard or Lennard.

He was keenly attracted by the bushes, too. With his powerful torch he examined every twig, going over the bushes with a thoroughness which caused Lennard to show some impatience and which made Girard openly laugh.

"You look for the little clue, eh, my friend?" he asked. "You think our mysterious lurker may have left some trace? But is it not a waste of the good time? I, too, believe in the small things, but here there is nothing."

"Quite sure, Girard?" asked Lee smoothly.

There was an almost eager note in his voice. For at that very moment he had found a twig which demanded closer attention. One little scrap was broken, and on the broken end Lee's keen eyes caught sight of something which should not have been there—which did not actually belong to the tree.

"Ah-ha! It is that you have found something?" asked Girard eagerly.

Lee took a tiny pair of tweezers out of his pocket and very gingerly he removed something from the twig. He held it near the torch bulb, and Lennard and Girard peered closer.

"What is it?" asked the Yard man. "Looks like a bit of potato peeling half-dried. Man alive, what's the good of messing about like this?"

"I regret that you should think that I am messing about, Lennard," said Lee smoothly. "If you look more intently, you will see that this so-called scrap of potato peeling is really a fragment of human skin."

"The deuce it is!" ejaculated Lennard. "Sorry, Lee! You're right, though! Looks as though it might have been torn from somebody's finger."

"It was," agreed Lee. "The man evidently pushed the bush aside and caught his finger on this twig—"

He was interrupted by a roar of laughter from Monsieur Girard. The little French

detective was holding his sides. His face was screwed up with hilarity.

"But this is exquisite!" he gasped, when he could find his voice. "*Mon Dieu!* You are the great detective, Monsieur Lee! I give you the good congratulations!"

"You appear to be amused," said Lee.

"Pardon, monsieur, but how can I help being amused?" asked Girard, again holding his sides. "You make the great discovery, and you think it is so big—oh, so big! Forgive me if I have my little laugh. But I think, *mon ami*, that you have made the little mistake."

"I don't agree with you, Girard," said Lee, wondering why the French detective was so hilarious. "This is certainly a scrap of human skin."

"*Mais, oui!*" agreed Girard. "Certainly it is a scrap of the skin human. I should know. *Voilà!*"

With a flourish he extended his own right hand and revealed a little gash near the end of the third finger. Part of the skin had been torn off. Grinning widely, he watched Nelson Lee's face.

"Oh, I see!" said Lee, in rather a subdued voice.

Lennard chuckled.

"Not such a discovery, after all, old man," he remarked.

"You return me my property?" chirruped Girard. "But not! You may keep him. I no longer need that piece of myself, Monsieur Lee. My finger, he mend unaided."

Nelson Lee could not help feeling crestfallen. He had thought his clue to be an excellent one, and now the discovery that the skin had been torn from Girard's own finger was disconcerting. However, the French detective might have taken the matter in a better spirit; his gloating laughter was another strong proof that he regarded Nelson Lee as a rival in this investigation. It was he who wanted to get all the "fat."

"I am sorry I did not cry aloud when I caught my finger," said the French detective, becoming more sedate. "But Girard, he makes light of little hurts. A scratch, a cut—Poof! It is nothing! Girard does not make the fuss, like a hurt child."

"So it seems," replied Lee shortly.

The garden unfortunately gave up no further secrets; but those footprints were something fresh, at all events. Marie's evidence did not seem to be such a fabrication as Girard had at first believed.

"As far as I can see, I've got to get that girl to give me the closest description she can of that man in the cloak," said Lennard. "Then we'll search for him. His evidence will probably be of importance; but there's not a ghost of a chance of it helping the prisoner. Rather the contrary."

"You think he witnessed the crime?" asked Lee.

"Well, it looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps—but you're going very largely upon assumption," Lennard said Nelson Lee. "I'm rather disappointed in the case. I want to do all I can to help young Martineau, but I freely confess that the prospects are not very bright."

"Why don't you be frank, and say that they're infernally black?" retorted Lennard. "Hang it all, Lee, this man was found with the weapon in his hand—"

"Yes, yes, we know that, and I have already told you why I don't take too serious a view of that fact," interrupted Nelson Lee. "Still, in the absence of any other evidence I'm compelled to admit that your own theory is the more likely."

"Theory nothing!" growled Lennard. "I go by facts."

"Ah, *mon ami*, you are the wise man," said Girard. "It is the facts which speak so loudly—the little facts and the big facts."

When they got indoors they found Madame Martineau looking as composed as ever, but pale and haggard. It was clear to Lee that she was bearing up under this strain only with the greatest difficulty. Bravely she was facing the dreadful tragedy, but never did she lose faith in her son.

"I regret, madame, that our researches in the garden have been of but meagre service," said Nelson Lee gravely. "Indeed, to be frank, I cannot see how my help will avail you."

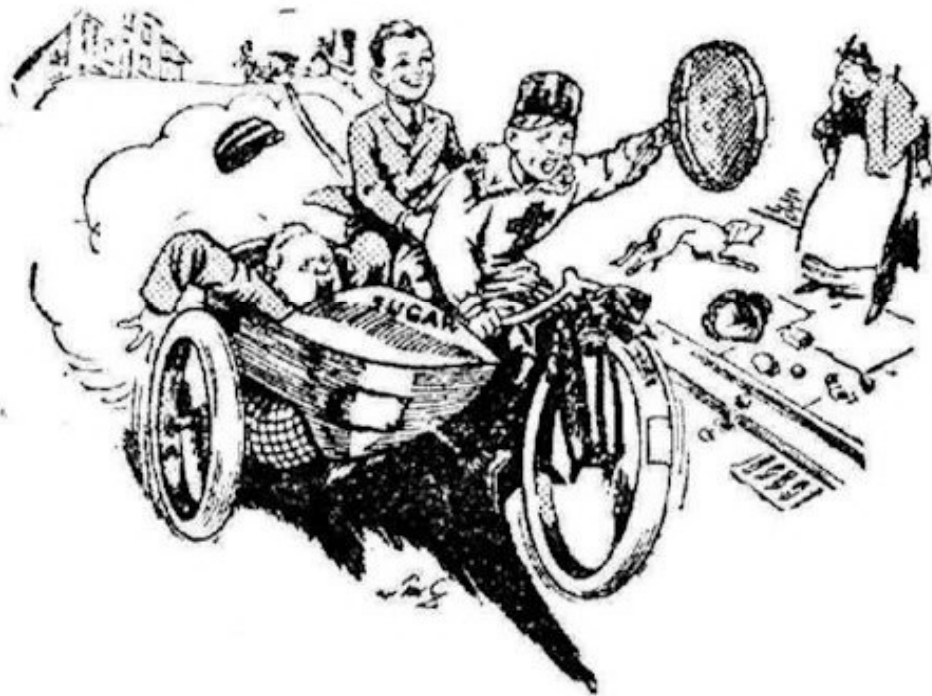
"So soon you admit yourself baffled?" asked madame, with some scorn.

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"When there is no clue, what can I do?" asked Lee defensively. "I would like to help your son, but by continuing this investigation I might only make more certain of the rope being placed round his neck. Rather than assist in such an operation, I would prefer to withdraw——"

Madame nodded coldly.

"You will wait?" she asked, her eyes regarding him almost with contempt. "I will write you a cheque, Monsieur Lee, for your services."

"No, certainly not!" protested Lee. "I have done nothing, and I——"

"You have spent some time here, and your time, I gather, is of some value," interrupted madame. "Will you be good enough, monsieur, to let me know the amount of my indebtedness?"

"As you insist, I will send you my account in due course," said the detective gravely.

Lennard accompanied Lee to the door. The chief-inspector bent confidentially near.

"If you ask me, old man, you're wise," he said in a low voice. "You're simply riding for a fall if you keep on with this case. That young French blighter is guilty. There's not a chance for him. Glad to find that you've got enough sense to clear out right away."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"There are times, Lennard, when I wonder how you ever rose to your present responsible position," he said banteringly. "I might see you again before the night is out. One never knows."

He passed out, and Lennard frowningly scratched his head. A parting shot like that from Nelson Lee was not without some hidden meaning. The burly Yard man wondered what he had overlooked.

OUTSIDE, Nelson Lee climbed into his Rolls-Royce special and drove straight to the Richmond Police Station. As he had expected Paul Martineau was lodged in the cells here. Much to Lee's satisfaction, Superintendent Quilter was available, and Quilter was an old acquaintance of his.

"I should like to have a few words with Paul Martineau, if it's possible," said Lee smoothly. "Just a matter of curiosity, Quilter. As a criminologist I'm interested in every type of murderer, you know. Could it be managed?"

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure," said the superintendent.

He hummed and hawed for a bit, and said a good deal about regulations, but in the end he allowed Nelson Lee to go along to Paul's cell and have a private chat with him.

Lee found the young man in a very dejected condition.

"You say that you are Mr. Nelson Lee?" he asked. "Are you here to help me, or to help the police?"

"If you are innocent, my boy, I'm here to help you," replied Lee quietly.

"I am innocent," vowed Paul. "As Heaven is my witness, I swear to you that I do not know how my stepfather was killed. I'm bewildered—dazed—dumbfounded! One moment he was alive—the next moment he was stretched at my feet, dead!"

Volubly, excitedly, he recounted what had happened. He seemed eager and desperate to talk. Lee's very presence acted as a stimulant, and he lost much of his depression.

Nipper looked and saw on the underside of the table a chalked circle containing a number of incisions.



"Sometimes I think that I must have done it," he went on. "For there was nobody else, Mr. Lee. That is the baffling point. Do such things happen? Do men suddenly do things without knowing it—and such terrible things? I was angry, but I had no evil thoughts in my mind."

"You mustn't dwell on that theory at all, Mr. Martineau," said Lee. "I don't think for a moment that you had a brain storm, and that you killed your father without knowing it. What I want you to tell me is this—and it may be of more importance than

—in confidence—what drove you to such an expedient? I gather that somebody was giving you a lot of trouble—pressing you for money."

"Yes, that's true," admitted Paul soberly. "He had been patient for some time, but he threatened to tell my stepfather everything unless I settled up—and if that had happened, I might have been completely disinherited."

"This man is shady, then? Who is he?"

"A fellow named Leroux—one of my own countrymen."

"Leroux," said Lee musingly. "I'm not surprised you were desperate! You mean the man who keeps the exclusive gambling house in Brook Street?"

"Yes, but he doesn't live at Brook Street—he's too clever for that," said Paul bitterly. "I've been a fool, Mr. Lee. And this ghastly affair, if ever I get out of it, will be a lesson to me for life! I'm not really bad—I'm only reckless and featherbrained."

He spoke so earnestly, and with such sincerity, that the detective was impressed. It was difficult indeed to believe that this young man could be guilty of a brutal, premeditated murder.

"I've gambled—I've wasted pots of my stepfather's money in Leroux's infernal place," went on Paul. "Worse than that, Mr. Lee—I've got into his debt. That was a thing I daren't tell my stepfather, and when he threatened to tell him himself I had to do something. But I did

not kill him! Never! You mustn't believe

"How much do you owe this Leroux?"

"Twenty-five thousand odd."

"Phew! That's a heavy sum, my boy," said Lee gravely. "However, you'll be able to pay it easily enough now, if you get out of this mess. And I hope you mean what you say."

"I do—I swear I do!" panted Paul. "I'm thinking of mother, too. Poor mother! My stepfather's death is an awful enough blow, but with me here she must be nearly out of her mind."

"Monsieur Girard, the eminent French detective, is comforting her," said Lee, not without a touch of irony. "But about this



it appears at the moment. Why did you come to Richmond at all?"

"To see my stepfather."

"I know that. But why did you want to see him? Money?"

"Well—yes."

"Much money?"

"A fair amount."

"And you were expecting him to cut up rusty, eh?" nodded Lee. "Yet you came to him? You must have had a very pressing reason, young man. I'd like you to tell me

man Leroux. Did you ever see him at the Brook Street place? I mean, did you deal with him direct, or through one of his agents?"

"I saw him once," replied Paul. "He doesn't come to London often—he runs similar dens in Paris, Brussels, Berlin, and Vienna. When he does come to London he stays in an hotel. He's a wily beggar!"

"I have heard of him, and I agree as to his wiliness," said Lee. "You say you saw him once? Describe him to me."

Paul thought deeply.

"A tall sort of man, rather slim and impressive—looked more like a learned college professor than a gambling den proprietor," he replied. "And he walked strangely, too. He walked in a stiff, stilted kind of way."

"On his heels?" asked Lee sharply.

"Why, yes, now you come to mention it."

"Well, Martineau, I think there's a good chance for you," said Lee. "For the moment madame, your mother, thinks that I have retired from the case—baffled. But to tell you the honest truth I have a keen desire to spring a little surprise on my colleague, Girard. He is so self-satisfied that he deserves a mild shock."

"Mother was brainy in sending for you, Mr. Lee," said Paul eagerly. "I'm not so sure about Girard. I'm really French, but I haven't much faith in our detectives. They're too excitable—too volatile. But look here! Why did you ask me all these questions about Leroux? Do you think that he killed my stepfather?"

"He might have done," replied Lee thoughtfully. "You owe him twenty-five thousand, and he might have taken means to find out whether you were likely to get the money. If not, where was he? Nowhere—unless your stepfather died; and then he would naturally get it from you. Your own arrest may not have entered into his calculations."

Paul's eyes glowed.

"You're terribly clever, Mr. Lee," he said breathlessly. "I hadn't even thought of anything like that! And I believe you're right. It must have been Leroux who did it."

"Now, young man, you mustn't get excited," said Lee smoothly. "You've cleared up a few points, and I can now go ahead with this inquiry with greater likelihood of success. Bear up, and don't worry too much about your mother. With any luck I'll soon restore you to her."

CHAPTER 5.

The Elusive Clue!

NELSON LEE was in a much better frame of mind as he drove speedily from Richmond to Gray's Inn Road.

He was satisfied that his early impression had not been at fault Lennard—as usual—was barking up the wrong tree. The official detective was accepting the obvious

evidence and neglecting the obscure. And yet it was the obscure which was vital.

Lee was now entirely convinced of Paul's innocence. But he was puzzled. This murder must have been committed in an extraordinarily cunning way—so cunning, indeed, that Lee could not yet arrive at the method.

When he got to Gray's Inn Road he found Nipper eager and keen.

"It's a bit thick, guv'nor," he protested. "You've been to Richmond, and you've left me out of this affair."

"My dear chap, there wasn't anything for you to do," replied Lee. "I want you to ring up all the big London hotels in my name, and see if you can find out where a man named Leroux has been staying," said Lee crisply. "He may have used another name—and if so we shall be up against a snag. Still, we'll hope for the best."

Lee himself had a hasty meal, and then went into the study to help Nipper on the other 'phone. But it wasn't necessary. Nipper had just obtained the information he desired.

"Here we are, sir," he said, picking up a writing-pad. "Pierre Leroux has been staying in the Dominion Hotel for a couple of days, but left on Tuesday."

"And to-day's Thursday," said Lee. "Two days. Rather a cold trail. Still, it might be worth looking at. Good-night, young 'un. Better not wait up for me—I shall probably be very late."

"Then there'll be two of us late," said Nipper promptly. "My only hat! Do you think you can keep me out of this now? Orders or no orders, I'm coming with you, and if you don't like it you can lump it!"

Nelson Lee chuckled, and raised no objection when Nipper tumbled into the Rolls-Royce Special beside him. Within ten minutes they were at the vast, palatial Dominion Hotel, in the West End. Lee soon got into touch with the under-manager.

"Yes, that 's right, Mr. Lee," he said. "I don't notice every guest, of course, but I happened to observe Leroux because of his curious way of walking—a stumpy sort of stride on his heels. Something wrong with his ankles, I imagine. It's a wonder he didn't get his inevitable taxi-cabs to run him right upstairs to his room. Never walked a yard unless he could help it."

"What I want to know is this," said Lee. "Would it be possible for me to look through the suite that Leroux occupied?"

"If it is not occupied by anybody—certainly," replied the under-manager.

He went off to make inquiries.

"You're lucky, Mr. Lee," said the under-manager, coming back. "That particular suite—No. 28, on the fourth floor—is still empty. If you like to go up to it, I'll take you."

"I'm very much obliged," said Nelson Lee earnestly.

The under-manager left Lee and Nipper alone in the suite, and then Lee got to work. Carefully, painstakingly, he examined every nook and cranny of the sitting-room, the bedroom and the bath-room. In the bath-room he made a discovery.

Bending over the wash-basin, he detected a faint, elusive perfume. He picked up the half-used cake of soap and smelt it. A keen light leapt into his eyes, and he carefully wrapped the soap up and placed it in his pocket.

Lee then proceeded to turn the pictures over in all the rooms—much to Nipper's mystification—and examined the backs of them. He even turned the wardrobe round, and then the dressing-table, and closely inspected these, too. He did not find what he sought.

"I can't understand it," he muttered. "The man must have used something."

"What for, guv'nor?" demanded Nipper. "What's the giddy game?"

Lee ignored him. Nipper was beginning to realise now that his presence here was entirely unnecessary. Nelson Lee was in one of his morose moods—a rare occurrence. He had apparently come here expecting to find something easily, and his non-success irritated him.

"Well, it's no good," he said at last. "We're simply wasting time by staying here. Come along, Nipper. Confound it, I'm beaten!"

He went to the door, and as he reached out his hand to switch off the light he took a last look round. His gaze fell upon the sturdy mahogany table in the centre of the room, and he almost jumped.

"Idiot!" he exclaimed. "Upon my word, Nipper, I must be showing signs of old age! Here, lend me a hand!"

They turned the table over, Nipper bewildered. An ejaculation of keen satisfaction escaped Lee's lips. All his good-humour was restored.

"What is there on the underside of this table that gives you such a kick?" asked Nipper wonderingly.

"This," said Lee, pointing.

He indicated a number of deep incisions in the solid woodwork. They were on the underside of the table, almost at the top-end—for the table itself was standing on its side, the under part facing the detective. The incisions were all enclosed within a small circle which had been chalked on the woodwork.

"Oh!" said Nipper. "I know just about as much as I did before. So our old pal, Leroux, suffers from the secret vice of dart-throwing in his off moments? He must be a pretty good hand at the game, because he seems to have scored a bullseye every time."

"A bullseye every time, Nipper!" nodded Lee thoughtfully.

LEAVING Nipper in the car, Lee entered another famous West End establishment soon afterwards. This place was a small Bohemian restaurant tucked away in a back street—a place much frequented by theatrical stars and other people connected with the theatre.

In a quiet alcove Lee found the man he wanted—Jimmy Metcalfe, one of London's most celebrated variety agents. Metcalfe was a man of sixty, and his knowledge of the music-hall was profound. There wasn't a vaudeville turn in existence that he hadn't booked at one time or another.

He and Lee had a little chat, and by the time it was over the great detective was in possession of a few facts which would probably be useful. He and Jimmy were the best of friends, and Lee had often gone to him for valuable information.

"Well, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, when the detective came out. "You've been having a high old time, haven't you? I've just seen about six chorus girls go in there, to say nothing of the leading lady from the Elite, and those two jazz dancers from the Jollity."

"I'm neither interested in chorus girls nor in leading ladies," replied Lee briskly. "As you seem determined to attach yourself to me for the rest of this adventure, I suppose I shall have to take you along to Richmond."

"My hat! Are you going back now—at midnight?" asked Nipper. "Guv'nor, you've found a hot trail, haven't you?"

"It's so hot that it's still sizzling!" replied Nelson Lee, as he pressed the self-starter.

CHAPTER 6.

The Hole in the Ground!

WHEN they arrived at Richmond the lights were still burning in the hall and some of the downstairs rooms of the house of tragedy. Nelson Lee strode straight to the hall door and gave a brisk ring. The door was opened almost immediately by Jacques, the butler, whose aged face was looking worn and strained.

"Madame is still available?" inquired Lee.

"Yes, monsieur," said Jacques, in a tired voice. "She is in the salon with Monsieur, the detective. Shall I tell madame that you have returned?"

"Please do so," said Lee, nodding.

The butler came back after a few moments, and Lee and Nipper were escorted upstairs to the salon. They found Madame Martineau reclining in an easy-chair, looking more worn and haggard than ever. M. Girard was taking his ease, too, and judging by the cigarette-ends in the ash-tray near him he had been more mentally than physically active.

"Ah-ha! So you return, Monsieur Lee?" he exclaimed, springing up. "Is it that you have the new clue?"

"I would like to know if there have been any fresh developments," said Nelson Lee, ignoring his rival's query, and addressing madame.

"I am satisfied, Monsieur Lee, that a woman, after all, is guilty," said the good lady. "Monsieur Girard has reconstructed the entire crime. *Mon Dieu!* But he is a clever one, this Monsieur Girard! So completely has he shown me how my poor husband was killed."

"Indeed?" said Lee, sitting down in response to madame's inviting hand. "This young man is Nipper, my assistant. So you have successfully reconstructed the crime, Monsieur Girard? Am I permitted to know the identity of the murderer?"

"*Sacre!* Is it—how you call it—playing the game?" retorted Girard. "You have retired, Monsieur Lee, and the case, it is in my hands."

"No, no! It is well that Monsieur Lee should know," put in madame. "Marie, she is the assassin!"

"Marie!" ejaculated Lee.

"Hush! As yet she knows nothing," continued madame. "Monsieur Girard thinks it better that she should live in her fool's paradise until to-morrow. She it was who entered the library, and who stabbed my husband. She is strong—I can vouch for her strength. She loved Paul, and Paul was not discussing money, as I first believed. Monsieur Girard, he has made that clear."

"Monsieur Girard has been very active," commented Lee dryly.

"Paul came to ask my husband for his consent to marry Marie," proceeded madame. "Hence the quarrel. *Ma foi!* Can you get imagine my husband's indignation when he heard of this suggested match? He forbade it, and even threatened to disinherit my son. Outside the door lurked Marie, ready with her weapon. Mad with temper, she flew in and struck the blow. And Paul dared not reveal his dreadful secret. Rather than that she should suffer he has chivalrously kept silent."

"Is it not the perfect explanation?" asked Girard proudly. "Does not every little detail fit? I am the *homme pratique*, Monsieur Lee. I look at the facts, I sift them, and I elucidate the mystery. In my armchair I discover the truth. It is not easy to hide things from Girard."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"Your story is certainly most ingenious—and I can see that you have convinced madame that it is the true explanation of the mystery, Monsieur Girard," he replied. "Unfortunately, it is but a theory—and a theory, moreover, which does not entirely cover all the facts."

Girard jumped up.

"You say that I am wrong?" he challenged excitedly.

"You must be wrong, for I have established Paul's innocence by a totally different line of reasoning," said Lee. "And much as

I regret the necessity of shattering your pretty story, I frankly declare that Marie is absolutely innocent."

Madame Martineau looked from one detective to the other in bewilderment.

"But this is too much for me, messieurs!" she cried. "Which of you is right? Monsieur Girard says that my son is innocent and Marie guilty; Monsieur Lee also says that my son is innocent, but that Marie is innocent also. *Mon Dieu!* Who, then, is guilty?"

"Monsieur Lee will perhaps explain?" said Girard hotly. "What are these new facts that you have elucidated, *mon ami*? *Sacre!* You retire from the case, you leave me to proceed alone, and yet you come back with this pretty story."

There was a tap on the door, and the butler hesitatingly appeared.

"The gentleman, Monsieur Lennard, of the police, madame," he announced in French.

Lee turned quickly to madame.

"Monsieur Lennard is here at my suggestion," he explained. "You permit that he should be admitted?"

"Yes," said madame willingly.

A minute later Chief Detective-inspector Lennard strode briskly into the apartment. He was rather puzzled, and after bowing to Madame Martineau he shot a quick, inquiring glance at Nelson Lee. Girard was almost red in the face with excitement and indignation.

"What is it you do?" he demanded hotly. "You try to make the fool of me, Monsieur Lee?"

"It is my wish to convince you, Monsieur Girard, that your own theory is at fault," replied Lee, springing up. "And in order to bring home this conviction it is necessary that we should pay a short visit to the garden."

Girard shrugged.

"Have we not already explored the garden?" he asked.

"Not thoroughly enough, I fancy," said Lee. "Madame, I beg of you to excuse us. Our absence will not be prolonged."

Going downstairs, Lennard gave Lee a nudge.

"What's the big idea?" he murmured.

"You'll soon see, old man."

They went out into the garden, and Nelson Lee led the way to a spot behind some rose bushes. In the meantime, he had instructed Nipper to get a spade from Jacques, and a lantern was also brought.

"So we're going to dig, are we?" said Lennard. "Hang it, Lee, you're mighty mysterious about this. What are we going to dig for?"

"Evidence," replied Lee briskly. "Evidence that will convince the stubbornest mule in the force—evidence that will convince even you, Lennard."

"I say, look here—" began Lennard, spluttering.

Nelson Lee darted forward and caught the man's wrist in a ju-jitsu grip. "Here is the murderer!" he snapped.



Lee only chuckled and took the spade from Nipper. Girard watched with open amusement. At one time, in the *salon*, an anxious little light had shown in his eyes, as though he expected Lee to upset his theory. But now he was content. He looked on in scornful interest.

Lennard and Nipper were interested, too, to say nothing of being puzzled. They all stood round watching Nelson Lee as he took quick measurements and then dug vigorously in the soft soil.

It was a strange scene, in that quiet garden, in the light of the flickering lantern. Nelson Lee did not desist until he had dug

a hole about eighteen inches deep. It was quite narrow, and Lennard, peering into it, saw nothing but earth.

"Now!" said Lee crisply.

He went down on his knees, rolled up his right sleeve, and groped about in the hole.

Gradually his expression changed. The eager light died out of his eyes and was replaced by a worried look.

"Strange!" he murmured, biting his lip.

"It is not as you hoped, monsieur?" asked Girard gently. "Something has gone wrong? Pray accept my condolences——"

"There is something here, Girard, although I may not have found precisely the right spot," interrupted Lee curtly. "Hullo! What—— Yes! Here we are! Splendid! I didn't think I was wrong."

He tugged at something, but it evidently resisted.

"What have you got there?" demanded Lennard impatiently.

"I hope to find the weapon—the real weapon which caused Monsieur Martineau's death!"

"But that dagger was found in the young man's hand——"

"Never mind the dagger," interrupted Lee. "This is more important. I knew from the first that I was right. But it seems to be stuck; we may have to do some more digging." He withdrew his arm. "Perhaps, monsieur, you will try?" he asked, turning to Girard.

"*Oui!* Why not?" said the French detective promptly. "I, too, am anxious to see this second weapon. My interest is of the greatest."

He quickly pushed up his sleeve and was about to dive his hand into the hole when Lee uttered a short, sharp exclamation. He was looking at Girard's exposed forearm, and the next moment he seized the Frenchman in a ju-jitsu grip which held him helpless.

"Lennard!" snapped Lee. "Here is the murderer of Monsieur Georges Martineau—Emile Girard, alias Pierre Leroux, alias Diabolo, the Dagger Demon!"

CHAPTER 7.

Nelson Lee's Triumph!

FOR one tense moment there was an absolute silence. Then Girard gave a shrill laugh.

"Imbecile!" he said contemptuously.

"Triple fool! You think you can play such tricks with Girard? *Mon Dieu!* You English play such mad jokes. You are all mad, you English!"

"Hang it, Lee, you'd better explain," said Lennard uneasily. "If this really is a joke——"

"Man alive, I don't joke on subjects like this!" snapped Lee. "What do you think I dug this hole in the ground for? Not to find another weapon—not to find anything at all, but merely to trick this gentlemen into exposing his right forearm. Until I had that last link of evidence I couldn't charge him."

"What link?" demanded Lennard blankly.

"The zig-zag scar——"

Before Lee could get any further Girard gave a scream of rage. He struggled

violently, convulsively. But for that ju-jitsu grip, which Lee maintained, he would have got away.

"Hurry up!" commanded Lee impatiently. "What's the matter with you, Lennard? Nipper, you've got handcuffs. Put them on."

But Lennard wasn't allowing anything like that. He produced his own "bracelets" and snapped them over Girard's wrists.

"Fools—fools!" screamed Girard, nearly foaming at the mouth. "*Sacre!* Such clever detectives. You arrest a man who was on the Channel boat at the very moment when the murder was committed. *La, la!* What cleverness!"

"Girard's right!" said Lennard sharply. "Look here, Lee——"

"My dear Lennard, do you take me for a dolt?" broke in Nelson Lee. "Unless I was absolutely certain of my facts, I wouldn't have taken this step. You are dealing with a very clever man, so clever that his alibi appears to be cast-iron. But like many a 'bis, it's easily shattered."

The chief-inspector was impressed.

"Well, let's get indoors," he said gruffly.

Madame was waiting in the hall.

"But what is this?" she cried, amazed.

"Monsieur! Your wrists——"

"Madame, you urged me to find the murderer of your husband," said Lee quietly. "I have found him."

"And now, *mon ami*, it is for you to prove that I am the tall man who was seen by Marie behind the bushes," sneered Girard. "That it was I who made the footprints—the footprints, *ma foi*, with the deep heels! And I walk on my toes! Oh, yes! You are a very clever man, Monsieur Lee!"

Lee acted as though Girard did not exist.

"I first suspected Girard soon after my arrival here," he explained quietly. "You remember when there was the first mention of footprints—after Marie had told her story? You remember how Girard ridiculed that story, and attempted to put us off?"

"Yes," said Lennard. "He said that it was a waste of time for us to make any examination."

"And yet Girard was actually the first to arrive at the spot—his object being, of course, to obliterate any footprints that might be there," said Lee. "It was a point he had overlooked; he did not know that Marie, the maid, had seen him behind those bushes, and, naturally, he was startled."

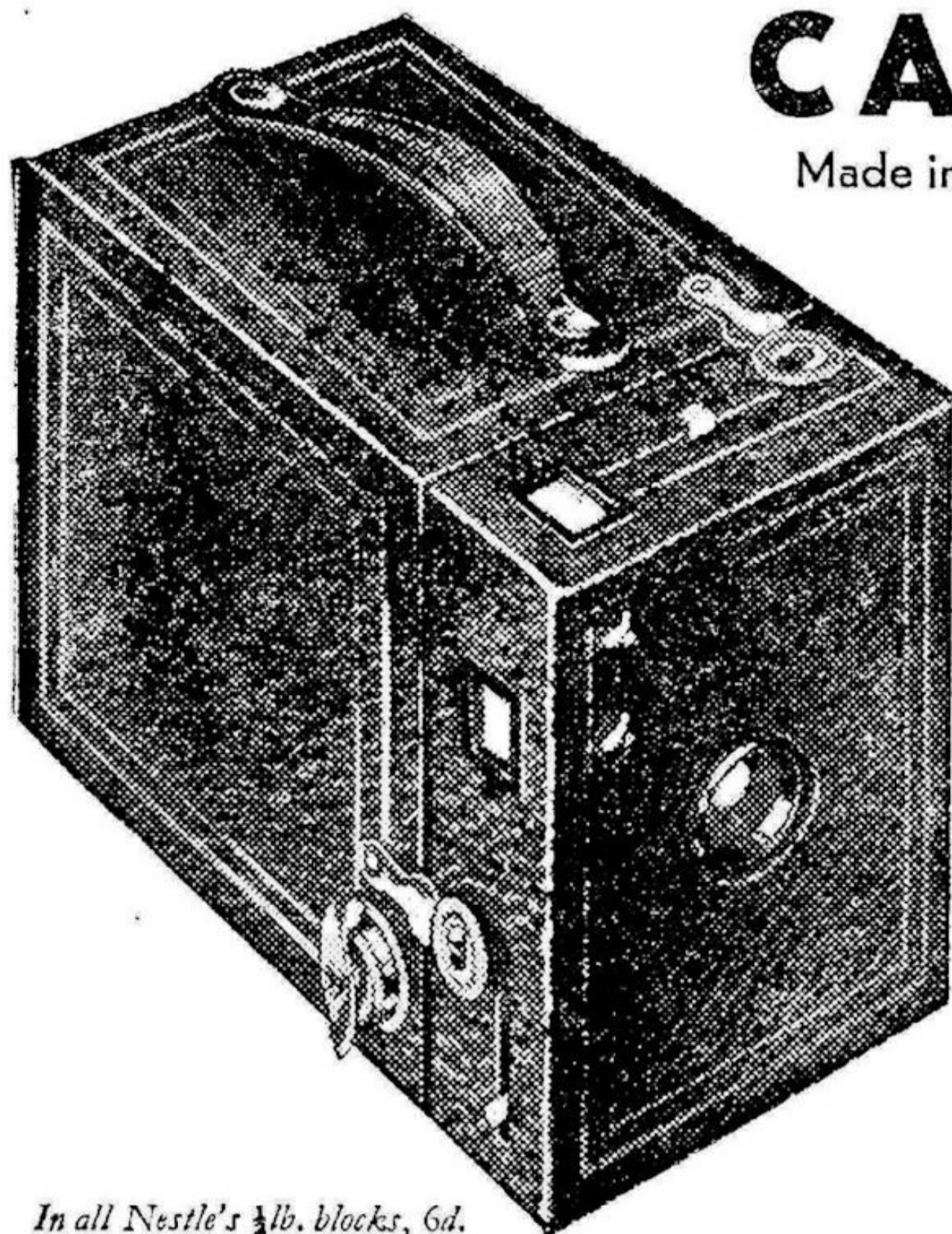
"But Marie saw a tall man," protested Lennard. "And those footprints were different——"

"Those footprints were Girard's," insisted Lee. "If you will be patient, Lennard, I will give you such evidence that will convince you. You didn't notice it at the time, but Girard very deftly avoided a boggy patch of the garden. It made me thoughtful. I took the trouble to find out—later—why Girard had made an apparently unnecessary swerve, for there was nothing in

(Continued on page 34.)

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The VITAL CLUE!

(Continued from page 32.)

the appearance of that patch to indicate its boggy-ness."

"You mean that he knew of its existence?"

"Of course," said Lee. "And yet he had only just arrived for the investigation, and it was impossible for him to have known anything about the garden—*unless he had been there previously*. He had certainly not been there previously as Girard the detective. A small point, but it set me thinking."

"You think to trap me by such paltry trifles?" asked Girard contemptuously. "But this is funny! So funny! I, Girard, have the keen eyes. You may not have seen the treacherous nature of that piece of ground, but I am not so blind."

Again Lee ignored him.

"The vital clue, however, was much more convincing," he continued. "It was the clue which caused me to make very exhaustive inquiries. You may remember Lennard, that I very carefully examined the bushes?"

"Yes, and you very carefully found a scrap of human skin," grinned the Yard man. "It was unfortunate that that piece of skin should prove to be Girard's."

"Unfortunate?" repeated Lee. "Lennard, I despair of you! My dear man, that discovery *was* the vital point. It was Girard's paramount blunder—for until he showed me his finger I did not know that he was even wounded."

"What do you try to prove?" asked Girard sharply.

"The evening has been dry and warm," retorted Lee. "The scrap of skin I found on that bush was dried and shrivelled. Remember, this, Lennard! That scrap had been on the bush *for at least two hours!* And yet Girard showed me his finger and laughingly declared that he had just torn it, and ridiculed my discovery as worthless. Worthless! It was worth everything! For it proved that Girard had been in this garden at least two hours previously."

"But Girard isn't tall. Again, Marie distinctly says that the tall man didn't come anywhere near the house."

"But yes, that is true," said madame. "And Paul? Why should Paul shield Monsieur Girard?"

"Paul did not see Monsieur Girard, madame," replied Lee gravely. "Nobody saw him—except Marie. Lennard, you remember those footprints? Fortunately I took plaster casts of two or three of them—much to your secret amusement—and they will be very valuable as evidence. You recall how the heels were deeply indented?"

"Well, yes."

"It occurred to me, as a possibility, that those footprints had been made by a man wearing stilts," continued Lee.

"You are all mad—mad!" shouted Girard in a choking voice.

His very outburst was significant. Lennard

was obliged to take a firmer grip. Girard was not merely pale now; he was trembling like a leaf, and a hunted look had come into his eyes.

"Yes, stilts—which would make him taller," said Lee relentlessly. "There was everything to suggest such a possibility; but, mark you, it was only a possibility, and it needed very careful substantiation. When I left here I went to the police station and interviewed Paul Martineau; I learned from him that he was very seriously in debt to a gambling-den proprietor named Leroux. And now, take heed of this! Leroux walks with a curiously stilted gait, on his heels. Leroux was a man who had an excellent motive for the crime—therefore he was the man to suspect."

"But you are clever, my friend," murmured madame. "So clever!"

"Inquiries told me that Leroux left the Dominion Hotel two days ago," proceeded Lee. "And Leroux, remember, was staying in London at the same time as Monsieur Girard. Both Frenchmen—both frequent visitors to London. Was it possible that they were the one and the same person?"

"I don't see it," grunted Lennard. "If Leroux and Girard were the same, how could he be staying at two hotels in two identities?"

"Girard comes to London as himself—openly," continued Lee. "He registers just as openly at the Apollo Hotel. He goes to the wash-room with a suit-case; he emerges from the wash-room wearing stilts and a clever make-up, and he hires a taxicab and drives to the Dominion Hotel and registers there as Pierre Leroux. If at any moment he wishes to become Girard again he merely seeks the privacy of any hotel wash-room and makes the change. Not so difficult, Lennard."

"Phew!" whistled Lennard.

"Leroux scarcely ever walked more than twenty yards, and then with difficulty," said Lee. "People thought he was a cripple—but it was because he was wearing stilts. And this, Leroux, remember, is a bit of a mystery man. He runs gambling dens, but seldom appears in person. I went to the Dominion Hotel, and there I found a table with deep indentations on the underside."

"Indentations?" asked Lennard, puzzled.

"Have I not already introduced Monsieur Girard to you as Diabolo, the Dagger Demon?" retorted Lee. "He no doubt thought he was a little out of practice—after having dropped his real profession for a number of years. So he tried his skill on the hotel table."

"It has been Paul's consistent statement that his stepfather suddenly fell with a dagger in his back. The window, Lennard, was open. If Paul did not strike that blow, then somebody from outside did. And as that somebody did not appear, then it obviously follows that the dagger was *thrown*. How many men are there, Lennard, who can throw a dagger so expertly as to commit murder at the first fling—and, moreover, to fling it so accurately that it will give the

impression that a left-handed man is responsible?"

"Not many," replied Lennard, with conviction. "I didn't even know there was one who could do it."

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That narrowed down my search considerably, didn't it? My next move was to go to a man who could give me information concerning dagger throwers. A man with that skill must certainly have been a public performer at one time or other.

"Briefly, I obtained the information I needed. Ten years ago there was a very famous turn on the French music halls known as 'Diabolo, the Dagger Demon.' He dropped out of the business because he very badly gashed his right arm, and for at least two years it robbed him of his living

and during those years he sought another. In fact, gambling. This new business progressed so well that he stuck to it. Diabolo was not only an extraordinarily clever knife-thrower, but—and note this—an important part of his turn was stilt-walking. Lennard, look at this; I borrowed it from my theatrical agent friend."

It was a photograph. It showed a grotesquely-costumed man with several daggers in either hand. His trousers were enormously wide, his coat absurdly long, with enormous buttons. In fact, a typical Continental knockabout comedian. The chief inspector started when he saw that this man bore a close resemblance facially to Monsieur Emile Girard.

(Concluded on page 43.)

Play up and play the game

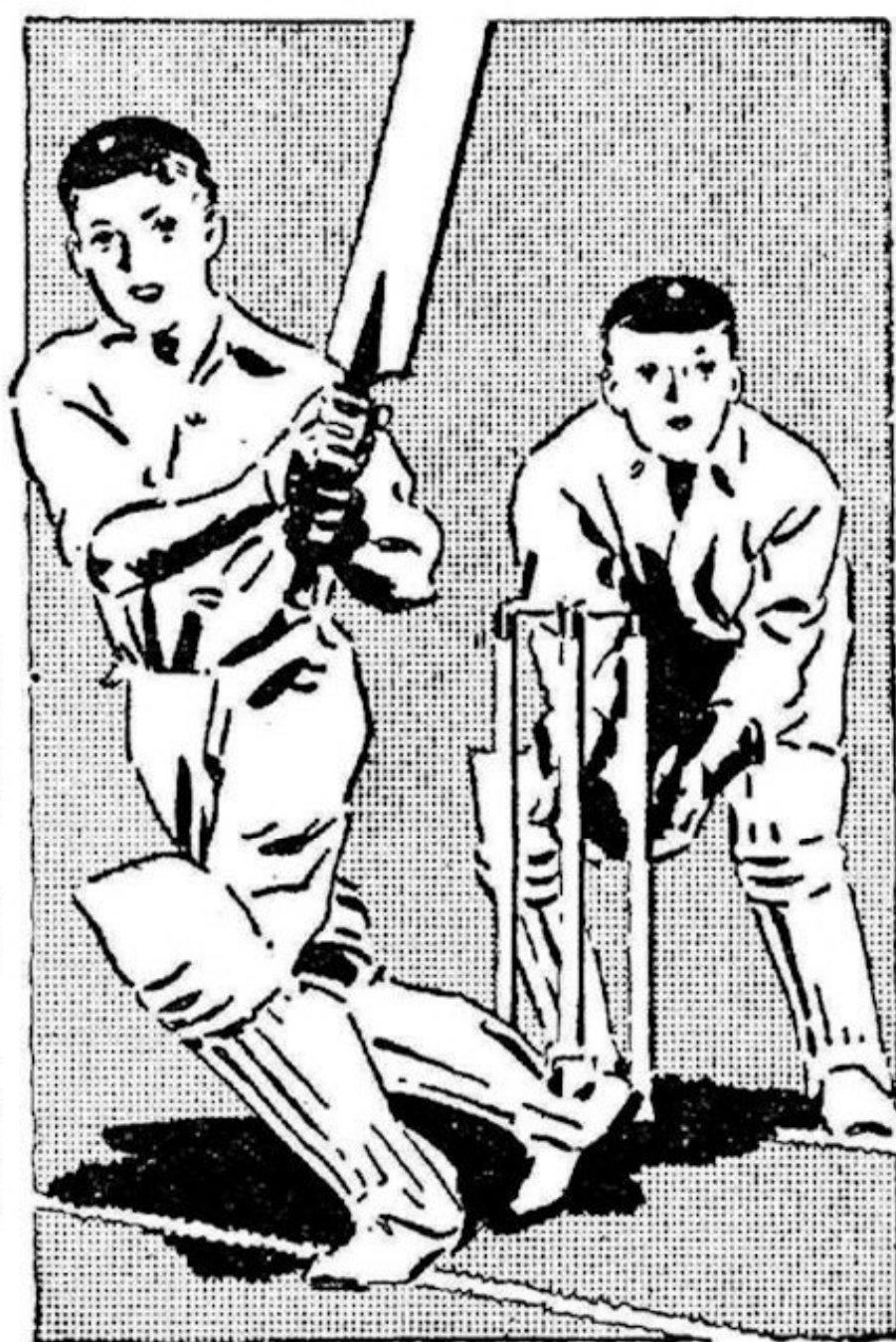
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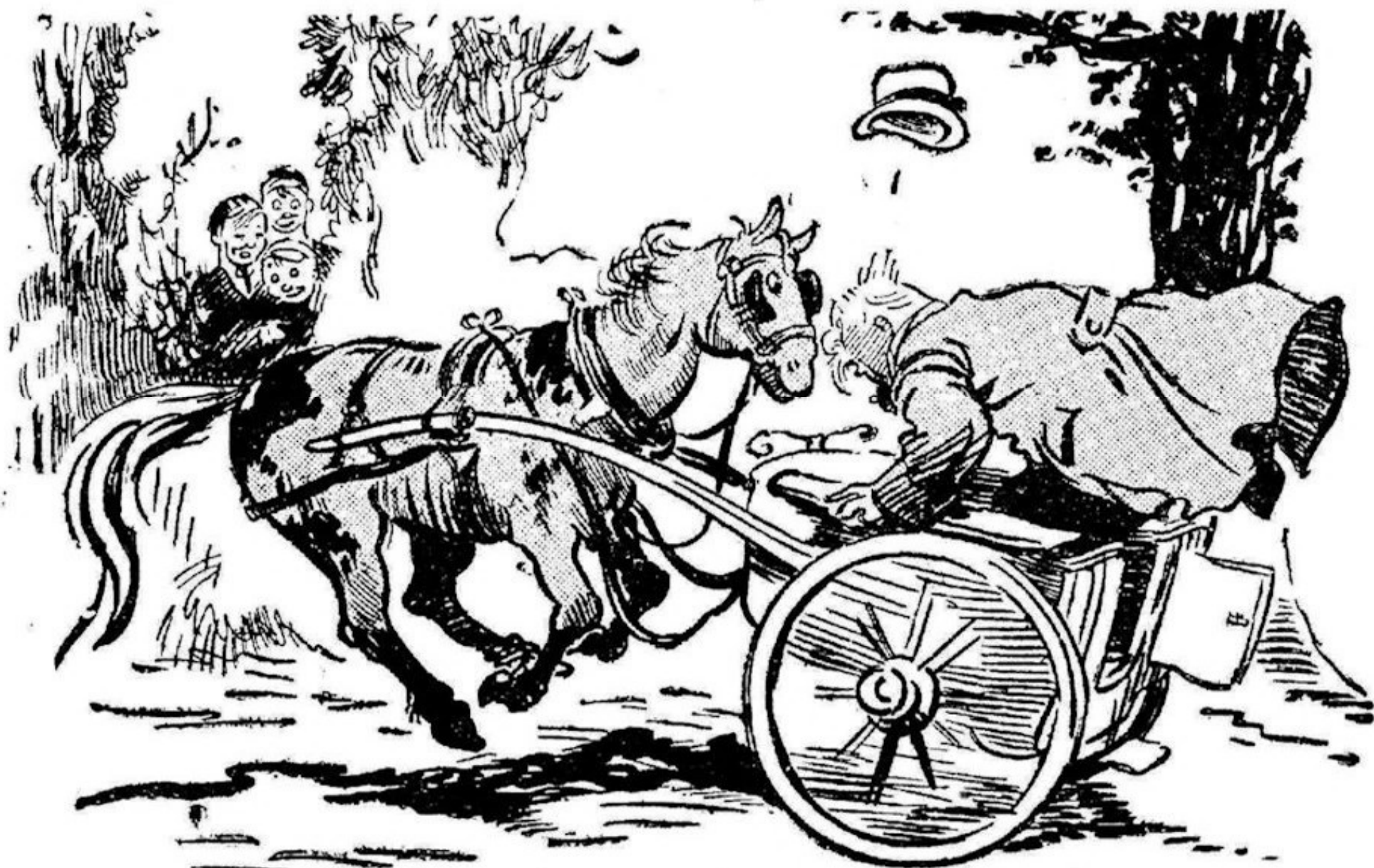
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E.K. 46

Laughs Galore in this Screamingly Funny Yarn!

THE TROUBLE TRIPLETS!



HIS MASTER'S NOSE!

Tale of a Tub!

"KEEP it up!" said Posh Trooble hopefully. "Got to make a start if we want an audience! Give 'em a few more catherine wheels, Sam. These kids seem to like 'em!"

"Blow the kids!" almost exploded Sam Trooble. "If I do any more I shall solve the secret of perpetual motion; and I don't want to!"

But despite his fear in that respect, Sam, the world-famed—self-styled—acrobat and juggler, proceeded to perform a few more catherine wheels, while Nippy, the world-famed—also self-styled—conjurer, proceeded with his job of turning eggs into rabbits, and rabbits into lively frogs.

It was heartbreaking work, however, when the audience consisted only of five grubby urchins, and an equally grubby one-eyed dog minus a tail.

It was evening, and the Trouble Triplets—known as the Trouble Triplets on account of their remarkable skill in searching for trouble and finding it—had halted on the outskirts of a small village. They had been tramping all day, and they were tired, and hungry. But they still hoped to cure that empty feeling under their waistcoats by

The nag didn't like it; neither do Posh & Co. like the colonel—and that's why you'll revel in this bilarious complete yarn.

giving a roadside entertainment and thus earn the wherewithal.

Selecting a small patch of grassy space opposite a cyclist's rest, they proceeded with their entertainment in

anticipation of an audience turning up. But the cyclists seemed to have rested somewhere else, and the village appeared to be like the one in the celebrated poem, deserted—save for the aforesaid five urchins and dog. For ten minutes now the Trouble Triplets had been going through their usual tricks, and they were getting a little depressed with the results. Even the optimistic Posh did not feel it worth while going round with the hat yet.

To make matters more trying the urchins did not seem at all impressed by their skill, and one ventured a solemn question at last.

"What be you doin' that for, mister?" he asked innocently, as the panting Sam paused for breath. "Got a pain somewhere?"

Sam glowered at him, muttered something about giving him a pain if he didn't shut up, and proceeded with his acrobatic antics. He started to roll round in a ball, with legs and arms clasped round his neck, and was going strong when the one-eyed mongrel decided to investigate the remarkable phenomenon at closer quarters.

He rushed in suddenly with a series of

defiant growls, and the next moment acrobat and investigator were mixed up in a whirling, yelling, yapping and yelping catherine-wheel. This unexpected performance brought, first a flicker of interest, then a smile of appreciation, and finally loud guffaws from the audience of five.

Sam brought the unrehearsed trick to a sudden end by falling on the mongrel, almost flattening him to a pancake. Yelping shrilly, the mongrel managed to scramble up, and streaked away for the distant horizon, thus reducing the audience to five only.

Just then, however, Posh's face lit up as a governess-cart, pulled by an ancient, piebald pony with a pronounced squint, came crawling along. At the reins was an old gentleman, and Posh felt he knew he was a retired Indian colonel, because he wore a fierce expression, a face like a boiled lobster, and whiskers like the mouldy bristles of a discarded yard-brush.

"Shush, Sam, you idiot!" he breathed. "Keep it up—don't stop. Here's a colonel coming. May mean a bob, at least!"

Sam and Nippy resumed work with a will, while Posh got his cap ready. Their hopes sank, however, as the colonel pulled up his steed and shook his whip at the triplets.

"Huh! Tramps!" he snorted. "Gad! Tramps causing a disturbance and an obstruction under my very wall, begad! Huh! Be off, confound you! You hear me? Be off before I call the constable! Huh!"

Posh bristled at once. The one-eyed dog had caused the disturbance, and they certainly were not obstructing anyone or anything.

"We're doing no harm, sir!" he replied respectfully.

"Harm!" hooted the old gent, almost swallowing some of his whiskers in his excitement. "Doing no harm when you're causing an obstruction under the very wall of my estate. Huh! D'you know I'm Colonel Blumpus?"

"Eh? Colonel Frumpus?" asked Posh.

"No, begad! Colonel Blumpus, squire of Mudslush village, and a Justice of the Peace, you young scoundrel! Be off! Ha! Here is the constable now! Sleepslow!"

"Yessir?"

The triplet sighted a portly, bewiskered policeman crossing the road with ponderous strides. So slow was his progress that Posh decided to hasten his velocity by the aid of his wonderful ventriloquial skill.

The next moment an ear-splitting "Honk, honk!" sounded behind the constable, and he gave a convulsive jerk, and leaped fully three feet—not counting his boots, which were nearly that—to the footpath. Then he glared round, trembling with righteous indignation. His jaw sagged as he looked for the car that had so upset his official dignity, and found it not.

"My eye!" he gurgled. "Where—what—"

"Didn't you see it pass, constable?" asked Posh innocently. "It must have been—"

"Two hundred an hour, at least," said

Sam, shading his eyes, as he stared along the dusty road. "Nearly blew me over—I don't think!"

"Scandalous!" gasped the colonel, who had also jumped convulsively on hearing the strident "Honk, honk!" "Didn't you take his confounded number, Sleepslow?"

"I didn't even see it!" gasped P.-c. Sleepslow. "It must 'ave been goin' it, and no error, sir!"

"Scandalous!" hooted Colonel Blumpus. "Where were your eyes, man? Those abominable road hogs! Huh! If I had my way I'd not allow a single motor on the road, begad! Dust-raising, murderous ruffians! Worse than poachers and tramps! Huh!" His warlike eye fell upon the triplets again, and he bristled. "Huh! I was just wanting you, Sleepslow!"

"Yessir!" said Sleepslow, jumping to attention.

"Move these young villains on!" ordered the colonel. "Impudence—confounded impudence! Causing an obstruction and a disturbance under my very walls. Huh! Gee-up!"

He tugged at the reins, and the ancient quadruped untied its legs and tottered on.

P.-c. Sleepslow raised a majestic hand.

"Move hon!" he ordered. "Hoff you goes—sharp!"

"But we're doing nothing wrong!" protested Sam warmly. "Only—"

"Move hon, and don't you hargue with me!" enorted the constable. "Want to be locked hup, or what? Causing a disturbance—"

"It was the dog that did that—" began Posh.

"Dog? Don't try it on me!" warned P.-c. Sleepslow. "There ain't no dog here, so don't— Yarrooop!"

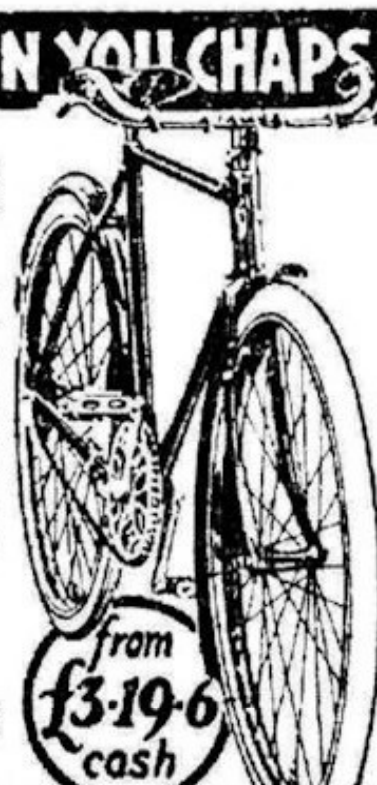
The portly constable nearly leapt out of his skin as a sudden, ferocious snarling sounded at his heels. The next moment he was leaping and twirling in his desperate effort to avoid the unseen, snarling animal.

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The Trouble Triplets, smiling loudly, gathered together their few possessions and moved on their way, leaving the podgy officer dancing about like an intoxicated hippopotamus, until he fell over his own feet and sat down in the road.

"The entertainment is now over!" remarked Posh, a trifle gloomily. "And we've only collected laughs, which won't cure my empty feeling! Hallo, there's old Blumpus' four-legged dolly-peg, and two-wheeled dolly-tub. I say, we ought to pay that mean old buffer back, you know!"

"I suppose he thinks he owns the blessed earth!" growled Sam. "I think we ought to teach the old hunk a lesson, Posh. Got a wheeze?"

"Yes, old fruit!" chuckled Posh, who was eyeing the governess "tub" which had been left unattended outside a small house standing well back from the road and screened by trees. "I think that mean old buffer ought to be brought face to face with something unpleasant—and that old bag of cat's-meat between the shafts just mee's the bill."

He whispered his plan to Sam and Nippy, and the three of them, keeping ears skinned for the colonel's return, began to get busy. They took the ancient pony out of the shafts, and then, turning her round, put her in between the shafts again with her nose over the front of the governess-cart. After that they reharnessed her and made fast.

Then they took cover in some bushes opposite and awaited developments.

Valour Rewarded!

THEY were soon rewarded.

Colonel Bumpus suddenly came in sight along the garden path. He was muttering to himself, and appeared to be in a terrific wax. As a matter of fact, he had just been having a row with a tenant regarding arrears of rent due to him.

"Scandalous!" he was muttering. "Disgraceful, begad! Monstrous!"

Communing with himself thus, the gallant old colonel climbed into the tub, and grabbed the reins before he noticed anything amiss.

"Gee-up!" he snarled.

Thus adjured, the bag of bones and cat's-meat wakened up again and ambled on, pushing the tub before it. The sudden jerk in the wrong direction sent Colonel Blumpus in a heap on the floor of the tub, and he bellowed terrifically.

Thinking this an order to accelerate, the pony, rather liking this novel way of locomotion, put on speed and actually trotted.

"What the—who the—why the——" roared the colonel.

He scrambled up, his face as red as a turkey. But he did not stay up long. As he came up he bumped into his faithful quadruped's muzzle. Face to face, for once, the two blinked into each other's eyes, and the old nag, realising he didn't like the look of the colonel's face at close quarters, made as if to take a bite out of his master's nose.

The colonel gave a wild shriek and collapsed again into the bottom of the tub.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the triplets.

Once again the ancient pony accelerated. Not being steered, however, from either stern or prow, so to speak, the misguided—or, rather, unguided—animal ran on at a tangent.

Crash!

The starboard wheel crashed into a gate-post. This unfortunate accident brought the tub swinging round, and it whirled through a farmyard gate, and then went rolling down a slight incline, the pony, realising now that something had gone wrong, striving gallantly to put on the brake.

It was a vain attempt. With the damaged wheel wobbling alarmingly, the tub progressed down the incline, and then plunged into the duckpond at the bottom.

"Oh, crikey!" gurgled Posh. "This comes of backing a horse the wrong way! Hallo, he's struck a snag now!"

The damaged wheel had either struck some obstruction in the middle of the duckpond, or else it had gone on strike, for now the pony was going round and round with the tub, as if on a pivot, sending up giant waves as it did so. Never had that duckpond had such a stirring up in its watery existence, and the smell that proceeded from it was appalling.

By this time the colonel was up aloft again, and as he found himself marooned, and blinked around the watery waste, he began to bellow at the top of his voice.

"Help! Good gad! Groogh! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the triplets, emerging from hiding to get a close-up.

"You—you young rascals!" bellowed the colonel. "Help! Fetch help at— Huh! Help! Johnson, Plimpkins, Rabbiet!"

The old gentleman had suddenly sighted three men in velveteens and gaiters ambling along a field-path. As it happened, they were the colonel's own gamekeepers, and they stood and blinked in alarm at the marooned colonel.

"My heye!" exclaimed Johnson, the head-keeper. "My heye, if it ain't the boss!"

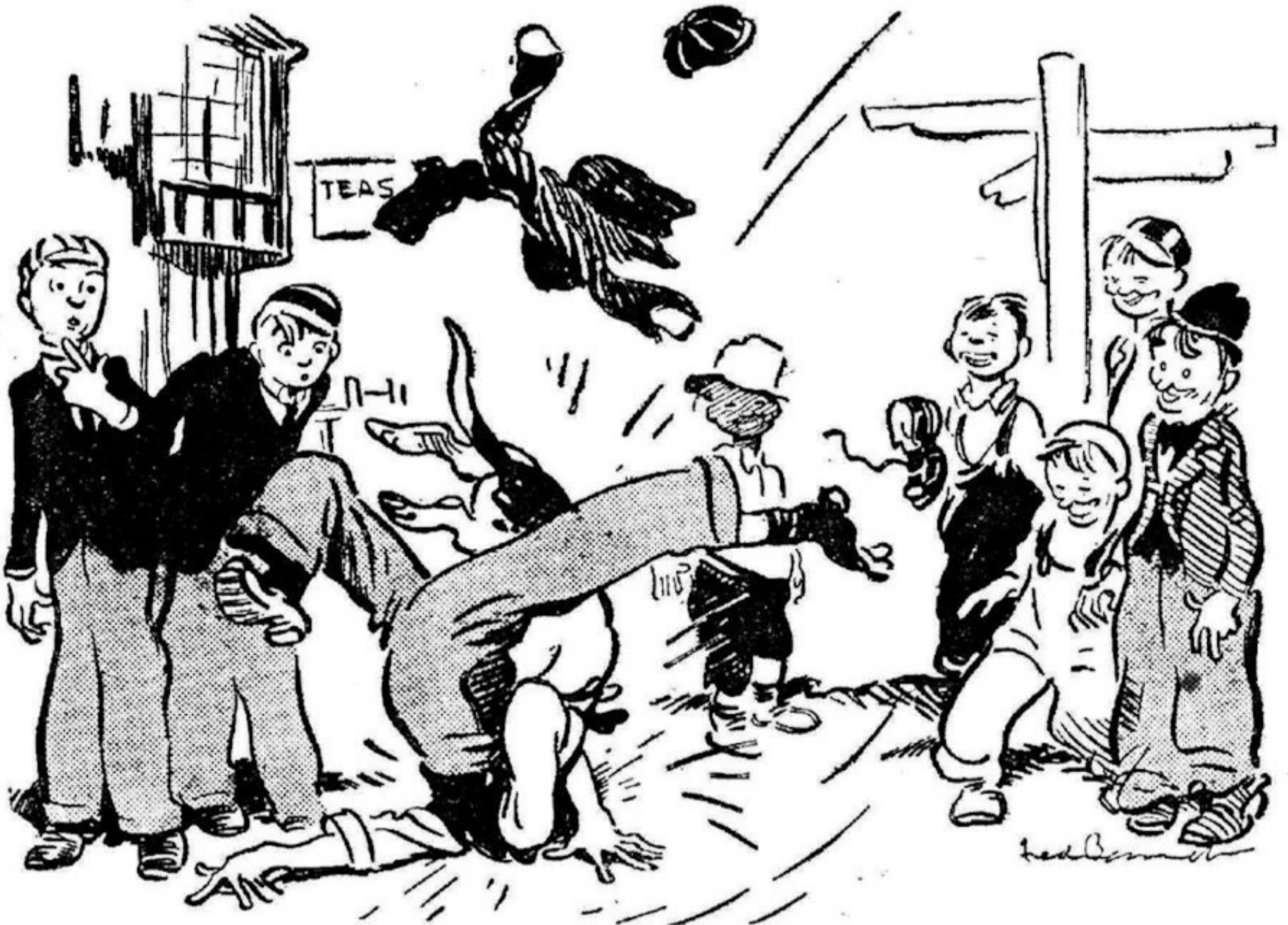
"Never mind standing there staring, Johnson!" shrieked Colonel Blumpus. "Help, you sleepy fools! Help!"

"My heye! Sorry, sir! But how——" gasped Johnson helplessly.

"How? Come and lead this confounded pony out!" bawled the gallant old warrior. "Get to work, you diots, or I'll sack the lot of you! Huh! Good gad!"

The chariot suddenly gave a lurch, almost tipping Colonel Blumpus out, and he began to bellow with such effect that Johnson and his fellow keepers decided to brave the watery elements and the smell. They charged in like heroes, and plunged through the mud and slime.

They got the marooned colonel ashore at last, almost in a state of apoplexy by this time. And the moment he landed on dry ground he made a rush on the triplets, who were doubled up with mirth.



The dog and Sam Trooble became mixed up in a whirling, yelling, yelping embrace.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Sam Trooble. Too late the wanderers had realised their danger. Before they could recover their wits, much less their legs, Colonel Blumpus had grabbed Posh, while Johnson, anxious to appease the colonel's wrath, made another gigantic leap, and two horny hands closed on the collars of Nippy and Sam.

"Huh! Scandalous! Outrageous!" panted Colonel Blumpus, almost exploding with indignation and rage. "The—the rascally young villains! You did it—don't attempt to deny it! I'll have you up before the bench for this, and get you sent to a reformatory, begad! Johnson!"

"Yessir!"

"You're sacked if you allow them to escape! Take them to Sleepslow and give them in charge! Plimpkins, Rabbiet, put that confounded pony back in the shafts as it should be!"

The keepers obeyed, and with a parting glare at the dismayed trio of jokers, Colonel Blumpus stumped into the tub and gathered up the reins. The tub rumbled out into the road through the gateway just as a motor-lorry was about to pass, and the colonel gave an alarmed bellow and dragged his ancient pony round to avoid a collision.

That did it. The sudden jerk proved too much for the wonky wheel. It suddenly flew off and rolled away, while the tub, having no visible means of support on the port side, crashed over, precipitating the old colonel into the roadway, right in the path of the rumbling lorry.

There was a wild yelling, a shrieking of hastily-applied brakes, and then a slim form whipped across the road as Sam, the acrobat, wrenched himself free from his captor and made a frantic leap to the rescue. His hands grabbed the colonel under the armpits, and with a powerful heave he dragged him out of danger just in the nick of time.

Two minutes later, Colonel Blumpus, fortunately little the worse for his heavy fall and narrow escape from death, was pumping Sam's fist up and down like a pump-handle.

"Gallant lad!" he gasped, his face a curious mottled white. "Gallant lad, begad! Johnson, take the confounded pony home and clear the road. I'm taking charge of these young rascals instead of Sleepslow—yes, begad!"

And he did.

Though a peppery old gent who detested motors, tramps, poachers, and opposition, Colonel Blumpus was really rather a sport, and that night, after a feed which they dreamed about for months afterwards, the Trouble Triplets slept between white sheets. The next morning, after an enormous breakfast, they left Blumpus Court, with a fiver each in their pockets and cheery smiles on their faces, to continue their wanderings in search of adventure—and fun.

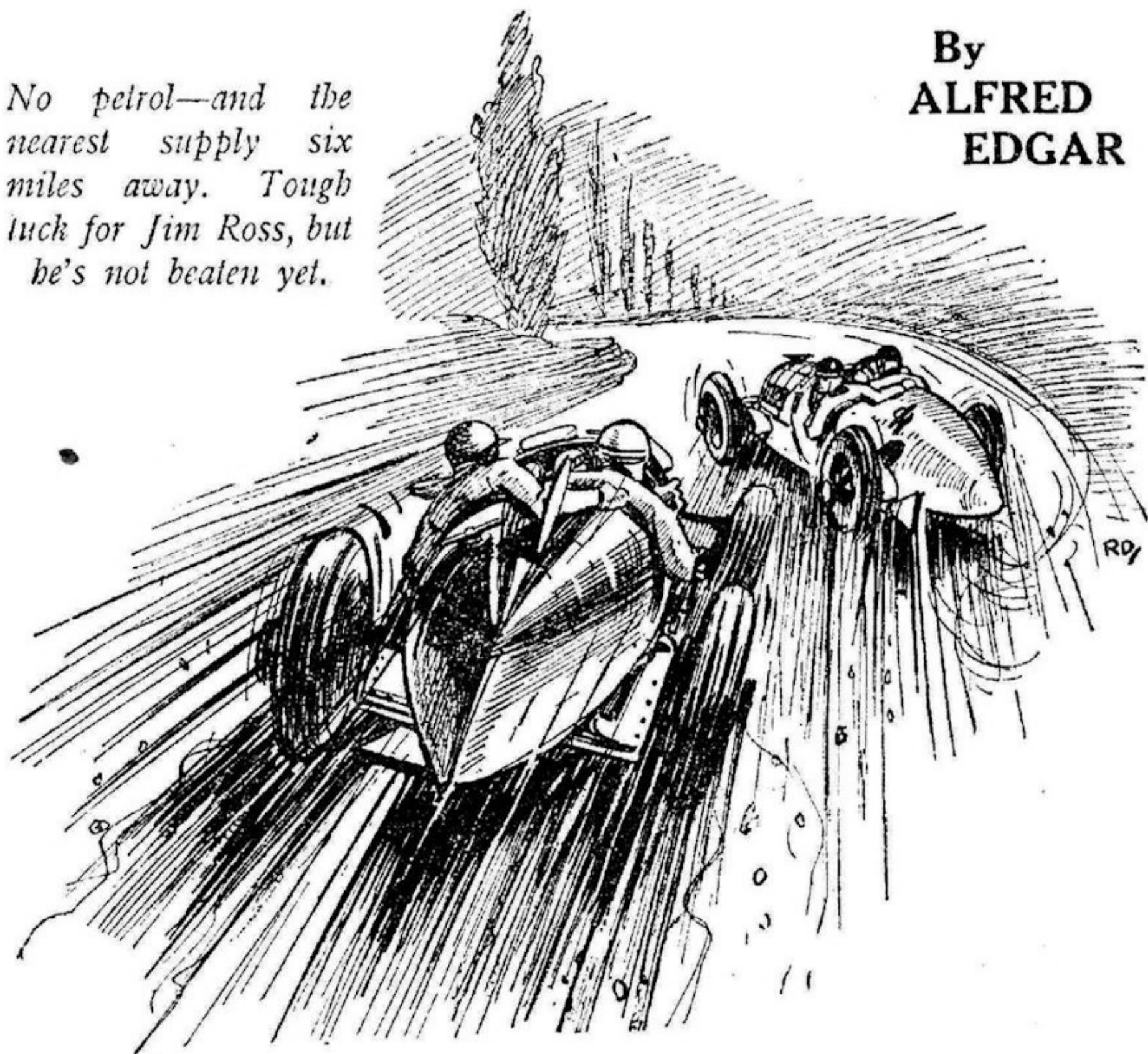
THE END.

(The *Three K Brethren* are due next Wednesday—look out for this screamingly funny new series of yarns!)

THE IRON SPEEDMAN!

By
**ALFRED
EDGAR**

No petrol—and the nearest supply six miles away. Tough luck for Jim Ross, but he's not beaten yet.



Three Laps Behind!

AN investigation which lasted but ten seconds showed that Jim was right. The petrol tank was empty!

"We were due to pull in for more petrol at the end of this lap!" Joe gasped. "Now we've run out!"

"And we're six miles from the pits!" Jim answered. "I've driven so hard, we're out o' juice before we should have been. Push on the tail; if we can get enough way on her we might get over these switchbacks and reach Gadaret Corner—I can run the rest of the way for juice then!"

He fastened the engine-cover and tumbled back to the cockpit. Joe shoved on the tail, then dived in beside Jim as the car began to roll forward down the slope beyond the hill which they had just topped.

It gathered speed, although a car passing them went by at such a pace that their own rate seemed but a crawl. Over the switchbacks they travelled, gathering enough speed

down one to make them crest the next.

All the time Jim was fuming and gasping. His teeth gritted as, just at Gadaret Village, there came a shattering roar from behind, and Stargie took his Ace past—thus putting himself a clear lap ahead.

They got the machine around the corner before its momentum died, then, while it was still running slowly, Jim climbed out.

"I'll run to the pits for juice—you push the car to meet me, Joe!" he yelled, and was off before his chum could protest.

It was little short of three miles to the stands and pits. It meant practically a six-mile run for Jim, because Joe would not be able to push the car either fast or far single-handed, although he might manage to cover a mile by the time Jim got back.

Jim tucked his elbows into his side and ran steadily. He didn't start off with a rush, because he had got to last the distance.

Soon the sweat was pouring down his face. His chest seemed as though it had an iron

band across it until he got his second wind and could run with less strain.

Minutes later, the watchers from the Ross-Ryan pit saw his white figure travelling down the side of the white, sunlit road. The crowd sighted him, recognised him, and cheered him. He came up to the pit with his face coated from dust and oil and sweat, grabbed a two-gallon can of juice, and turned back without a word. His very action told them what was wrong.

Two miles back along the road, he met Joe. His chum was almost prostrate from his efforts, and both were staggering as they tipped the petrol into the tank. They had to rest half a minute before Joe found renewed strength enough to push-start the car. It roared on, then, and stopped again at the pits for Jim to fill his tank to the brim.

"Shan't stop again until the race is over!" he yelled to his brother, and Steve stared at the grimness in Jim's face.

Twenty seconds later the crowd was cheering the machine as it stormed away once more—and now the delay had put them three clear laps behind Lon Stargie!

S-s-s-speed!

ALL the bad luck of the game seemed to have dogged Jim from the start of the race. But he didn't give bad luck any more chances, because he went too fast for ill-fortune to catch him!

What the car had done earlier seemed like nothing to what she did now! She wasn't a car at all; she was a thundering, rocketing green meteor, with Jim like an iron man behind the wheel, immobile save for the shifting of arms and shoulders as he steered, or pitched the machine around a corner.

Joe was braced at his side, forgetful of the bumps, watching for cars ahead. He never looked astern, because there was no chance of anything at all coming up behind and wanting to pass!

Lon Stargie's pit had signalled him to ease off his speed. He had left his immediate rivals behind, and it was impossible for the Ross-Ryan even to challenge him now—so the Ace men thought.

They began to alter their minds, however, when Jim reduced the three laps' lead to two, which placed him a shade more than twenty miles behind.

He crept up steadily, gaining nearly a minute on every lap, but still the Ace men did not imagine that he stood any chance of challenging their crack. There was no sense in telling Stargie to go faster, and thus risk cracking up his car, until they were sure that the Ross-Ryan was dangerous.

On over the sun-drenched course Jim sent his machine, and always he spared a glance for the white stone at Gadaret Corner, and always sight of it strengthened his grim resolve to make Stargie pay ere the race was done.

Then, down the grand-stand straight, he

sighted his rival, and pulled wide to pass him. He hurtled past him in a whirl of dust, and the crowd roared him on. They knew that Jim was now only one lap behind.

Stargie did not press his car as he watched Jim go ahead. The dark-faced speedman grinned to himself. The kid would probably try and take a corner too fast soon, and wreck his machine—serve the young fool right! In the meantime he, the great Lon Stargie, was in the lead, and he'd stop there.

Lap after lap Jim went around, and now Joe became aware of a subtle difference in him. Jim was bent forward, willing the car on. He took corners still faster—but he never skidded at all.

It was as though all his father's wonderful judgment had come to aid him at this critical stage of the race. He did not lose the fraction of a second on any corner—and still he gained on Lon Stargie.

When they had but five laps to do, and when the Ross-Ryan was lying second, Joe leaned over and croaked:

"They've given Stargie the all-out signal!"

"I've got it, too!" Jim bawled in answer, and as he spoke a red disc waved from their own pit.

"You can't go any faster!" Joe gasped.

"Can't I—I've been saving a bit for this!" Jim told him, and impossible though it seemed, he spoke the truth, for Joe felt the car's engine surge in answer to the last fractional opening of the throttle.

Hard though he had driven, Jim had played the real racing driver's best card in holding just a shade of power in hand, and he used it now.

Four laps from the finish, they signalled that he was ninety seconds behind Stargie—and still gaining! Three laps from the end he was sixty seconds behind, and when they had two laps still to go they told him that he was but thirty seconds in the rear.

It was as they cleared Gadaret Corner and hurtled up the grand-stand straight that Jim saw Lon Stargie's dust-smothered car ahead. He knew that if he could pass him during the one lap that they had still to cover, then he must win—and on this lap before him he meant to send Lon Stargie to the side of the road, crushed in the heart of a shattered car!

The Crash!

DOWN the straightaway the two machines stormed, passing slower cars, and they went by the grand-stands with hardly a hundred yards between them.

The crowds stood up to watch them go. Mr. Ryan, Steve and the rest in Jim's pit mounted the plank and yelled him on—but he did not seem to close in on Stargie.

The hundred yards of road—from which dust rose like smoke—was still between them when they turned the deadly hairpin and cleared the hill beyond, and Jim did not

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grand serial, chums. You'll follow with breathless interest the amazing adventures of Dick in his fight against the man he has sworn to run to earth.

"KNIGHTS OF THE ROAD!"

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A yarn which breathes the glamour of olden times. Thrilling hold-ups, exciting chases across the countryside, nerve-tingling fights with the King's Riders. You'll revel in this

lessen the distance until they were hurtling down the switchback road to Gadaret Corner.

Joe, watching him now, saw that his jaw was set and his nostrils were pinched in. He knew what was in his chum's mind.

"Jim, you're not going to crash him!" he yelled.

He got no answer. Closer and closer they drew to the rocking machine in front, while the coloured roofs of Gadaret Village showed up ahead. Stones flung back by the Ace's wheels were hitting their radiator guard when they hurtled between the buildings.

The Ross-Ryan crept up, and they were almost level with the Ace as the corner showed. Neither slowing, they ripped at it. The fencing and the trees swept to meet them, and still they rushed on at unchecked speed.

Joe heard Stargie's brakes go on, and saw the man swing his steering-wheel, meaning to skid the corner. In that moment Jim braked as well, then both were shooting into the turn, Stargie leading and skidding.

Jim's brakes came off, he stamped the throttle pedal and his car shot ahead—starting to cut full across the Ace's radiator!

Stargie saw his track blocked. Jim saw his head jerk upright, his mouth opened, terror showed into his eyes. He couldn't straighten his car—he must crash—he was done!

And then, in the instant that Stargie seemed doomed, Jim trod again on his brakes and wrenched on the steering-wheel, so that his car elid away from the other and gave him room.

In the moment that he had Stargie at his mercy, Jim relented and let him live.

They skidded madly, straightened, and then shot on, with Joe turning to look back, holding his breath as he realised what had happened.

He saw Stargie still skidding. He saw the car's tail hit the fencing, so that broken wood shot out. The impact dragged the front of the car round, but even then he would have

escaped save that one of his worn front tyres burst as it touched a paling.

The car lurched, bucked on the road, then slid completely round. Joe saw it start to turn over. He saw one wheel break clean away, and through all the roaring of Jim's machine came the clattering crash as the Ace turned over.

On one side it slithered round and round, oil-smoke gushing and metal fracturing. It leaped high, slammed down, and then slid—smoking and battered—to the foot of the white stone which marked the place where Jim's father had died!

Stargie was dragged from his smoking machine just before it burst into flame. He was not killed, but he never drove again.

"I couldn't finish him!" Jim panted the words to Joe as they flashed away along the straight.

"He burst a tyre—he'd have been all right otherwise!" Joe yelled through the uproar. "It wasn't your fault he crashed. I knew you wouldn't do it—it wouldn't have been right!"

"My dad wouldn't have done it to anyone!" Jim's voice carried through the victorious roar of the engine as they ripped along towards the winner's flag.

"Stargie got it all the same!" Joe told him. "He piled up right at the foot of the memorial!"

One minute later the winner's flag slashed down as the roaring Ross-Ryan Special zoomed across the finishing line.

She had won the world's greatest motor-race, and that put the seal on the car. Her wheels were now set on the road to fortune, and, in time, Woodburn village became the setting for a big factory which turned out Ross-Ryan cars that made a name famous the world over. And the firm's star driver and part owner is Jim Ross!

THE END.

THE VITAL CLUE!

(Continued from page 35.)

"This is good enough!" he said grimly. "You're under arrest, Monsieur Girard. I charge you with the murder of Georges Martineau, and anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence against you."

IT was a masterpiece of deduction on Nelson Lee's part.

And after the arrest, of course, a whole mass of fresh evidence came to light. Once an investigation into Girard's affairs was started, the case against him became black.

It was proved beyond doubt that he and Lereux was one and the same. His idea in becoming a private detective was a cunning one. In that guise he accepted commissions from wealthy clients, and whenever the opportunity occurred he made capital out of the confidences which were made him. He blackmailed his victims—and yet, all the time, he made the world believe that he was a clever and trustworthy detective.

This source of income, coupled with his gambling houses, was lucrative. But such a life could not go on for ever without one of his victims turning. Girard had made a blunder in attempting to blackmail Monsieur Georges Martineau. It had started a year or two earlier, and it was only recently that Monsieur Martineau had threatened to expose the so-called detective. Girard, finding Paul mixed up with one of his gambling dens, conceived the idea of murdering the man who threatened him, while making it appear that Paul was the assassin.

In this way he would not only get rid of his tormentor, but he would provide a scape-

goat. Thus, he had insisted upon payment of Paul's debts—he had driven Paul to interview his stepfather, and he had chosen his own time to wait in the garden. To clinch matters he had so cunningly flung that knife as to make it appear that a left-handed man had struck the blow. Paul's removal of the knife had unwittingly helped.

As for Girard's alibi, Lee rapidly tore it to shreds. Careful inquiries soon destroyed it. Girard had only pretended to leave by the boat-train for France. Actually he had gone to Richmond, and had committed the murder. That done, he had sped to Croydon, where he had already arranged for a fast plane to be ready—using, of course, another identity and another passport. At Calais he had alighted, and had joined the Calais-Paris express. Thus he would have arrived in Paris as though he had completed the journey by train and boat. A clever alibi—for the murder was actually committed while Girard was supposed to be on his journey.

One other little point which had helped Lee was Girard's personal toilet soap, which he had inadvertently left behind at the Dominion Hotel. Girard himself had exuded the faintest of perfumes—a real French touch, this, and Lee had detected that same perfume in the room that had supposedly been occupied by Leroux.

Needless to say, Girard was found guilty, and, British justice being what it is, he did not escape the hangman.

THE END.

(Another enthralling mystery and detective yarn featuring Nelson Lee and his cub detectives next week, entitled "The Lone Flyer!")

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