

THE NIGHT HAWK THRILLS!

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SUPER-MAN
INSIDE.

NELSON LEE

2d



The
AVENGER!

New Series No. 40.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

October 25th, 1930.

A Breezy Yarn Featuring Vivian Travers, Whose Motto is—

Safety Last!

by

*Edwy Searles
Brooks.*

The Boy
Who Tried
To Crock Himself!

CHAPTER 1.

A Slip of the Memory!

VIVIAN TRAVERS, of the Ancient House at St. Frank's, whistled cheerily as he sauntered out through the lobby. He stood in the doorway, looking out upon the soaking rain with an expression of amiable contentment. It was a drab, chill, unfriendly October evening, and dark masses



of lowering clouds were scudding across the sky.

"What's the idea?" asked Handforth, of Study D, as he came up behind Travers and gazed out upon the dismal vista. "What are you whistling for, you ass? There's nothing to be happy about!"

"To-morrow, dear old fellow, is Wednesday," said Travers serenely.

"What about it?"

"That's why I'm happy."

"Then you'd better come to earth," said Handforth tartly. "What's the good of a half-holiday if it's wet? The glass is going down all the time, and these clouds look as if they're everlasting."

"And still I'm happy," said Travers blandly. "As for the rain, it won't worry me if it keeps on until Thursday. In fact, I don't care if it snows!"

He suddenly started forward, a bright light in his eyes, and without another word he dashed out into the rain and vanished.

"Well I'm jiggered!" said Handforth blankly. "He doesn't care if it rains till Thursday, and he dives out into the downpour without even a cap! The poor fathead must think he's a fish!"

He peered out, but Travers had vanished.

Travers wasn't far off, however; he was standing in the shelter of West Arch, talking to Vera Wilkes—the Housemaster's daughter—Irene Manners, and Phyllis Palmer. The three Moor View girls had attracted his attention as they hurried in.

"Isn't it a shame?" Vera was saying. "This rain's going to spoil everything, by the look of it."

"No amount of rain can alter the fact that to-morrow is Wednesday," replied Travers contentedly. "Besides, why take any notice of the weather reports or the barometer? They're not always reliable. It might be a glorious day."

"Well, there's nothing like being optimistic," smiled Phyllis. "And whatever the weather, I'm going up to town to-morrow with my people."

Vivian Travers' jaw dropped; all his serenity deserted him; he looked at the girl in consternation.

"Going to town?" he repeated blankly.

"It's my birthday, Vivian," she explained. "A special treat, you know."

"I know it's your birthday—that's why I was so happy," ejaculated Travers, looking confused and awkward. "I—I— Well, I was rather hoping that you'd have me over to tea, and—and—"

He paused, tongue-tied; and for the cool-headed Travers to be red and awkward and tongue-tied was very unusual. Nobody else in the world but Phyllis Palmer could have plunged him into this sorry condition. He regarded her as his special chum, yet he was generally nervous in her presence.

"I did say something about our having a special spread at Moor View, didn't I?" asked Phyllis gently. "And I think I invited you, Vivian, too."

"I know," said Travers. "I—I was counting on it."

"I got a letter from my people to-day, and they're coming down especially by car to take me up to London," explained the girl.

"They'll be here for lunch, and then we're going up for a regular spree—talkies, swell tea in a big restaurant, theatre, and home late."

"Oh, I say!" protested Travers bleakly.

"Don't look so disappointed, you ass!" laughed Phyllis, her eyes twinkling merrily. "You're coming, too."

"Eh?" gasped Travers, jumping.

"Of course," smiled Phyllis. "I was only teasing you, Vivian. I particularly want you to come—if you can wangle a pass. I shan't enjoy myself half so much if you don't come."



"I'll wangle anything!" declared Travers breathlessly. "By Samson! I'll dash off and see old Wilkey about it now! I shan't get a minute's peace of mind until I fix it. Thanks awfully, Phyl. You've bucked me no end."

The other girls laughed.

"Lucky bounders!" said Irene enviously.

MR. ALINGTON WILKES stroked his untidy moustache as he sat back in his chair, gazing at Travers on the other side of the desk.

"Well, it's a tall order, young man," he said thoughtfully. "You say you won't get back until late? What do you call late?"

"I'm afraid it won't be till nearly midnight, sir."

"That's a bit thick," said the Housemaster, pursing his lips. "You're quite sure you're going up with Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, as well as the daughter? No hanky-panky tricks, old man?"

"I'm not that sort, sir!" protested Travers. "I wouldn't ask for a pass under false pretences. Why, Mr. and Mrs. Palmer will call for me in their car to-morrow. The whole thing's straightforward enough, sir. You see, it's Phyllis's birthday, and she and I— Well, the fact is—"

"All right, old scout, you needn't tie yourself into knots," grinned Mr. Wilkes, picking up his pen. "Seeing that it's a special occasion, I'll give you a pass. And I hope you have a good time."

"Thanks awfully, sir!" said Travers eagerly. "You're a brick!"

"Don't be a young ass," replied Mr. Wilkes, as he handed over the pass and slapped the junior on the back.

Travers was beaming with gratification as he walked into the lobby, the precious pass safely in his pocket. He was so full of joy that he was compelled to unburden himself to the first fellow he met—who happened to be Nipper, the Junior skipper.

"Old Wilkey's a corker!" he said enthusiastically. "Nipper, dear old fellow, he's absolutely a one hundred per cent. sport!"

"Why don't you tell me something I don't know?" asked Nipper, smiling. "But what's the latest?"

"It's Phyllis's birthday to-morrow," explained Travers happily. "She's going up to town with her people, and she's asked me to go. They'll fetch us at mid-day, and we shan't get back till late at night. Isn't old Wilkey a stunner?"

But Nipper did not hear the question. A shadow had passed over his face, and he was now frowning.

"You say you're leaving at mid-day?" he asked bluntly.

"Yes."

"And not getting back until nearly midnight?"

"That's the idea," said Travers serenely.

"Haven't you forgotten that to-morrow's Wednesday?" asked Nipper.

"Forgotten it! I've been remembering it all day!"

"Well, haven't you forgotten something else, then?" asked Nipper grimly. "What about to-morrow's match?"

"Match!" said Travers blankly, a startled look coming into his eyes. "Why, I—I— By Samson! You mean the Barfield match? Well, it doesn't matter, does it?" he went on. "You can give somebody else my place."

"Can I?" retorted Nipper. "It's rather a pity, Travers, that you didn't come to me first before fixing up this outing. I'm afraid I can't release you. You're in the Eleven—your name's on the list—and you'll have to play!"

— —

CHAPTER 2.

Nipper Puts His Foot Down!

THERE was something so final in Nipper's tone that Travers was alarmed.

"But it's a special occasion!" he protested.

"I know it is," nodded Nipper. "Barfield is a strong side, and we've got to play them on their own ground."

"I didn't mean that—"

"I know you didn't—but I did," interrupted Nipper firmly. "You're at the top of your form just now, Travers, and I can't afford to leave you out. One or two chaps who could play in your place are crocked. Perhaps you don't realise that there's no substitute for you?"

"Oh, rot!" said Travers, in alarm. "Surely out of all the fellows you can find somebody—"

"There's nobody to take your place successfully," replied Nipper emphatically. "If you don't play the team will be disorganised. I'm sorry, Travers, but you'll have to turn out."

"And give up this outing with Phyllis?"

"Certainly. Football's more important."

"Hang it, you're dashed unreasonable!" protested Travers hotly. "It isn't often I ask to be excused—"

"You didn't ask," broke in Nipper. "That's just the trouble. You took it for granted that the team could get along without you. In fact, you forgot footer altogether, and that's not the kind of spirit I like to see in my Eleven. Football comes first, Travers. Don't forget that."

"Why argue over nothing?" said Travers irritably. "Even if I had asked you, you wouldn't have released me—you've just admitted it."

"You're not jibbing, are you?" asked Nipper, staring. "Don't you see, you ass, that your absence will mean practically chucking the game away?"

"Oh, rot!"

"It's not rot!" said Nipper warmly. "At any other time I wouldn't bind you so strictly; but when it's a question of winning or losing a match, I'm putting my foot down. Your absence will upset the whole forward line. You're badly wanted in this game, Travers, and you can celebrate Phyllis's birthday some other time."

Travers breathed hard. He was a keen footballer, but there was a wayward strain in his character, and he hated being dictated to. Besides, he had set his heart on taking that trip to London with Phyllis.

"I've got old Wilkey's pass in my pocket," he said defiantly.

"You didn't tell Wilkey that you were badly wanted for footer to-morrow, I suppose?" asked Nipper. "If you had done, he wouldn't have given you that pass, and you know it. I hate jawing at a fellow like this, but I'm Junior skipper, and I'm going to have my way. Footer comes before pleasure,

"You won't do that," said Travers. "You won't sneak!"

"Sneak, be hanged!" retorted Nipper, exasperated. "If you let the Junior Eleven down I shall be justified. Come, Travers, pull yourself together! It's not like you to show this nasty spirit. Be sensible!"

"I'm sorry, but my mind's made up," said the other stubbornly.

"Minds have been changed before to-day, and second thoughts are sometimes best," said Nipper. "Goodness knows we don't want to have a row about it, but I can tell you candidly that I'm going to have my own way



Travers deliberately skidded and lost control of his motor-bike. He was flung from the machine and hit the ground with a thud.

Travers. It's beastly unfair of you to force me to speak like this."

"And it's beastly unfair of you to be so autocratic," retorted Travers, glaring. "Phyllis's birthday only comes once a year, and you've got to pick on that very day to force me to play! Well, I've got Wilkey's pass, and I'm going!"

Nipper was never slow to accept a challenge.

"So you're defying me?" he said grimly. "Do you want me to go to Wilkey and get that pass cancelled? One word from me would be enough."

in this affair. Think it over, old man. I'll say nothing more about it until morning school to-morrow. If you haven't decided by then I shall be forced to go to Mr. Wilkes."

He swung on his heel and walked off, leaving Travers biting his lip with vexation.

TRAVERS realised that he was in the wrong, but this only served to make him the more rebellious. That little "tiff" had aroused his blood, and he vowed to himself that he wouldn't play. He was hanged if Nipper was going to mess up that London spree!

The whole business was very awkward. Keen as he was on football, he was ten times keener on going up to London with Phyllis. But the problem was a difficult one—with all the odds against him. If the Junior skipper was really determined—and there seemed no doubt of this—he would win.

"The rotter!" muttered Travers, as he leaned against the doorpost and looked out into the rain. "If he does force me to play he can't make me score goals! I'll get my own back!"

Yet he knew, even as he uttered these unworthy sentiments, that if it really came to the point he would give of his best. Travers wasn't the fellow to play dirty. All the same, he was ready enough to get out of playing if there was any possible avenue of escape. He told himself that the Saints would win in any case; and he wasn't going to be dished. But there was a snag.

"Nipper's bound to go to old Wilkey in the morning," Travers told himself miserably. "I shan't blame him either. He'll have no alternative. And what will old Wilkey do? Cancel that pass as sure as Hottentots are black!"

Then suddenly another thought came to him.

"If only I was crocked. I shouldn't be expected to play," he muttered. "A sprained ankle would be enough—or a twisted shoulder. I'd still be able to go on that spree with Phyllis, although I couldn't play footer. For the love of Samson! It's an idea!"

Travers was a reckless fellow, to say nothing of being headstrong, and in his present obstinate mood he was more reckless than ever. If he met with an "accident" Nipper couldn't possibly play him, and Mr. Wilkes wouldn't cancel that pass either. It was a simple solution to his problem.

Easily done, too. He walked upstairs as he heard voices in the Remove passage. When Handforth & Co. and K. K. and several others came into the lobby, Travers was just pretending to be walking downstairs from the top.

"Oh, I say, K. K.!" he sang out. "I've been looking for you. I want——"

He apparently missed his footing as he ran eagerly downstairs. The next second he crashed headlong and came hurtling down.

CHAPTER 3.

Nothing Doing!

VIVIAN TRAVERS did the thing thoroughly. He simply let himself go freely from top to bottom of the stairs, and made no attempt to check his devastating fall.

Crash! Thud! Bang!

He landed in a disordered heap on the mat. Handforth and the others rushed forward in alarm.

"Great Scott! He must be hurt!" ejaculated Handforth concernedly.

"What about to-morrow's game?" yelled Gresham.

It was natural that the fellows should think of football at once. Travers was one of the star performers.

"It's all right—don't make a fuss!" groaned Vivian, as he uncoiled himself. "I don't seem to be hurt much. My ankle, I think——"

"Not your ankle!" gasped Parkington, in alarm.

Travers was hauled up by the anxious fellows. And to his infinite astonishment—even his disgust—he discovered that he wasn't hurt anywhere. Not a bruise! Not a sprain or a scratch!

"For the love of Samson!" murmured Travers amazedly.

He managed to escape from the sympathetic crowd, and when he found himself alone in Study H he breathed hard with disappointment. He felt himself all over once again. Try as he would, he couldn't find a bruise.

"Well, I'm not going to be swindled like that!" Travers told himself grimly. "There must be some way! I can't fall downstairs again, or the chaps would smell a rat. Nipper would, anyhow."

His failure had made him more hot-headed than ever. He vowed that he wasn't going to be foiled now that he had made up his mind to his course of action. Another idea came to him—a better one this time.

FIVE minutes later he was wheeling his powerful motor-cycle out of the school garage. He had donned his overalls, for it was still raining in torrents. Before he could get started he ran into Wilson of the Sixth.

"Going for a joy-ride?" asked the prefect sarcastically.

"Only taking a run to the village," replied Travers. "I shall just be able to get back by calling-over."

"You'd better see that you do—you haven't got much time," said Wilson, with a glance at the school clock.

"By gad, I shall have to hurry!" ejaculated Travers, putting his leg over the machine and operating the kick-starter. "I think I'll manage it, Wilson."

He was glad that Nipper and a number of other fellows had come to the Ancient House doorway to have another look at the weather. Travers was strengthened. What rot! Forcing him to play when it was a certainty that the morrow would be a soaker! In all probability there wouldn't be any football at all!

The engine roared, he let in the clutch fiercely, and started off. He came to the conclusion that there wasn't any need for him to go down to the village. His original idea had been to stage a skid in the High Street. Why not do it on the spot? Nipper was looking on.

Travers gathered speed as he heared the gates, and he purposely left it until the last

moment before he swung round. The motorcycle, with its engine roaring, started a wild, spectacular skid—and Travers let it go! He was an expert at skids, and could perform them to order. He was as brilliant as many a dirt track rider.

He gave a wild yell, and apparently lost control. The machine, broadsiding violently,

There was a rush by the watching juniors, who had witnessed the whole accident. Somebody yelled for the doctor to be fetched. Another bawled for the stretcher.

Travers was sitting up when the crowd arrived, and the engine had just spluttered into silence. Travers was astounded to find that he felt no pain.

"What's the matter with you, Travers?" asked Nipper, half-suspiciously. "Are you hurt, old man?"

"Do you think I can come a cropper like that without being hurt?" groaned Travers feebly.

"He must be worried, or something," said Handforth. "He fell downstairs ten minutes ago, and now he's been trying to kill himself on his motor-bike! Something must have upset him."

Nipper helped the victim up.

"You ass!" he said, in a low voice. "You needn't take it so much to heart. It's not like you, Travers, to——"

"Oh, cheese it!" broke in Travers. "I skidded."

He stamped about, and felt his arms. Again he had escaped scot free. Amazingly enough, he hadn't suffered a bruise or a scratch.

"Well, thank goodness you're not crocked!" said Handforth, with relief. "We should be in a fine fix to-morrow without you in the team, Travers! We'd better get indoors—we're getting wet. How the dickens you escaped damage beats me!"

"It's only his bike that's smashed," said K. K. contentedly.

"Wha-a-at!" yelled Travers. "My bike! Smashed!"

He dashed over to it, proving to all and sundry that he was indeed unhurt. His dismay was great when he beheld the twisted handlebars and the dented petrol-tank. This was retribution, indeed! He hadn't hurt himself, but he had hurt the machine! Disgusted and gloomy, he put the motor-cycle away.

"What's the use?" he asked himself, after he had shed his overalls and had tidied himself up. "Here am I practising Safety Last, and I can't even give myself a decent scratch!"

It was most exasperating. When he went into the Common-room there were all sorts of solicitous inquiries after his health. But Travers discounted them, for he knew that

Dressed only in his pyjamas, Travers stood in the Triangle, exposed to the cold night wind.



sideslipped for about twenty feet, the gravel and mud splashing up in a blinding spray. Travers went hurtling in one direction, and he struck the ground violently, rolling over and over. The machine crashed on its side, the engine still roaring, the back wheel spinning madly.

"My only sainted aunt!"

"He's half killed himself!"

"Poor old Travers!"

the fellows were thinking more of the Barfield match than they were of him.

"Oh, give it a rest," he said. "I'm not hurt, I tell you. It takes more than a skid to hurt me. I'm as right as rain."

"Well, I hope you'll be more careful in future," said Nipper, with a fatherly air. "You can do that sort of thing once too often, my lad! First you fall downstairs, and then you skid half way across the Triangle. If you do those sort of things any more, you'll probably break your neck!"

When Travers went to bed he examined himself, and he certainly did find a tiny bruise on his left thigh and an insignificant graze on his right elbow; but to show these to Nipper as an excuse for not playing in the Barfield match would be farcical.

He thought of Nipper's words. He had been very lucky to escape so scatheless after both his "accidents." He now realised that he might easily have broken a leg or an arm. That would have achieved his end—but it would also have barred him from going out with Phyllis.

"I'd better go easy," he told himself glumly. "A thing like this can be overdone! I don't want to get really crocked."

His dormitory mate—Jimmy Potts—was regarding him strangely.

"What's up with you, Travers?" he asked. "You've been morose all the evening. Didn't you have a row with Nipper? Somebody told me——"

"You shouldn't believe all you hear," interrupted Travers, getting into bed. "I've had no row with Nipper. Perhaps the weather has made me feel fed up. I dare say I shall be all right in the morning. Good-night!"

He rolled over and pulled the blankets over him. The schoolboy baronet shrugged

his shoulders and got into his own bed. Travers was so consistently amiable that Sir Jimmy could easily forgive him for being grumpy once in a while.

It wasn't until half an hour after lights-out, and Jimmy was asleep, that Travers had another idea. And this one really was a corker!

CHAPTER 4.

The Last Straw!

NIPPER sat up in bed with a sudden start.

Something had awakened him; he wasn't quite sure what it was, but he knew that he had heard something. The school clock was just chiming eleven, and a stray moon beam was stealing through the dormitory window.

Click! Click!

Nipper heard it again—and now he understood. Tiny gravel stones were being thrown against the window. As he got out of bed Sir Montie Tregellis-West sat up, blinking.

"Anything wrong, dear old boy?" he asked sleepily.

"I can't understand it," said Nipper. "Somebody seems to be chucking stones at our window. Half a tick; I'll have a look!"

He opened the window and leaned out. The scudding clouds were clearing, and the rain had ceased to fall.

The sky was stormy, but the moon was sailing in a clear space, and the West Square was flooded with silvery light. Nipper's satisfaction at seeing this improvement in the weather conditions was put out of his head by the sight of the figure standing below.

"Who is it?" asked Nipper blankly.

He could see a form down there—a form attired only in pyjamas! Even his feet were bare, and his hair was blowing about in the wind. Then, with a shock, Nipper recognised Vivian Travers.

Extra-Long St. Frank's Yarn Next Wednesday.



Phipps sacked! Sensation at St. Frank's. But Archie Glenthorne's determined. He wants a valet who will let him wear yellow ties with pink spots—and Trott's the fellow. Hence Phipps' dismissal and Trott trots in in his place. And Archie becomes a living rainbow!

One laugh from beginning to end. E. S. Brooks has never written a funnier yarn than:

"ARCHIE'S NEW VALET!"

Coming next week—order your copy now.

"Begad!" ejaculated Sir Montie, joining him at the window. "It's Travers! The frightful ass will catch his death of cold!"

"Travers!" shouted Nipper. "What do you think you're doing?"

Vivian Travers made no answer. He stared up blankly, and the moonlight, shining on his face, revealed a set, expressionless mask. He turned away after a moment and walked with a peculiar automatic gait towards West Arch.

"Travers!" called Nipper. "I say, can't you—" He broke off, for still Travers took no notice. "Well, I'm hanged!" said Nipper. "I believe the chap's walking in his sleep! That's it! I must have been on his mind somehow, and that's why he threw stones at my window. Quick, Montie! We've got to bring him in!"

"Begad, yes!" ejaculated Sir Montie. "He'll get pneumonia—he will, really!"

They hustled into their dressing-gowns and slippers. In the corridor they encountered Mr. Wilkes—also in dressing-gown and slippers, and armed with a powerful electric torch.

"One of the fellows outside—in his pyjamas," said the Housemaster briefly. "I just saw him, and I believe he's walking in his sleep. Glad you fellows are coming. You may be needed."

"It's Travers, sir," explained Nipper.

They found Travers wandering in the Triangle. He was chilled to the marrow; and, inwardly, he gloated. This was doing the trick all right! In the morning he would have a first-class cold, and would be put on the sick-list. No good for footer—but his trip to London wouldn't be cancelled! He'd jolly well see that the doctor didn't keep him in the sanny!

"Come, Travers," murmured Mr. Wilkes gently. "No, don't force him, you chaps. If he wakes up suddenly he might—"

Travers gave a sudden jump, and the set, expressionless look left his face. He gave a little cry, and he gazed round wildly.

"What's—what's happened?" he gasped. "I'm frozen! I—I— Why, I thought I was in the river!" he faltered. "Mr. Wilkes! What am I doing out here, in my pyjamas?"

"Take it easy, old man—you've only been walking in your sleep," said the Housemaster, as he wrapped a big blanket round the reckless junior. "We'll soon have you in bed. Glad you didn't get too much of a shock when you woke up. Nipper, dash indoors and get a hot-water bottle. Better get two while you're about it."

TRAVERS was soon nestling between thick blankets, with a hot-water bottle at his feet and another in the region of his chest. He had been dosed with some of Mr. Wilkes' special cough mixture, and he was feeling warm and comfortable.

"I think you'll be all right," said Mr. Wilkes cheerily. "We just got you back in time, and with luck—to say nothing of a

strong constitution—you'll be all serene in the morning."

Travers gave it up. This was the limit. He wasn't showing the slightest symptom of chill; he hadn't even sneezed. He didn't feel shivery in his limbs, and his chest was as sound as a bell. He went off into a peaceful sleep. When the rising-bell rang in the morning he was as fit as a fiddle. And now he realised what an absolute idiot he had been to take such mad risks. His sense of proportion was restored.

"Thank goodness none of the chaps know what a cad I was," he told himself soberly. "I've got to apologise to Nipper, too. The dear old fellow was right all the time. That Barfield match is more important than any spree!"

The Remove was looking to him to play a great game that afternoon—and he vowed that he would play it.

In the lobby he ran into Vera and Phyllis.

"Just the chap I wanted to see," said Phyllis briskly. "I'm dreadfully sorry, Vivian, but that London outing is off!"

"Off!" ejaculated Travers, startled.

"Well, not exactly off," corrected the girl. "Mother isn't very well—only a bit of a cold—but she's written to say that it'll be better if we celebrate my birthday on Saturday, instead. I hope you don't mind?"

"Mind!" said Travers delightedly. "Why, it's too good for words! You see, I'm booked to play against Barfield to-day, but there's only a House match on Saturday, and I'm not even in the team. Good egg!"

He let out a whoop, and performed an impromptu war dance.

"Be careful!" cried Vera warningly.

It was too late. Travers accidentally trod on a piece of orange peel that somebody had carelessly left on the stone floor, and he went down with a crash.

"Oooooo!" he gasped agonisingly.

"Oh, are you hurt?" cried the two girls.

He was. His left ankle had doubled under him, and it was nastily ricked. Nipper, coming downstairs, had seen the mishap, and he groaned when he felt the ankle.

"You're crocked!" he said dismally.

And so Travers was only a passenger that afternoon—hobbling about with a heavily-bandaged ankle and assisted by two sticks. He was gloomy and miserable, but he had long since come to the conclusion that he had received his just deserts.

His only spark of consolation was that the Barfield Junior XI had lost two of its best men owing to minor mishaps, and St. Frank's, although handicapped, proved the better team. The Saints won by three goals to two.

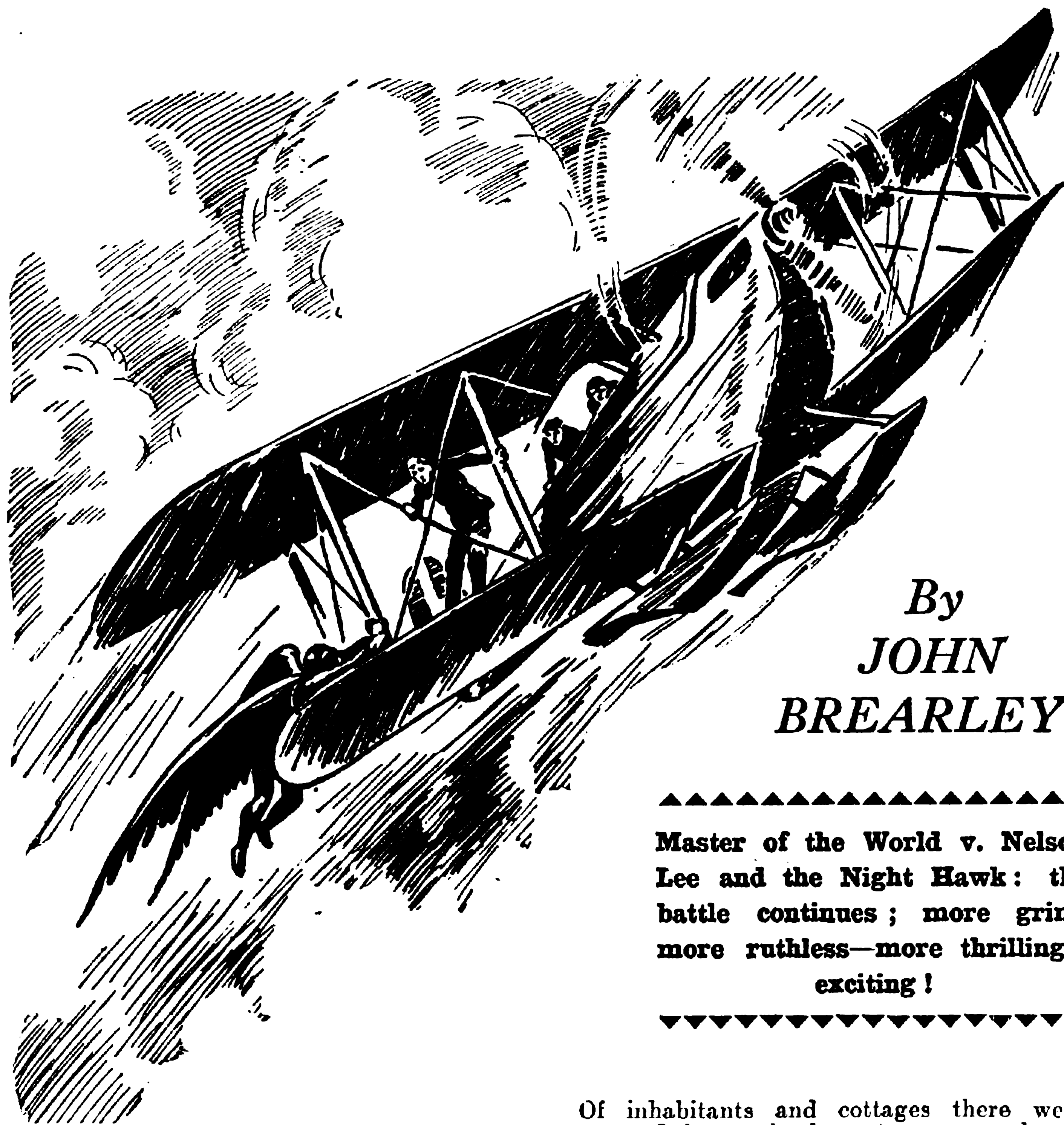
Vivian Travers gave a deep breath of relief as the final whistle blew, and solemnly told himself that he had played the risky game of Safety Last for the first and last time.

THE END.

(Corking extra-long St. Frank's yarn next week, lads, "Archie's New Valet." One long laugh from beginning to end!)

Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk in Another Full-of-Thrills Yarn!

THE AVENGER!



By
**JOHN
BREARLEY**

Master of the World v. Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk: the battle continues; more grim, more ruthless—more thrillingly exciting!

CHAPTER 1.

The Master's Headquarters!

OFF the dull, flat coast of Friesland, ugly, desolate and forbidding, a chain of small islands wallowed in the North Sea waves, like sluggish sea beasts at rest. Built during the centuries of tide-mud and sand, held together by coarse grass that even the hardy Frisian cattle disdained, they lay useless and forlorn; while above them wheeled clouds of gulls, whose harsh screams echoed over the lonely sea.

Of inhabitants and cottages there were none. Only on the largest, a saucer-shaped island nearly half a mile long, were any signs of life visible; a group of men standing darkly on the sea wall, staring into the sunset with fearful eyes.

Out to sea, but drawing nearer with every second, a powerful launch lifted her sharp bows above the waves and left a broad, foaming track behind her. The sinking sun stained the choppy sea into a blood-red, at which some of the men shuddered superstitiously.

To more than one of them, that stain seemed ominously prophetic. The Master

of the World was coming to his new headquarters with a blaze of crimson at his back.

With a swirl of water beneath her stern, the launch swerved into the channel between the islands, and headed straight for home. Her engines stopped; as she glided towards the landing-stage a party of the island men ran down to the waterline to bear a hand. The others stood stolidly on the sea wall and stared at the grim figure which sat upright and alone in the stern sheets.

Although only one of the garrison had seen him before, instinct told them that this was the Master; the unknown man who ruled their organisation with a rod of iron; whose punishments for disobedience or neglect were swift and merciless, and who had already reduced every country in Europe, save only England, to subjection.

As the boat stopped, he stood erect, a tall malignant presence, whose head was entirely shrouded by a black cowl. His eyes, hidden, too, by thick, blue glasses, swept the crowd with a single, contemptuous glance. There was something coldly repellent in his attitude, a wolfishness that made the on-lookers cringe abjectly.

They were a motley collection of international scum; men from the Marseilles docks or Paris slums, from the waterfront of Amsterdam or the ghettos of half Germany; men who could fight like brutes with every weapon under the sun. Yet, like brutes, they cowered before the chill cruelty of their Master.

Ignoring an outstretched hand, he stepped out of the launch and stood looking on silently while the rest of the party landed.

First came a little crumpled man, whose lined face was pale, and whose lips trembled pitifully: Professor Godfrey Fabian, bearer of the most famous name in the world of science—but the Master's chief ally; "tool" would have been the better word. As he stumbled ashore, the rough faces around broke into leering grins, which vanished swiftly when the Master glared round.

Hugged tightly in his arms, the professor held two long metal cylinders, each of which had a curious frame of crystal lenses at one end, and a square funnel at the other. One of these funnels had a thin screen of metal gauze over its mouth, but the other was bent and battered as though by a succession of piercing blows.

Old man though he was, Professor Fabian was striving with all the force of his still-powerful intellect and dignity to appear at ease. But tragedy brooded in his puckered eyes.

A few hours ago—years, it seemed already—he had been unmasked by Nelson Lee, the great detective, and his position in the Master's sinister band laid bare. He was still half-stunned by the shock of that swift, unexpected exposure.

Then again, he had seen his gracious old house in Kent ruthlessly destroyed to cover the Master's tracks. True, Nelson Lee and

Nipper, the detective's young assistant, had perished, either in the flames or at the hands of Hector, the giant gorilla, and so his secret was safe for a while. Yet, sooner or later, others must find him out, must read the truth of his disappearance from England; and the thought of the great position he had sacrificed to throw in his lot with these wild men and their wilder leader filled him with despair. Not even the prospect of one day sharing the conquest of the world with the Master could cheer him. His nerve had gone. The swift flight from England to these desolate islands had left him numb and helpless.

Little the Master of the World cared for his henchman's plight, however. As soon as the party were all ashore, he turned and began to climb the steps to the sea wall, still without a word.

At the top, the garrison met him, huddling together nervously, with two men a little in front of them. One of these, a burly man in a shabby sea captain's uniform, twisted his cap with shaky fingers and bowed obsequiously. The other, a lean, iron-faced American, stood more at ease, though his thin mouth was tight and his "inty eyes hard and watchful. They were the leaders of the garrison.

Within a yard of them, the Master stopped and looked them up and down. The seaman bobbed again.

"Welcome to—to the new headquarters, Master!" he mumbled hastily.

There was a moment's silence. Then the Master's voice, harsh as a rasp, spoke for the first time:

"You are the commander of my submarine?" he rapped.

"Aye, aye, sir—Master. Samuel Scarfe, late of——"

"Blockhead!" snarled the Master in a voice that brought a gasp from the crowd and narrowed the American's eyes to slits. "What do I care who you are? Tell me—why was the Laurel not sunk this morning? Why was the signal for the Fire Ray not given?"

Samuel Scarfe's tanned face went a dirty yellow. At dawn that morning, the American pleasure liner Laurel should have been destroyed off the Kentish coast; instead of which, something had gone wrong, and the Master's submarine had been forced to fly.

It was plain that the Master was in a fiendish rage, and the seaman plunged hurriedly into an explanation.

"Why, Master, we arrived in good time. We waited for the Laurel until the—the Ice Ray cleaned up, and rose immediately. Frenchy, the rangefinder, went up to bring on the Fire Ray, and the next we heard was his signal to dive and run for it."

"Where is the rangefinder?"

"D-dead, sir. I heard a couple of shots from somewhere, and he must have fallen over the side of the submarine. We submerged immediately."

"You made no attempt to find who shot him, fool?"

"Why, n-no, Master. Your orders, if you remember, have been always to 'ook it in case of trouble——"

"Bah!"

A long arm shot out, gripped the scared sailor by the throat and shook him until his teeth rattled. A hail of merciless blows descended on his upturned face and head, then, with a vicious swing, he was torn off the sea wall and flung sheer into the water below. The Master wheeled furiously on the American, who stiffened tensely.

"Well—you! What's your report?"

Joe Sherman, some-time construction engineer in the States, now captain of the island, glanced at the submarine commander struggling feebly out of the water, and shrugged.

"I gotcha orders, chief!" he drawled quietly. "Everything's O.K. fer you to look aroun'."

The Master glared for a moment as though resentful of the cool manner of speech, but as Sherman gazed at him with placid respect, he pushed past in silence and began to descend the inner slope of the wall. Professor Fabian, still clutching his instruments, followed, and the American, with a look that dared any of the men to come after, brought up the rear.

The Master had come home!

CHAPTER 2.

The Underground Fortress!

DOWN in the hollow of the island, the Master stood for a long time, looking about him like a wild beast inspecting its lair. Shoulders hunched, hands clasped behind him, he brooded over the scene, his muffled head moving in little fierce jerks as he peered from point to point.

Like all his schemes, this island fortress was the result of long and careful preparation. There was nothing haphazard or slipshod in its planning. Over six months before he had commenced his campaign of terror, shattering Europe with the Twin Rays of Destruction, he had selected this bleak, depressing spot for his future headquarters, the capital from which he would rule the world. And since then he had steadily trickled men and materials into the place, under the command of the American adventurer by his side.

The whole length of the little kingdom was dotted with low, corrugated-iron huts, built against the sea wall, while closer at hand, in the shelter of some wind-bedraggled trees, stood a larger one of wood. Narrow tracks, trodden in the grass by heavy boots, linked up the huts, and at regular intervals, by the side of these paths, curious perforated discs had been let into the ground.

At three points on the sea wall, squat searchlights jutted out, screened by bushes and cleverly camouflaged, and all around the island ran ugly wires, held above ground by thick insulators. A single touch of a lever would turn the whole place into an electric gridiron, so that swift death waited for any hostile raiders who ever set foot on the Master's domain.

The first inspection was finished at last. With a grunt that might have meant anything, the Master turned and strode towards the wooden hut under the trees, curtly beckoning Sherman and Professor Fabian to follow.

They passed inside, Sherman closing the door quickly against the curious watchers outside. Within the hut, the light was dull and gloomy; the place was bare, save for a rickety table and a chair. Folding his arms, the Master watched the American's deft movements with sombre eyes.

Swiftly Sherman slid the table into a corner, then crossed to the wall and pulled down a small switch. There came a low hiss of compressed air beneath their feet, and instantly half the floor slid back, disclosing a flight of concrete steps leading down into utter darkness. Another switch clicked and a glow of electric light sprang out of the depths.

Down into the bowels of the earth they went, the Master leading with firm, rapid steps, Professor Fabian stumbling once or twice through sheer nervousness.

At the foot of the stairs, the party halted in a small chamber, where two narrow corridors began. One apparently led away into the very heart of the island, losing itself at last in the brightness of countless twinkling lights. The other was shorter and led to a steel door, let into a solid concrete wall. The Master headed for this without hesitation. Sherman touched another switch; the door swung open.

And then Professor Fabian began the strangest tour of his life. At every turn, fresh marvels of this amazing subterranean stronghold crowded upon him.

As in a dream, he was taken from room to room—all built of concrete, twenty yards below sea-level. There were store-rooms for food and clothing; an efficient arsenal; a well-equipped secretary's office; bed-rooms and living-rooms for the Master and himself, barely furnished but comfortable.

In the corner of each compartment, a steel periscope pierced its way to the surface, so that sea, sky and island were constantly under the eyes of the men who lived and worked below. The air was kept sweet by silent electric pumps; short, brightly-illuminated passages joined up every room. The place was a wonderful underground maze; a spider's web—with the tall, hooded Master as the spider!

They came, eventually, to a great room built under the sea wall facing the North Sea—the largest room of all. And, at sight

of it, Professor Fabian forgot all his fears and troubles at last; forgot everything save his great overwhelming love of science. He gave a little cry of admiration and awe; he limped forward eagerly, his eyes bright and keen under their snowy brows.

For one quick, expert survey told him that here, in this desolate island, the Master had built him a laboratory as magnificently-fitted as the one he had just left in far-off Kent.

Swinging round on the watching Sherman, the Master jerked his head towards the door.

"Get out!" he barked. Then, as the American sauntered from the laboratory, he strode over and seized the professor's frail shoulder in a claw-like grip.

"Now, Fabian! How much damage has Nelson Lee's cub done to that instrument? Tell me—and quickly!"

CHAPTER 3.

Bluff!

THE deadly Twin Rays—the Ice Ray that paralysed and the Fire Ray that burnt and destroyed—were the discoveries of Professor Fabian; two of the obscure rays that scientists know to exist, but have so far failed to harness.

Up to a point, they were produced by the same process as X-rays, the shortest rays known and the most piercing. But from that point onwards, the professor's secret invention took charge and turned them from rays of healing into evil, monstrous dangers.

By means of prismatic lenses, arranged to a millionth part of an inch, the X-rays were forced through long, slim cylinders of heat-resisting metal until they became even shorter in wave-length, and more penetrative still in their action. Very little electric force was necessary to send them through the ether. They were "fired" through sturdy funnels like loud speakers, made of helloid and coated with a secret acid.

And it was the Fire Ray funnel, and its cylinder, that Nipper's hail of bullets, fired gallantly into the very heart of the orange flame when it threatened to kill him and Nelson Lee, had wrecked.

At the fierce clutch on his arm, Professor Fabian came out of his happy trance and blinked timidly. Clever and famous man as the scientist was, the Master of the World dominated him body and soul—as he had done for months past. He was as clay in the Master's hands.

"Why—why, I have not had time yet for a full examination, Master!" he faltered. "But, as you know, the Ice Ray instruments were not touched at all, and——"

"I know, I know!" snapped the Master. "But the Fire Ray, man, the Fire Ray? I saw you brooding over the cylinder in the launch!" He thumped violently on the bench. "Do you realise that to-morrow

morning Great Britain's time-limit expires? That unless her Government agrees to my terms, I intend to smash London into utter ruin?"

"Y-yes!"

"Then what use is the Ice Ray alone? I can only stupefy London's inhabitants; not a single building could I harm! Tell me, is the Fire Ray wrecked beyond repair?"

The professor plucked at his lips and thought rapidly.

"I can repair it," he mumbled at last, "but"—and he cringed timorously—"it will take at least three days!"

The Master flung him off with a curse.

"Three days!" he stormed. "And here am I, with every plan laid and every man posted, ready to bring that stiff-necked country to heel! If the British Government holds out and I cannot fulfil my threat to-morrow, my prestige goes at once. I shall have to work all over again!" His eyes flamed madly. "Ah, if I had my hands round the throat of Nelson Lee's young hound, I'd——"

By a great effort, he checked his raving. He threw back his black hood impatiently and smiled a slow, cruel grin.

"But, at least, Hector avenged me!" he whispered, staring hideously in front of him.

Professor Fabian shuddered. Before his eyes appeared a picture of Nelson Lee and Nipper at bay on the flat roof of his house, with Hector, the Master's enormous gorilla, advancing slowly, wounded and terrible——

Still, it was no use worrying. They were dead now. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched the Master, who stood deep in thought, a frown on his forehead. Suddenly the man snapped his fingers and looked up eagerly.

"It is devilish luck, Fabian; but I will not be beaten! If we cannot attack London to-morrow, or for at least three days, we will not slacken our grip. Already Londoners' nerves are at breaking-point; some are clamouring for the Government to yield! We must use bluff, my friend!"

The Master strode to a desk, jerked out pencil and paper and began to write. For half an hour there was silence in the underground laboratory, during which Fabian fingered his smashed invention dolefully and took occasional glimpses into the free upper world through the periscope by the door. At last the Master leapt to his feet again, his finger on a bell-push.

The door opened noiselessly and Sherman came in once more. The Master scowled at him sourly.

"You have an airplane here!" he stated. "Is it ready for flight?"

Sherman nodded.

"Sure. Other end of the island, chief. It's all ready!"

"And how many of you scum can fly?" the Master demanded brusquely.

Taking no notice of the insult beyond a dry, fleeting grin, the American replied calmly:

"Eight, chief. Six men you sent me, myself and another I picked up!"

"Very well. Have you studied the mainland yonder as I ordered?" The Master jerked his head towards the coast of Friesland and Holland beyond. Sherman looked surprised at the unexpected question.

"Yes, chief. Thoroughly."

"Know the town of Veerden?"

A quick gleam appeared in Sherman's pale eyes. He nodded again.

"Sure. There's a Dutch commercial aerodrome there!" he answered readily.

"I know that, dolt! Keep your comments till I ask for them!" snarled the Master viciously. "Listen. To-morrow morning, at 3 a.m. exactly, I shall want two men to fly the machine you have here to England. And to-morrow night, you will take the rest of the pilots to Veerden aerodrome and bring back six 'planes. The Ice Ray will prepare the way for you—as usual. I shall need an Air Force in my kingdom!" he finished haughtily.

Snatching a paper from his desk, he tossed it across.

"There are your orders and time-table! See that everything is properly rehearsed before you start. Now send the English wireless operator and clerk to me!"

Sherman stepped quietly across to a telephone and rapped out quick orders. Within a few seconds, two men came nervously into the room. The Master studied them balefully.

"Wireless operator?"

"Me, sir!" gulped one of the men hastily.

A paper was thrown at his feet.

"To-morrow at 3.30 a.m. this message is to be wirelessly to every station in the British Isles. See to it. Go! And you, clerk"—the other cringed—"prepare as many copies of this message—on single sheets—as you can turn out between now and 3 a.m. Work all night, remember; and see that the supply is large."

The Master began to pace the room with long furious strides, muttering to himself. Under the stimulus of action, and the thought of his thwarted plans for the destruction of London, the man's uncontrollable nature was rising every moment. In his eyes glowed the light of madness. Presently he burst out:

"Would that I could have tortured that cub, Nipper, with my own hands!" he choked. "And his spy of a master! This time to-morrow London would have been in ruins but for them! And yet"—his voice rose to a harsh pitch—"I will not be defied! My time will come; and, meanwhile, the people of London must suffer!"

He cackled madly for a moment. Then, seeing Joe Sherman still waiting stolidly, he stopped and stared at him.

"Well, what do you want? You have your orders! Go!"

"Sure, chief!" The man turned and walked towards the door, but the Master's

voice, soft and silky of a sudden, stopped him.

"Stay!"

Sherman stopped. The Master came nearer.

"Have any—visitors—appeared here?" he asked slowly. Sherman met him eye to eye.

"Yes, one!" he replied easily. "Some fishing guy landed in a storm a few days back!"

"I see. And what did you do?"

"Why, we bumped him off!" answered Sherman in mild surprise. "What else?"

Quick as a flash, the Master's fist crashed on the American's jaw and sent him headlong to the concrete floor. He was up again in a second, hand on hip, eyes blazing murderously, but he stopped as he saw a gun in his leader's hand, pointed straight for his heart. Fists clenched, he panted with helpless rage, heedless of the thin trickle of blood on his face.

"What's the big idea?" he gasped, at length. The Master smiled at him coldly.

"Just that I do not like your style, my friend! You are lacking in respect! Whether you are captain of the men or not, I am your Master—just as I am the Master of every other criminal dog on this island. Address me as such in future. Now, get out!"

Sherman shrugged.

"Yes—Master!" he growled, and slouched out. But his eyes glittered deep down, like those of an angry cat.

After the door had slammed defiantly, the Master turned slowly to Fabian once more.

"I must watch that man!" he said thoughtfully. "And get rid of him as soon as possible. Meanwhile—he is too useful!"

A remarkable change had come over him swiftly; the bullying, tempestuous expression had disappeared and his voice was suave and cultured as he clapped Fabian firmly on the shoulder.

"Come, my friend; forgive my little discourtesies. This is to be our home, where we can work together—the glorious work. What do you think of it?"

"It is amazing!" returned Fabian slowly. "Beyond my wildest dreams. Your organising powers are marvellous, Master. But do you think we are safe here?"

The Master smiled strangely.

"We are safe from—anything! And there are at least six exits by underground passages to the sea wall. But no one can smash through our defences. Protected by the Twin Rays we are safe from any force on land or sea."

"And—and air?" asked Fabian anxiously.

The Master rallied him jovially.

"By air most of all!" he cried. "You saw those discs on the ground? I have a grim surprise for any hostile aircraft that pays us a visit, believe me!"

Once again his hand descended on the professor's frail shoulder.

"Never fear, Fabian! Our triumph is in sight! To-morrow morning we tighten our



"Bah!" snarled the Master of the World, contemptuously and struck his lieutenant. The man toppled over backwards and fell into the sea below.

hall, the Embankment and Trafalgar Square groups of weary people drifted along the pavements and listened dully to raucous orators, who lashed them with panic-driven tongues. Save for these hoarse voices, however, the crowds were dumb and restless; the streets silent except

for the shuffle of countless feet. A feeling of stark impending disaster lurked in every mind.

For the past four days London had lived in a nerve-wracking atmosphere of suspense. Business in the City had almost ceased; mobs roamed the streets daily. Strong bodies of police and soldiers patrolled all main roads, for although up till now no disorder had broken out, there was an ugly temper born of helplessness and anger abroad, and growing stronger every hour.

Intense fear, like the hand of Death itself, gripped each heart in the great metropolis—the fear of the Master of the World.

The Master!

On all hands curses deep and heartfelt were showered on the greatest menace of the century. His threats, and the knowledge of his terrible weapons were an ever-present shadow on people's thoughts. Some tried bravely to mock at the danger, calling it a maniac's scare; but the facts were too deadly. Everyone knew of the Master; everyone knew that ordinary defences were useless against him. The world cowered at his name.

From the first his merciless grip had never relaxed. The attack on the Bank of England had caused a profound stir; even now men

grip on Great Britain's people, and in three days' time——" His voice sank to an exultant whisper. "I will prove I am the Master of the World!"

CHAPTER 4.

Panic in London!

OUTSIDE the Houses of Parliament, with the grey light of early morning glimmering on their wan, haggard faces, a vast throng of Londoners stood waiting.

Hour after hour throughout the chill night their numbers had grown until the big square was filled to overflowing. In White-

were labouring to repair the deep scar left by the Fire Ray. Then had followed his arrogant demand to every country in Europe, and after that his slashing attacks against all rebels had shocked the whole world to a standstill by their rapidity.

The utter destruction of the Zeppelin works in Germany, the Dutch disasters, and the sinking with all hands of France's greatest warship had paralysed the nations. Now it was Great Britain's turn.

And so, after days of strain and a night of restless watching, the people of London were waiting to learn their fate. Up and down the bleak street they had passed the hours of darkness, each wondering vaguely when and where the Master would strike.

For at the eleventh hour the British Government had definitely thrown down his terms and hurled defiance in his teeth!

His first demand, some days ago, had been for twenty million pounds, and when the Government had sturdily refused to pay he had contemptuously doubled the amount and given them two more days in which to surrender.

To-day, the day that had just broken dimly over St. Stephen's Tower, was the last.

Rumours were flying everywhere; each hour brought fresh news. The Cabinet had dissolved; Parliament was in an uproar. The Master had destroyed a house in Kent yesterday, and with it Professor Fabian, the famous scientist, and Nelson Lee, the equally famous detective, whom the Government had

called in to assist. Another scientist, Dr. Weinbach, had mysteriously disappeared. Every new tale added to the public ferment.

The Government were to have given the Master his reply by midnight. At 11.30 it was generally known they had resolved to yield and pay the forty millions demanded. Then for some reason they had changed their minds.

No one knew why exactly, but some said it was due to a last-minute message from Nelson Lee. But Nelson Lee was dead! It was all terribly confusing.

Since earliest dawn another tale had been steadily gaining strength—a report that the Master had postponed his attack and proposed fresh terms. There were vague stories flashing about town of a mysterious wireless message that had come through to all Government stations, giving the nation three days' further grace, but stretching the terms to eighty million pounds! London seethed with a new thrill. And presently, as the sensational tidings grew more and more certain, a low murmur began to rise from the tired, sullen crowds. It was a menacing growl of exasperation, like the first mutterings of a storm, and at the note the police patrols tightened their ranks grimly. Trouble was brewing.

For some time the throng swayed and heaved as though awaiting a leader, until at last pent-up feelings gave way. At the foot of Whitehall, amid a sudden bustle and stir,



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know 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.

HOT STUFF!

Father (to son at end of school term): "Well, my son, what results have we this term?"

Son: "Not so bad, dad. I am next to the top boy when we all stand round in a circle."

(J. Thorburn, 55, Lubnaig Road, Glasgow, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

NOT ALWAYS RIGHT!

Proprietor (rebuking assistant for rudeness to a customer): "John, you must remember the golden rule of business—the customer is always right."

John: "Well, sir, he said you were a swindler."

(L. Sheppard, Kington Magna, Gillingham, Dorset, has been awarded a penknife.)

HE KNEW FROM EXPERIENCE!

Aviator Examiner: "What are vacuums in the air called?"

Student: "Pockets, sir."

Examiner: "Why are they so called?"

Student: "Because they are empty, sir."

(H. Price, 6, High Lane, Stoke-on-Trent, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

SOME HORSE!

Horse-dealer (trying to sell a very scraggy horse): "He's a very good horse for drawing."

Prospective Buyer: "Yes, but I'm a haulage contractor, not a humorous artist."

(J. Docherty, 66, Sunny Side Street, Falkirk; Scotland, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE ONLY WAY!

Very Stout Man: "Can you tell me the way out of this park, my lad?"

Billy: "Have you tried sideways, mister?"

(C. Bibby, 113, Pendre, Bridgend, Glam., has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HE KNEW!

Science-master: "Trees contribute greatly to the heat of the atmosphere."

Tommy: "Yes, the birch has often warmed me up."

(F. Peck, 55, Hertford Road, East Finchley, N.2, has been awarded a penknife.)

a burly tough, red-faced and formidable, fought his way to a high window-sill and flung an arm furiously towards the Houses of Parliament.

"Fellow-citizens!"

His leather-lunged bellow, drowning the voices around him, rang across the square, fierce and startling. The crowd stiffened; a sea of curious faces turned to him at once. He surveyed them through little piggy eyes.

"Fellow-citizens!" he screamed again in the hoarse voice of a professional agitator. "'Ow much longer've we got to stand this misery? 'Ow much longer is this sword of Damocles goin' ter hang over our 'eads? We can't fight this Master of the World. He's got us beat, same as France and Germany and the rest. And the Gov'ment know it!"

It was the lead the crowd wanted; they caught fire at once. A great shout of agreement flamed from the ranks, spreading along Whitehall to the throng in Trafalgar Square. Fists were clenched on high, women screamed hysterically. The agitator burst forth again.

"We've gotter give in, fellow-citizens!" he yelled. "We're all in the Master's grip! We can't work, we can't eat, we can't sleep fer worry! Every day we hold out costs us more! Twenty million at first—then forty—now eighty! All to come from the taxes—bread stolen from our wives and kids!"

A fresh rolling roar rang out. Little knots of police tried to get to the man, but solid

masses of stubborn shoulders fended them off. He waved his arms wildly.

"And for why? Where's the sense? Just because the stiff-necked fools in Parliament yonder won't give in!"

His voice became a shriek.

"Fellow-citizens, let's make 'em give in! Let's end it—now! Let's march across to Parliament this minute and make 'em agree to knuckle down! Fellow-citizens, I tell yer plain—we can't beat the Master of the World!"

The words died away in echoes, and the crowd gathered its breath for a last fiery yell. They were not cowards, the people of London, but the stress of the last few days had been too much.

As one man they turned and began moving towards the Houses of Parliament in a huge, torpid mass, brushing the police aside like straws. The agitator watched them go with a little cunning smile on his coarse face. He had done his work; he had inflamed a vast army into desperate, determined action.

But even as the vanguard of the mob streamed through the wide gates, beating down the defences by sheer weight, a deep, thrilling sound from the sky above stopped them. Faces were raised, fingers pointed. The rush halted in its tracks, and a long, deep sigh of fear swept through the crowded streets.

Only a few yards above St. Stephen's Tower, flying slowly and confidently, an airplane had suddenly appeared. And painted

FIRST HAND KNOWLEDGE !

Albert came home from school with a swollen eye and a cut cheek, and he explained to his mother that he had been fighting with Tommy Smith.

"You shouldn't fight with that boy," his mother remonstrated impatiently.

"I know that, mother," said Albert, sadly. "I found that out as soon as I started."

(A. Osborn, 2, Loncroft Road, Camberwell, London, S.E., has been awarded a penknife.)

THE DIFFERENCE !

Bertie's school report had been received.

"I'm losing patience with you!" exclaimed his father. "How is it young Jones is always at the top of the class while you are at the bottom?"

The boy looked at his father reproachfully.

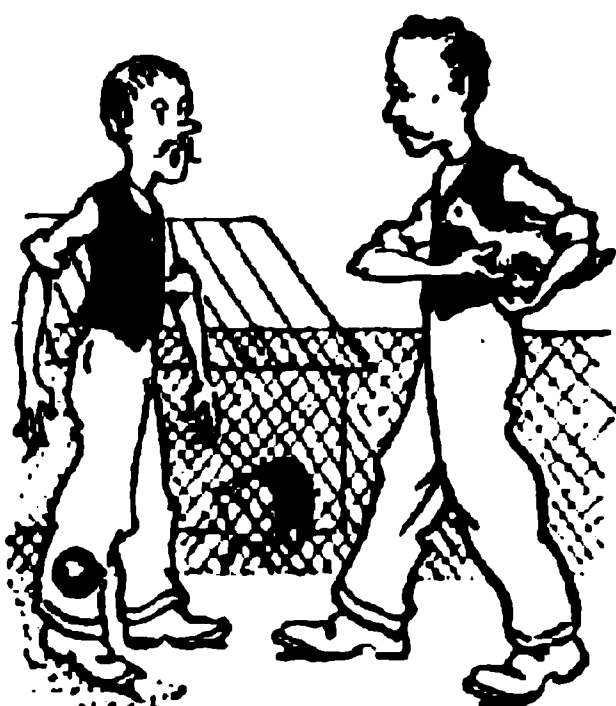
"You forget, dad," he said, kindly, "that Jones has awfully clever parents."

(A. Richardson, St. Agnes, 28, Alleyn Park, Dulwich, S.E.21, has been awarded a penknife.)

LAY—AND DELAY!

A Scotch farmer sold twenty hens to a neighbour, but only nineteen arrived. In the evening, however, the farmer turned up with the missing one.

"This one didna lay until the afternoon," he announced, explaining the cause of the delay.



P. Mullin, 13, York Street, South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

HOW TO DO IT !

Ma : "Where did you get all that coal, Willie? I hope you didn't steal it."

Willie : "No, ma. I just stood at the railway crossing and made faces at the engine drivers."

(E. Simmons, 70, Brunswick Crescent, New Southgate, N.11, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

DRAUGHTY !

First Tramp : "You've got a bad cold, Bill."

Second Tramp : "That I have."

First Tramp : "And how d'you get it?"

Second Tramp : "Ah! I slept in a field last night, and someone left the gate open."

(C. Staddon, 10, Southey Street, Roath, Cardiff, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

A DEAD SHOT !

"Well, my lad, I see you've got a bull at last," observed the sergeant.

"Hooray!" yelled Tubby, the regiment's worst shot.

"Yes," muttered the sergeant, "and it's lying dead in the field on the right of the target."

(R. Thompson, 33, Bell Street, Wolverhampton, has been awarded a penknife.)

across its red fuselage in staring white letters was the title of its owner: the Master of the World!

CHAPTER 5.

An Arrogant Message!

ONWARDS the Master's 'plane came, her engine snarling harshly in the awed stillness. Thousands of stricken eyes followed her, yet no man moved. A nameless horror rooted the tight-packed multitude to the spot. It was a moment when naked terror filled every soul.

Came a sharp crash of rifle-fire from a platoon of Guards on duty in Downing Street. The spell was broken. Yet the 'plane continued her flight above Whitehall, serene and leisurely. Only a gleam of white showed fleetingly beneath her cabin floor, as if in answer to the bullets, and next moment the air was full of fluttering papers, streaming and dancing in her wake.

Like a snowstorm, they drifted earthwards, some falling on roofs and ledges, but the majority into the crowded street. Hands reached up and grabbed for them frantically, mêlées and free fights broke out. The London populace forgot their horror and their intentions on Parliament in their anxiety to read the Master's messages.

From a doorway of the Foreign Office, where he had been watching the proceedings with a scornful eye, a lithe youngster left his companion and darted into the struggling press. He was back a few minutes later, dusty and dishevelled, but grasping one of the leaflets in his hand. With a plunge and a wriggle he regained the doorway and held out his prize eagerly.

"What-ho, gov'nor!" he gasped. "Read this!"

Nelson Lee seized it quickly. His face was a mask of weariness, for he had been up all night on many important missions, following his strenuous afternoon at Professor Fabian's house; but his iron will drove him on and kept him keen and alert.

He scanned the crumpled paper swiftly, and his tired eyes hardened. The Master's words, as usual, were terse and direct.

"To the People of England:

"You are fools! Your stubborn Government is deliberately risking national disaster by defying me!

"At any hour of the day or night I can smash every house and building in London. After that, Manchester, Liverpool and the rest of the cities in turn.

"Remember the Continent!

"As punishment for the folly of your ministers, I now demand eighty million pounds, to be paid in gold within three days from to-day.

"This is Great Britain's last chance. I advise the British people to take matters in

their own hands. Choose between my demand—or ruin! And, remember, I am always your master!

"THE MASTER OF THE WORLD."

Nelson Lee and Nipper glanced at each other in silence. The boy's face was alight with joy; he gripped his master firmly by the arm.

"Bluff!" he whispered gleefully. "This settles it, gov'nor—we've got him stone-cold. He can't attack to-day as threatened 'cos I busted his Fire Ray machine yesterday, so the blighter's sparring for time!"

Lee nodded.

"And stirring up civil war in the meantime," he answered soberly, watching the frenzied scene before him.

The fevered assembly had gone suddenly mad. It was the last straw. By now everyone had read the Master's message, and an indescribable babel rose to the morning sky. Nerves snapped like fiddlestrings; women and men, too, broke down and wept openly. Relief at the last-minute reprieve was mingled with sick disgust and dismay at the prospect of another three days of dread and an increased demand.

High above the bedlam the red and black airplane cruised steadily, showering down its havoc-breeding cargo. Nelson Lee watched it circle over Trafalgar Square, turn and zoom back towards Westminster, empty now, its task completed.

As it came over Whitehall again the Guards' platoon opened fire once more, their bullets glancing harmlessly off its armoured sides. But now, instead of ignoring the attack, the flyer whirled and struck back with deadly efficiency. A quick swerve, a sudden swoop, the rapid toc-toc of a machine-gun, and a hail of lead swept the soldiers off their feet.

Half a dozen went down in little heaps; others dragged themselves to cover. The rest stood their ground gallantly, but the airplane passed on, while the crowd stampeded in all directions.

Above the shrieks and uproar a hoarse voice called—the voice of the agitator who had first enraged the crowd. He was still on his window-sill, his gestures wilder than ever as he brandished one of the Master's messages above his head.

"Now, fellow-citizens!" he bawled. "Let's put an end to all this. We're beaten; the Master's got us tight. Take his advice and force the Gov'ment to give in. Come on—altogether!"

He gave a triumphant howl as the crowd took up the cry and surged forward in a seething mass. Then abruptly his ravings ended in a hoarse gasp. A strong hand yanked him ruthlessly from his post, a terrific right to the jaw stretched him unconscious against the wall. And while the onlookers stared dazedly, Nelson Lee, eyes flashing, leapt to the window-sill himself, with both arms raised and pointing.



Sherman's gun
spurred flame and
lead, and the other
man fell to the ground
in a crumpled heap.

"Never mind such croakers
as this!" he roared. "Look at
the Master's airplane!"

CHAPTER 6.

Wings of Vengeance!

LIKE Nelson Lee and Nipper, Thurston Kyle—known as the "Night Hawk," and a brilliant scientist—and his young assistant, Snub Hawkins, had been busy throughout the night; for since the discovery of the Master's new headquarters among the Frisian Islands there was much to be done. The crisis in the battle was approaching, and neither the detective

nor the scientist intended leaving a stone unturned in their efforts to defeat the man who had terrorised the world.

The electric lights in Kyle's great laboratory had been switched off, and the blinds lowered, but the room was not in darkness, for on one of the great workbenches weird flames glowed and hissed from giant cathodes, and brilliant blue-white sparks crackled venomously to the insistent whine of a dynamo. Occasional flashes of dazzling light darted across the room, illuminating the

mysterious figure of the scientist, whose dark smock and grotesque goggles made a fantastic picture in the vivid glare.

At his seat in front of the radio cabinet, Snub Hawkins sat watching, the delicate earphones strapped to his head as he listened idly to the murmur of voices from Whitehall, miles away. There was not a single Government roof in that famous neighbourhood on which, at some time or other, Thurston Kyle had not secreted his sensitive microphones, and so the sound of weary and restless London came clearly over the ether.

So far nothing exciting had happened, and Snub had almost forgotten his duty in the fascination of watching Thurston Kyle at work when, all at once, the instrument picked up a noise that made the youngster stiffen alertly—the vibrant note of an airplane, followed presently by a loud, hysterical outcry from thousands of throats. He listened intently for a few minutes, then sprang to his feet.

"Can you spare a moment, sir?" he cried. "There's trouble brewing Westminster way!"

Thurston Kyle left his work immediately and came across. He took up the earphones quickly, a sharp frown marking his forehead at the hubbub that greeted his ears. There was something strangely alarming in that slow, steady roar, mingled with frightened cries and yells. Replacing the 'phones after a short, breathless interval, he began stripping off his smock.

"Trouble, as you say, Snub. I think I must go and see," he said quietly; whereupon Snub snapped into activity.

Five minutes later, with a swoop and a slash of his strong curved wings, Thurston Kyle, Night Hawk, flashed from the veranda rail of his laboratory and swung upwards into the dim sky, invisible in his silk-covered suit. Pulling down his vizor against the sting of the wind, he climbed, steadied himself, and swept dizzily over the roofs of London towards the river and Westminster.

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At top speed he shot across Trafalgar Square, where he checked at once on bristling wings for a quick survey of the land. Beneath him he saw a sleek, red and black 'plane, flying slowly in circles as it scattered leaflets on the densely huddled crowds below, and he dropped like a stone for closer inspection.

An eddy of wind, catching some of the papers, whirled them aloft. He dived and skilfully snatched one. What he read then made his fierce face gleam with the light of battle!

The Master's 'plane had turned and was roaring back along Whitehall. Wheeling brilliantly, the Night Hawk streaked in pursuit, an automatic in each hand.

A sharp rattle of rifles from the street below made him swerve at baffling speed; he heard the metallic spang! of bullets striking the 'plane. At once her machine-gun came out and spat viciously in reply until the little group of soldiers was silenced. Then in a long, whistling dive, both weapons aflame and a smile of savage delight on his lips, the Night Hawk struck!

A stream of lead at point-blank range sent the tail-plane spinning into the air. The red and black craft gave a wild, giddy lurch, staggered into a recovery, and began to struggle upwards, as a wounded bird seeks to escape; her machine-gun stammered a challenge to the unexpected foe.

But the Night Hawk flicked over and above the plunging 'plane like a swallow. His assault, born of experience, was bewildering in its dazzling ferocity. He dived, landing heavily on a wing-tip, and when the airplane tilted, fired rapidly into its cockpit. The machine-gunner, seeing the strange, terrible figure now at such short range, swung his weapon round, but before he could fire a bullet through the throat killed him instantly. Another tore through the pilot's shoulder, smashing his arm, but he stuck frantically to his seat in an effort to get clear.

Gradually, slowly, the crippled 'plane dropped lower and lower, straight towards the madly-shouting throng in the streets. Seeing the sudden fresh peril of the situation, the Night Hawk crashed into the attack once more.

He swung over the top of the 'plane in a hissing, twisting plunge, too fast for the pilot to follow, and jumped on to the lip of the cockpit. The airman, whining in terror, rose to meet him, but a gun-butt between the eyes knocked him senseless, after which Kyle's strong hand jerked him impatiently from his seat and hurled him into space.

He disappeared. Clinging to the reeling, kicking craft, the Night Hawk reached among the controls, pushed the rudder-bar over, at the same time hurling himself high and wide into safety. The 'plane, turned off her course with just sufficient speed to carry her, ripped downwards in a slanting, jerky dive, straight for the river beneath Westminster Bridge.

By inches only she cleared the tall Embankment roofs, swerved, hit the bridge parapet, rebounded and burst into flame. Amid fountains of water and a cloud of hissing steam and oil, the Master's airplane crashed harmlessly on the broad surface of the Thames.

A SHOUT of joy, not unmixed with awe, rose from the crowd, growing louder and louder as the news of the disaster travelled. The utter completeness and lightning rapidity with which the Master's messenger had been smashed thrilled London to the core. It was a fitting climax to a dreadful night, and a harsh, challenging reply to the Master's bombast.

All eyes searched the sky for the mysterious avenger, but in vain. Not a soul had glimpsed the Night Hawk's furious onslaught; the fusilade of shots, the pilot thrown from the 'plane by an invisible hand, and the machine's last dive to destruction were all that anyone had seen or heard.

Two people among the throng, however, knew exactly what had happened, and acted decisively.

"So the Master is not invincible!" cried Nelson Lee in a voice that carried, as soon as the air fight was over. And the words, taken up, swelled quickly into a roar of delight. London was getting its nerve back.

Dropping quickly from the window-sill, the detective hailed a constable, who shoved through the crowd to his side.

"Take this man in charge!" Lee ordered, pointing to the still dazed agitator. "I fancy he's one of the Master's men. Better get an escort first, though. There may be others about."

"I'll get him in, Mr. Lee!" growled the officer grimly.

As fast as they could after that, Nelson Lee and Nipper threaded their way to St. James' Park, where their car was parked. With Lee at the wheel and his youthful assistant still chortling over the recent events, they headed at full speed for the old rambling house tucked away on Hampstead Heath, where the Night Hawk had his secluded nest.

"CONGRATULATIONS, Kyle! A magnificent effort!"

Although Nelson Lee and Nipper had travelled at full speed all the way from Westminster to the Spaniards. Thurston Kyle had obviously beaten them by some time for he had changed his flying gear for his smock, and the fragrant odour of hot coffee filled the room. He rose quickly to greet his visitors, acknowledging Lee's hearty words with a grave smile.

"Thank you! I am glad I was in time," he said simply. Taking the Master's "message" from his pocket, he passed it across. "You saw one of these precious leaflets, I presume? What do you make of it, Lee?"

"Why, it proves we were right!" replied Nelson Lee promptly. "I am sure now that

Nipper's bullets must have damaged his Fire Ray apparatus badly—whether permanently or not I cannot say. Otherwise"—he nodded significantly—"from what I saw of the Master's genial temper, he would not have postponed his attack on London to-day. My opinion is that this morning's scare, together with the increased demand and the extra time-limit, is simply a ruse to keep his hold on the public nerves, and in the meantime he and Fabian are making every effort to repair the instrument. The man is, without doubt, the most fiendish madman I have ever faced."

Thurston Kyle pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"My views entirely. And what's your next move, Lee?"

"I intend to sleep like a log until midnight to-night," replied the detective.

"Until midnight to-night!" repeated Thurston Kyle slowly. "Ah! And then?"

"Action! Everything is ready, and we shall be fresh and fit. It is our turn at last to take the offensive."

Thurston Kyle's stern eyes glittered.

"You have made all arrangements?"

"All!" nodded Nelson Lee. "I have been busy all night. Through certain influence I have secured an armoured naval bomber—ready for me at any moment at Shoeburyness. She carries eight explosive and two gas bombs. Sufficient to blow the Master's island to rags. Also, I have managed affairs quietly."

The Night Hawk clapped him on the shoulder.

"Excellent! And your programme, Lee? I am leaving all the tactics to you, my dear fellow."

Lee smiled thoughtfully.

"I shall leave Shoeburyness myself at exactly one o'clock in the morning. You had better join me there, and we will fly across together. We shall be within striking distance somewhere about three—about an hour before day-break, that is. Then we strike! I will attack first with the bombs, and afterwards I will leave the survivors—if any—to you. I hope we can capture the Master and Fabian alive, but in any case—"

"We must and shall stamp out the whole foul brood!" cried the Night Hawk forcibly.

A silence fell, during which the still, small voice of Nipper broke in anxiously:

"And what about Snub and me, guv'nor?" he hinted.

Thurston Kyle stroked his chin in doubt.

"It will be perilous work for young hands, Lee—" He hesitated. "I do not think—"

"Oh, I say, Mr. Kyle!"

"Have a heart, sir!" urged Snub pathetically, at which the scientist suddenly broke into one of his rare, genial smiles, and pulled the lad's ear playfully.

"What do you say, Lee?"

"Oh, I was taking Nipper as machine-



gunner, in any case!" laughed Nelson Lee. "The machine holds four; there will be room for Snub!"

"Whoopce!" yelled Snub, and joined Nipper in a war-dance behind Thurston Kyle's broad back.

Nelson Lee held out his hand quietly.

"Au-revoir, Kyle—until one o'clock. I can only trust that all will go well!"

Flinging back his head, Thurston Kyle laughed like a lighthearted schoolboy.

"Never fear, Lee! By four o'clock tomorrow, the Master's gang, headquarters, and all his devilish apparatus, will be things of the past—and we shall be on our journey home!"

CHAPTER 7.

The Raid on Veerden Airport!

THE neat little Dutch town of Veerden, among the Friesland plains east of the Zuyder Zee, slept peacefully under a stormy sky. Overhead, thin, jagged clouds from the North Sea blotted out the faint starlight, and a bitter wind whistled

Nelson Lee sent his 'plane roaring downwards — and the destruction of the Master's headquarters began!

through the narrow, cobbled streets, which were dark and deserted; for it was nearly midnight.

A mile beyond the quiet town, however, a great glare of light split the sky, the beacon and flood-lights of the new Dutch airport that had been recently established. In half an hour the night liner from Warsaw, via Berlin, was due, and the aerodrome hummed with orderly activity as it prepared to receive her and deal with the incoming passengers and mails.

Very few of the passengers ever stayed at Veerden—it was merely a junction for all the North European lines—so that two mail 'planes, together with four cabin Fokkers, had been run out of their hangars, ready to take the approaching travellers on to Amsterdam, The Hague, Brussels, or even Paris and London. An army of officials and mechanics waited in front of the hangars, with occasional glances up at the forbidding sky.

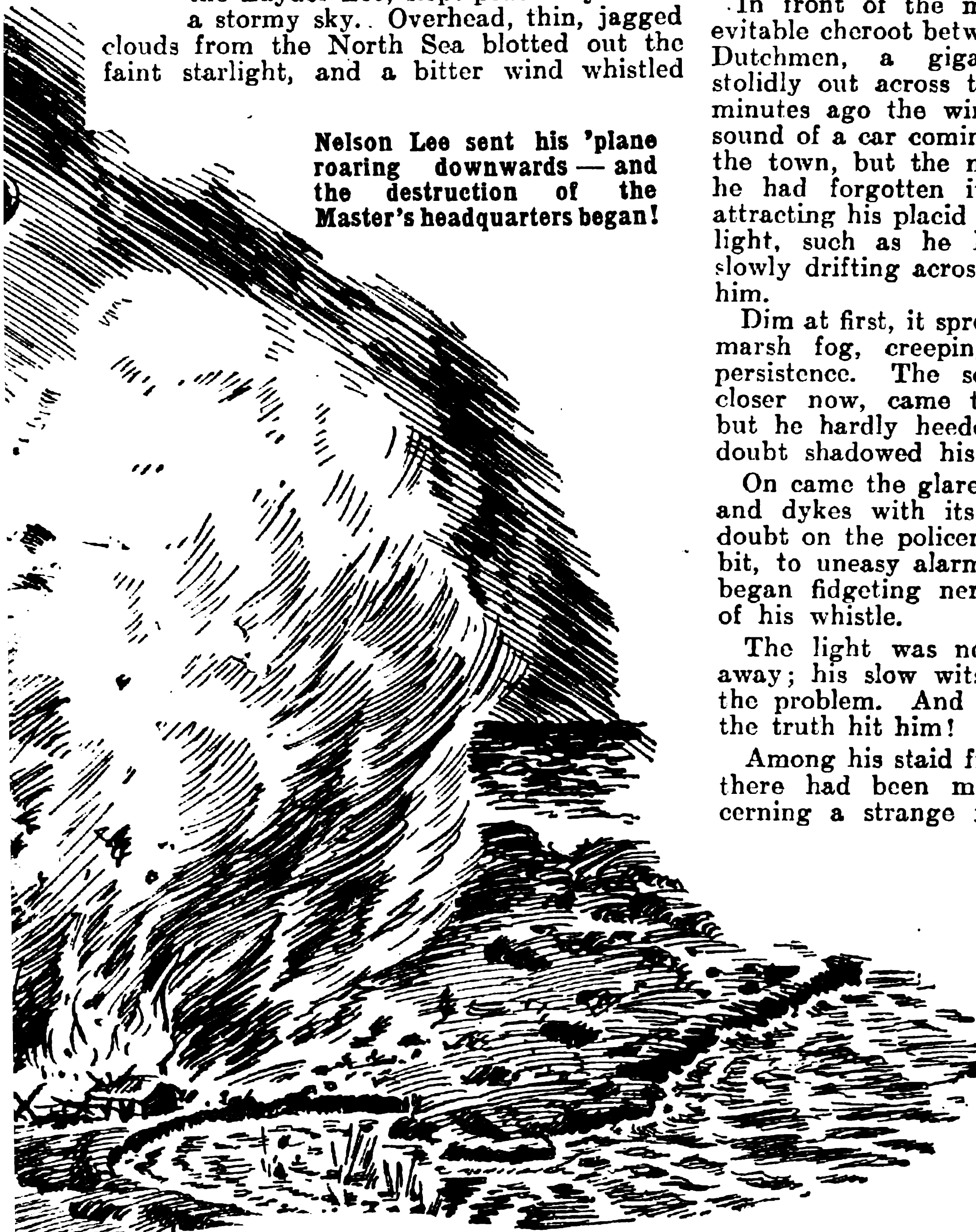
In front of the main gates, with the inevitable cheroot between his lips like all good Dutchmen, a gigantic policeman stared stolidly out across the dark plains. A few minutes ago the wind had carried the faint sound of a car coming across country beyond the town, but the noise had died away and he had forgotten it. Something else was attracting his placid attention; a vague green light, such as he had never seen before, slowly drifting across the dark fields towards him.

Dim at first, it spread gradually like a thick marsh fog, creeping onwards with steady persistence. The sound of the car, much closer now, came to the watchman's ears, but he hardly heeded it. A slow frown of doubt shadowed his broad face.

On came the glare, lighting scattered trees and dykes with its sickly, evil glow. The doubt on the policeman's face turned, bit by bit, to uneasy alarm, and, after a while, he began fidgeting nervously with the chain of his whistle.

The light was now barely seventy yards away; his slow wits grappled clumsily with the problem. And then, like a thunderbolt, the truth hit him!

Among his staid friends in Veerden market there had been much gossip of late concerning a strange menace overhanging the Continent, and of a devil called the "Master of the World"; reports and random scares of disaster in Germany, France, and even farther south in the bulb-growing lands of his own native Holland. There were wild tales of death and damage caused by mysterious lights; an orange light and—and—mercy of Heaven, yes!—a green light!



A green light! The Master of the World! Roused at last, the policeman's big hand jerked frantically at his whistle.

Putt!

Out of the darkness of the road, a streak of fire flashed for an instant; a dull report followed. The sentry slid gently to the ground. A hush ensued, broken only by the light footsteps of a man racing down the road for his life.

As a wave foams over a breakwater, so the Ice Ray leapt on Veerden airport and swept across the flying ground. Its colour faded in the brilliant flood-lights, so that it was upon the men before they realised. The only one who could have warned them lay dead beside the gate. Stifled cries and yells rang out as figures began to drop stiffly to the ground. One by one, the Ray caught them in its freezing grip, threw them down and passed on.

Deeper and deeper into the very heart of the airport the Ice Ray flowed, dropping every living thing there; and as it went, through the gates behind it came a big car, out of which jumped six men, to watch the scene in cynical amusement. Yet hardly more than a week ago Holland had purchased her "safety" from the Master of the World to the tune of six million pounds!

At last the outrage on Veerden was complete. The Ray drifted on and began scouring the open country beyond, while the Master's men, with Sherman at their head, abandoned the car and strode towards the 'planes. The American ran his eyes expertly over the Fokkers and mail-carriers, drawn up ready for the Warsaw liner; he nodded shortly and waved his hand.

"Come on, boys! Snap into it! Each take a machine an' get goin'. I'm bringing up the rear!"

Quickly and decisively he detailed each man off, leaving one of the Fokkers for himself. His commands, in German and French, were sharply to the point despite his clumsy accent, and all save one of the men jumped willingly to obey. There should have been eight in the party all told, but the pilot who had flown across to London that morning had—failed to return.

Sherman grinned mirthlessly as he watched his busy crew. The Master's rage all day had been too terrible for mere words—and the American softly rubbed his bruised jaw.

Casting a quick look round, he saw the Ice Ray still flickering across the flat countryside. A stuttering explosion, another, and then another, announced that the airplanes were ready for flight, and the men were looking towards him for further orders. He passed swiftly down the line, cursing them.

"Gwan, get along, you boneheads! You gotcha orders—don't wait. I'll guard the rear all right. Smart now, darn you!"

The stutters changed quickly to smooth, whole-hearted roars, the end machine taxied forward. One after another, the two mail-

carriers and two Fokkers swept into the air and vanished speedily into the darkness. Remained only one Fokker beside Sherman's own, with her pilot, a hefty German, standing by the cockpit regarding him curiously.

Sherman whirled on him fiercely.

"Waal—whatja waitin' for, Dutchy? Start movin'!"

The German moved closer.

"I vait for you!" he answered softly. "I vill bring up de rear. You vas go first!"

"Oh!" Sherman frowned at him for several seconds and the corners of his mouth drooped. "Who says so, Dutchy?"

"De Mastder!" replied the German stolidly. "I t'ink he don't trusdt you no more. He say I vas to vatch you!"

"Did he?" purred the American. "Waal, I don't want you 'vatching' me—see? I'm trailin' behind to—to see none o' you cheap skates bolt, or try anythin' funny with the Master's airplanes. Now scat!"

Solemnly Dutchy shook his head.

"Nein. I t'ink it is you who vill bolt. You are sore 'cause de mastder ponch you on de jaw—ja!"

With ponderous quickness, he pulled out a gun and aimed it straight at the lithe American.

"De Mastder say, too, if you start de roff stoff I am to——"

A terrible light flared suddenly in Sherman's deep-set eyes.

"Yeah?" he whispered icily. "You're to—what?"

"Shoot!"

"Then—shoot, you squarehead!"

Quick as a panther he sprang sideways and back, his hand flashing. The German was ready and willing for battle, but he hadn't a hope; he was up against a man who had learnt his gunmanship, not in the Wild West, but in a far harder school—the East Side of Chicago. Even as Dutchy swung round a swift tattoo of shots rattled from Sherman's hip like the sound of a kettle-drum, after which he turned and ran towards his Fokker.

In another minute the harsh song of the engine rolled across the deadly silent airport, the 'plane slid forward and began to climb. For some time the American followed steadily in the wake of the others, then, waving his hand derisively, he pressed the rudder-bar and swung recklessly away on a westerly course.

The Master's raid on Veerden airport was over. Of the six pilots who had taken part in it, four flew through the night towards the island with their spoils, one lay face down on the airport turf, and the sixth, with a grim, revengeful smile on his hard face, headed for England as fast as his powerful bus would take him.

And in England, at that very moment, Nelson Lee's car was just drawing into Shoeburyness!

CHAPTER 8.

Guns at Sea!

THE net to catch the Master of the World was closing in.

Eastwards across the North Sea, in the teeth of a gale, rushed a great Navy hydroplane—a giant, armoured bird whose mission was Justice, swift and ruthless.

In the pilot's seat, Nelson Lee, smiling slightly in quiet anticipation, balanced the 'plane against the smash of the wind, and drove onwards, serenely confident. Behind him Nipper crouched in the observer's cockpit, a wicked machine-gun within reach, and powerful night-glasses glued to his eyes. Farther back still, in the spare seat, huddled Snub Hawkins, his freckled face tense but cool.

Somewhere out in the wind-torn darkness, miles ahead on a scouting foray, was the fourth member of the raid—the Night Hawk, alone and free beneath his swift, steel-feathered wings. The time was three o'clock in the morning.

Caught by a shrieking gust, the sturdy hydroplane staggered, whereupon Nelson Lee brought her round skilfully and began to climb higher. A muffled exclamation burst abruptly from Nipper's lips. On the horizon of the sullen sea below, his glasses had picked up a line of small islands, mere blots amid the heaving waves. After one long look he grabbed at the speaking-tube eagerly.

"Chain of islands ahead, sir; about eight miles away to the south-east!"

Raising his hand in answer, Lee eased the joystick over and shot upwards in a long sweep until the altimeter read 6,000 feet. In an even bank he sent the 'plane cruising in a wide, smooth circle.

"Signals, Nipper!"

From a rack beside him Nipper seized a long electric torch and thrust it over the side, its white beam stabbing the gloom. Barely ten seconds had elapsed when out of the dark sky dropped the Night Hawk, light as a feather, his wings and gear drenched by a passing shower.

With his immense speed he had left the hydroplane and gone on in front. His handsome face shone with keen, saturnine daring as he swirled alongside, pulled himself gently on to the lower left wing, and leaned across the shield of the cockpit.

"I was returning to find you, Lee!" he cried piercingly, above the racket of the engine and the howl of the gale. "You are within sighting distance now!"

"Nipper has just spotted the islands!" shouted Lee. "Is all ready?"

Thurston Kyle edged closer.

"Yes. There are sentries on the island wall; also four airplanes which have not long arrived, I think. Men are busy erecting canvas shelters for them."

Nelson Lee smiled curiously. Up here among the rain clouds and darkness, battling against a tempest, his strange ally made an even more fantastic figure as he hung care-

lessly across the fuselage of the shuddering hydroplane, his eyes glinting like diamond points. There was no time for such thoughts now, however, and the detective dismissed them promptly. It was the moment for action!

"Right!" he answered. "Lead on, Kyle! We're with you!"

The Night Hawk swept his hand across his broad belt and switched on a big lamp fixed between his shoulders. With that shining steadily, Nelson Lee could follow him straight to the Master's island, somewhere among those dark shapes below. Bombs first—eight of them, and after that machine-guns and automatics, if necessary!

Lee saw Thurston Kyle laugh as he always did at the start of a battle, and his own white teeth flashed in answer. Nipper's voice, cheerful but quivering with excitement, told him that everything was all right behind. The Night Hawk dived from the wing. The detective pressed steadily on the rudder-bar and opened the throttle wide.

The raid had commenced.

Then, even as they dived, from a dozen points on the rear horizon red tongues flashed venomously, a noise as of a hideous thunder-clap drowned the storm, and to the tune of a long-drawn, whistling shriek a salvo of shells tore through the air and exploded all over the chain of islands.

The British Navy, warned by the vindictive Sherman, had stepped into the fight!

STARTLED and amazed, Nelson Lee instinctively checked the first dizzy rush of the bomber, and whirled aloft again.

The Night Hawk appeared out of the darkness, flinging himself recklessly on top of the 'plane so that he could shout in Lee's ear. The fury in his face baffled description.

"What's this, Lee?" he blazed. "Ten thousand devils, what does this mean?"

Nelson Lee shot a quick glance over his shoulder.

"It means someone else has discovered the Master's hiding-place!" he cried calmly. "Although who, Heaven knows!"

The bomber was out of danger now. Below her, the sky was full of whistling steel. Nipper's voice yelled sharply:

"Searchlights!"

From the midst of the dark islands ahead, three brilliant jets of light spurted, kindling the murky sea with their dazzling beams.

Mechanically Lee and the others followed their direction as they groped like searching fingers towards the streaks of gunfire. The beams met, merged into one enormous glare, and flooded the night with radiance.

A simultaneous cry broke from everyone on the hydroplane.

"Look!"

Across the skyline, dashing gloriously through white waves, raced a long line of destroyers, guns spouting, funnels belching.

The moment the searchlights caught them each vessel let drive a broadside; orange bursts and tall fountains of water showered around and close to the islands. In a flash, it seemed, the warships twisted snakily and another salvo screeched across the seas, registering at least four direct hits.

Nearer every moment the naval shells crept—became more accurate. One of the searchlights marking the destroyers disappeared beneath a pillar of flame and smoke, and the others were snapped off instantly. The island relapsed into black obscurity once more.

Above the bellow of the guns Thurston Kyle's voice rang out dramatically:

"Look! There goes the Master's reply! Heaven help them!"

The largest of the islands had burst into the ghastly green glare of the Ice Ray!

THERE was nothing slow or stealthy now about the Ice Ray's attack. Fired at short range and with full propelling force behind it, the green fog glided hungrily towards its enemies on sea and land, spreading like a vast smoke-screen, eager to grapple with and smother whatever stayed in its path.

Silent, dazzling and all-embracing, it gushed forth; ships and gunners were trapped by its vicious speed. Seeing the peril advancing so swiftly, the destroyers turned to steam out of range, firing stubbornly as they went. But their case was hopeless. Faster even than the gale which fanned it, the Ice Ray poured over them in a gigantic, blinding torrent, burying them to their topmost spars, soaking even into their roaring stokeholds.

To the crew of the hydroplane it was a spectacle such as they had never seen before, terrifying in its complete and lightning action—a glimpse of war in the future, when men and guns have ceased to count, and only superior science will win the day.

As the Ice Ray swept out to sea the ghostly shapes of helpless destroyers were seen in its wake, some hove-to at the last minute and lurching drunkenly in the waves, while others, strewn with silent figures, careered madly away at full-steam. A jangling, echoing crash proclaimed that two had collided; the shattering yell of bursting boilers followed soon after.

In ten minutes the Master had annihilated his foes.

The Ice Ray died away. Nelson Lee shut off the bomber's engine, and the world was silent once more save for the swish of the gale. He turned to look at Thurston Kyle, whose face was white and hard as marble.

"Now it is our turn, Kyle!" he cried violently, and jerked the starting lever.

The strident roar of the 'plane rang through the night like a battle-cry.

CHAPTER 9.

Nelson Lee Strikes Home!

THERE was no holding back this time!

Down, down, down in a blood-tingling, soul-stirring dive, a sweeping, challenging invasion, rushed the great bomber, the tempest sobbing through her struts, her crew greedy for action and revenge.

The Night Hawk led them on; the islands leapt to meet them. The sonorous clangour of the engine must have reached the Master's sentries for, as the hydroplane hurtled downwards, the remaining searchlights shot out once more, this time into the clouds.

Careless of discovery, Nelson Lee sent the 'plane towards them at dauntless speed. The vivid beams closed in and caught him; Nipper's machine-gun tocked forth a stream of lead in reply. Leaving his post in front, the Night Hawk whirled backwards above the cockpit, hands to his mouth in an effort to make himself heard.

"You've got 'em, Lee! Now!" he thundered.

Nelson Lee's boot crashed home on the first bomb lever.

Straight and true, a sleek, enormous missile plunged to earth. Leaning over the side, Nipper and Snub watched it go, curving a little towards the end of its flight. A blaze of blinding scarlet, an inferno of flame like a colossal rosette opened beneath them; a deafening explosion wrenched at their eardrums. Caught by the terrific back-blast, the bomber reeled giddily, but Nelson Lee pulled her straight and kicked the second lever.

This time the bomb landed deep in the centre of the island, sending up an enormous volcano of sand. Again and again and yet again he released the deadly projectiles. The Ice Ray flared out malevolently in an effort to trap him, but it was too late. Banking, wheeling, diving, throwing the heavy bomber about in the air as easily as the lightest Moth, the detective dodged and struck back, ripping the surface of the island wide open from end to end.

Both searchlights vanished into space with their crews, the Master's submarine and its shed dissolved into splinters of metal and brickwork. The air became full of whizzing fragments and horrible tumbling shapes. Great waterspouts leapt high among the waves. And the Ice Ray—disappeared!

Deep down in his steel and concrete lair that trembled with the concussion of the bombs, the Master of the World, stark mad and foaming, threw himself against a lever on the laboratory wall.

Instantly, through all the vent-holes that were left on the surface, an immense cloud of thick, nauseating vapour gushed into the air, blotting out the island entirely. He staggered to the middle of the laboratory, striking matches with stiff, nerveless fingers. The sight of Fabian lying weakly beside the Ice Ray apparatus made him howl with fury, and his clawlike hands dragged the

scientist to his feet. The old man was too shaken to do aught else but blink foolishly at the lighted match, so that an awful stillness reigned while the two men who had terrified the world strove to regain their nerve.

Their hopes were ruined. Defeat grinned in their faces.

A panic-stricken man nursing a badly-cut cheek burst into the room. The Master seized him.

"Well?"

"Hopeless, Master!" panted the newcomer in broken English. "There ees not'ing left! Searchlights gone, submarine—all ze huts and ze men wit' them!"

"Curse the men!" snarled the master. "What of the airplanes I sent you to examine?"

"Two 'ave been blown to bits, anot'er badly damaged, and ze ot'er——"

"Yes?"

"Has escape' by a miracle, Master. Zere is ze bare chance yet, but all ze tunnels are smashed in and blocked!"

Hope flamed in the Master's eyes.

"We must take a chance. Hurry back and get ready to start!"

The man ran out as his leader swung round on Fabian, who flinched dazedly.

"Quickly, you! Dismantle the Ice Ray. I will fetch the other!"

Under his rapid commands, Professor Fabian managed to disconnect the precious Ice Ray cylinder, and, snatching it from him, the Master placed it beneath his arm with the half-repaired Fire Ray, and pushed his colleague towards the door.

In the feeble light of another match, he turned to take a last look round at the laboratory, the nerve-centre of his kingdom—that kingdom which was now a mass of battered rubbish; and his teeth glittered tigerishly.

The match went out. Darkness returned. Without a word the Master swung on his heel and strode away.

CHAPTER 10.

Beaten at the Post!

STILL with the two gas bombs left, Nelson Lee had swung round for another raking flight across the island, when Thurston Kyle whistled alongside the 'plane at tremendous pace and stopped dead above his head, pointing earthwards.

"Poison gas, Lee!" he cried. "Get away at once. Leave this to me!"

There was just time for the detective to slam the engine into its full power and pull strongly on the joystick. The hydroplane rose on her tail and streaked upwards even as the first sluggish fumes writhed around her mighty floats.

Flinging himself clear with a slashing sweep of his wings, Thurston Kyle threw

back his visor, and in its place donned a respirator taken from the sling around his neck.

He was just about to swoop down when, from the other end of the island, came the reverberating clamour of an airplane starting up, changing to a long-drawn whine as the machine drew clear of the land and fled away to sea.

In a flicker of an eyelash, the Night Hawk twisted in his own length and went streaking through the mist as fast as his irresistible wings would drive, deathly white with anger and dimay. A great fear lent added force to his rousing, cyclonic rush; for something told him that if he allowed that 'plane to escape, all his and Nelson Lee's labours would have been in vain.

It was amazing to watch the Night Hawk's terrific dash. The first glimmer of the false dawn was lighting the clouds, but the gale still blew fiercely; yet, in spite of that, Thurston Kyle travelled faster and faster, gaining on the fugitive 'plane at every beat of his wings.

At last he was on level terms. Swinging beneath the wing, he reached up and caught a strut, and in a flash he had tossed himself aboard, eyes sparkling dangerously, hand reaching for a bomb. The pilot, feeling his weight on the wing, 'rolled' madly to shake him off, but the Night Hawk hung on coolly, waiting for the chance of a clean throw.

And then—in that second of victory, came defeat!

A panel in the cabin slid back and a man's arm flashed out. The Night Hawk sent in a lightning shot which missed by a fraction, and before he could fire again, a round, fragile ball burst on the airplane's wing, a yard from his face.

The world vanished in a blaze of purple light. A seering fire splashed into his face and the choking fumes of ammonia gushed into his mouth and nostrils. Helpless and nearly stifled, he slid limply from the wing, gasping with pain and with one eye completely closed—out of action!

For seconds he hung in space, his senses reeling; and only by the greatest effort of his will did he save himself from a swoon. He heard the Fokker making good her escape, heard the blessed sound of Nelson Lee's hydroplane heading towards him; so, setting his teeth against the agony of his face, he judged the drop through a single misty eye, and dived.

Nelson Lee had seen the flash of the ammonia bomb and now saw Kyle's electric lamp falling swiftly. Praying that his ally was still conscious, he dipped the bomber and slid beneath him. In another moment the crippled Night Hawk thudded on the tip of the lower wing and lay there, half-fainting but clinging to a strut with the clutch of death, his legs dangling into emptiness.

(Continued on page 44.)



VENGEANCE

Startling News!

"GRUB!"

That lean, boisterous, red-headed son of Texas, Red Potter, snapped the single word emphatically.

"My tummy shore feels empty, Pete," he mused. "Gee, I could eat my saddle!"

"And me!" echoed Peter Graham, grinning. "Thank goodness for a town at last!"

He reined in his horse for a moment to survey the long street before him alive with the colour and bustle of the Mexican Border. On the sidewalks, in and out of the frame-built saloons, cheerful cowpunchers strutted in their high-heeled boots, mingling with alert Mexicans wearing straw sombreros and brilliant scrapes. Indians mouched along in the dust. A babel of voices, in half a dozen tongues, rose on the hot afternoon air.

It was the sight of the Mexicans swarm-

ing in the street that caused both Red and Peter instinctively to pull down the brims of their great "four-gallon" hats, the better to hide their features. Vidallo was a typical frontier town, raw and turbulent, built on the American bank of the great Rio Grande. The other side was Mexico. And beyond, only two days' ride across the flat, cattle-strewn plains Peter could see in the distance, was Zareda City—where Manuel Garcia lived. Peter's cheeks, tanned by the long trek across Arizona into Texas, glowed as he turned to follow Red again. Another stage on Vengeance Trail had been passed. He was drawing very near now to the slayer of his father.

The hungry Red, who seemed to know Vidallo backwards, had already steered his tired horse to a hitching rack in front of a gaudy wooden "restaurant." Both the youngsters were famishing, for it had been

—THE BEST"—PETER AND RED!

a long day. They had parted company with Buck Rogers and the friendly punchers of the Lazy K outfit only that morning in El Paso, and pushed on at once to this wilder town farther along the Border.

Peter slid stiffly out of the saddle and tied his mount to a post, Red following suit. They waited for a little bunch of reckless riders to tear pass, turned to enter the eating-house, when a startled voice rang out: "Red Potter!"

In a flash the redhead whirled, both hands sliding to his belt. A sturdy young puncher, hat pushed back and mouth agape, had reined his horse on to its haunches and was staring at him in open astonishment. Red's hands fell slowly away from his guns.

"Shorty Malone! Why, yuh dern li'l ornery coyote!"

"Red! Why, yuh lanky, carrot-topped old hoss-thief! How be yuh?"

The newcomer dismounted and took Red's outstretched hand in a numbing grip.

"By gosh!" he chortled. "It's good tuh see yore ugly mug ag'in, Red. Say, whar yuh been all this time? An' whatcha doin' in this tough town?"

Flinging an arm round his shoulders, Red scuffled him into the restaurant, dragging Peter along after him. The place was deserted save for its bored proprietor, drowsing against the counter.

"What we doin'?" roared the Texan hilariously. "Waal, first of all we're goin'

tuh eat—some! Hey, boss—grub for three, pronto!"

He turned joyously to the grinning Peter.

"Say, Pete, meet Shorty Malone—squar'st li'l runt that ever came out o' the Texas Panhandle. Shorty, this yer is Peter Graham—my pard. He's English. An' if yuh want tuh know what it feels like tuh be kicked by fourteen bulls an' a cyclone, pick a scrap with him. I did, and I know!"

Shorty pushed out his fist.

"Proud tuh know yuh then, Pete!" he smiled.

Taking a table that commanded a view of the street through the open door, the

three youngsters were soon wiring into bacon and hard beans, Peter listening while the others exchanged glee-ful gossip. At last, when only the hot,

muddy coffee remained to be sipped, Red lay back and grinned at his old friend.

"Waal, yo're shore a sight for sore eyes!" he confessed. "An' what you doin' now?"

"Punchin' cows for th' Circle Bar," answered Shorty promptly. "That was some of our outfit jest come in. Come an' meet 'em. Or are yuh headin' for some place?"

Red did not answer in words. But he jerked his head significantly in the direction of the Rio, and Shorty raised his eyebrows.

"Tha' so?" He regarded the partners on Vengeance Trail with frank curiosity. "Business? Or——"

Another Smashing Adventure:

ACROSS THE RIO GRANDE!

TRAIL!



"Business!" Red agreed quietly. He lifted his head for a moment to be sure the proprietor wasn't listening, but that worthy was dozing again. Then he turned to Peter.

"Pete, Shorty's a real squar' guy, and might help us tuh-night. Mind ef I tell him?"

Peter shook his head. He liked the friendly, care-free Malone already.

"Carry on!" he said, whereat the Texan bent closer.

"Yep, business, Shorty!" he whispered. "Thar's a guy in Zareda City—Manuel Garcia he calls his doggone self—and he's plumb interested in Pete and me. He's so darn interested, in fact, that he's let go a 'message' ag'in us. I reckon yuh know what thet means?"

"Gee, I shore do!" gasped Shorty.

"That message has troubled us some!" went on Red. "We've had to down two greasers a'ready back in Arizona, and thar might have been plenty more, only we had company to El Paso. An' now Pete and me are goin' south to see this Garcia gent about it!"

To Peter's surprise, Shorty stiffened in his chair, his face alight with perplexed excitement.

"Yuh—yuh're goin' gunnin' fer Manuel Garcia? In Zareda City?" he breathed. "Gee, yo're crazy. Say"—a thought occurred to him, and he leaned forward suddenly—"whar yuh been this last week?"

"I told yuh—out on the plains," Red answered slowly. "Helpin' drive a bunch of Lazy K steers from Arizona. Why?"

"An' ain't you heerd no news?" whispered Shorty.

"News? Nope. Not fer over a fortnight, anyway. Say, yuh locoed imaged, what's on yore mind besides yore hat?"

"Jest this, Red," replied the other Texan quietly. "Yuh an' Pete ain't goin' to no Zareda City. Because there's been a real, honest-to-goodness revolution sprung in Mexico doorin' the last week. An' Zareda's the rebel headqua'ters—an' Manuel Garcia's leadin' it!"

Peter Meets a Friend!

FOR a long, startled moment neither Red nor Peter could do anything but stare at each other blankly. Manuel Garcia, the murderer of Peter's father, leader of a Mexican revolt! The news was too shattering for the boys to grasp at first, and when they did so both gave a gasp of utter dismay.

They had guessed that Garcia must be a powerful man in his own country to be able to wield the influence he did among the Mexicans in Arizona and Texas. As Red had said, it took a "real big guy to send a Message round." But now to find that Garcia was so "big" brought all their plans tumbling down in a heap.

Then Peter snapped roughly:

"Well, we're going after him, anyway!"

Shorty studied his hefty figure with narrow, thoughtful eyes.

"Yeah? An' what're yuh like with a gun?" he asked abruptly.

The strange question made Peter frown for an instant, and then he understood. His hand moved like a streak to his belt, and the muzzle of his Colt flicked above the level of the table, covering Shorty squarely.

"Like that!" he answered with a snap. The cowpuncher, after a single expert glance, nodded calmly.

"An' thet's purty fair—for an Englishman. Red been teachin' yuh?"

"Yes. And I'm practising the draw all day long!"

Shorty grunted.

"Waal, pard, yuh'll need it in Zareda—ef yuh git thar. But—yuh won't!"

With an impatient smack on the table, Red butted in on the talk.

"Aw, lay off!" he rapped, his green eyes glinting. "We'll git thar all right, an' take care of ourselves. Tell us some more 'bout this revolution, Shorty—an' quick!"

A glance at the two grim faces before him was enough for the puncher. He began to talk eagerly.

"Why, it's like this. This yer Manuel Garcia, say, he's a bad hombre. He's supposed to be a merchant, but yuh know what thet covers down in Mexico. He's got minin' interests everywhar"—Peter winced here, for trouble connected with a silver mine had been the cause of Garcia killing the boy's father—"an' cattle; in fact, he's plumb rich. He's the King Pippin in Zareda City; an' I've heerd it said he runs the biggest rustlin' and smugglin' outfits that ever infested this ole Border. Yes, sirs, he's the pow'fulest guy in all north Mex. An' now he aims to be boss of the hull darn outfit!"

In tense silence Red and Peter listened while Shorty told them the news that was common property along the Border. It was a typical Mexican coup Garcia had pulled off, long-planned and well-organised. At a single stroke he had trapped the Federal garrison in Zareda and made himself master of all the country and the railways between there and the Border. The swiftness of the rebellion had paralysed the Mexican Government.

An army of mountain bandits, cattle-scum and peasants had flocked to his banner, and since then he had been running in arms and ammunition from the United States as fast as his experts could dodge the American rangers. He had already assembled a great arsenal at Las Santos, a railhead two miles beyond the Rio, and was only waiting for a last consignment of Winchesters and hand-grenades to arrive before loading all the arms on a train and running them into Zareda.

"An', boys, it's said that those Winchesters an' grenades are goin' across the river tuh-night—from this very town!" said Shorty.



"Pull your gun!" snapped Peter. His own weapon flashed out; crashed. Through a cloud of smoke he saw the Mexican stagger—

"Gee!" whistled Red, and Peter's heart leapt. "An' ain't Vidallo doin' nuthing about it?"

The cowboy shrugged.

"What kin we do, Red? Yuh know this town; it's tough. Thar's as many greasers an' Injuns in it as white men, an' Garcia's sent his own chief lieutenant across to prowl roun' and see the deal goes off O.K. 'Sides, what's it matter to us if greasers fight each other? Our sheriff ain't lookin' fer a bullet in the back on account o' that, yuh bet. An' I don't blame him. Those guns'll go across to Las Santos, the train'll git loaded up, and the hull bunch'll be taken into Zareda!"

Shorty's eyes narrowed grimly.

"An', boy, when those arms git distributed among Garcia's army, the Mexican Government'll wonder what's hit it. Serve 'em right fer bein' slow. Garcia shore stands a sumptuous chance o' winnin' the game, believe me!"

"But supposing the ammunition train doesn't get to Zareda?" asked Peter.

"Waal, then it'll be different; 'cause the Mex. army'll be down on his before he can refit it. But say"—Shorty looked up suddenly—"that train'll be guarded by real sharpshooters. Yuh ain't goin' to try no fool tricks with it, are yuh?"

In the pause that followed, Red grinned with sudden reckless glee. And Peter, folding his arms on the food-stained table, leaned across until his face was close to Shorty's.

"Listen, old son. I've come all the way from England to 'get' Garcia. If I can shove this ammunition train out of action, sharpshooters or not, it'll knock his revolution cock-eyed, I reckon, won't it? And afterwards, sooner or later, I'm going into Zareda City and I'm going to kill him!"

The sturdy cowpuncher stared at him, fascinated by the blaze in his grey eyes.

"Gee, you've got sand all right!" he said at last. "But, boy, yuh'll hev a stiff job. As I said, besides the train guard there's plenty o' Garcia's men in town, includin' his chief lieutenant. Yuh kin bet they'll be watchin' for anyone crossin' the river tuh-night, or foolin' aroun' on the plains yonder."

"Let 'em!" snapped Red curtly. "I'll show 'em some Injun scouting tricks that'll knock 'em——"

He broke off with a little gasp of pain. For Peter's iron grip had fallen suddenly on his wrist, and the English lad, with a swift grin of sudden fierce joy on his lips, was staring through the restaurant door into the dusty street.

"Pete! What th'—"

Slowly Peter turned his head, and the others fell back before the look on his face.

"Shorty," he whispered eagerly, "yuh asked what I was like with a gun just now. You're going to see. Look, Red!"

Darting a half-scared glance at him, Red bent forward. Then his whole body seemed to expand.

"Gosh!"

In the middle of the street, laughing and talking arrogantly with a group of brightly-dressed, armed Mexicans, stood Juan-of-the-Scar. The man in the 'Frisco eating-house; the stabber of Pedro Gomez; and Manuel Garcia's chief lieutenant!

Peter Graham—Gunman!

QUICKER than a striking rattlesnake Red snapped round and whirled Peter out of sight, blocking the path to the door with his wiry body.

"Yuh ain't goin' out thar; don't think it!" he rapped with savage intentness. "Yuh ain't good enough to tackle a two-gun Mexican down on th' Border yet. Leave this tuh me!"

Peter Graham's eyes narrowed to icy pin-points as he glowered at his chum's set face.

"Red," he answered softly, "you're a good scout. But if you try to stop me now, I'll break your jaw. That back-stabbing hound out there belongs to me. Stand away!"

Peter pushed the startled Red aside and darted through the door in one long stride. The two cowboys flung themselves after him, but it was too late. Peter was already in the street and gliding swiftly towards the Mexican group.

Alarm showed in Red Potter's eyes then. Only too well he knew what would follow even if, by some miracle, Peter killed his man. He whirled on Shorty and gripped him tight.

"Git yore outfit!" he commanded harshly. "Git 'em quick, or I'll—"

Without a word Shorty turned and fled towards a distant saloon. And Red, hardly daring to breathe, stood in the doorway staring haggardly after his partner.

In the street a sudden silence had fallen. Men on the sidewalks and loungers by the hitching-racks broke off their gossip sharply to watch the tall boy, with the flaming eyes of a killer, burst swiftly into the sunlight and go striding towards the unsuspecting Mexicans. Wise in the ways of the Border, instinct told them what was coming. Every man stopped in his tracks.

And Peter strode on, deaf and blind to everything save the man he was after. A red mist seemed to have blotted out the rest of the street, and his heart bumped cruelly. Yet he knew he was icy-cool and tigerishly ready for action.

The Mexicans, too, seemed unaware of the quiet that had fallen around them. Their talk and laughter sounded louder in the

hush. Then one of them saw Peter come to a halt a few yards off, and at the sight his dark eyes widened in alarm. Before he could speak or move, however, the clear, time-honoured challenge of the West cut the air like a whiplash.

"Juan! I want you. Turn round!"

There was a frantic gasp; a pause; then a frenzied stampede from the line of fire. In the twinkling of an eye the sunny street was empty save for the two crouching figures: Juan with his thin face dark with panic, and Peter watching him with death in his steady stare.

"Ha!" In the startled Mexican's eyes leapt a gleam of recognition that faded at once to a wolfish glare of fear. His jaw dropped feebly. "Wha'—why you after me?" he whispered. "I not know you!"

"Liar!" The freezing insult was like a blow across the face. "You know me all right—Peter Graham! But you can't stab me in the back. I've got you cold!"

A tremor passed through the Mexican's frame, and Peter saw it. He crouched slightly from the hips, right arm crooked at the elbow, thumb outspread. His left hand shot out fiercely.

"You first; Garcia next!" he snarled. "You've got your gun, greaser. Pull it!"

With the words he gave a pantherish spring sideways, his hand coming up in the deadly draw Red had taught him. The gun seemed to leap from its holster, spouting vicious red streaks. A roar of shots deafened him; something plucked at his scarf with spiteful fingers. He saw Juan's face, twisted in agonised surprise, loom through a haze of powder-smoke, and fired again. The Mexican appeared to crumple hideously, bending simultaneously at the neck, waist and ankles.

He was dead before he hit the ground.

With a steady hand Peter holstered his gun. And then the sidewalks of Vidallo became alive with armed men. A shrill whoop sounded from somewhere, followed by a shot. Before he could turn, Peter was surrounded by lean-faced men, all with guns drawn. As in a dream, he felt Red Potter's arms hugging him, dragging him from the centre of the street and babbling with joy as he did so.

"Gosh, yuh was quick, Pete; gosh, yuh was quick!" he stammered over and over again. Still in a trance, Peter was hustled through a doorway into a saloon, where a grinning bar-keeper held up a flap for them to pass into a back room. And there Shorty Malone and the rest of the Circle Bar punchers, who had covered the retreat, joined them.

Gradually Peter pulled himself together. For the first time he felt a searing pain burning his cheek, and, putting up a hand, brought it away stained with red. While he was staring at the blood, a tall, grave cowboy patted him gently on the shoulder.

"Yuh done well, son. Shake, will yuh? Thet greaser coyote beat yuh to the draw, but yore footwork saved yuh. Lemme bind that nick on yore checkbone."

"An' yuh got him plumb centre!" howled Red, dancing an Apache war-step with the whooping Shorty.

Peter looked up at the tall cowboy.

"Will there be trouble with the sheriff?" he asked quietly. "I'm ready if there is. The man murdered a friend of mine, and so—I had to get him!"

A slow smile was the answer.

"There'll be no trouble, son. It was a cl'ar challenge, and Sheriff Waters won't be botherin' yuh in this town; none whatever. Yore trouble is with the greasers. Shorty tells me yuh and yore pard are aimin' to cross the Border tuh-night. Waal, you've shore got tuh stay in this room till then; yuh'll git plugged for certain ef yuh don't!"

"An' don't worry about tuh-night, Pete, either!" breathed Red urgently. "It's my turn now; I'll git yuh across. An' we'll git Garcia's armed train yet!"

A few minutes later Peter's cheek had been doctored, and the room was clear save for Red and Shorty talking eagerly over in a corner. But Peter wasn't listening. Leaning back in his chair, he was busy cutting a notch in the walnut handle of his gun.

One enemy had fallen on Vengeance Trail!

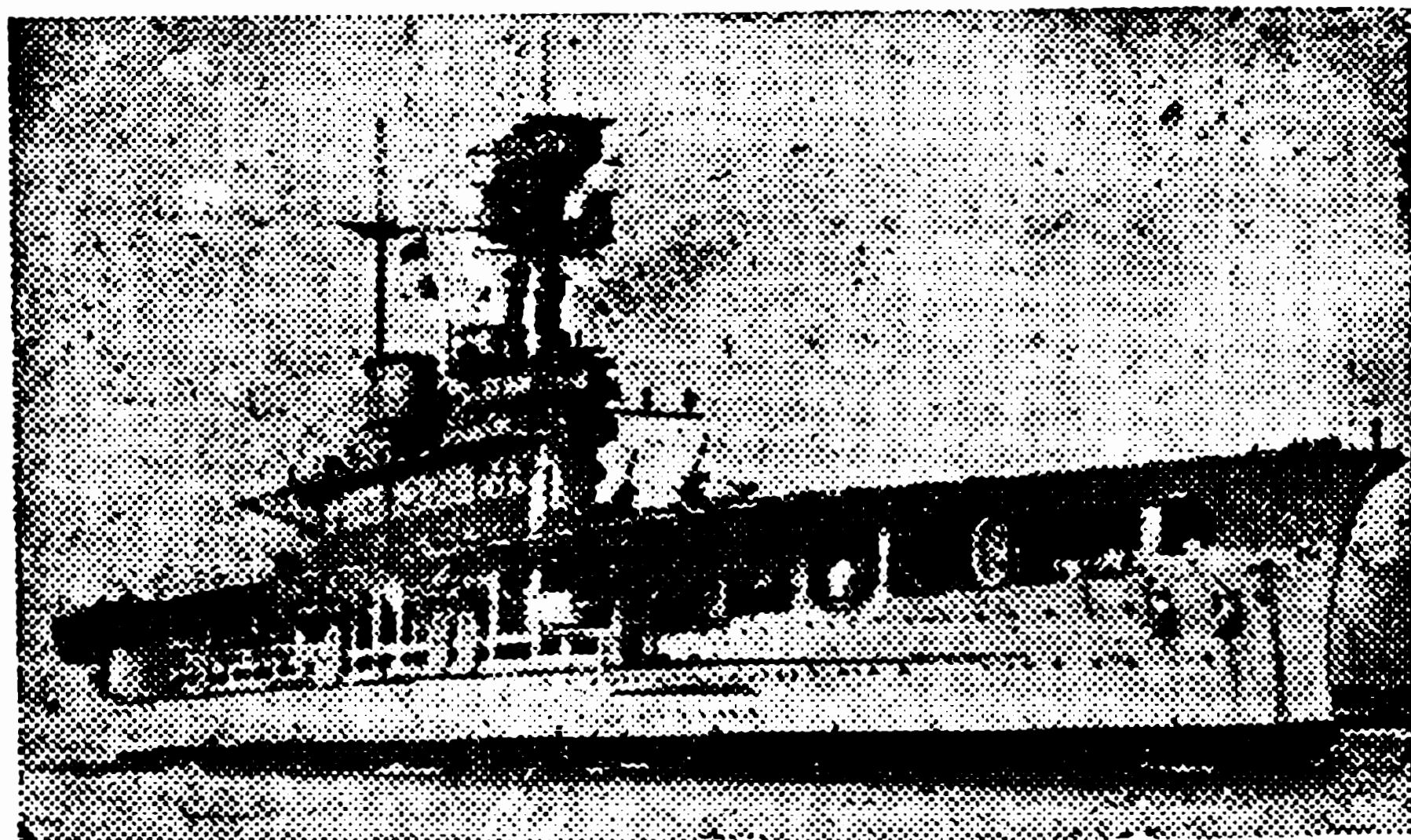
Disaster at Las Santos!

RED and Peter left Vidallo town that night—left it just before the moon rose, and when the night was at its blackest. They were naked as Indians, save for a loincloth each, and from head to toe their skins had been darkened with pigment by Shorty Malone. Shoulder-holsters held their guns, and wicked bowie knives rested in sheaths between their shoulder-blades. In addition, Red carried a small parcel in a waterproof slicker, which he handled very tenderly.

Arrived at the bank of the great Rio, in a dark cutting below the town, they forced their horses into the water, lying flat along their saddles until the river deepened. The horses lost their footing at length, floundered a moment, then struck out vigorously for the Mexican side. And the boys, sliding off, clung to their flowing manes and were hauled slowly across with scarcely a ripple, Red keeping his precious bundle aloft with one hand.

A disgusted snort, a stumble and a hasty scramble through the mud. Peter drew a long, deep breath. He was in Mexico at last.

Patiently he crouched in the darkness while Red led the horses to a clump of trees, hobbled them there and muffled their heads in case they scented other ponies and



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whinnied. He glided back to Peter's side like a lean, dark ghost.

And now began for the English lad the most thrilling adventure of his life—greater even than the duel with Juan-of-the-Scar. It was two miles to Las Santos railhead—two miles through country seething with keen-eyed Mexican rebels. In spite of Juan's death, Shorty had discovered that Garcia's last load of rifles and grenades had crossed the Rio. Would the two partners be in time to stop the train carrying the munitions to Zareda?

Noiselessly they began the perilous journey. It seemed to Peter that Red had the eyes and nose of a lynx in the darkness. Sometimes he would vanish into the night, scouting ahead on his own; once they huddled beneath a giant cactus while a mounted patrol cantered past within feet of their hiding-place. Across the sandy plain they crept like shadows, Peter following the Texan blindly. He ran when Red did; froze as into stone at his command.

The moon rose. Suddenly the two boys stopped. For clearly, on the still night air came the staccato sounds of an engine getting up stream, less than half a mile away.

Still Red did not hurry. His was the infinite deadly patience of the skilled hunter. Occasionally Peter saw the lights of Las Santos quite plainly—a squalid village huddled beside the railway terminus; then before he could look again Red had turned his back on the place and was wriggling away in the opposite direction. And invariably—a second later—Peter saw the reason, as the dark figure of an armed sentry loomed up in the moonlight.

Garcia was plainly taking no risks. Las Santos depot was surrounded by a wide cordon of his men.

But at long last, thanks to Red's skill, the two partners pierced the net. A long stalk, with Peter's eyes glued to the Texan's heels, a tense wait, and a swift rush; then Red halted and Peter looked up. They were in a small hollow, filled with coarse grass and shielded by straggling mesquite bushes. At Red's touch Peter crawled to the bank and stared out, choking back a gasp of delight. A hundred yards away, on faintly-gleaming railway lines, lay the long, black bulk of a train.

They were in time!

Cautiously the two boys crawled towards the train. Like eels they slipped beneath the centre wagon, lying flat on the railroad sleepers while Red unpacked the parcel he had been carrying with cool but careful hands. From where they lay they could see the feet of men walking briskly from the train to a great lighted goods-shed and back again.

Swiftly the Texan went to work, while Peter kept guard, gun in hand. From a tin canister he poured out a heap of coarse black blasting-powder, and in the middle of the mound, gently and with breathless care, he laid two slim, dangerous sticks wrapped in

red, greasy paper. In a few noiseless minutes he had completed his task.

He touched Peter's arm lightly, and they backed away together from beneath the train, Red paying out a length of fuse as they went until, at last, they were out in the open again. The job had been finished barely in time, it seemed, for just as they rolled clear of the wheels the lights in the goods-shed snapped out, a piercing whistle shrilled, and the snorts of the engine grew suddenly longer and more emphatic. Garcia's train was starting. With a chuckle of sheer excitement Red struck a match, waited a second until the fuse was well alight, then grabbed Peter's hand.

"Git!"

They got! Reckless of sentries, they fled into the darkness, running for their lives as they had never run before. Someone must have seen the burning fuse, for a harsh challenge sounded, followed by frantic footsteps and a shot. But neither of the fugitives heeded them. In a headlong, frenzied charge they hurled themselves onwards to safety, crashing through bushes, stumbling on the tough grass, until the ground gave under them suddenly and they fell in a panting heap into the little hollow.

And as they slid to the bottom inferno broke loose at Las Santos. A vivid flame, like a crackling, snarling demon, ripped the darkness abruptly into shreds; the earth around shuddered as the bellow of a mighty explosion roared to the stars. Into the air belched a rolling pillar of smoke that hung above like a great black pall, and from which pattered showers of dirt and a hail of shapeless, whirling debris. A scarlet wave of fire, springing fiercely into life, began flowing with hungry venom over all that was left of the train.

Silence, complete and terrible, followed. Of the great arsenal Manuel Garcia had assembled, not a rifle or machine-gun remained whole, not a hand-grenade but what had exploded. Dazed and nearly deaf, Peter and Red staggered to their feet, took one look at the destruction behind them—and ran.

In the grove beside the Rio Grande, where their horses waited, the reckless pair threw themselves at the foot of a tree and for the next few minutes writhed and twisted in an effort to regain their wind. Red was the first to sit up, twiddling his fingers impudently across the shadowy plain to where a red glow lit the distance.

"By gosh!" he gulped as Peter sat up, too. "Thet was some stunt! Gee, I reckon Garcia may hev heerd that bang plumb down in Zareda City. Waal, thet's our message tuh him!"

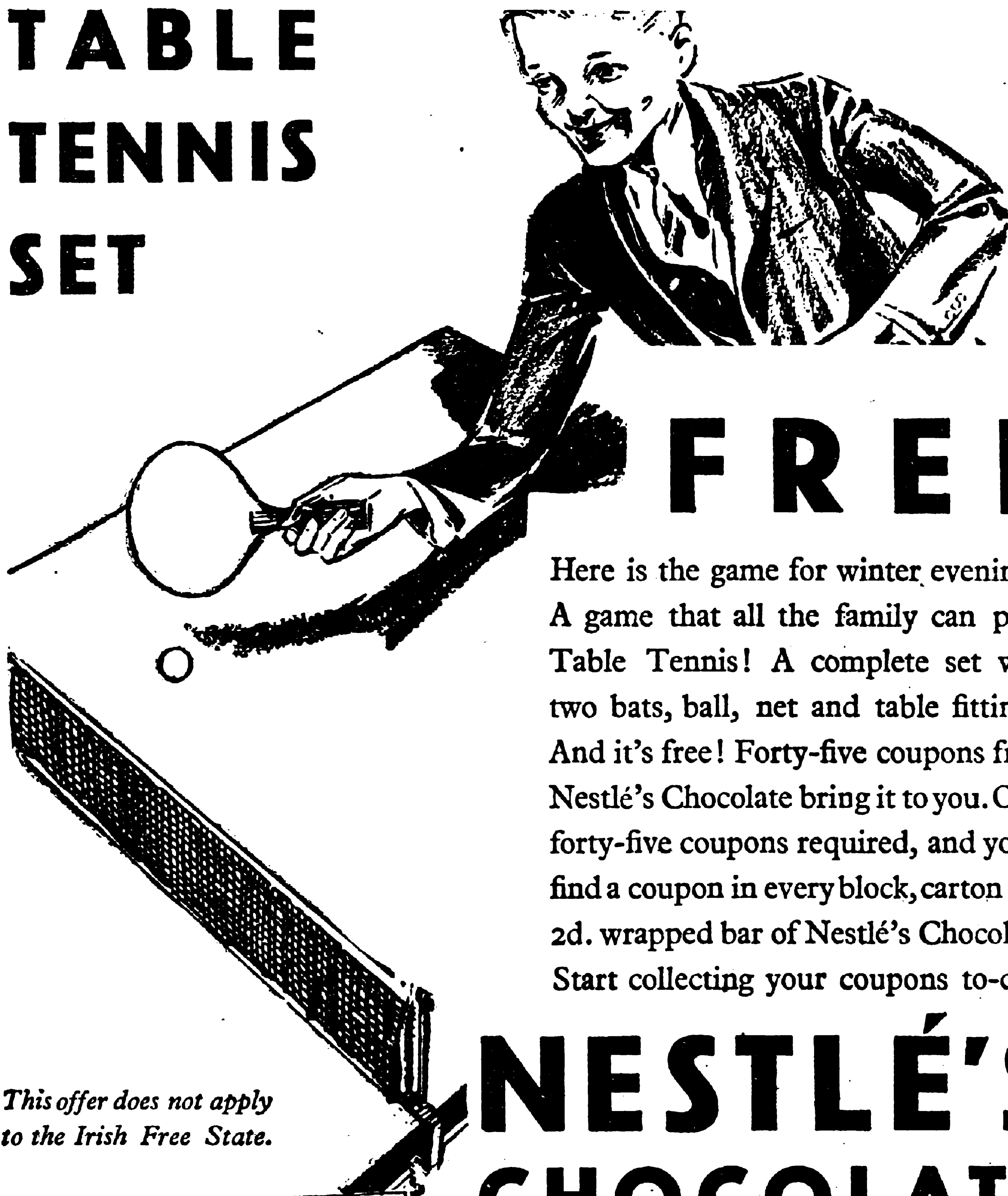
Peter gripped Red's hand.

"Right! And now it's up to us to collect the answer—in person!"

THE END.

(Peter and his enemy meet face to face next week! Plenty of thrills and excitement in this topping yarn, lads!)

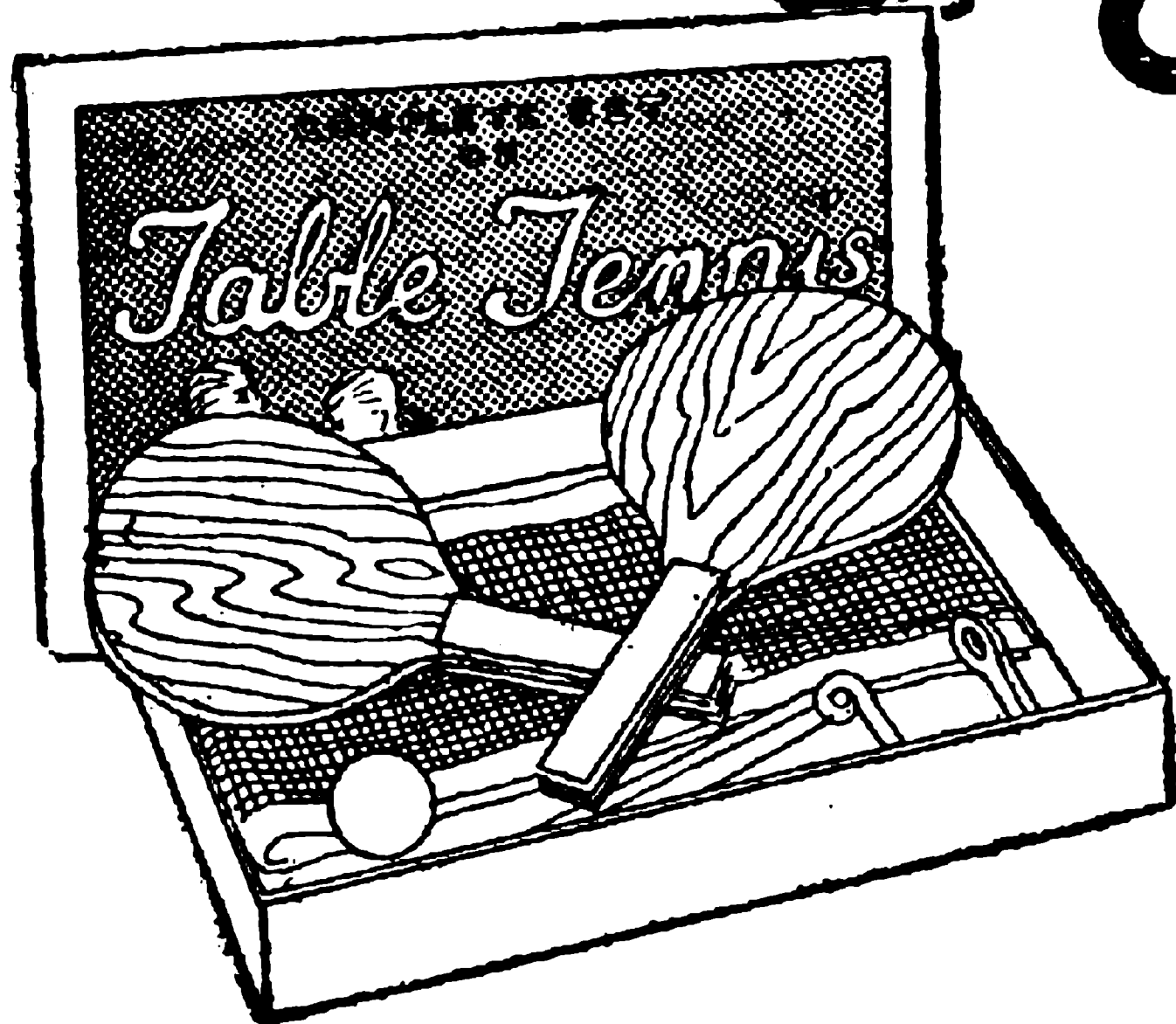
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BULL'S-EYE BILL!



By **ARTHUR
S. HARDY**

The Gaolbirds in Court!

THE newspapers were full of the Charity Match—Town Police v. Gaolbirds—which had resulted in a pitched battle on the football field and the arrest of the entire Gaolbirds' team, with the exception of Bull's-Eye Bill's stepfather, One-Punch Pete, who had managed to slip away.

On Thursday morning, when the Gaolbirds were to appear in court, Gipsy Dick harnessed Buttercup, his yellow horse, to his gaudily-painted but rickety caravan, and with Bull's-Eye Bill sitting beside him, drove from the flats to the police court, where they found Sergeant Topper, the tallest and biggest policeman in the county, on duty at the door.

Sergeant Topper pointed to the queue—and winked.

Gipsy Dick and Topper were great pals, and in spite of the fact that officially the court was full, Dick and Bull's-Eye Bill gained admittance. Inside they met Sergeant Puffin, who had a great admiration for Bull's-Eye, and he led the two pals into the well of the court, where they sat down among the clerks, the solicitors and the barristers.

They were just in time to see the Gaolbirds, under strong escort, hustled into the dock. Now, the dock happened to be small, and there were ten out-size prisoners, the

smallest of whom weighed fourteen stone. Twenty hefty policemen shepherded the crooks into the dock as sheep into a pen, but when six had got in four had to stay out, and there were mutual recriminations.

"Stop that wrangling," bawled the magistrate, a testy, fussy, bald-headed little man. "Turn the jury out and usher the prisoners into the jury box."

It was done, and ten of the ugliest looking toughs ever seen in court were ranged in a line with a double row of bobbies behind them.

"I was not present at this—er—unfortunate match," said the magistrate. "Who began the mischief?"

"The perlice!" snapped Jawbreaker Jim, one of the ugliest of the gaolbirds.

"The crooks!"

called Sergeant Puffin from the door.

"I never set eyes on a p'liceman," bawled Darkey Dan, another ugly-looking tough, "without I wanta take a running kick at 'im. What did the secretary of the society say just before the match? 'Play your own game,' 'e said, and my game's swat a p'liceman."

"The only redeeming point to this charity match, as far as I can see, is that a great deal of money—h'm—ah—yes—will be given to the town hospitals," said the magistrate.

**GIPSY DICK'S JAWBREAKERS
STOP JAWBREAKER JIM
JAWING !**

"Apart from the scoring of goals by Bull's-Eye Bill, there seems to have been no game, but man taking man. The police made a graceful gesture when they volunteered to play the Gaolbirds, but the end might have been anticipated. I do not intend to allow any team to knock our police about. I am glad these men were arrested, and I shall fine each and every one of them ten shillings, or one month's hard labour."

"I got no dough. Gimme the month," said Darkey Dan.

"Same 'ere," growled Jawbreaker Jim. The eight others also expressed a similar desire in a sullen chorus.

"Remove the prisoners. Next case!" snapped the magistrate.

Then the secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Welfare Among Hardened Criminals arose. It was he who had promoted the unlucky charity match. It was he who believed in extending the soft hand to incorrigible crooks.

"Your wusshup," he cried in a piping voice, "I regret that the experiment on the football field was a failure. But if these men were to go to prison I should regard myself as responsible. If they slugged the police, the police slugged them. It was fifty-fifty, and they have been locked up all night. I will pay the fines, and I'm sure only good will come of it."

The fines were accepted and paid and the Gaolbirds were released. Jawbreaker Jim went straight up the secretary and gave him his hand. There were tears in Jim's eyes.

"Guv'nor," he choked, "you're a real pal."

It was not until after he had left the court that the secretary missed his wallet, which was stuffed with notes.

Gipsy Dick and Bull's-Eye Bill filed out of court on the tail of the crooks, and Jawbreaker Jim saw them out of the corner of his eyes.

"Yer wait!" he snarled. "Yer gotta Cup-tie with Mudbank agin Cheeseboro. I'll get me own back, Bull's-Eye!"

Then Jim, who was the last of the Gaolbirds to leave the court, saw Sergeant Puffin standing close against the wall. Jawbreaker Jim edged over towards the sergeant, and when he was passing him, jammed his hob-nailed boot down on the sergeant's foot.

Sergeant Puffin winced but made no other sign. But as Jawbreaker walked on, laughing, the sergeant launched a boot with an inch-thick sole hard at the part Jim was made to sit upon. Bull's-Eye heard Jim grunt. Then Jim, feeling he must take it out of somebody, slugged Darkey Dan on the chin. Darkey Stumbled. He did not see where the punch came from, but socked Tiny Martin, the largest of the Gaolbirds, on the button as hard as he could hit him.

In front of Tiny stood Sergeant Topper. The big crook whipped a piece of hardened rubber out of his pocket and drove at

Topper's head with it. But Sergeant Topper was prepared. Just in time he ducked, and at the same moment flashed a ham-like fist at Tiny's jaw.

Tiny bobbed his head, and Jawbreaker Jim, who had pulled Dan aside, eager to be in any trouble that was going with the police, got it bang on the sniffer. He went down as if he had been shot, and his pals had to carry him into the street.

"What is all that noise out there, Sergeant Puffin?" bawled the magistrate from the bench.

"Gaolbirds rejoicing hon leavin' court, sir," answered Sergeant Puffin without turning a hair.

Gipsy Dick's Jawbreakers.

"IT seems to me, Bull's-Eye," said Gipsy Dick that afternoon, as he rigged up his travelling kitchen and prepared to make a stock of his famous sweets for sale at the Cup-tie to be played on Saturday, "that there's likely to be trouble when Mudbank United play Cheeseboro' on the 'Boro ground on Saturday."

"Think so, Dick?"

"Ay, lad. I know Cheeseboro'. They're not a sporty crowd, and I hear that One-Punch Pete is egging the Gaolbirds on to spoil the match."

"There'll be an extra lot of police on duty, Dick."

Gipsy Dick shook his head. Police were all very well, but with the best intentions they can't keep a crowd of 10,000 excitable football fans in order once they've gone mad.

"I'm not worrying about Mudbank winning the Tie, Bull's-Eye," said Dick, "for you'll be playing. You've gotta clever team, and the Cheeseboro' barracking won't stop you. But the Gaolbirds may egg the crowd on to invade the pitch and start some trouble. What we've gotta do is keep the Gaolbirds quiet."

"Can it be done, Gipsy?"

"Dunno," replied Gipsy Dick as he turned a great tin of butter into a pan, added sugar and flavouring, and set the pan upon the fire. "I'm gonner try."

"What sweets you making?" asked Bull's-Eye Bill two hours later, when he came back from a stroll along the canal bank.

Dick had coffee-coloured sweets with brown stripes in them, red sweets and white sweets, clear boiled sweets with scented flavours, and lots of different kinds of caramels which he was busy wrapping up in paper, a thing he did with incredible rapidity.

"Bull's-Eye Bills," answered Gipsy with a wink, "fruit drops, buttercup caramels—named after the horse—and jawbreakers, named after Jawbreaker Jim. Those striped ones are jawbreakers, Bull's-Eye. Try one."

Bull's-Eye deftly caught the sweet Gipsy threw at him and sucked it. It was the most wonderful sweet he had ever tasted, sticky

but not too sticky, sweet but not too sweet—and what a peppermint flavour!

"Grand!" he cried.

He helped Gipsy Smith to wrap the jawbreakers up in blue paper, and it was not until they were storing away the trays of sweets in the porcelain-lined store-rooms below the caravan that Bull's-Eye saw a tray filled with the same sized and shaped sweets in pink paper.

"What are they, Gipsy?" he asked.

"Jawbreakers," answered Gipsy Dick, whistling softly.

Saturday afternoon turned out fine and bright—ideal for a fast game of footer.

Cheeseboro' was an outlying suburb of the town, and Bull's-Eye Bill went over to it on the caravan. The rest of the Mudbank team, including Bull's-Eye's great chum, Chip Rogers, drove over in a motor-charabanc.

Gipsy Dick and Bull's-Eye arrived to find the football ground already pretty well packed. Gipsy drove his caravan into the enclosure, rigged up his stall, and began to sell his sweets. Bull's-Eye was greeted by his team-mates, and he went in to change.

"Hi, there's Gipsy Dick's caravan!" said Jawbreaker Jim, as he caught sight of it. "He's sellin' sweets. Come on!"

The gaolbirds, daring the crowd to take their places, swarmed down to Dick's stall. Bull's-Eye's old enemy, Ginger Hackem, joined them. The sweets were selling like hot cakes.

Gipsy Dick pulled two trays of sweets into view—one containing sweets wrapped in blue paper, the other sweets wrapped in pink paper.

"Try Gipsy Dick's famous jawbreakers," he cried.

The Cheeseboro' colours were red and white; Mudbank wore white shirts and black knickers. Whenever a man with a red-and-white favour bought a packet of jawbreakers, Dick gave him a pink bag. Whenever a Mudbank man with a black-and-white favour bought a bag, he gave him a blue one.

Ginger Hackem slapped threepence on the counter and Gipsy Dick offered him a pink bag.

"See any green?" jeered Ginger. "Blue ones fer me!"

Gipsy Dick gave him a blue bag, and, sampling one of the jawbreakers cautiously, Ginger found it the finest sweet he had ever tasted.

Meanwhile Gipsy Dick had pushed the tray of pink sweets down the counter towards the gaolbirds. Reaching out a big hand, Jawbreaker drew the tray nearer and pinched a bag of sweets. He gave it to Darkey Dan and took another one. This he gave to Tiny Martin. Then One-Punch Pete snatched a bag. Jawbreaker Jim pocketed half a dozen bags for himself, and when all the gaolbirds had been supplied with free sweets, Jim edged away.

"Haw! Keep yer toffee!" he growled, as he mooched away.

He and the others worked their way back to their places with violence, and an ugly-looking crowd of Cheeseboro' partisans flowed in behind. Then the whole bunch started munching the pink sweets.

"Pinched 'em right under Gipsy Dick's eyes!" chuckled Jawbreaker Jim as he stuffed a sweet into his mouth. "He's so green he dunno 'e's alive."

They waited, munching the sweets with moving jaws. Five minutes later the Mudbank team turned out, Bull's-Eye Bill looking conspicuous because of his tricolour boots and his tiny size. As he twinkled down the pitch the Mudbank supporters burst into a mighty roar. Ginger Hackem, who hadn't sampled the pink sweets, set up a howl.

"Come on, gaolbirds!" he bawled, glancing at Jawbreaker Jim & Co. "'Iss 'em! Boo! Hoo! Err!"

He saw the whole crowd of gaolbirds prepare for a big hiss. He saw them try to open their jaws and clench them tight again, saw their bodies swell and their faces grow purple. And all he could hear was a feeble hiss that didn't even pass the railings; something like this—"Ssssss!"—when Jawbreaker Jim and his pals meant it to be like this—"SSSSSSS!"

"What's the matter with yer?" howled Ginger Hackem. "Why don't yer 'iss 'em?"

Again there was a feeble "Ssssss!" Then Jawbreaker Jim turned, tried to open his jaws—couldn't because they were stuck down tight—and pointed towards them with his index finger, his eyes rolling fiercely. He passed a piece of pink wrapping up to Ginger. On it was printed: "Jawbreakers—if you try to loosen the toffee before it melts, warranted to break your jaw."

All round the rails the supporters of the Cheeseboro' side were in a similar predicament. Any snake-like noise they made was drowned in the whole-hearted roar of the Mudbank boys:

"Play up, Mudbank United!"

"Bang 'em in, Bull's-Eye!"

Gipsy Dick had made a special brand of jawbreakers for the gaolbirds and the Cheeseboro' fans!

On the Target as Usual!

THAT Second Round Cup-tie began in an absolute roar for the Mudbank team, and Chip Rogers saw to it that Bull's-Eye soon had the ball.

Bull's-Eye's reputation had spread by this time all over the country. People spoke of him as a freak—Bull's-Eye Bill, always on the target. They talked about his red, white and blue boots, his trickiness, and his shooting power. The Cheeseboro' boys had vowed that they would stop Bull's-Eye's goal-getting career this time. They made a dead set for him, but dodging an outstretched foot here,

The crooks heaved and pulled, but Jawbreaker Jim was firmly stuck to the ground—thanks to Gipsy Dick's special toffee!



a jutting shoulder there and then a stuck-out elbow, he slipped three men and found himself in midfield.

"Don't let 'im through!" howled Ginger Hackem. "Turn 'im over!"

The right-back tried to, but fell as Bull's-Eye slipped him. Then, as Bull's-Eye dodged into the penalty area and was just going to shoot, the Cheeseboro' centre-half dragged him by the shirt.

The referee, who was up with the play, blew his whistle for a penalty. Bull's-Eye scored the first goal with a smashing drive. Three minutes later he shot the ball home from ten yards out with a corking punt. Ten minutes from the start he headed into the net from a corner kick.

The Cheeseboro' crowd in the stand began to wail. From both ends of the ground came howls and protests. But on the bank opposite the stand the hooligans who usually gave the others a lead stood like a lot of dumb mice with their mouths tight shut. Even the gaolbirds, who had sworn to wreck the match if Mudbank ever looked like winning, were silent.

Cheeseboro' didn't know what to make of it. Their players, disheartened at their supporters' lukewarmness, began to play rotten football, then threw up the sponge.

Bull's-Eye scored his fourth goal five minutes before half-time, and in the last minute edged the ball to Chip, who raked the netting with a grand hook shot.

At half-time Jawbreaker Jim grabbed hold

of Tiny Martin, the crook with ten convictions, and led him round the bank to the place where Gipsy Dick had planted his caravan. On their heels stalked the rest of the gaolbirds. Their bulldog faces were set and hard, their mouths thinned to a streak, and they kept their teeth tight shut. They were out for trouble.

But when they arrived Gipsy Dick's caravan was gone. In its place stood a long line of burly policemen sent over from the town with Sergeant Puffin in command. Jawbreaker Jim faced him savagely.

"Hrrrr—gippppp—drrrr!" he hissed.

"Can't hear yer. Clear the line," said Sergeant Puffin.

Jim drew out a dirty piece of paper and a stub of pencil and wrote. The sergeant read the message:

"Where's Gipsy Dick? Can't talk. Jaws stuck."

The sergeant wrote back:

"Dick's gone home in caravan. Follow the line of police and you'll find him. A treat to find you quiet.—PUFFIN."

Jawbreaker Jim pointed along the line of stalwart bobbies.

"Cmmmmmm!" he hissed, and the gaolbirds followed him. The police formed a double line towards the end, and rolled the

(Continued on page 44.)

Knights of the Road!



The Plotters!

"IT'S the safest way in the world to take an armed man," continued Dirkley. "Our Revenue officer at Dalton, where I live, caught a smuggler that way. The man you noose is yanked out of his saddle, and half-stunned by the shock, his arms drawn tight to his sides by the rope, he can't draw a weapon."

"Who's to tackle it, though?" sneered Binstead. "Will you?"

"No fear! We'll get the chaps from the village—Sam Clamp and his friends—to do it for us. We've chummed in with them once or twice before, as you know."

Sam Clamp, the wheelright's son, was a local sharp character, a great hand at poaching and anything that paid for the trouble. He had a following of four or five burly louts like himself. There was a feud between the St. Anstell's boys and this gang, but the admirable Dirkley and his followers were on friendly terms with Sam and his mates.

"We shall have to split it up with them," said Dirkley; "but we've got to make sure of our man, and it's no use my counting on

The noose slipped over the rider's neck and dragged him from his horse . . . Dick Forrester was a prisoner!

you kids, you'd funk it and make a mess of it. Sam will do the noosing; his mates will jump out on this Forrester and truss him up as soon as he's nabbed.

We'll hide with the others, and help them bind the prisoner when they've got him safe, and then we'll all march off to the assize court together. That's the game, and I want to know if you're all agreed!"

"Wait a bit," said Lindsay, the new recruit, flushing a little. "I don't like this job, Dirkley. I don't mind trapping a highwayman, and I'm not particular as to how it's done, but I think it's a dirty trick when he trusted the letter to you and gave you a guinea."

"Now look here, you young milksop!" snarled Dirkley. "I've had enough of this snivelling talk from you. Do you mean to say you're frightened?"

"No, I'm not," said Lindsay. "I tell you what it is, Dirkley. I've done several things with you I'm not over-proud of, and I've had about enough of it. You chaps can do this job by yourselves. It doesn't suit me. I'll leave you to it!"

"Then clear out, and a good riddance!" growled Dirkley. Then as Lindsay turned away the other took a step forward, his eyes gleaming savagely as he stared into Lindsay's. "I think you know me well enough to keep your mouth shut about this," he added between his teeth. "You breathe a word of it, and see what'll happen to you."

Lindsay did not reply, but turning on his heel he walked away through the plantation.

"We're well rid of that canting little beast!" said Dirkley. "He hasn't pluck enough for a dashing bit of work, and he'll be too frightened to sneak on us. Now, you chaps, slip back to the school, and I'll go and fix it up with Sam Clamp."

Help at Hand!

"ONE hundred and ninety-eight—ninety-nine—two hundred," counted Ralph, as he finished the last line of an imposition. "Done at last! Oh, hallo, Lindsay! What's your trouble?"

"I—I want to speak to you," said Lindsay, very embarrassed. "Something important."

"Out with it!"

"I—I'm not a sneak," said Lindsay, fidgeting, "but I can't keep it to myself any longer. There's something I want to ask you."

"What on earth are you babbling about?" said Ralph impatiently.

"Are you a brother of Dick Forrester, the highwayman," blurted out Lindsay, "or aren't you? That's what I want to know!"

Ralph was on his guard in a moment. He threw a keen glance at Lindsay, and gave a whistle of consternation.

"How did you know that?" he said quickly, gripping the boy by the arm.

"Dirkley found it out," said Lindsay hurriedly. "We met your brother in the plantation the other night, and he gave Dirkley a note for you, asking you to meet him there to-day. Dirkley read the note, and he and his lot hatched a plan to lay a trap for your brother, with the village louts to help, and claim the reward."

"What!" cried Ralph.

"They're going to drop a noose over him from the old oak-tree and lasso him. It was such a dirty trick, I wouldn't have anything to do with it. I wish I'd warned you before."

"Why on earth didn't you?" cried Ralph. "When is it to be done?"

"At four to-day."

"Four! It's ten past now!"

Ralph rushed like a whirlwind out of the school and tore breathlessly towards the plantation. There was despair in his heart as he raced across the meadows to the meeting-place. What could he do if his brother were captured already? What chance had he single-handed of freeing Dick?

As Ralph vaulted over the second fence he saw a small crowd of figures approaching. It was a party of his schoolfellows returning from a hunting expedition in the woods. As Ralph saw who they were a desperate resolve took possession of him. He would tell them the truth, and ask their help. They were only boys, but what will not a sturdy crew of British schoolboys achieve if they are called upon?

"Hallo, Fernhall! Where are you running?"

"Conyers—Hilton!" panted Ralph, rushing up to them. "I'm in a ghastly mess! Will you help me?"

"Of course!" chorused the boys at once. "What's the row, old chap?"

"My brother's in trouble—Dick Forrester, the highwayman——"

"Forrester—your brother?" gasped Conyers in amazement.

"Yes; but never mind that at the moment. That sneak Dirkley has found it out, and laid a trap to capture him. They'll have got him by now! Will you help me rescue him, or are you going to turn on me?"

"The famous highwayman—your brother!" cried Conyers excitedly. "By Jove, I've always wanted to meet him! Will we help? You bet your head we will! Who's got him?"

"Sam Clamp and the village louts, with Dirkley's lot, in the plantation. Quick! There's not a moment to lose!"

"That sweep and his gang!" cried Hilton. "Come on, you fellows! There's a pile of

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

DICK FORRESTER learns upon the death of his father that all the vast estates and fortune, with the exception of a hundred guineas, have passed into the hands of his rascally uncle,

VANE FORRESTER. The latter refuses to give the boy his money, and, appointing himself guardian, states his intention of sending Dick and his brother,

RALPH FORRESTER, to Duncansby School—a notorious place in the north of England. Travelling by coach, Vane and the two boys are held up by

DICK TURPIN, the famous highwayman. Dick joins forces with Turpin, and, after bidding Ralph to be of stout heart and promising to fetch him soon, the two ride away. They have many stirring adventures together until Dick leaves his companion and rides north to see how his brother is faring. In the meantime, Ralph has reached Duncansby School, a dreary, desolate place on the wild moorlands. Unknown to him, Vane has arranged with the headmaster that the boy shall "not live long." Ralph is rescued by his brother, who takes him to St. Anstell's College, where he is known as Fernhall. Dirkley, the school sneak, discovers the secret and plots with his cronies to capture Dick when he comes to visit Ralph.

(Now read on.)

hedge-stakes by the fence there. Grab one apiece and go for them!"

"Easy! Don't make a noise about it," said Conyers, helping himself to the biggest stake, while the others swiftly armed themselves. "Steal up and take 'em unawares. We shall do better so. They're a heavy lot, an' quite as many as we are. Jump out on 'em, and hit quick and hard!"

"Forward!" said Hilton. "Remember, he's young Ralph's brother. We've got to rescue him at any cost!"

Ralph's heart gave a bound as he set out with his staunch chums, and the crowd hurried away silently towards the plantation, gripping their weapons tight.

Captured!

DICK FORRESTER cantered over the hill whistling gaily, and pulled his horse to a walk as he neared the rendezvous where he was to meet his brother. There was no sign of Ralph.

"Can he have got my message?" thought Dick, passing on beneath the great oak-tree that overhung the path. "If that youngster I gave the note to——"

He broke off with a cry of alarm, for something like a brown snake fell over his head and tightened round his body. It was a noose dropped from the overhanging branch of the oak; it pinned Dick's arms to his sides and jerked him from the saddle before he could move or think.

"Treachery!" cried Dick, and, making a desperate attempt to duck free and keep his seat, he drove his heels inwards, and his spurs struck into Satan's sides as he was hauled backwards. Unused to such treatment, the great black horse bounded forward with a snort, and crashed away through the plantation.

Dick struck the ground with a crash that knocked the breath out of his body, and he was hardly down before half a dozen forms rushed from the thickets and flung themselves upon him.

"Hold him fast! Turn him on his face!" cried several rough voices. "Sit on his 'ead, boys, an' get a bit o' twine round the wrists o' him!"

Revived by his danger, Dick made a mighty effort, and nearly shook himself free. His captors, burly village louts, were too many for him, and flung him down again, for he could not use his arms. He was weaponless, his pistols were in the saddle-holsters, and Satan had bolted.

Dick wasted no breath in words. His legs were the only means of defence left him, and he used them with fine effect. Two of the attackers leaped away, yelling, but two others flung themselves across his knees and pinned them down, while the man in the tree had dropped from his perch and was hauling with all his might on the noose.

"Got him!" yelled the captors triumphantly. "Turn 'im over!"

They forced Dick on his face, and immediately five or six more figures, who had been hopping about on the outskirts of the struggle, rushed in and helped bind the prisoner, hooting with delight. One of them dealt the helpless highwayman a vicious kick in the side, and Dick, turning his head, recognised the boy he had given the note to, and saw how he had been trapped. It was the admirable Dirkley, the sneak of St. Anstell's.

"Hurrah!" shrieked Dirkley and his followers. "We've got him! Two hundred an' fifty guineas to share up, boys!"

"You got him!" growled Sam Clamp, a burly youth in a fur cap. "A lot you did! Come on, my coveys, we've got him fast! Off with him to Hutton Gaol!"

"Share and share alike!" cried Dirkley. "We started the game, and they'll pay us all evenly—— Look out!"

There was a sudden rush of dark forms from the undergrowth, and from every side a dozen active figures flung themselves on the outlaw's captors. Dirkley and his mates fled, yelling, at the first onset. There was an oath and a howl as two of Clamp's louts were bowled over.

"Well done!" shouted Dick, as he recognised Ralph and his chums. "Oh, well hit, lads! Give it 'em well and hearty!"

He struggled furiously to free himself and join in the fight, but he was too tightly bound. His captors left him where he lay, and with savage oaths, turned on their attackers.

Convers and Hilton, with the others to back them, fought like Trojans, Ralph engaging one of the biggest of the villagers himself. At the first onset they drove the louts back in confusion; but Clamp rallied his mates and pressed forward again, the fight raging hotly.

So heavy and powerful were the villagers, and so handy their short cudgels against the unwieldy hedge-stakes of the St. Anstell boys, that the latter were slowly beaten back. Ralph, realising that the fight was going against his comrades, cried wildly to his brother.

"Dick! Where are you?"

"Here, under the bush!" cried Dick, who was filled with anxiety and impatience, skinning his wrists till the blood ran as he tried to work loose his bonds.

Turning on his opponent with suddenly intensified ferocity, Ralph redoubled his efforts, drove back his amazed adversary, who was twice his size, and fairly stretched him out with a blow that snapped the hedge-stake and sent half of it spinning into the air. Then, darting to his brother's side, Ralph whipped out his pocket-knife and cut Dick free in an instant.

(Dick has been rescued, but he isn't out of trouble yet. Next week's stirring instalment is packed with excitement, lads.)

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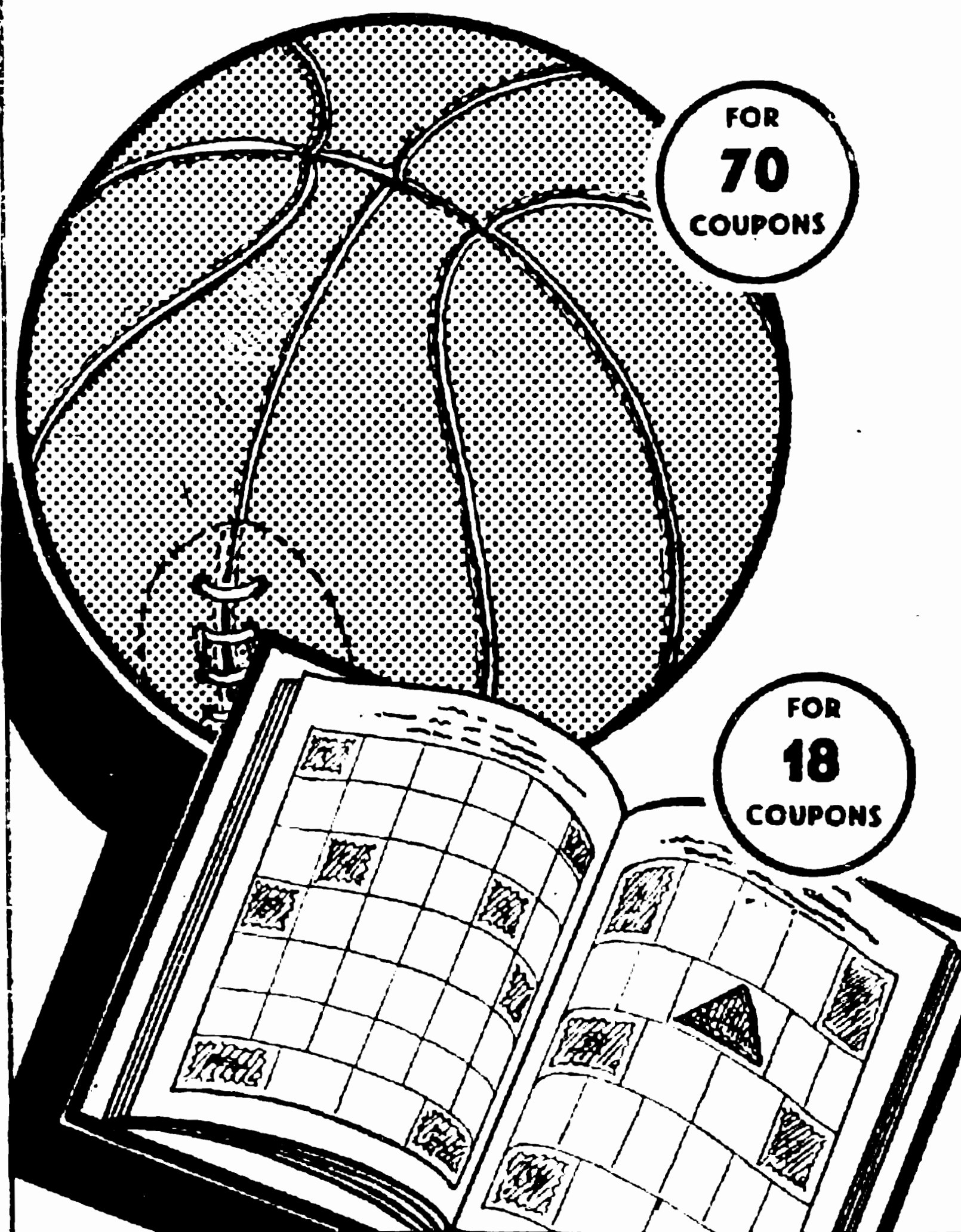
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BULL'S-EYE BILL

(Continued from page 39.)

dumb crooks along from one to another until suddenly they rolled past a gate and found themselves in the street.

They stamped and they danced with rage. They tried to get back but could not. The worst gang in England had been coaxed out of the football ground by a police trick. And to make matters worse, as they roamed about bent on vengeance, they could hear Gipsy Dick's voice calling out from another pitch inside the Cheeseboro' ground.

"Now, ladies and gents, who'd like a nice little packet of jawbreakers—Gipsy Dick's own sweet—only threepence, and the best sweet ever made."

The gaolbirds had been doubly done!

The second half of that Cup-tie, which Mudbank United won by 10 goals to 0, was nearly over before Jawbreaker Jim got his jaws free at last and hurled the last bit of toffee he had been trying to swallow on to the pavement.

"Gipsy Dick tricked us, and Bull's-Eye won the tie," he yelled, smashing his boot down savagely on the bit of toffee. "But we'll wait for 'em! We'll git our own back! And as for Puffin and his regiment of slops, why—"

Sergeant Topper, the biggest policeman in the town, happened along just then and gave Jim a push.

"That's enough!" he cried. "Move on!"

But Jawbreaker Jim could not move on. He was stuck to the pavement by that piece of toffee, and the dejected gaolbirds were still trying to drag him free when Bull's-Eye and Gipsy Dick passed on their way homeward.

(Stunning new series starting next week, featuring Bouncer Billy Baxter, the world's greatest optimist! Don't miss the opening yarn, lads.)

THE AVENGER!

(Continued from page 27.)

It was a terrible position, but worse was to follow. Out of the cockpit, almost sobbing with grief, clambered Snub Hawkins: hung for a terrible second against the fury of the gale, then launched himself on to the wing. He slipped, saved himself by a frantic grab, and began crawling slowly towards the edge. Steel-wristed and steel-nerved, Nelson Lee kept the plane steady during that appalling journey until Snub reached his master and hauled him slowly and painfully into safety.

Then, lips compressed, jaw like iron, Nelson Lee fought his way back bitterly towards the coast of Friesland.

The chase was abandoned. The Master of the World had won—at the eleventh hour!

"WE must take our defeat like sportsmen, I suppose!" mused Thurston Kyle quietly. "But, Lee, it was cruel to lose like that, when victory was so near!"

Nelson Lee studied his friend's bandaged face sympathetically. It was two days since the great duel among the Frisan islands, and the whole world still seethed with the sensational discoveries that had been made. The detective could well guess at the thoughts smouldering in Thurston Kyle's brain.

"Let's call it a drawn game!" he smiled cheerfully at last. "After all, we had the best of it, Kyle. We have removed the pressure on London, smashed the Master's headquarters, and his whole gang. Sooner or later—we shall destroy him, too!"

The Night Hawk rose to his feet, tall, muscular and impressive. His fist crashed on Nelson Lee's mantelpiece.

"Yes. If it takes my whole life!" he cried.

THE END.

(Another detective-thriller yarn introducing Nelson Lee and the Night Hawk coming shortly. Look out for it!)

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