

"THE PERIL OF THE MOOR!"

Rousing Long St. Frank's
School Yarn Complete Inside.

NELSON LEE

2^d



New Series No. 63.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

April 4th, 1931.

The PERIL of



**AN APRIL THE FIRST JOKE
COMES UNSTUCK—BUT HAS A
STICKY ENDING!**

CHAPTER 1.

April Fools' Day!

THE servants' hall at Edgemore Castle presented a lively, gay appearance.

Up and down the long table were dozens of noisy, hungry youngsters in Scouts' kit. At the head of the table sat the Earl of Edgemore himself, the lord and master of this fine old historical pile. At the foot of the table sat the young Viscount Bellton.

"Well, I must say, Skeets, that your pater is brainy," remarked one of the Boy Scouts, leaning across and addressing Viscount Bellton. "Feeding here, in the servants' hall, is a lot better than using the ordinary

reception-rooms. More homely—handier for the kitchens, too."

"Guess that's how we figured it," nodded Viscount Bellton, grinning. "Trust pop to do the best thing! We're no great shakes at doing the grand, Handy, and I guess we fit in this picture a heap better."

Edward Oswald Handforth, of the St. Frank's Remove, heartily agreed. The Earl of Edgemore and Viscount Bellton, otherwise Skeets, were rough diamonds, perhaps—they had been raised on a one-man farm in the backwoods of Canada—but they were true blue.

All these Boy Scouts, up and down the table, were members of the St. Frank's Remove. About half of that famous Form

Rousing Complete Yarn of Schoolboy Adventure.

The MOOR

By *EDWY SEARLES*
BROOKS

was represented. The Easter holidays, in fact, had officially commenced, and many of the Removites had gone home, including such unwanted specimens as Bernard Forrest, Gulliver, Bell, and Eustace Carroll. All these fellows round the table were, so to speak, "half marked and guaranteed."

The Remove had come to Edgemore Castle just prior to the holidays, in fact—owing to the circumstance that the Ancient House at St. Frank's had been flooded out by the mysterious diversion of a local stream. This

stream, owing to the breakage of a barrier wall, had rushed into an underground channel, and the floods at St. Frank's had been serious.

That breach was now repaired, and the stream was flowing along its normal course; many workmen were busy on the Ancient House, repairing the damage. When the new term commenced, everything would be normal again.

A number of Removites, including Nipper, the Form captain, and such stalwarts as Vivian Travers, Kirby Keeble Parkington, Archie Glenthorne, Handforth, Reggie Pitt and Fullwood, were gleefully taking advantage of the rancher-earl's invitation. They were having a fine time, holidaying at the castle. Everything was so free and easy.

The earl, who had recently come into his inheritance, was a



most unusual man—just as his son was an unusual boy. There was no “side” about them; no swank or snobbishness. They were open-air types, with a “straight-from-the-shoulder” manner.

The first thing the earl had done, upon taking up residence at the castle, had been to dismiss the entire domestic staff. As he said, he and Skeets had always done their own cooking and other work on the old ranch, and they weren't going to alter their habits now! So here they were, in this fine old castle, living in the servants' quarters. A great many people in the neighbourhood were scandalised, but a great many others, understanding the earl's point of view, admired him.

“I'm figuring that we'll do things by degrees,” the bluff earl had said. “Mebbe, after we've got used to it, we'll bring a few servants back, and settle down as honest-to-goodness members of the county aristocracy. But just now we're raw tenderfeet, and we'll walk before we run. I don't want Skeets to get any high-faultin' ideas into his young head; and, if it comes to that, I don't want to get any into mine. We'll handle this thing easy-like.”

That the earl's views were changing was evidenced by the fact that he had already allowed Skeets to join St. Frank's as a scholar. When they had first come, Lord Edgemore had scouted the very idea. Skeets was old enough to earn his own living—Skeets was strong enough to work! But the earl soon found that Skeets was too rough a diamond to fit the title of Viscount Bellton. Thus he was put at St. Frank's.

“Well, boys, it's a perfectly glorious day,” said the earl, from the head of the table. “More like summer than spring. I guess you're going out hiking, eh?”

“That's the idea, sir,” said Nipper. “A sort of Scout's route march. We're tramping to Caistowe first, so that we can have a bathe; then we'll camp out somewhere for a meal, go on another hike in the afternoon, and get back in the evening.”

“Sounds good to me,” said Lord Edgemore, nodding. “But you're not taking Skeets with you.”

“Gee, pop!” protested Skeets. “I was figuring on going!”

“Then you'll have to figure some other way, son,” said his father. “You're coming with me. There's some good shooting around this ranch, and I shall need you.”

“Maybe you're right, pop,” said Skeets. “We'll get busy shooting rabbits ready for a big supper, eh? Something for the fellers when they get home. I sure guess they'll be hungry after their hike.”

“Rabbits?” asked Travers, in a thoughtful voice. “Upon my Samson! I'm surprised, Skeets, that you and your father are satisfied to go about shooting rabbits!”

“What else is there to shoot?” asked Skeets.

“Why don't you go out on the moor?” said Travers. “You know the moor, don't you? The border of it is practically adjoining the Edgemore estates, and it stretches for miles across country—a wild, rugged, desolate waste.”

“What's this—a geography lesson?” demanded Handforth, staring. “You silly ass, Travers: Do you think Lord Edgemore doesn't know what a moor is like?”

“I was only mentioning it,” said Travers mildly. “I thought perhaps Lord Edgemore and Skeets would prefer to have a go at the wolves.”

“The which?” ejaculated Handforth.

“Wolves,” said Travers, as solemn as a judge.

“Aw, shucks!” grinned Skeets. “Be yourself, Travers! You know darned well that there aren't any wolves in England.”

“No wolves?” repeated Travers, with a stare. “Do you mean to say that you haven't heard of the wolves on Bannington Moor?”

“Of course we haven't!”

“Well, of course, you're new here,” said Travers, nodding. “And, if it comes to that, it's not generally known, anyhow.”

“What are you trying to do, sonny—hood-wink us?” asked Lord Edgemore dryly.

“Wolves—in England?” added Skeets. “Say, that's the bunk!”

“My dear chap Bannington Moor is tremendously wild, if you only penetrate far enough into it,” said Travers. “Naturally, the people about here don't like to talk too much about the wolves. But right in the heart of the moor, where there aren't any roads, the wolves are dangerous to people who aren't armed. They lurk about in the spinneys, and they're as savage as any of the wolves of Russia.”

“Look here——” began Handforth.

“If you're after real, exciting sport, you can't do better than go after these wolves, sir,” continued Travers. “And the more wolves you shoot, the better for the countryside.”

“Oh!” said Lord Edgemore slowly.

He was cautious. He hardly knew whether to believe Vivian Travers or not. Most of the other fellows, by this time, had jumped to it that Travers was indulging in the gentle art of pulling his host's leg. Scenting fun, they assumed grave faces, and nodded in solemn agreement. Handforth, being thick-headed, scented nothing.

“You're mad, Travers!” he said, glaring. “I've never heard—— Eh? What's the idea of kicking my shin, Church, you fat-head?”

“Sorry!” gasped Church. “My—my foot slipped!”

Travers, looking very thoughtful, toyed with a table-fork. Jimmy Potts, who was sitting next to him, suddenly jumped in his seat. He saw that Travers was executing a figure “1” on the table-cloth.

"It's not generally known, sir, that in some of these remote corners of England wolves still exist," said Travers, looking across at Lord Edgemore. "Even some of our fellows don't know it. But if you and Skeets will take your guns out, I'll guarantee you a surprise."

"Gee! Are you on the level, Travers?" burst out Skeets excitedly.

"Hang it, dear old fellow, you don't think I'd send your pater on a wild goose chase, do you?" asked Travers reproachfully.

While this had been going on, Jimmy Potts had leaned across to his neighbour, and had whispered some magic words. They were passed along, and very soon they came to Handforth's own ears.

"Shush, Handy!" breathed Church. "It's the first of April!"

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "The first— Oh, yes! Rather!"

In a flash now he saw the wheeze. All these guests at Edgemore Castle had been enjoying themselves so much that they had completely overlooked the fact that this glorious morning was All Fools' Day! Travers was the only one who had thought of it—and he was now doing his best to work a really first-class wheeze.

Heroically, Handforth restrained his laughter, just as the other fellows were restraining theirs.

"Wolves?" he said loudly. "Oh, well! I wasn't going to say anything about them, Travers. In fact, I think you're a silly ass for mentioning them at all. You know jolly well that the fact that there are wolves on the moor is kept pretty dark in this district."

"The people about here don't talk about them, I know," agreed Travers. "But, dash it, Lord Edgemore is a resident now, and it's only right that he should know."

"There's that, of course," said Nipper, joining in the little plot. "And, as you say, Travers, if Skeets and his pater can rid the countryside of some of these pests, all the better."

Other Removites began to join in and do their bit. They all did it so well that before long Lord Edgemore's doubts began to vanish. Even Handforth was doing his part well—he was saying just sufficient. Handy's usual custom was to overdo a thing, and thereby give it away. He would have overdone it now, but for the fact that Church and McClure were next to him, and that they restrained him.

The Removites in a flash realised the full humour of this All Fools' Day joke. What a scream it would be if the earl and Skeets went out on the Moor to look for wolves! What a yell the Removites would have later, when they heard of their dismal failure! A first of April stunt of the juiciest kind!

And the Earl of Edgemore was already swallowing the bait!

CHAPTER 2.

The Wolf-Hunters!

HARD-HEADED and shrewd as Lord Edgemore was, he could hardly be blamed for believing the extraordinary story of the wolves of Bannington moor. For the Removites did their job so thoroughly that it was almost impossible to disbelieve them.

Skeets, of course, once he saw that his father was convinced, became convinced, too.

They were new to England, these two; they had only been in the district a short while. And they both knew that Bannington Moor was a wild, desolate stretch of moorland, with rocky hills and barren valleys; with spinneys and patches of woodland. A great waste of country, even more picturesque in some ways than the Canadian prairies.

It seemed natural to them that this barren area should be infested with wolves. Every-

body round the table was supporting Travers' story; sinister yarns of the wolves were invented on the spur of the moment, and trotted out. It was the first of April, and these inventions were permissible. The great

thing was to get Lord Edgemore and Skeets so convinced that they would set off on their fools' errand.

"Didn't you notice, sir, how we arranged to hike to Caistowe?" asked Travers. "We didn't like to say it, but the moor is taboo. It would be a different thing if we were armed. You and Skeets, with guns, won't be in any danger—you'll probably get a lot of exciting sport."

"Well, I guess I'll hand it to little old England!" said Lord Edgemore heartily. "I reckoned that there wasn't any real sport in this country. But wolves! Say, Skeets, I'm all excited over this!"

"Think it'll be safe to go, pop?" asked Skeets breathlessly.

"I'm not afraid of any darned wolves—and neither are you," replied his father. "We'll go on this hunt, son."

The schoolboys could hardly contain themselves. The trick was done! The bait had been swallowed, hook, line and sinker! Lord Edgemore and Skeets were fooled up to the eyes!

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast brisk preparations were made for the day's business. The Scouts got ready for their hike. The various patrols trundled out their trucks and made certain that all their camping equipment was packed. Lord Edgemore and Skeets, with packs on their shoulders and with guns ready, decided to set out at once.

"Between Ourselves!"

The first of Edwy Searles Brooks' breezy chats with readers of the Nelson Lee appears in this issue on Page 40.

"No need to wait for us, sir—we're going in a different direction, anyhow," said Nipper cheerfully. "Hope you have a good day's sport, Skeets!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Kill as many wolves as you can!"

They were all out of doors now, and the castle was locked up. The Scouts set off on their hike, and Lord Edgemore and his son set off on their fools' errand, followed by rousing cheers.

It was not until the pair had got quite out of earshot that the Removites gave vent to their hilarity.

"I can't believe it!" gasped K. K., holding his sides. "Ye gods and little fishes! Wolves—in England—on Bannington Moor! Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've never seen a man so eager in all my life!" chuckled Handforth. "But you can understand it. Ever since the earl has been here he's pined for some real hunting. Potting at rabbits isn't real sport to a man like that. He jumped at this chance as a drowning man clutches at a giddy straw!"

"Well done, Travers, old man!" said Nipper, patting Travers on the shoulder. "Everybody forgot All Fools' Day except you."

"My wheeze," said Travers, grinning, "is to go for our hike to Caistowe, and then we'll have our bathe. After that, we'll set off across the moor and come up with Skeets and his pater about midday. We'll have our yell of laughter, and then we'll all camp together for a feed. How's that?"

"Jolly good!"

"First rate!"

So it was agreed, and the Scouts set off on their hike in high spirits. Everybody declared that the wheeze was a corker.

Meanwhile the fooled pair were making for the moor.

"Mighty queer, Skeets, that we've heard nothing about these wolves until now," remarked Lord Edgemore thoughtfully.

There was still a lurking doubt at the back of his mind, and Skeets, too, found it difficult to believe in those "savage brutes" which were reputed to roam the moorland wastes.

"Mebbe the fellers didn't like to tell us, pop," said the young viscount. "I'm figuring that the folks around these parts don't exactly boast of their wolves."

"There's something in that," admitted his father. "But it's a big surprise to me to learn that wolves can still live in a country like England. Russia, yes! Even Canada. Say, Skeets, do you think those youngsters were spinning us a fool yarn?"

"Why should they, pop?" protested Skeets. "I guess there'd be no sense in that. You've got to remember that Bannington Moor is one of the wildest tracts of country——"

He broke off as they were passing through a heavily-wooded belt on the farther side of the park. Just beyond, the moor started, stretching away in desolate undulations.

"What's wrong, son?" asked the earl, glancing at the boy.

"I guess there's somebody hiding against those bushes, pop," murmured Skeets, with a little nod of his head. "We'd better see who it is, eh? This is still our private property, isn't it?"

Skeets had not been brought up in the Canadian backwoods without acquiring an expert knowledge of woodcraft. Although the movement in those bushes had been slight, he had instantly detected it. The pair altered their direction, and suddenly they came upon a man who was obviously trying to conceal himself. He stood back, dismayed, now that he was found.

"Well, young feller, what's the idea?" asked Lord Edgemore sternly. "Don't you know that this is private property?"

"Yes, my lord," muttered the man. "I—I was only cutting across the park to the lane, my lord. Didn't mean no harm."

The fellow was well dressed, and there was that indefinable air about him which stamped him as an indoor manservant. Lord Edgemore regarded him closely.

"Haven't I seen you before?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord. I was head footman at the castle before you came."

"That's right, pop!" said Skeets. "I recognise him, too."

Neither of them liked the look of the fellow. There was a surly, hangdog expression about him. His eyes were shifty, and his whole manner was unpleasing.

"I guess you're feeling pretty sore at me, eh?" asked the earl quietly.

"Sore, my lord? No, my lord, of course not!"

"What's your name?"

"Leach, my lord."

"Not so much of this 'my lord' after every other word," growled the rancher-earl. "I've heard that some of you men took your dismissal pretty badly."

"Not me, my lord," said Leach quickly. "Mr. Bodkin, the butler, was kind enough to give me a good reference, and I shall soon be in another job."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," said Lord Edgemore, nodding.

"Being so used to crossing the park, my lord, I did so to-day without thinking," went on the ex-footman. "Very sorry, my lord; it won't happen again."

Lord Edgemore grunted. He didn't like the man's obsequious tone, and there was something guilty-looking about him, too. Leach was almost trembling, as though he had been caught red-handed at some under-hand game. Perhaps he had been poaching.

"We'll be getting along, Skeets," said Lord Edgemore bluntly. "All right, Leach; I'll say nothing about it this time."

"Thank you, my lord."

"Oh, by the way," went on his lordship, "you're a native of these parts, aren't you?"

"Yes, my lord."



Followed by rousing cheers from the St. Frank's Scouts, Lord Edgemore and Skeets, little realising that they were the victims of an April the First joke, set out for Bannington Moor—to shoot wolves!



"Know the neighbourhood inside out, eh?"

"Well, I was born and bred and brought up in these parts, my lord."

"Maybe you can tell us where we're most likely to come across a pack of these wolves," said Lord Edgemore. "I guess you know the moor as well as any other man."

"Wolves, my lord?" ejaculated Leach, staring.

He was not a dullard. Not long since, before dodging across to this part of the park, he had heard the St. Frank's Removites yelling with laughter over some joke. He had even caught the words "All Fools' Day," and had then known that the boys had been playing a First of April trick on somebody.

"See here, Leach," said Lord Edgemore suddenly. "These schoolboys tell us that there are wolves to be found on Bannington

Moor. My son and myself are going out now to do a bit of shooting."

"I—I understand, my lord," said Leach.

"Ever seen any of these wolves yourself?" demanded the earl abruptly.

"Why, yes," replied Leach, with a queer light in his eyes. "Wolves, my lord? Wolves on the moor? Everybody knows about them, my lord."

The earl, who had been rather expecting a different reply, looked at the man closely. But Leach only appeared to be excited and flushed—which was a not unnatural condition upon hearing such news.

Actually, the ex-footman had decided, on the spur of the moment, to agree with this fantastic wolf story. An idea had occurred to him—vague and elusive at the moment, but it was at the back of his mind. For one moment, he had thought of giving Lord Edgemore the tip—saying straight out that

the boys were playing an April Fool joke. But why should he? He hated Lord Edgemore, because Lord Edgemore had thrown him out of his job. If he was fool enough to go looking for wolves on the moor, let him!

And there was something else—there was that elusive idea which lurked at the back of his mind.

"On what part of the moor are these wolves to be found?" asked the rancher-earl.

"Mostly towards the middle, my lord, where it's the wildest," replied Leach quickly. "There's a deal of rough, scraggy kind of woodland out there, and the wolves get hidden up amongst the rocks and bushes. Folks about here daren't cross the moor after dark—and not many of 'em would go off the road, even in daylight. They don't attack human beings as a rule, but there's never no telling with such animals. Look here, my lord."

He walked to the top of a hillock, and pointed. From this spot a wide expanse of the moor was in view, and Skeets and his father joined Leach, and followed the direction of his pointing finger.

"See that rugged little hill sticking out, about three miles away, my lord?" asked Leach.

"Yes."

"Well, there's a road skirting that hill; but beyond, on the other side of the road, there's nothing but a waste of barren land, my lord," said Leach. "It stretches for some miles, until you come across another road."

"I get you."

"That stretch of moor in between is rare dangerous, my lord," said Leach earnestly. "That's where the wolves are, mostly. Mebbe you won't find any for some hours. But they're there all right—hungry, vicious beasts. I've seen 'em from a distance, but, like most of the other people in these parts, I steer well clear of 'em."

"Thank you, Leach," said Lord Edgemore, giving the man half a crown. "Your information has been very useful, I guess. Come along, Skeets—we'll get going."

"Much obliged, my lord," said Leach respectfully.

The pair went off, the last of Lord Edgemore's doubts gone. He had rather discounted the stories that the schoolboys had told him, thinking, perhaps, that they were just foolish, exaggerated country tales. But here was the corroboration of this man—a native; and there had been nothing indefinite about Leach's statements.

"Skeets, boy, we're going to have some sport to-day," said the earl heartily. "I was kinda figuring that the wolves were a myth."

"Gee, pop, I'm all excited!" said Skeets breathlessly.

They plodded on to the moor, eager for their sport—unsuspicious of the jape that had been played upon them, and equally unsuspicious of the murderous plan that was taking shape in John Leach's evil mind!

CHAPTER 3.

The Plotters!

MR. STEPHEN GATFIELD, private secretary to Mr. Mortimer Carroll, millionaire, frowned angrily as John Leach stood before him.

"Didn't I tell you, Leach, not to come to me at this hotel?" he asked harshly. "Do you want people to start talking? We mustn't be known to one another——"

"It's all right, sir," panted Leach. "I made out to the clerk that I didn't know you, and that I had come after a job. Nobody won't think anything."

"That's all very well, but we can't be too careful," replied Gatfield. "What's the matter with you? What's happened? If you're getting into a panic again——"

"No, sir," broke in Leach. "I ain't in any panic now. There's a chance for us, sir—one that won't never come again."

The man had ridden full pelt from Edgemore on his bicycle, and now that he had arrived he was streaming with perspiration. He had come straight to the Grapes Hotel in Bannington, where Mr. Gatfield was staying.

"Sit down, Leach, and don't talk so loudly," said the private secretary. "Here, take this."

He poured out a drink, and handed it to the man. Leach gulped it down, Gatfield watching him narrowly as he did so.

There was an understanding between these two. They had plotted together previously, and so deeply were they involved that they had no secrets.

Mr. Mortimer Carroll was a distant relative of Lord Edgemore's; and if the earl and his son were unfortunately disposed of, the earldom would go to Mr. Carroll. Even now Mr. Carroll was bringing a case in the High Courts, claiming that the earldom was rightfully his, although there was very little chance that the decision would go in his favour.

But if Lord Edgemore and Viscount Bell-ton were to be killed "accidentally," then there would be no doubt whatever in the issue. Carroll would succeed to the title and estates as a matter of course.

It was Stephen Gatfield who had conceived this rascally idea. Gatfield had been Mr. Carroll's private secretary for years, and he knew much more about Mr. Carroll's private affairs than Mr. Carroll liked. In fact, Gatfield had been blackmailing his employer for years.

Now, with this chance in front of him, Gatfield was going all out for a fortune. For if the murderous plan succeeded, he would receive a sum of twenty thousand pounds from Carroll. But as Gatfield had told himself, this was merely the beginning; he would have a hold over the new Lord Edgemore which would endure for life.

Stephen Gatfield was cunning, however; he had no desire to implicate himself in this murder plot. Hence his employment of a tool—John Leach.

Leach was the very man. Ever since his dismissal from the castle, he had been going about Bannington uttering wild and foolish threats against Lord Edgemore. So, if Lord Edgemore died, and any question arose as to the "accidental" nature of his death, Leach would be the first to fall under suspicion. If there was any hint of foul play, Leach would be "for it."

Quite recently, just before the Easter holidays, the first attempt had been made. Lord Edgemore and his son, exploring the castle dungeons, had found themselves mysteriously locked in. Then the dungeon had become flooded, and only the heroic efforts of the St. Frank's fellows had saved them from a terrible death.

The earl regarded the whole affair as an accident. But at least two St. Frank's fellows — Nipper and Vivian Travers—had their secret suspicions. They were now well on the alert, although they had said nothing to any of the other Removites.

"I've just come from the castle, sir," said Leach eagerly. And he explained how he had been caught on the estate by Lord Edgemore.

"You fool!" said Gatfield angrily. "Didn't I tell you to be careful? There are bound to be suspicions if you are seen lurking about the park. There'll be talk afterwards——"

"But you ain't heard everything, sir!" interrupted Leach. "I found that Lord Edgemore and his son was going on to the moor, after wolves."

"After what?"

"Wolves, sir."

Mr. Gatfield refused to believe it.

"I know that this precious pair from Canada are pretty raw," he said, "but you're not going to tell me, Leach, that they're childish enough to go on to Bannington Moor expecting to find wolves. The thing's absurd!"

"That's what I thought at first, sir," agreed Leach. "But you've got to remember that Lord Edgemore and this boy is new to England. An' they've been kidded, too—kidded by them St. Frank's boys."

Leach went on to explain his idea of what had been happening—which, of course, was a bullseye.

"Oh!" said Gatfield slowly. "That's different, of course. By gad! And these two have really gone on to the moor, looking for wolves? Well I'm hanged!"

He broke into a roar of contemptuous laughter.

"Very funny, Leach, but that was no reason for you to come to me openly like this, in the middle of the morning," he

went on, changing his manner. "We can't do anything to-day. We must be patient; we must await an opportunity——"

"But it's come, sir!" broke in Leach. "Lumme, I ain't keen on this job at all—but you've promised me a couple of thousand quid, an' I'm with you. I shall get my own back on that old rotter, too!"

"Look here, Leach, you'll leave the thinking to me," said Mr. Gatfield curtly. "When I want you, I'll let you know. I don't want any of your ideas or suggestions."

"Hold on, sir," said Leach truculently. "Mighty clever, ain't you? But two heads is always better than one."

"And I don't want any insolence, Leach!" snapped Gatfield.

"Oh, come off it, guv'nor!" said the ex-footman. "Here am I, with a first-rate idea, and you won't even listen to it! Don't you understand that them fools have gone right out on to the moor?"

"What about it?"

"By themselves—a lone!" continued Leach, dropping his voice. "And they ain't never been on the moor before, sir! You may not know the moor, but I do! It's a rare bad place for people to wander over when they don't know the ground."

Something in his tone

made Gatfield stare.

"What are you getting at?" he demanded. "Out with it!"

"There's bogs, sir," whispered Leach.

"Bogs!"

"Not one, but five or six!" continued Leach. "I know 'em—an' I know that some of 'em can't be told from the safe ground. They all look alike—until you're in 'em! When I was a kid, I used to go out on the moor hundreds o' times, an' I know every inch of the ground. I wouldn't never get trapped in a bog. But supposin' these 'ere strangers was to fall into one—by accident?"

Stephen Gatfield gave his companion a hard look.

"There may be something in the idea," he said slowly.

"It's a cert!" protested Leach. "Here's these two on the moor, and they don't know a yard of it! Why, Mr. Gatfield, sir, if they was to get swallowed up, who would dream that it was anything but an unfortunate accident? Don't you see? All because of that crazy April Fool joke!"

"Gad, Leach, I believe you're right," said Gatfield tensely. "If any blame fell upon anybody, those boys would get it!"

"That's just the thing I've been trying to tell you, sir!" urged Leach.

Gatfield paced up and down.

Great News, Chums!

Double-length St. Frank's yarns will commence in a fortnight's time, with a magnificent new series of stories introducing many old favourite characters. Full details next week.

Look Out For A Grand Surprise.

"We must act at once, then," he said, almost feverishly. "It's no good leaving a thing like this to chance, Leach. Those two might go all day without striking a patch of bog."

"But if we was to be there, sir?" asked Leach cunningly. "Get me, gov'nor? If we was to work things so that them fools walked right into one of the worst of the bogs?"

Gatfield almost turned pale.

"You're a more complete rogue than I thought you to be, Leach," he said, looking at the man with new interest. "We shall have to be careful over this. In open daylight, and——"

"On the moor there ain't a chance of us bein' spotted by anybody," broke in Leach. "And supposin' we was? Can't we work it so that it looks accidental?"

Gatfield suddenly made up his mind.

"You're absolutely sure that you know where these bogs are to be found?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, sir!"

"Then come with me," said Gatfield, moving towards the door. "No! You go first. Take care to grumble to the lift attendant as you go down that I'm a wash-out—that I didn't have a job for you after all. Walk straight out of the town, and I'll pick you up with my car out on the country road. Do you understand all that?"

"Yes, sir," said Leach eagerly.

A moment later he had gone, and Stephen Gatfield, still pacing up and down, began to work out the details of this ugly plot.

CHAPTER 4.

K. K. Gets Stuck!

"BURRRRRRRH!"

Church, with chattering teeth, gave vent to that remarkable sound.

He was on the beach at Caistowe, and he had just allowed a wave to break over his bare feet.



THRILLS!

**Book-Length
Yarns of SEXTON
BLAKE for
4d. ONLY!**

No. 277—THE YELLOW SKULL

A gripping novel of detective adventure in China.

By G. H. Teed.

No. 278—THE HOODED RAIDER

A powerful story of crime and intrigue.

By Donald Stuart.

No. 279—THE SECRET OF THE SANATORIUM

A sensational drama of plotting and thrills.

By Coutts Brisbane.

No. 280—MURDER ON THE MARSHES

A baffling narrative of amazing mystery.

By Gilbert Chester.

SEXTON BLAKE Library

Now on Sale - - - - - 4d. each

"What's the matter, fathead?" asked Handforth, who hadn't yet tested the water. "What are you making that noise for?"

"I'm thinking that we ought to leave bathing until the summer-time," said Church, shivering. "My only hat! This water is as cold as the giddy Arctic!"

Most of the St. Frank's fellows, in bathing costumes, were about to plunge in for their dip. It was gloriously warm in the sunshine, and the front at Caistowe was looking its best. Holiday-makers were there in plenty, and a few people were bathing with apparent enjoyment.

"It's no good dipping your feet in and then shivering!" scoffed Handforth. "The best way is to plunge straight in and take a header. Watch me!"

Church and McClure watched; and so did a number of other fellows. Edward Oswald Handforth, taking a deep breath, ran into a breaking wave, dived, and a terrific gulp escaped him. The water felt exactly like liquid ice.

"By George!" gurgled Handforth, coming to the surface. "It is a bit cuc-cuc-cold!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Still, I'm a Scout!" went on Handforth, with an effort. "I'll do my good deed for the day."

He grabbed at Church, and obtained a firm hold.

"Hi!" howled Church. "What the dickens—— Leggo! Now, Handy, be sensible——"

Splash!

Church went under with a shriek of dismay, which changed to a watery gurgle. But he was really all the better for it, for once under, and having swum for a bit, the water lost all its terrors. Very soon all the Scouts were swimming strongly.

The tide was ebbing, and some little distance from the shore a sandbank was appearing, washed only by an occasional ripple of water.

"I'll race you chaps to that sandbank out there!" said Handforth boisterously. "Come on! Who's game?"

"Better go easy, Handy!" advised Church. "That sandbank is farther off than it looks."

"Think I can't swim it, ass?"

"You might get cramp in this cold water——"

"I might be grabbed by a shark!" said Handforth sarcastically. "Caistowe Bay is infested with sharks—just as Bannington Moor is overrun with savage wolves!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wonder how Skeets and his pater are getting on?" grinned K. K. "They'll be lucky if they land a badger!"

"I can just picture them wandering about, their guns ready, looking for the giddy wolves!" chuckled Deeks. "Oh, my hat! What a lark! And won't they just go for us when we turn up and tell 'em how they've been fooled!"

"They're sports—they'll laugh with the rest of us," said Handforth. "Well, what about this swim? Will anybody take the challenge?"

Parkington and Deeks and Reggie Pitt and one or two others accepted the challenge, and soon they were swimming strongly out towards the sandbank. K. K. swam manfully, and he was the first to arrive—much to Handforth's astonishment and indignation. Parkington stood on the wet sand, his limbs glistening in the sunshine, his face alight with amusement.

"Come on, Handy!" he encouraged. "What's the matter with you? Who told you that you can swim?"

Even while speaking, K. K. glanced down at his feet. He experienced a sensation as though he were standing upon a spring mattress. The sands beneath him were quivering and quaking, and when he tried to lift one of his feet he found that the effort was too much for him. He had sunk in until the sand was well over his ankles.

"Hallo!" he sang out, grinning. "I'm stuck!"

He tried harder, putting all his weight on to his left foot in order to free his right. The result was startling. His left leg sank in deeply, and it felt to Kirby Keeble Parkington as though some hidden hand, far beneath the sand, had gripped him by the ankle and was pulling.

"Hi!" he ejaculated protestingly, but without alarm. "My giddy aunt! What's happening? Lend us a hand out of here, you chaps. I'm sinking right in. Silly business!"

He floundered helplessly, and when Handforth and Nipper and Deeks and Travers grasped him, they found that their task was not so simple as it looked.

"Easy, sweethearts—easy!" urged K. K. "You'll pull my giddy arms out of their sockets! Whoa! Not so much of the rough stuff!"

He was still floundering, and the more he floundered the deeper he sank into the quicksand. There was no need for alarm, however, for Parkington had plenty of helpers at hand. By dint of steady pulling and easing they at last tore him from the grip of the sandy quagmire.

"Phew! That was a bit nasty," said the victim, when he was in the water again. "A good thing you chaps were handy. Let's get back to the beach."

A change came over Nipper while they were swimming. A good deal of the cheerfulness had gone out of his expression; in fact, an anxious light was now in his eyes.

"We've had enough of this," he said bluntly as they all ran up the beach. "Let's get dressed as quickly as we can."

"Rats!" protested Handforth. "I'm not feeling cold yet!"

"Never mind—come and get dressed," said Nipper. "It's important."

Most of the Scouts were ready enough to "call it a day." They had had their swim, and they were satisfied. Even Handforth felt.

as he rubbed himself down, that sea bathing at the beginning of April was a joy to be taken in small doses.

"What was the hurry?" asked the burly patrol leader of the Tiger Patrol, when all the Scouts collected together after dressing.

"I thought of something," said Nipper, looking worried.

"Grub? It's hardly time for grub yet——"

"Not grub," interrupted Nipper. "I'm thinking of Skeets and his pater."

"No need to look worried over them," grinned Handforth. "They're still on that fools' errand, and I'll bet they're getting a bit sick of searching the moor for wolves."

A chuckle went round, but Nipper did not join in it.

"The joke was all right—a thoroughly good First of April stunt," said the Remove skipper. "But when I saw K. K. in that quicksand, I got a bit of a jolt. Something occurred to me which we ought to have thought of before."

"He's talking in riddles," said Handforth, scratching his head. "What the dickens is the connection between K. K. in a quicksand and Skeets and his father looking for wolves that don't exist?"

"There's this connection," replied Nipper. "You won't find quicksands on Bannington Moor—but you'll find bogs!"

"Bogs!" went up a chorus.

"Beastly, treacherous, death-trap bogs!" said Nipper. "And don't forget that Lord Edgemore and Skeets are new to the moor. They might easily get caught in one."

"Good gad!"

"I say, this is pretty serious!"

"Nipper's right—we ought to buzz off at once!"

"Hear, hear!"

Even Handforth, who usually objected to everything, had no objections to make to this suggestion. None of the fellows believed that the victims of their little joke were in any real danger; but, at the same time, a doubt was troubling them.

CHAPTER 5.

The Men on the Moor!

A TWO-SEATER car, with stationary engine, stood on the lonely road which bordered the moor. There were fields and woods and meadows on one hand, and the desolate expanse of the moor on the other. Mr. Stephen Gatfield and John Leach were on the edge of the great wasteland. At the moment, Gatfield was perched high on a hilltop near by, armed with powerful binoculars.

He shivered as he took a look at that gloomy scene—gloomy in spite of the sunshine which swept it, in spite of the blue skies overhead. There was something depressing, even sinister, about the moor.

A chill wind was sweeping from it, and it was this, perhaps, which caused Gatfield

to shiver. From this rise, he could see the huge, dreary expanse, mottled with gnarled and craggy hills and hummocks, with an occasional patch of ragged-looking, wind-swept trees. There were little hills and valleys, and an apparently illimitable expanse of gorse-land. The moor road could be seen winding its way into the distance, and here and there were rough tracks. A great gash denoted the deserted quarries, fairly close at hand.

"A fitting spot," muttered Gatfield, under his breath.

He realised that there was no certainty of success. Before anything could be attempted, the Earl of Edgemore and his son had to be located. And that might not be easy. They were somewhere out there, amid the boulders and craggy hills and wastes of gorse and shallow valleys.

Carefully putting the binoculars to his eyes, Gatfield commenced a slow, systematic search. He met with success after ten minutes. During this time, he had searched methodically and carefully. Not a sign of life had he seen—until now.

Through his binoculars—far, far away—he glimpsed two figures emerging from a gully, or cleft, in the moor. They were coming out into the open, walking slowly. At such a distance, it was impossible to recognise them. But it seemed to him that one was considerably smaller than the other—and who else but Lord Edgemore and his son would be on the moor?

With great care, Gatfield marked the spot; he memorised a jutting hill to the west, and a clump of trees a little farther to the north. The moorland road, he found, meandered fairly close to the spot where the two figures were walking.

"Any luck, sir?" asked Leach, when Gatfield joined him two minutes later.

"I've seen them," replied Gatfield. "Get into the car, Leach. What happens after this must largely depend upon you."

"Your idea is to trick them into walking into a bog without knowing it, sir!" said Leach. "If you ask me, I ain't sure that it'll succeed. Where's the sense of bein' half-hearted like that?"

"At all costs, Leach, this affair must appear accidental," replied the other grimly. "Even if we are compelled to show ourselves to Lord Edgemore, we must still appear in the light of harmless travellers. You understand? There is always the possibility that something might go amiss. We are taking no risks, Leach—none whatever!"

They drove off, and were soon bowling along the stony, ill-kept road.

SKEETS ROSSITER, otherwise Viscount Bellton, removed his cap, looked round helplessly, and scratched his head.

"Beats me, pop," he said. "We've been going for over three hours, and the only durned things we've seen with four legs have been rabbits!"



"I'm a Boy Scout, and this is my day's good turn," said Handforth breezily, as he proceeded to throw Church into the icy cold water.

"I'm beginning to wonder about those wolves," said Lord Edgemore thoughtfully. "I guess I was doubtful about them at the start, but everybody was so durned certain—Hullo! What's wrong, son?"

Skeets was looking startled. A flush had come into his face, and his eyes were wide open. He and his father were standing on a little hillock, where they could see for miles across the moor in every direction. But Skeets was not interested in the moor. He looked at his father excitedly.

"Gosh darn it! Don't you know what to-day is, pop?"

"Wednesday, I guess."

"No, not the day of the week—the date!"

"Say, Skeets, pipe down!" said the earl.

"What's biting you, anyway?"

"Nothing's biting me, pop—but to-day is the first of the month," said Skeets dismally.

"I don't see—April!" ejaculated the Earl of Edgemore. "Gee, Skeets! You mean it's the First of April!"

"Sure, pop!"

"And those darned boys——"

The earl broke off and went into a roar of unrestrained laughter. Skeets stared at him for a moment, and then joined in. The next moment they were both shouting with merriment.

"We've sure got to hand it to those school friends of yours, Skeets!" panted Lord Edgemore at length. "Jumping snakes, they've sure made suckers out of us!"

They roared again.

"Wolves!" gurgled Skeets. "Say, can you beat it, pop? And we fell for it like a couple of tenderfeet!"

"The joke's on us, son—and it's a good joke!" chuckled his lordship. "Say, I take off my hat to those kids!"

Many men, in a similar position, might have been furious—for it is not everybody who can see the point of a joke, especially when the joke is against themselves. But Lord Edgemore was a sportsman, every inch of him, and he felt no animosity towards the schoolboys for what they had done.

"Now that we know the truth, Skeets, we can remember all sorts of things that might have given us the tip," smiled the rancher-earl. "But the boys did it so well that they had me on their string. Well, I guess it's up to us to hike off home and look foolish when those boys get around."

"Funny, though, why that man should have told the same story about the wolves," said Skeets.

"Yes, I can't quite figure that out," admitted Lord Edgemore. "Come to think of it, though, he was a bit startled when we first mentioned wolves, wasn't he? Then he suddenly seemed to get wise. I guess he jumped to the game, Skeets, and thought it best to keep it up. Say," he added suddenly, "I'm beginning to wonder if those boys didn't send him deliberately—just as a part of the joke!"

"I'll bet you've hit it, pop!" grinned Skeets. "We've sure been fooled up to the eyebrows!"

Again and again they burst into laughter as they walked off briskly across the moor.

"Hullo! There's a car over there, pop!" exclaimed Skeets suddenly. "Maybe we can get a lift!"

They both paused, shading their eyes from the sun. A considerable distance off, apparently driving along one of the moorland tracks, a car could be seen. It was not coming directly towards them, but slantwise, and, unless they altered their own course, would miss them altogether.

"I guess our legs are good enough for us, Skeets," said Lord Edgemore, smiling. "We hiked out here, and we'll hike back. Those boys will laugh quite enough—without us giving them the additional laugh of having to ride home."

"Guess you're right," admitted Skeets.

They continued walking, and occasionally Skeets turned his head to glance at the distant car. It was not so distant now, and they could even hear the humming of the engine, borne on the breeze. Skeets happened to glance round again, and as he did so he saw the car give a sudden lurch. It swung round, sagged badly to starboard, and came to a sudden halt.

"Gee! Those folks are in trouble, by the look of it," said Skeets, halting.

Lord Edgemore could see somebody climbing out of the car and walking round to the rear. Another man followed. Both stood still, as though inspecting some damage.

"Puncture, I guess," said the earl. "Well, we'll not be needed for that, Skeets. Most cars carry spare wheels, and if two men can't change a wheel, they shouldn't be on the road. Let's keep going, son."

CHAPTER 6.

The Trap!

STEPHEN GATFIELD, while pretending to concentrate his attention on the car, was actually taking a swift, comprehensive look round the moor. Not a living soul was in sight—except those two figures only a short distance away.

"You'd best be quick, sir!" panted Leach nervously. "You can't go wrong. Keep by that little clump of rock, and then down into the hollow on the right-hand side of the spinney. The bog's beyond—one of the worst bogs on the whole moor. Couldn't have been better, sir, not if it had all been arranged."

"Luck is with us, then," said Gatfield tensely. "You're sure of this, Leach—absolutely sure?"

"I ought to be sure—I know the moor like a book."

"Everything depends on this," went on Gatfield. "We must succeed, Leach—we must! Failure now would be disastrous. For in order to put this thing through I shall have to show myself openly. And that's dangerous."

"Not if these two never appear again, sir," breathed Leach.

"That's where we make ourselves safe," replied Gatfield. "But, by thunder, if you have made a mistake about this, I'll half kill you! We can't afford to blunder! You'd better come with me——"

A Staff of Expert Contributors

is at your service if you read POPULAR WIRELESS. Week by week they will give you particulars of the newest and latest developments in the world of Radio.

If you are not getting the fullest possible satisfaction from your set, POPULAR WIRELESS will probably put you right. If you can't get as many foreign stations as the chap next door—again, "P.W." will put you right.

Place a regular order with your Newsagent right away.

POPULAR WIRELESS

Buy a Copy To-day - - - - - 3d.

"No, guv'nor!" broke in Leach. "I daren't! Lord Edgemore knows me, and he might think it queer, especially after meeting him this morning. He don't know you."

"Yes, you're right," said Gatfield. "Well, wait here!"

He ran quickly over the moor in the direction of the distant figures.

"**H**OLD on, pop!" said Skeets. "One of those men is coming in our direction, I think—running, too. I guess they need help after all."

The earl paused and watched. It was true enough. A figure was running across the moor, waving occasionally, and it was clear that he was attempting to attract the attention of Lord Edgemore and his son.

"We'd better go and meet him," said the earl.

They walked in the direction of the approaching man, picking their way with care; for the moor hereabouts was of an uncertain character. Only at close quarters did one find that the ground was not as solid as it seemed. A false step into an ordinary-looking mossy patch might mean sinking in as far as one's ankles. It was most difficult to tell where these treacherous swamps lay—although, generally, they were in the hollows.

"Go easy, son," advised the earl cautiously. "I don't like the look of the ground ahead. We'd best veer around this patch and make for the higher ground beyond."

"Seems all right, pop," said Skeets.

But the earl was careful. His morning on the moor had taught him to be so. More than once he and Skeets had found themselves walking on ground that quivered and quavered under their feet, which let them sink in over their ankles. They had backed out without difficulty, and had then kept their eyes open for such traps.

"I say!" came a hail from the running man.

Lord Edgemore, halting, gave an answering wave. It seemed to him that the ground between them and the stranger was by no means secure. There was a bit of a hollow, and although the surface was green and grassy, it somehow looked dangerous.

"All right!" sang out the earl. "We'll come around."

Gatfield was alarmed. He wanted nothing to go wrong with his diabolical scheme now. He had approached as near to the bog as he dared; even as he stood he could feel the apparently solid ground shivering beneath him.

"Most awfully sorry to bother you, sir, but can you lend us a hand?" he shouted urgently.

"That's all right!" yelled Skeets. "We're coming! What's the trouble—a puncture?"

"Oh, no!" replied Gatfield. "I was talking to my friend, and practically before I knew it the car was off the track, and she's got stuck in a soft patch. One of the rear wheels wants easing out, and the two of us

can't manage it. But if you gentlemen will lend a hand——"

"We'll come around by the rising ground," said Lord Edgemore, pointing.

"There's no need to go all that way, sir," said Gatfield. "It's nearly double the distance. You can come straight across."

"I guess you're a stranger on this moor?" asked Lord Edgemore dryly.

"Oh, no! I know every inch of it," replied Gatfield.

"Then you ought to know that some of these hollows are boggy and dangerous," replied the earl. "This patch in front of us looks ugly to me."

Gatfield laughed.

"My dear sir, I can assure you that it is perfectly sound," he replied. "These bogs are very tricky. The worst of them are those which appear solid ground. This piece here may look uncertain, but it is quite all right. Take my word for it, sir."

"Gee, pop, what if we do get our ankles wet?" asked Skeets in surprise. "We're not scared of a bog, are we?"

Against his better judgment, Lord Edgemore agreed. He was definitely suspicious of that hollow, but he did not want this stranger to think him squeamish. Besides, Skeets had already started. His father immediately followed, and soon they were plunging right into the hollow.

Gatfield watched them with burning eyes. Now that the actual moment had come, the man was trembling from head to foot with anxiety. So far, everything had been absurdly ridiculously simple. Was it possible that these two would fall into the trap?

They were on just that part of the moor which was best suited for Gatfield's grim purpose. If only they came on now and got so far that it was impossible to turn back——

"Easy, Skeets!" exclaimed Lord Edgemore in sudden alarm. "This ground is getting mighty bad. I was afraid—— Whoa, boy!"

Skeets, a little in advance, had suddenly plunged, and his left foot had sunk right in up to the knee. Endeavouring to extricate himself, his right leg went in in just the same way, and there was an expression of comic dismay on the boy's features.

"Gee! You were sure right, pop!" said Skeets.

"Don't struggle—don't try to get out," said his father. "I'll fix you, son."

Gatfield, his heart throbbing, watched the pair as they floundered.

"I say, sir, I'm terribly sorry about this!" he shouted, with deep concern in his voice. "I thought I knew every inch of this moor, and I could have sworn that this hollow was safe. I'm afraid you're getting yourselves into a pretty muddy state, and I feel that I'm to blame. You'll have to let me help you."

He pretended to advance—and actually did so far a yard or two, where the ground was fairly safe. Meanwhile, Lord Edgemore was far too occupied to take much notice of Gat-

field's words, for his own feet were sinking into the bog. He reached Skeets' side, and he gripped the boy. As he did so, he felt his feet sinking deeper and deeper in; and the ground for yards around seemed to quiver and shake like a great jelly.

"I guess this is my fault, pop," said Skeets remorsefully. "We're getting into an awful mess, and this mud clings so—it seems to drag us down!"

"Bogs are funny that way," said his father dryly. "But we'll make it."

He was very annoyed; and when he got out of the quagmire he fully intended giving this stranger a piece of his mind. But he blamed himself, too; he should not have allowed himself to be influenced. Right from the start, he had felt that this hollow was treacherous.

Not that Lord Edgemore had the slightest suspicion that he and Skeets were in any danger. At the worst he thought that they would get wet and muddy. As for the stranger deliberately enticing them into this bog, such a palpably absurd thought never crossed the earl's mind. From first to last, the incident appeared to be the result of a mere accident.

Gatfield, even now that he had come out into the open with his murder plot, was still on the safe side.

"I say, are you two stuck there?" he shouted anxiously. "I'll never forgive myself for telling you to come straight across. If I had thought there was any danger——"

"Danger?" broke in the earl, looking up.

His voice was sharp. Something in Gatfield's tone arrested his attention, and he was in time to see the tense, rigid attitude of the man; in time to see the flushed, gloating look on his face, the burning expression in his eyes.

Gatfield was some distance away, but the earl's eyesight was good. He missed none of those signs. And suddenly a suspicion came to him—vague and unbelievable at first. So much so, in fact, that he dismissed it on the instant. It was preposterous to imagine that this stranger could have deliberately lured them into the bog.

"Say, this is getting nasty, pop!" said Skeets, breathing hard. "I guess I can't get my legs free! This mud seems to be pulling me down——"

"Keep your head, young 'un," interrupted his father quietly. "The more you struggle the deeper you'll sink. We've got to take this easily. Out in Canada, we call these things muskegs, and I've come across one or two mighty unpleasant ones in my time. But this looks like beating them all."

He was attempting to drag himself back, for he knew that they were only just within the danger zone. A few yards away the ground was not so boggy, and if they could only reach it, they would be able to get back to safety.

But it was easier said than done.

The earl himself was in so far that the sticky, slimy quagmire had come up above his knees. And, although he was pulling

quietly and systematically, he felt that he was being dragged inexorably down—deeper and deeper. It felt exactly as though some unseen monster, in the heart of the bog, had gripped him by the feet, and was pulling.

"I guess you were right, stranger, when you mentioned danger!" exclaimed the earl, looking across at Gatfield again. "You'd best hustle some, and see what you can do."

Gatfield, who had been taking a look round the moor, and who was relieved to find that the only other human being in sight was John Leach, gave his attention to the struggling pair.

"This is awfully rotten, sir!" he shouted concernedly. "I was an absolute fool to tell you to cross this hollow. But the last time I was here it was quite safe. I suppose these recent rains——"

"You might do something, instead of talking," interrupted the earl.

"Oh, yes, of course!" said Gatfield hastily. "As soon as you can get out, I shall be only too glad to give you a lift in my car, and take you wherever you want to go."

"I don't think we can get out unless we have help," said the rancher-earl grimly. "The sooner you understand that, sir, the better. This bog has got us; it's dragging us deeper and deeper down."

"Oh, I say, not really!" ejaculated Gatfield in assumed astonishment. "If you only try hard enough, you'll soon get yourselves free."

He was deliberately taking a light view of the situation—as though he had no real idea of its actual peril.

"I tell you we can't get out, unless you help us!" insisted Lord Edgemore. "Have you any rope in your car? You and your friend had better make it snappy! While you're wasting time, looking at us, the position is getting worse!"

"No need to get excited, sir," said Gatfield reproachfully. "That's where we English score over you Americans—we keep our heads. You are an American, aren't you?"

"I am not. I am the Earl of Edgemore, and this is my son, Viscount Bellton."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Gatfield in apparent amazement. "Well, I'm hanged. I've heard about you, sir, but it never occurred to me——"

"Does it occur to you to get into some sort of action?" demanded Lord Edgemore angrily. "Can't you see that we're bogged—owing to your blundering advice? Confound it, man, have you no sense?"

An expression of horror came into Gatfield's eyes.

"Good heavens! You don't really mean, Lord Edgemore, that you and your son are in real peril?" he gasped frantically. "And it's my fault—my fault! Oh, this is terrible! What can I do?"

He gave a very fair imitation of getting into a panic.



Skeets took a step forward—and his leg sank knee-deep into thick, slimy mud. He felt himself being sucked downwards—relentlessly.

"Keep your head, for one thing," commanded the earl. "Get back to your car and see if you have any rope—or anything that will serve as a rope. Bring your friend back with you, and——"

"Yes, yes, of course!" shouted Gatfield desperately. "I'll go! Hold tight, both of you, and I'll soon have you out of this mess!"

He turned on his heel, floundering a bit in the edge of the bog, and ran off. Mr. Stephen Gatfield rather prided himself upon his masterly acting.

CHAPTER 7.

The Dread Truth!

"**N**OT a sign of them!" said Handforth as he scanned the moor.

Crowds of other Scouts were peering in all directions. They were on one of the highest points, not far from the disused quarries, and in the clear sunshine of the April day they could see for miles. But in all that vista of wild, rugged moorland they saw no indication of human life.

Yet that dramatic scene, in which Gatfield was taking such a grim part, was not so far distant—concealed by a jutting bluff and a rugged, wind-swept spinney.

"Well, of course, it's quite possible that they twigged," said Kirby Keeble Parkington. "I dare say they've gone home, thoroughly fed up with the whole giddy business."

"Well, we mustn't chuck it up yet," argued Handforth. "It might be a good idea for us to spread out and go across the

moor in two or three parties. I'll take my Tigers in one direction, and the Lions and the Hawks and the Bears, and the others, can take different routes."

Nipper, the patrol leader of the Lions, was standing a little aside, and Vivian Travers was with him.

"You look troubled, Nipper, dear old fellow," murmured Travers.

"I am troubled—more uneasy than I can say," replied Nipper in a low voice. "I can't help thinking that there's something wrong, Travers."

"Well, well! It's wonderful how the imagination can get hold of a chap," said Travers dryly. "I'll bet you're thinking of that little incident at the castle, a few days ago?"

"Yes."

"Then forget it," advised Travers. "There can't have been any foul play to-day, dear old fellow. We only played an April Fool joke, and I don't see——"

"That's not the point," interrupted Nipper. "You and I, Travers, are the only chaps who suspected that there was something fishy about that other business—when Lord Edgemore and Skeets were nearly drowned in that dungeon. We found a rummy footprint—a footprint which we couldn't account for. And we had half an idea that some unauthorised person had got into the castle and deliberately shut those two into the dungeon."

"But, hang it, it was only a vague suspicion."

"And here, to-day, our silly joke has provided another opportunity for foul play," continued Nipper anxiously. "Oh, it's all very well to scoff, Travers, but think of the possibilities! This moor is full of bogs. If

there's anybody trying to murder Skeets and his father, it's a certainty that they're on the look-out—watching, waiting, for an opportunity. And could there be a better opportunity than this? Let's get on—let's spread out in all directions. We've got to find these two!"

Travers, catching a little of Nipper's alarm, nodded.

"Come on, then!" he said briskly.

"What are you two jawing about?" demanded Handforth, coming across to them. "And what are you looking so worried about, Nipper? Dash it, there's not one chance in a thousand that Skeets and his pater have really met with any trouble. I'll bet they're back at the castle now having a feed."

BUT Skeets and his father were fighting for their very lives.

Within a few minutes of Gatfield's departure—before Gatfield had reached the car, in fact—the pair had sunk to their waists, and now they ceased struggling. They found that struggling only made their position worse.

"This is tough, pop!" panted Skeets ruefully. "Gee! That guy ought to be shot for getting us into this mess!"

"Let's hope he has a rope in the car," said Lord Edgemore quietly.

He had already dismissed that first suspicion which had sprung into his mind; he had dismissed it as unthinkable. Perhaps it had been a trick of the sunlight which had

made it appear that Gatfield's expression had been one of gloating triumph. What possible reason could this stranger have for such an act of treachery?

Then another uncomfortable thought came into the earl's mind. He remembered that previous affair in the dungeon. The dungeon door had closed accidentally. But had it? In spite of his natural desire to dismiss this fantastic theory, Lord Edgemore found that it obtained a firmer grip upon him. However, not a word of his suspicions did he breathe to Skeets yet.

But Skeets was not such a dullard himself. He had had time to think now; and he suddenly pulled at his father's sleeve. When he spoke his voice was trembling.

"Pop! There's something on your mind," he said tensely. "Gee, pop, you're not figuring that there's something crooked in this, are you?"

"Crooked, son?" asked Lord Edgemore, with a laugh. "What on earth put such an idea into your head?"

"Aw, shucks! You can't put me off like that!" protested Skeets. "I can see that you are suspicious, pop!"

"I'm just trying to figure, why anybody should have a hankering to get us out of the way," said Lord Edgemore slowly.

The boy paled slightly.

"That dungeon, pop!" he whispered. "We thought that was an accident, didn't we? And now—another accident! Jumping



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along now. A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; pocket wallets, penknives and bumper books are also offered as prizes. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

VERY BRAVE!

Boy (who is accompanied by small brother, to dentist): "I want you to take a tooth out, an' I don't want gas 'cos I'm in a hurry."

Dentist: "That's a brave young man! Which tooth is it?"

Boy (to small brother): "Show him yer bad tooth, Billy."

(R. T. Lee, 2, Horton Street, Lincoln, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

IN THE DARK.

A motorist was taking a friend out in his small car. They were bowling along a country road when the friend suddenly noticed how dark it had become.

"I didn't know there was a tunnel along this road," he remarked.

"Tunnel fiddlesticks!" retorted the driver. "We're under a lorry."

(B. Watson, No. 50, Training Ship "Exmouth," off Grays, Essex, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

ANY COMPLAINTS?

"Any complaints, corporal?" asked the colonel.

"Yes, sir. Taste that, sir," replied the corporal promptly.

The colonel put the liquid to his lips.

"Why," he remarked, "that's the best soup I ever tasted."

"Yes, sir," retorted the corporal, "and the cook wants to call it coffee."

(E. Westlake, 9, The Bungalows, Streatham Road, Streatham, S.W.16, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

WISDOM.

Jock: "I am always ill the night before a journey."

Pat: "Then why don't ye travel a day earlier?"

(D. Macfarlane, 403, Church Street, Maritzburg, Natal, S. Africa, has been awarded a book.)

COULDN'T BE CAUGHT.

Teacher: "Tommy, what is two and two?"

Tommy: "Four, miss."

Teacher: "Now, what is two and six?"

Tommy (quickly): "Half a crown, miss."

(C. Marshall, Nottingham Road, Belper, Derbyshire, has been awarded a penknife.)

snakes! It would be a mighty queer coincidence——"

He broke off as his father uttered a low, angry exclamation. Lord Edgemore was looking intently across the moor. Gatfield had long since disappeared, for it was difficult to see very far out of that shallow hollow. But a sound had come to Lord Edgemore's ears—the starting of a motor-car's engine.

"They've got the car going, pop!" said Skeets breathlessly.

"Sure! I can hear."

"Then maybe we're wrong——"

"No, son, we're right!" interrupted the rancher-earl grimly.

"You mean——"

"I mean that we were lured into this bog deliberately."

"Gosh! But I don't see——"

"That feller came to us for help, saying that the car was ditched!" exclaimed Lord Edgemore fiercely. "Can't you figure it out, Skeets? Listen! That car's on the move now—proving that it was never ditched at all."

"Gee!"

"That means that it was all a trap, designed especially to fool us," went on the earl. "That's twice we've been fooled to-day. Skeets, to our ever-lasting shame. The first time it was only a boyish joke, and one that amused us. But this is somewhat different."

"That car's going—leaving us here!" panted Skeets, horrified. "And we're sinking

lower and lower every minute. Say, within half an hour we'll be under, pop. Can't we do something?"

He commenced struggling, but his father quickly gripped him.

"No, don't do that son!" advised the earl quietly. "That'll only make things worse. We'll take this gamely."

He caught a glimpse just then of the car. It was some distance away, and apparently driving along one of the rough moorland tracks. According to the direction it was taking, it would come comparatively near to this boggy hollow before it went off towards the main road.

"Quick, Skeets!" said the earl, an idea coming to him. "Hunch yourself down—flop on the bog as though you were unconscious."

"But, pop——"

"Don't ask questions—do as I say!" insisted his father. "I'll do the same."

A few seconds later they were both sprawling over, motionless, as though unconscious.

STEPHEN GATFIELD was possessed of an irresistible desire to get away from this scene—to put hundreds of miles between himself and the moor.

Yet, in spite of this desire, an impulse, even more irresistible, caused him to drive his car in this direction so that he could catch a glimpse of the hollow as he passed.

EXACTLY!

Editor: "Your story should be at least two hundred words shorter."

Aspiring Author: "Why, it' is only two hundred words long."

Editor: "That's just it!"

(*E. Nolan, 41, Walker Drive, Whetley Lane, Bradford, has been awarded a penknife.*)

WORTH LEARNING.

Uncle: "What have you learnt at school to-day, my boy?"

Boy: "How to fix the 'Nelson Lee' under the cover of my book without the master seeing it."

(*J. Swires, Whinbush, Summerbridge, Nr. Harrogate, has been awarded a penknife.*)

BACK TO FRONT.

Farmer: "Now, my lad, you've got that horse the wrong way in the shafts."

Mike: "Begorrah, and how do ye know which way Oi be going?"

(*Miss C. Morris, 2, Stephen Street, Barrow-in-Furness, has been awarded a book.*)

A HOME TRUTH.

"Disease always attacks the weakest spot, boys," remarked the teacher.

"Please, teacher, didn't you tell us yesterday that you had a cold in your head?" observed one bright pupil.

(*G. W. Croft, 111, Rushton Road, Desborough, Nr. Kettering, has been awarded a book.*)

A SPORTING OFFER.

Old Lady: "Will you two boys stop fighting and make friends if I give you sixpence each?"

The boys (together): "Make it a bob for the winner, mum."

(*C. Lucas, 29, Bendall Street, Lisson Grove, London, N.W.1, has been awarded a book.*)

GREAT GUNS.

Ship's cook: "Ever been on a ship before?"

New Assistant: "Sure, I was a gunner in the Navy."

Ship's Cook: "You're just the man I want. Come right in and shell the peas."

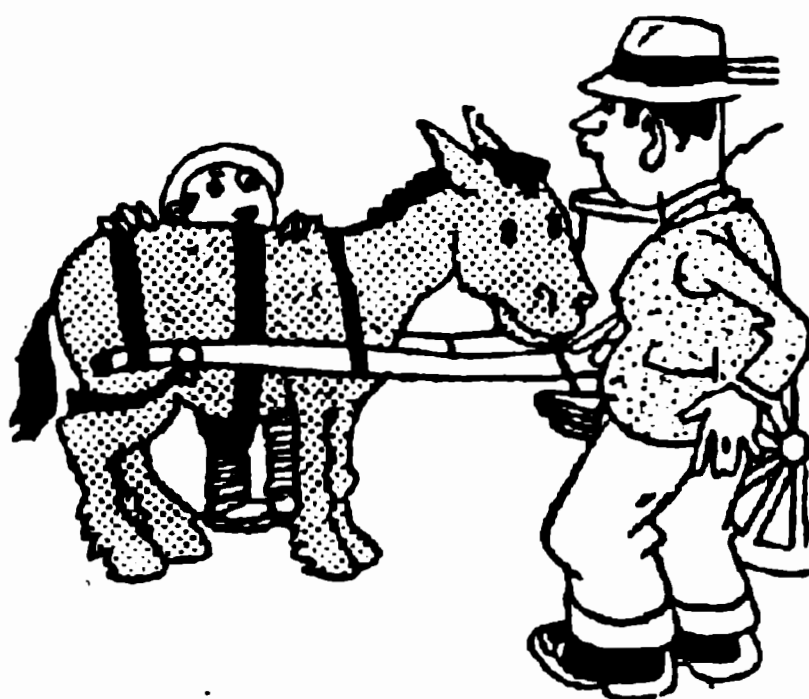
(*C. Otway, 16, Vernon Road, Roman Road, Bow, E.3, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)

MARVELLOUS.

First Boy: "My canary eats seed by the peck."

Second boy: "Pooh! That's nothing. My goldfish can swim round the globe in less than a minute."

(*A. Stephenson, 13, Ilron Road, Walthamstow, E.17, has been awarded a pocket wallet.*)



"You're mad, guv'nor!" gasped Leach, frantic. "They'll see us—"

"All the better!" snapped Gatfield. "We'll shout out to them as we pass, promising to fetch help. It'll look more genuine."

But as they approached they received a surprise. Their victims were sprawling over, motionless. The end had come far more quickly than Gatfield had supposed. Their struggles, no doubt, had exhausted them to such an extent that they had lost consciousness. Or perhaps there was something in the bog—some noxious gas, released by their struggles, which had robbed them of their senses.

Gatfield applied the brakes, stopped the car, and jumped out. Leach followed. Together they ran over the rough ground, dodging patches of gorse, leaping boulders. At last they approached the quagmire running down into the hollow. They halted comparatively near by, and Gatfield's face was flushed.

"Look, Leach!" he exclaimed tensely. "They're deeply in now—well past their waists. Within twenty minutes they'll be sucked right under!"

"Let's—let's get away, guv'nor!" shouted Leach. "I daren't look! They're—they're dead already, ain't they?"

"If not dead, next door to it!" gloated Gatfield. "And who's ever to know that it wasn't an accident? Look! The boy's hat is some yards away, and it will be found. The only clue! We're safe, Leach—we've done the job brilliantly!"

"I can't stand it!" shrieked Leach. "Let's get away."

And then at that moment a startling thing happened. Lord Edgemore and Skeets raised themselves from the bog, and the two plotters started back aghast.

"You murderous devils!" shouted Lord Edgemore furiously. "Now I know the truth!"

"They heard—they heard!" screamed Leach insanely.

He turned on his heel and ran, something cracking in his brain. The horror of it had maddened him. Screaming still, he stumbled over a boulder, sprawled heavily, cutting his hands on the rough stones. He picked himself up, ran on, and reached the car.

And Stephen Gatfield, equally startled but by no means bereft of his senses, ran, too. In his panic, however, he ran in a different direction, and almost before he knew it he found his feet sogging into soft, treacherous mud. He stumbled, sprawled, and was horrified to find that he was in the mud up to his knees. He tried to get back, but he couldn't. He had struck another bog patch—one that he had been unaware of. It had got him—it was pulling at him!

"Leach!" he shrieked. "Leach, you fool! Help! Help!"

He struggled more fiercely than ever, and his heart nearly stopped beating when he found that he could not move from that

fatal place. He was caught in the same kind of trap as he had prepared for his victims!

"Leach!" he screamed again. "Help! Where are you, Leach?"

But John Leach, entirely crazed, was at the wheel of Gatfield's car, and the car was careering across the moor with ever-increasing speed.

CHAPTER 8.

The Death Ride!

"I SAY! Look at that car!" ejaculated Church, pointing.

"Which car?" said Handforth.

The Scouts had not yet divided up, although they were preparing to do so. Church's unexpected shout caused them all to gaze across the moor.

A motor-car had come into sight beyond that rising bluff, and it was being driven in such a peculiar way that all the St. Frank's fellows stood stock-still, staring.

"We couldn't see it before because of that hill," said Nipper quickly. "By Jove! What's the matter with the driver? He's gone clean off the road! Look at the way the car is charging through those gorse-bushes!"

"The silly fool will come a cropper in a minute!" said Parkington.

It was quite true that the car had left the moorland track; it was careering along at random, missing boulders by hairbreadths, charging through clumps of gorse, leaping this way, jolting that way.

The schoolboys stood watching, fascinated. Their original mission was quite forgotten now. None of the Scouts, in fact, had ever believed that Lord Edgemore and Skeets were in danger. They had only come in deference to Nipper's wishes—and because it was time the joke was exposed, anyhow.

The appearance of this car claimed their full attention. It was sensational; at any second, the boys expected to see the coupe turn completely over with a devastating crash. But miraculously it kept on, and its speed was anything between forty and fifty miles an hour.

Leach, at the wheel, had no knowledge of his speed; he had no knowledge of anything, except that he was getting farther and farther away from that scene of dread.

He scarcely knew anything about cars, and all he did now was to grip the steering-wheel and keep his foot hard down on the accelerator. His stricken brain was incapable of realising that he was charging to disaster.

The car shot through the last patch of gorse, and then came straight on over the hard, smooth, grassy stretch which lay between the gorse and the old quarry. The schoolboys, alarmed and excited, ran forward impulsively.

"Look!" yelled McClure. "Oh, my hat! Did you see that?"

The car, now only a quarter of a mile away, had leapt clean into the air as it topped a ridge. When it struck the moor again, it veered off and came charging on.

"Great Scott! He's heading straight towards the quarry!" exclaimed Nipper.

A chorus of horrified shouts went up. It was only too true. Quite close at hand was the disused quarry—a sheer cliff at this point, dropping for well over a hundred feet. Unless the car's course was altered—

"We'd better warn him!" bellowed Kirby Keeble Parkington. "Come on, you chaps! He'll kill himself unless we round him off!"

The Scouts ran on to meet the approaching car, their faces flushed, their hearts thudding. The unexpectedness of this crisis had filled them with wild excitement.

"Hi! Look out!" roared Handforth urgently, waving his arms like mill-sails. "Stop!"

The man at the wheel of the car either failed to see the signals, or he ignored them. The car still came straight on, its engine throbbing, its exhaust roaring.

"Stop!" yelled the Scouts. "There's danger ahead! The quarry!"

But the man at the wheel was deaf to everything except the voice within him, which bade him get farther and farther away from the scene of his villainy.

"Look out, you chaps!" panted Nipper. "He'll run you down unless you're careful!"

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!"

"Scatter, you chaps!"

"Mind what you're doing, Handy!"

Handforth, with his usual recklessness, was running straight at the car. The other juniors were scattering, realising that their efforts were in vain. Only at the last second did Handforth dodge. He had the narrowest escape of his life. The car shot past him, and there was scarcely an inch between his leaping body and the off-side front wing. Edward Oswald went sprawling, to pick himself up, boiling with fury and amazement.

"The rotter!" he gasped. "He nearly ran me down—and I was trying to warn him!"

"Oh, Handy!" panted Church, clutching at his chum. "I—I thought you were hit!"

"Look!" muttered Handforth aghast.

The others were silent. They stood like statues, staring, fascinated. Nothing that they could do now would make any difference. They had attempted to warn the mad motorist, but in vain.

Now the car was charging headlong at the quarry. The boys witnessed one of the most sensational and most spectacular accidents that had ever happened. The car, with increasing speed, leapt over the edge of the cliff and shot into mid-air.

"Oh!" went up a gasping shout from the watching boys.

It was almost unbelievable. The car turned a complete somersault, its wheels still whizzing round. Then, completely upside down,

it vanished from the boys' view. There was a single second of tense, agonising silence. Then—

Cra-a-a-sh!

The noise, as the falling car struck the bottom of the quarry, out of sight, was such a sickening one that many of the Removites turned deathly pale.

"He's killed—he must be killed!" whispered Church. "Oh, my hat! I've never seen anything like it! Never!"

"I hope I shall never see anything like it again!" said Handforth huskily. "It was—horrible!"

With one accord, they all started forward. Breathlessly they ran to the edge of the quarry, and were almost afraid to peer down.

The car, a mass of wreckage, was lying in a torn and twisted heap on its side. The wheels were shattered, the body a crumpled mass of scrap-iron. There was an absolute silence.

"He's dead!" said Nipper soberly. "Poor chap! He can't be alive after a fall like that!"

"But—but why?" asked Archie Glen-thorne. "I mean to say, I'm absolutely dazed, old things! Was the fellow crazy?"

"He must have been—there's no other explanation," said Nipper. "But come on! There's a chance in a thousand that he might still be alive, and in that case he'll need help."

Without hesitation, he ran off towards one of the steeply sloping paths which led down the cliff into the quarry. The others followed. Nipper and Handforth and K. K. and Travers were the first there, and they dashed towards the wrecked car.

"Look!" gasped Nipper. "He's out here—on the grass! Poor beggar, he must have been thrown clean through the wind-screen!"

They gathered round, horrified. John Leach sprawled there, apparently dead. His face and hands were badly cut, and he was bleeding. He did not present a cheerful sight. But the Scouts steeled themselves, and prepared to do everything that was humanly possible.

As they knelt beside him, Leach's eyelids flickered, and then opened.

"He's alive!" exclaimed Handforth. "Quick, some of you! Get some water! See if you can't prepare some bandages—tear up your shorts, if necessary!"

But before any of the other Scouts could heed the words, Leach intervened.

"No, no," he muttered. "I need no bandages. I'm going. I can feel it here—inside me. I shan't last more than five minutes. And there's something I've got to say—something I must say."

"Steady!" said Nipper, kneeling beside the injured man. "It may not be so bad as you think."

Even as he spoke, however, he knew that the man was dying.

John Leach himself was sane again now, and his dying desire was to undo the fiendish work which he and Stephen Gatfield had engineered.

CHAPTER 9.

Scouts to the Rescue!

"TAKE it easy," said Nipper gently, as he tried to ease the man's position. "We tried to warn you of the quarry——"

"I didn't know," muttered Leach. "I didn't even know that I was driving across the moor. I was mad—mad with horror. But I'm going now, and I want you boys to get to those two before it's too late." He tried to point, and groaned. "Save them!" he said desperately. "Do you hear me? Save them!"

The Scouts, anguished, failed to understand.

"His mind's wandering," whispered Handforth.

"No, no! It's not!" panted Leach, hearing the words. "I know what I'm talking about. I'm dying—and there's no time to lose. You've got to save those two! Never mind Gatfield—I don't know what happened to him, anyway. But you must save those others."

"Save them?" asked Nipper gently. "Save whom?"

"Lord — Lord Edgemore and—and his son."

"What!"

"They're trapped—trapped in the bog!"

"Oh!"

"I helped Gatfield—but he's the murderer!" breathed Leach fiercely. "It was he who persuaded me—he who promised me two thousand pounds——"

"Who are you?" asked Nipper, quickly taking out his pocket-book and getting his pencil ready. "Quick! I'll take a statement down if you want me to."

"Yes—yes—before it's too late!"

The man was weaker now, and his face was ashen grey where there were no bloodstains.

"My name is Leach—I used to be head footman at the castle," he muttered. "I was sacked, and, like a fool, I uttered threats against the earl."

"Did you trap Lord Edgemore and his son in that dungeon?" asked Nipper.

"Yes. And Gatfield and I broke the dam in that stream, allowing the water to go underground," whispered Leach. "But it was Gatfield's idea—not mine. He's been



"Stop! The quarry!" yelled Handforth warningly, but the car heeded not. With a roar

trying to murder Lord Edgemore and his son."

"Oh, my only hat!"

"This—this morning we found out that they were going on to the moor, and we thought it would be a good idea to trap them in a bog," continued Leach feebly. "Gatfield and I came out; we pretended that our car had broken down—we got them into the bog——"

"What!"

"They're there now, I tell you—being sucked down!" moaned Leach. "I'm—I'm trying to tell you. Gatfield thinks I don't know—but I do! He let things out without knowing it. Carroll paid him to do this!"

"Carroll?" asked Handforth, aghast.

"Mortimer Carroll, the millionaire,"



at the fear-crazed man at the wheel of the hurtling vehicle charged at Handforth.

replied the dying man fiercely. "He's the next earl, and he's been trying— Oh, there's—there's something wrong—"

A gurgle sounded in his throat, and he only breathed with difficulty.

"See if you can't save them!" he went on, his voice so feeble that the words could hardly be heard. "There—there may be time! They found out—they knew what we had done, and I think my brain must have gone. I went crazy—crazy with fear and horror."

"Wait!" said Nipper steadily. "Ease him up if you can, you chaps. Look here, Leach, try to pull yourself together for a moment. This statement is vitally important. Do you think you can sign it?"

"I'll—I'll try!" gasped Leach.

With the startled boys supporting him, and with Nipper holding the pencil in his fingers, he managed to scrawl his signature in Nipper's notebook. But the effort was his last. For hardly had he finished before he sank back with a long sigh. His eyes closed, and not many of those Boy Scouts needed telling the truth.

"Has—has he gone?" asked Handforth huskily.

Nipper rose to his feet.

"Yes, he's dead," he replied quietly. "He was a scoundrel, but during his last few minutes he did his utmost to square himself."

"What was that he said about Lord Edgemore and Skeets?" said K. K. "It can't be true. The poor chap's brain must have been—"

"No! It was true!" interrupted Nipper. "Can't you fellows understand? This is the second attempt on Lord Edgemore's life, and this time it may be successful. That affair at the castle—down in the dungeon—wasn't an accident at all. It was a deliberate plot."

"Great Scott!"

"And we mustn't stay here talking—we've got to get into action," went on Nipper. "We can come back here later. The main thing now is to dash across the moor and save Skeets and his pater. Good heavens! We may not be able to get there in time!"

"But we don't even know the way!" gasped Watson.

"We do pretty well, because this car must have been coming from that direction," replied Nipper. "Come on, everybody! Run as you've never run in all your lives!"

"But it's impossible—it's fantastic!" protested Reggie Pitt. "I mean, about Carroll! Why, Carroll's a Remove chap! He may be a rotter, but it's too awful to think that his pater could have plotted to murder—"

"We can talk of this later," broke in Nipper. "Come on, I tell you!"

They raced off, only too glad to get away from that tragic spot. Their thoughts were in a tumult as they raced for the cliff path, to climb desperately until they reached the moor.

They all knew Eustace Carroll, the new fellow in the Remove, and they remembered how Carroll had been boasting that before long his father would be the Earl of Edgemore. But they also knew that Carroll had based his boasts upon the assumption that

Mortimer Carroll would win a lawsuit which was soon coming off in the High Courts.

And who was Gatfield? Leach had kept referring to the man, but none of the boys knew who he was, or anything about him. However, as Nipper had said, there was only one thing of importance now—to get to the spot where Skeets and his father were in danger.

The fittest of the boys now came well to the fore, and it said much for Archie Glen-thorne's stamina that he was in the first half-dozen. When it came to a crisis, the immaculate Archie was never found wanting.

As they neared that little bluff which stood up from the moor, Nipper, who was leading, half-turned.

"Better spread out here," he panted. "And keep your eyes skinned. If any of you spot anything queer, shout to the rest of us."

"O.K.!" gasped Handforth.

They scattered, running off in widely different directions. Every boy was searching the moor keenly, but as far as they could see there was nothing. Not a human being was within sight.

It fell to Handforth's lot, as it happened, to make the great discovery. He would not have made it at all but for a sound that he heard. For, keen though his eyesight was, he was running right past the fateful spot without even seeing the entrapped pair.

He knew that it was boggy here, and it was only by pulling himself up short that he escaped plunging into a treacherous patch. He was just veering off, intending to get to the more solid ground, when he checked. Was it imagination, or had he heard something?

"Handy! This way, Handy!"

He halted dead, his brain throbbing.

"Hallo!" he ejaculated, staring round wildly. "Did—did anybody shout?"

"We're here, Handy—quick!" came a feeble voice. "There's not much time, I guess, but if you make it snappy——"

"Great Scott!" yelled Handforth.

He was on the edge of a hollow. And now suddenly he saw that what he had taken to be two small boulders were the heads of two human beings, just protruding from the bog. Lord Edgemore and Skeets were in up to their necks, and their plight was desperate indeed!

Handforth, in his excitement, started plunging into the bog itself.

"No, no!" called Lord Edgemore. "Don't, boy! It's bad enough for Skeets and me to be trapped! Keep away!"

Handforth halted, remembering Nipper's words. He spun round, and saw the other Scouts scattered about all over the immediate landscape.

"Hi!" he howled. "Help! This way, the Tigers!"

"Are they there?" shouted Travers, who was nearest.

"Yes! They're in the bog! Quick!" yelled Handforth

Travers gave the word to the others, and in a moment they were all dashing up from various directions.

SKEETS and his father, side by side, had given themselves up for lost.

The bog was sucking them down—relentlessly, inexorably. They could do nothing to save themselves. To struggle was useless; indeed, it only seemed to make their position worse, to bring them nearer to their doom!

Slowly, horribly, they were being pulled deeper and deeper into the mire. Their spirits had sunk lower and lower; there seemed to be no hope for them whatever. But now, wonder of wonders, the St. Frank's fellows had appeared on the scene.

The rancher-earl and his son felt their hearts thumping madly within them. Were they to be rescued once again just when death was about to claim them? And were the St. Frank's juniors once again to be the rescuers?

The Removites came rushing up from all directions. Nipper quickly took command of the situation.

"We mustn't waste a second, you chaps!" he said urgently, as he noted the terrible predicament of the rancher-earl and Skeets. "They'll be under within a couple of minutes unless we do something! Reggie, have you brought those ropes from the trucks as I told you?"

"Sure thing, Nipper!" called Reggie Pitt, as he breathlessly ran up, a number of coils of rope in his hand.

The St. Frank's Scouts, when they had set out from Edgemore Castle, had taken their hand-trucks with them. They contained food supplies, and all the other equipment essential for scouting, including, luckily, plenty of rope.

"Good for you, Reggie!" commended Nipper. "We shall need all these ropes. Come on, you fellows. Take a rope each, tie a noose at one end, and then throw it to the earl and Skeets!"

Swiftly the St. Frank's juniors did as they were bid. Nooses were knotted in all the ropes, and then the boys approached as near to the bog as they dared.

"Coming over, sir!" called Nipper to the rancher-earl and Skeets. "Can you manage to catch the ropes and loop them round your shoulders?"

"You're sure a fine bunch of kids!" replied Lord Edgemore with a smile. "Chuck them over, lads!"

The ropes whistled through the air. Some fell short; some were blown aside by the fairly strong wind which was whistling across the moor; and others fell within easy reach of the endangered couple.

The earl and Skeets were submerged in the bog well up to their necks now, and it was with difficulty that they succeeded in bringing their arms to the surface and reaching for the ropes. It was with even more difficulty that they attempted to loop the nooses under their arm-pits. At last it was done,

nowever, while the St. Frank's boys waited with feverish impatience for the word to start heaving

"Right-ho, fellers!" shouted the Earl of Edgemore. "But take it easy. I guess we're well stuck in this stuff, and it's going to be a tough and painful job pulling us out."

Nipper had foreseen this, however, and with his usual foresight he issued fresh instructions.

"Some of you fellows get round to the other side," he ordered crisply. "At first we'll have to heave alternate ways to ease the earl and Skeets from the bog. Buck up, there! Are you ready? Then go!"

It was a slow job—and a painful one for Lord Edgemore and Skeets. First the ropes were tugged one way, then another, backwards and forwards, sideways. Gradually they were loosened from the clinging mud that had threatened to drag them down in its embrace to their death. And then at last came the order to haul "full steam ahead!"

The Scouts all congregated together and began slowly to drag the two victims of the bog towards them. Nearer, nearer. It was a terrible strain, both for rescued and rescuers. Nearer still, one more tug; no, just another—and the Earl of Edgemore and Skeets were safe!

CHAPTER 10.

All Serene!

A CRACKED cheer went up from the exhausted Scouts; but it soon died away.

The Earl of Edgemore and his son had attempted to stagger to their feet, only to collapse from weakness. The terrible ordeal had left them practically helpless.

The rancher-earl was tough and he soon recovered, but it was some time before Skeets could stand. And by that time the St. Frank's fellows had recovered from their own strenuous efforts.

Some of them were covered with mud from their rescue efforts, and looked like scarecrows. But they didn't care. Happily they gathered round Lord Edgemore and the young viscount; happy in the fact that once again they had been able to rescue these two from such a terrible fate.

The earl was profuse in his gratitude, much to the embarrassment of the Scouts. Vivian Travers was looking very downcast.

"And to think that I've been the cause of all this," he said contritely. "That crazy April the First trick— Oh, kick me hard, somebody!"

But nobody obliged; and the Earl of Edgemore smiled and patted Travers on the back.

"That was nothing. Forget it," he said. "Skeets and I had a good laugh over that, I guess. We were in no danger of falling into a bog, young fellers. We were betrayed into——"

"Yes, we know, sir!" interrupted Nipper. "A man named Leach came driving across

the moor in a car, and he's dead now—he killed himself. Fell right down into the quarry. He said there was another man named Gatfield."

"There was another man named Gatfield," said Lord Edgemore grimly.

"Was, sir?"

"Gatfield suffered the fate that he mapped out for Skeets and me," replied his lordship. "Heavens above! I never again want to hear such horrible screams as we heard when the poor wretch went under!"

The Scouts stared in bewilderment.

"We don't understand, sir," said Handforth bluntly.

"The less we can talk of it, the better, I guess," said Skeets with a shudder. "Can't you get what pop's been trying to tell you? Gatfield got caught in the bog himself—quite close to us. But, like a fool, he struggled, and the bog got him."

"Oh!"

"He—he went under about three minutes before you fellers showed up," continued Skeets. "I can hear his screams now! It's no good looking for him—he's right in by this time—dead, of course!"

"Don't, Skeets, son!" interrupted his father. "It's over now, and we want to forget it."

A REMARKABLE change had been wrought within an hour.

At Lord Edgemore's suggestion, they all took the shortest cut to the castle. Once there they plunged into the lake as a preliminary, getting off most of the mud. Then they went indoors, had quick baths, and then changed into their ordinary suits.

Hot coffee and some food gave them new life, and the horrors of the moor were becoming lessened. And by now, too, they had had time to discuss the whole situation and to compare notes.

"What action are you going to take, sir?" asked Nipper.

"I'm figuring that the man Leach was right," replied Lord Edgemore grimly. "This whole murderous business was instigated by Mortimer Carroll. But what proof is there? What evidence? I guess the best thing we can do is to go straight to the police and lay all the facts before them."

"I was thinking exactly the same thing, sir," said Nipper, nodding.

Their first move, however, was to go back to the quarry. Here Lord Edgemore definitely satisfied himself that Leach was dead. After that, the whole party, in the flivver lorry, went into Bannington.

Inspector Jameson, of the Bannington police, was thunderstruck when he heard the story; indeed, it was some little time before he actually credited it.

But Nipper's written statement, signed by Leach, was a vitally important document, and the inspector took charge of it at once.

(Continued on page 43.)

Super-Thrills in This Week's Complete Dynamic Night Hawk Yarn!

The MENACE of NAGIR



CHAPTER 1.

The Face in the Bushes!

"MR. KYLE! Here at last!"

Thurston Kyle, halting his car on the drive of a fine old house, outside Reigate, stepped out and raised his hat with a warm smile. The slim girl, a dainty picture in the evening sunlight, ran quickly down the steps to give him a firm handshake.

"Here at last, Margaret!" he smiled. "I would have called this morning, but thought it better to allow you and Sir John to recover from your—er—exciting flight home last night. Also, I have been very busy myself all day!"

Margaret Alan, daughter of Sir John Alan, the famous explorer, smiled up at

the tall, handsome visitor. They were firm friends already. The previous night, aided by Thurston Kyle in his secret character of the Night Hawk, she had daringly rescued her father from the pseudo mental asylum in Paris, where he had been kept a prisoner by his one-time lieutenant, Juan Alvarida.

As far as Thurston Kyle was yet aware, Sir John and the Spaniard were the only survivors of the Alan Expedition that had left England, eight months ago, for the Congo, in search of the Lost City of Nagir, once a wealthy colony of the ancient Egyptian Empire.

Thurston Kyle had already gathered, from a conversation overheard in the asylum, that Alvarida had deserted the party just when hostile natives had become particularly dangerous, taking

The Nagirines stop at nothing in their quest of vengeance—until they come up against the Night Hawk.

By
JOHN BREARLEY.

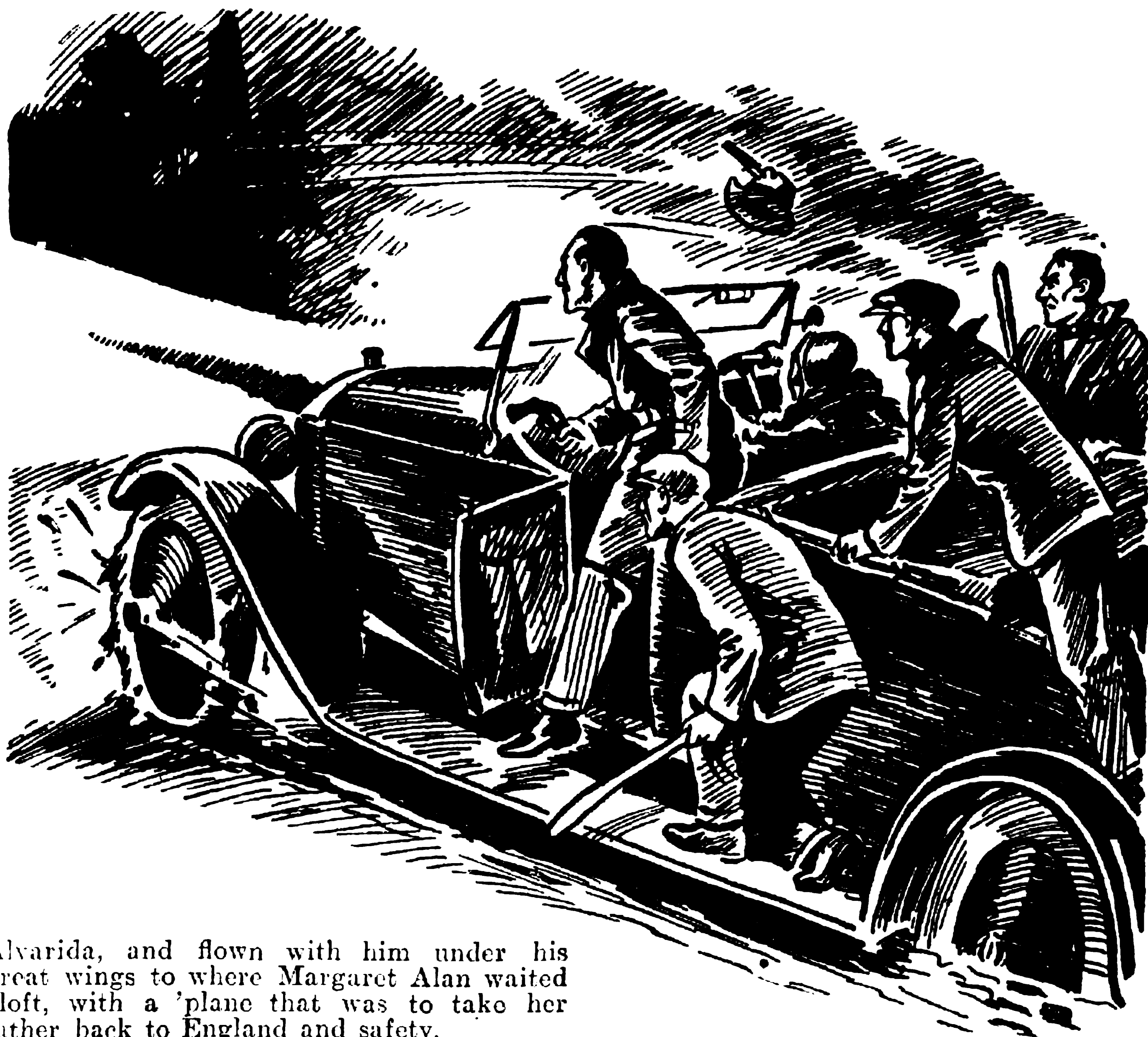
with him in his flight all the arms and stores, too. Sir John, in his resolute way, had pushed on in spite of all, and had actually penetrated to Nagir, uncovering a rich treasure there. Finally, Alvarida had captured him on his way back to civilisation and tried to force from him the secret of that treasure.

So much had the scientist heard. He had dragged Sir John from the clutches of

Thurston Kyle had been making arrangements to bring the youngster home in comfort as soon as he could be moved. And, further, he had spent several important hours at the little Electrical Construction Works in which he was interested, supervising the last touches to his latest and greatest invention.

Now that he had reached Reigate at last, however, he was eager to see his old friend, Sir John, without delay. Having shaken hands with his plucky girl ally of the previous night, he turned as though to saunter with her into the house. But Margaret stopped him for a moment.

"Before going in, Mr. Kyle, I—I want to thank you myself for what you did for dad last night!" she faltered. "You were magnificent. I shall never forget your sweeping across my 'plane—with dad in your arms—



Alvarida, and flown with him under his great wings to where Margaret Alan waited aloft, with a 'plane that was to take her father back to England and safety.

The rest of the story he had yet to learn. That was why he had just motored down to Reigate.

He had not intruded himself earlier, rightly guessing, with innate tact, that the Alans, father and daughter, would be glad to have several hours together before outsiders, however welcome, joined them. Besides, he had been busy. Snub Hawkins, as a result of last night's adventures, was lying with a broken rib in a Paris hotel, and

under your great wings. It—was wonderful! Did you invent them?" Her eyes were round with wonder.

Thurston Kyle's grave smile faded abruptly. A slight frown crossed his face, and he darted an instinctive glance of caution round the drive, which was flanked on either side by dark masses of rhododendrons and laurel. Any reference to his wonderful wings—especially in the open air—was something he did not realise at all.

"You have said nothing about the rescue to a soul?" he asked, so sharply that the girl's face clouded.

"Oh! Oh, no! I promised I wouldn't and——"

Her distress was so patent that Thurston Kyle relaxed, although his eyes wandered swiftly again. He laughed and gently patted her shoulder.

"Of course—of course. That is a secret between us, eh?" To cheer her up, he took on a pose of mock boastfulness as they went up the steps. "Yes, I invented them, I am a marvellous inventor, Margaret!"

The girl, catching the humorous note in his voice, laughed brightly.

"I'll bet you are. I'd love to see your other stunts, if they're as marvellous as them. I'm just crazy on flying!"

"Are you?" Thurston Kyle still kept to his bantering tone. "Then, if you're a good girl, perhaps I'll show you my latest invention soon. I've an idea it will make you 'crazier' still. It may interest Sir John also," he finished softly.

Then, in answer to her inquiry, he told her how Snub was getting on; and together they passed into the cosy house.

It was unfortunate that neither noticed the swarthy face that snarled at their retreating backs for a second—from the sheltering rhododendrons.

CHAPTER 2.

A Thrilling Tale!

"WELL, John? Glad to see you properly at last, old fellow!"

The haggard face of Sir John Alan brightened. The explorer sat in a deep armchair before a crackling fire in a first-floor study, but the latticed window was wide open, commanding a view of the mellow lawn and garden behind the house. He raised a hand slowly and took Thurston Kyle's in an eager grip.

"Kyle. Gad, this is great. I—I'll never be able to thank——"

The scientist's genial laugh stopped him. Thurston Kyle's usual cold reserved manner had fallen away like a cloak in the presence of his old school friend.

"Suppose we forget all that?" he said lightly. "As a matter of fact, all the credit for last night goes to"—he bowed to Margaret—"a very gallant young lady." He pulled up a chair to the fire. "Now, John, let's hear all about you. That is, if you are strong enough."

"Oh, I'm all right!" growled Sir John restively. "Be right as ninepence in a day or so. No bones broken. Want regular sleep and regular grub, that's all. Had too little of either lately—thanks to Alvarida, the hound!"

He spoke in the quick, jerky sentences typical of the man of action. Playing the invalid was plainly irking him. Under his bushy brows, his eyes were keen and pierc-

ing as of old—making strong contrast to the rest of his sunken face.

"Suppose you want to hear about the expedition, eh? Well, it was a wash-out. All due to Alvarida. Glad you got me here secretly, Kyle. Don't want to have to tell reporters about him or anyone else—yet."

Thurston Kyle nodded. Discovery by newspapermen was the least of Sir John's troubles, he thought, from what he had gathered of the case. There were others far more dangerous from whom the explorer's whereabouts must be kept hidden.

"That Spaniard was recommended to me, as you know!" continued Sir John explosively. "He certainly had a great reputation. But crooked! He was as straight as a corkscrew. Before we reached M'Bolo, he'd quarrelled with everyone—Foster, Hendricks and Langdale. He'd brought his own personal staff, too; four of his countrymen—toughs who'd been with him on his last trip up the Amazon. Useful men—but I didn't like 'em from the first.

"Well, we left M'Bolo—just a native coastal dump—and hit the bush. We paddled in five canoes up the Congo for three weeks. After that we turned into the Ubangi, and within a couple of days were well into the back o' beyond.

"As you know, the expedition was based on charts made up from information gathered from all sources—old travellers' diaries, natives' yarns, and so forth. It was hopeless work at first. We were in a mighty country; just a blind net of rivers, streams, fever swamps and jungle. And we foraged around for close on two months, getting deeper in—but getting nowhere.

"So far, the natives we'd met had been fairly friendly; but when we asked 'em about Nagir, they shut up like clams. Fairly wilted in their tracks.

"At last, though, our luck turned. We'd been out close on four months—in the country between the Ubangi and the Saga rivers. And one night an old fisherman paddled into camp. We'd offered big rewards for any information about the Lost City, and this old guy had come to claim it. All the time he talked he was shivering with funk; but I doubled the reward straight away, and that clinched it. He told us we should have turned up a little tributary of the Saga that our chart didn't show. Told us, too, that he'd been guide to the last expedition there in 1918. He didn't say what had happened to them. But we guessed——"

"Ah!" ejaculated the Night Hawk.

"Well, he led us. We followed him for three days through the greatest skein of lakes and rivers we'd tumbled on yet. I kept a chart on paper, and another in my head, which was as well. It was like paddling along a spider's web, but something seemed to tell us we were on the right track at last. And when, on the fourth day, we were attacked, we knew we were there.

"They were different from the usual Congo natives, these niggers who set about us. Tall,

keen-featured, high-shouldered and brown—not black. Also, they were an organised force.

"They hit us hard. Not only that, but they hit us with rifles, too. Good modern rifles. No spears or arrows, but real man-stopping Winchesters. It was a shock for us, Kyle, I can tell you. But the biggest shock of all was to find they were led by a white man!"

He paused to let the words sink home, noting the grim expression on Thurston Kyle's face.

"Nice, wasn't it? Well, we were up against it. But we clawed free. These fellows may have had Winchesters, but we had two machine-guns, and we sprayed the bush properly. They broke for the inner forests again after half an hour, giving us time to think.

"It was then Alvarida showed himself. Where he got his reputation from goodness knows. He was as yellow as a guinea. He and his men wanted to turn back. But we others—we'd come in search of Nagir, and all the tribes in the Congo weren't stopping us.

"Our guide told us that the brown fellows were the Nagirines, and that we were within striking distance of the Lost City. The Nagirines had a ghastly name in those parts—they were just a well-drilled crew of fiendish devils, and every now and then they raided other tribes or white trading-posts, finishing up with a torture party that made even that tough country shiver.

"That decided us. We didn't mind the Nagirines defending their own—that was natural, although, of course, the city couldn't have belonged to them in the first place, three thousand years back. But when we'd listened to their exploits for a full hour, we reckoned the sooner that tribe of unbelievable ghouls were wiped out and their renegade leader hanged, the better for all. Instead of becoming a party of explorers, we decided to go right on the warpath to avenge the white traders who'd gone west—painfully.

"But not Alvarida. That night he turned traitor. It was his turn for guard, fool that I was to have allowed it, and"—Sir John's face grew bleak—"when we woke up he and his men had gone. And with them the machine-guns and every spare rifle in the outfit.

"As soon as the truth leaked out our bearers and paddlers bolted, too—all except our guide. I—er—persuaded him to stay—with a gun! He took us into a swamp to hide—there were only Foster, Hendricks, Langdale and myself left—and though the Nagirines swept down again, they missed us. We lay hidden till nightfall. Then he led us to Nagir. At last!"

The silence in the room was intense. So absorbed were the listeners that they were unaware twilight had fallen, and Sir John talked on by the light of the fire.

"The place was four hours' march away. He took us down a gully that had once been

a stream, through some of the worst 'bush' I've ever seen—bush that teemed with snakes at that. But in the end we reached Nagir.

"We came on it suddenly in the moonlight. Gad, Kyle, it was the sight of a lifetime! The city was quiet and empty—save for snakes and monkeys—so it was obvious the Nagirines lived somewhere outside. There were temples, palaces and villas, all built in perfect squares—and all ancient Egyptian work to the last brick. We'd proved that Nagir existed.

"Imagine it—a lost city, thousands of years old. Some of the lesser buildings on the outskirts were smothered by jungle, but from the state of the main square and the great temple, the Nagirines regularly kept the place clear. What for we couldn't tell—yet.

"There was not a soul to be seen. So we stole into the temple and made camp. For three days we studied the place—mapped it out, made notes of the buildings. Of course, we worked chiefly at night, but the full moon made that easy.

"It was weird and somehow horrible. There were statues everywhere, and long halls full of ancient mummies. We felt we were being watched all the time. Then"—Sir John's voice deepened—"Langdale found the Priests' Treasure.

"As you know, he's the most famous antiquarian in the world, and the main temple fascinated him. He was always poking round there; and at last, from his experience of places like Luxor and other old cities of Egypt, he got on the track of the temple vaults.

"Well, Kyle, you cannot guess at what we found. Such treasure never was unearthed before. There were gems in all sorts of settings and of tremendous value. Altar pieces, scarabs and mosaics that would be the envy of every museum in the world, and stacks of ancient papyrus writing, with the history of Nagir and the lost colonisation of the Congo by Egypt. Jove, it's the greatest discovery for five hundred years. From the hieroglyphics of the writing, Langdale said they were at least three thousand years old, all packed away in camphor boxes of pure gold and cedar!"

Sir John's eyes burned with a fanatic's zeal. It was plain that he had little thought for the colossal financial value of his find. He was thinking of the antiquarians and savants all over the globe to whom this treasure-trove would open up vast new channels of explorations into the science and history of a buried civilisation.

He had a kindred spirit, too—Thurston Kyle, whose dark eyes were like diamonds as he followed his friends story raptly.

"And what then?"

"We hid it!" replied Sir John quietly. "We knew we were in a tight corner, but we hoped to escape and come back with a finer expedition than ever. So we found another hiding-place, a clever one, and we

transferred the stuff. Then came the inevitable.

"That night we found why the Nagirines kept the city and temple clear of jungle; for we witnessed their priests holding a ceremony there. They'd captured our fleeing paddlers; and—well, I'll tell you about it when Margaret isn't here. And, of course, they discovered our presence.

"We managed to escape deeper into the temple and hold out for a day and a half. All we had were our own rifles and revolvers and a little ammunition. When that went they rushed us.

"It was night-time. I'd been firing from a nook high up in the roof; the others were down below. The Nagirines took us from the rear. I saw them suddenly rush into our chamber, and with only Foster, Hendricks and Langdale on the floor to stop them, it—it was all over in a moment.

"There was nothing I could do but escape. They hadn't noticed me. I managed to get clear somehow—down the dry river again and back to our hidden canoes. I got one to the river—and paddled!

"After that I don't remember. All I know is that I paddled by the course in my head. I seemed to go on for days. The next I knew some white men had got me.

"Yes; Alvarida's gang. They'd got lost. They grabbed me, and I faded out. When I came properly to my senses again we were near M'Bolo once more; they'd picked up a native guide. And the first thing Alvarida asked me was where had we hidden the Priests' Treasure.

"I couldn't make out how he knew about it. Then he mocked me with the news that I'd been raving about it in my fever for weeks, which was true. I only remember a few lucid patches during the journey, so I guess I was right off my head. But by some queer freak I hadn't blabbed about the hiding-place.

"I told him to go to blazes. He proceeded to give me hades at M'Bolo. Then one day he and his men bolted by a trading steamer, taking me with 'em. They were scared stiff.

"It seemed the Nagirines had trailed me—trailed us all. And they were after us like bloodhounds for hiding their treasure. Alvarida bolted, as I say—smuggled me eventually into France somehow, and into that asylum kept by a pal of his, where you found me.

"There he thought he was safe. That Priests' Treasure had gripped him properly. He was even willing to face the Nagirines again in spite of their terrible name. All he wanted was the jewels and ornaments—money, the scum. The writings could go hang. And he was going to organise a real hefty force to get them once I'd given him the secret.

"But I still kept mum, and he gave it me—hot and strong. That's all. You came and dragged me out—Margaret has told me how. It's the crowning miracle of the last eight terrible months, Kyle, and—"

Thurston Kyle held up his hand, and the explorer sank back, exhausted by his long, bitter tale. Behind the bald sentences it was easy for his audience to picture the magnificent pluck of the man who, in spite of terrific odds, had fought on to his goal—and fought back again, too, heavy with grief at losing his tried companions in so terrible a fashion. Thurston Kyle's face darkened ominously as he thought again of Juan Alvarida, the cause of the whole disaster.

"What do you intend doing now, John?" he asked soberly, after a long, thoughtful silence.

The answer came like a trumpet-call.

"Go back to Nagir!"

CHAPTER 3.

Thurston Kyle's Promise!

FOR all his weakness, Sir John Alan sat up with fierce vigour.

"Go back!" he repeated. "I'm going back to Nagir as soon as I can. For one thing, that ancient treasure must be brought to the civilised world, not left in the midst of bloodthirsty fiends in the heart of nowhere. Then again, there are my friends to avenge. I'm going back to get those Nagirines and their renegade leader.

"Nor is that all. Kyle, we were not the first white men to reach Nagir!" Sir John's fiery eyes flashed from the scientist to Margaret in the tense stillness. "That 1918 expedition reached there, too," he went on more calmly. "And they were trapped there like us."

"Ah!" Kyle suddenly sat forward. His friend's tone hinted at dark horrors as he nodded slowly.

"We—we found traces of them." Sir John's voice grew brittle with passion. "Kyle, I knew some of those men. I'm going to get even with the Nagirines for that, too—even if I go back alone!"

Over Thurston Kyle's face spread a slow smile, so cold and mirthless that the others stared at him wide-eyed.

"You won't go alone!" he said with grim and obvious meaning. His friend leaned forward.

"You—you mean you'll come this time? I remember you warned me against going last—"

"I shall come!" Thurston Kyle's words were crisp and final. "It will be an adventure after my own heart. My friend, I do not like renegade white men. I do not like native torturers. Least of all do I like treacherous snakes such as Alvarida. Had I known all this last night I would have—"

He paused, not wishing to speak in full before the girl. But they knew it would have meant more than a severe thrashing for the Spaniard. Putting his finger-tips together, the Night Hawk leaned back, pensively eyeing the ceiling.



A gigantic figure appeared in the window. Two huge hands flashed out and gripped the gunman by the throat.

"Yes, I should like to recover that treasure. But there is another reason I shall come. I wish to test my newest invention," he said calmly.

It took a moment for the startling remark to sink in.

"Your——"

"My latest invention—a monster flying-boat. An air-liner, troop-transport—anything you like to call it. I found myself in dire need of one some months ago, and had great trouble in getting it. So I have made one for myself." His eyes gleamed with an inventor's enthusiasm. "John, I am hoping my machine will revolutionise air-travel. I have had it assembled at a small construction works in which I am interested, and I put the finishing touches to it myself this morning." He smiled briefly.

"I will not go into the details now. You shall see it for yourself. But I tell you this, John—that whereas you took over four months to reach Nagir by canoe through dense bush, my 'Thunderer' will get you there in just over four days. And not only you, but myself and fifteen of the sturdiest and trustiest adventurers who ever donned sun-helmet and fired a rifle!"

Sir John's face grew luminous with amazement and delight.

"Kyle! This is astounding! You are not joking?"

"Far from it!" smiled his friend sternly. "Get yourself fit, John; let me get Snub back from Paris ~~with~~ his rib mended—say about seven days' time—and I promise you, if you can supply me with a rough compass course, we shall be in Nagir—by air—four days later."

Before anyone could speak, through the open window came a soft, sibilant voice, sneeringly triumphant:

"Will you? Perhaps not! Put your hands up—everyone!"

There was a moment of paralysed silence. Then, slipping over the sill from the dark garden outside, came a tall man who moved with the lithe speed of a panther. The flickering light from the fire struck red and purple gleams from the long-barrelled gun in his fist—a gun fitted with a slim silencer.

So swiftly did he move that he was in the room ere the others quite realised it. A long arm, flicking out, pulled Margaret Alan from her chair and held her, rigid and helpless, in a tight clasp. The gun was rested grimly on her shoulder, covering the two men squarely.

Behind it, white teeth flashing in a vaunting smile, stood the Spaniard, Juan Alvarida.

HE was the first to break the hush.
 "So you are going back to Nagir, eh, Sir John? After the Priests' Treasure? How noble!"

The explorer, with bulging eyes fixed on his daughter, made an effort to rise. A movement of the gun and a sharp command from Thurston Kyle caused him to sink back helplessly. He panted with rage.

"Alvarida! You dog! You've been listening, eh?"

"To every word, my friend!" The Spaniard paused for a moment, enjoying his victory. His smile became uglier still as he turned a smouldering glare on Thurston Kyle.

"So my little attempt on the canal bridge last night was not successful, Senor Kyle? You still live, then? And it seems you were the dramatic figure with the wings who snatched Sir John from my little cage, too? And gave me that cowardly thrashing? I do not pretend to know how you worked it all—neither do I care. I have a long account with you, which will be settled now!"

Thurston Kyle, hands raised, yawned delicately. The Spaniard's smile turned to a snarl.

"Ve-ry pretty!" he jeered. "But I think you will be sorry for that thrashing yet, senor!"

"I am sorry for it now," returned the scientist, with a surprising mildness that made Sir John stare—only to grin harshly at the words that followed. "I am sorry I thrashed you, Alvarida. The next opportunity I get I shall probably kill you!"

"So? But will there be another opportunity?" asked Alvarida with silky politeness.

Thurston Kyle nodded.

"There will!" He surveyed the man stonily, realising, however, that he and Sir John were completely helpless with Margaret held as a shield between them and their opponent. "I see your gun is silenced, senor. Yet I do not think you will have the nerve to shoot, somehow!"

Alvarida, snatching the gun from the girl's shoulder, raised it threateningly.

"Do you not? By the saints——" For a moment Kyle's life trembled in the balance. Then the man smiled and shrugged. "Business before pleasure!" he mocked. "Your turn will come. Meanwhile, it is Sir John I wish to speak to most!" His voice grew louder with a touch of arrogant bravado.

"I am a determined man, senors—as you may have guessed. I found out last night that you had escaped, Thurston Kyle, and that your assistant lies ill in the Hotel Metropole, Paris. I have made arrangements to deal with him some time to-night. Ah, that touches you, does it? Well, I made a shot in the dark, and, like many such, the shot came off. I flew to England to-day. Paid this chance visit to Reigate where I have been a very welcome visitor so often, eh? I was hidden among the bushes when you and this fair young lady talked so gaily

about your wings, and how you had outwitted me!" Margaret winced piteously. "Since then I have been outside enjoying the conversation."

"Scum!" remarked Sir John pithily. But he knew what was coming, as did the others.

Before uttering another word, however, the Spaniard backed towards the window, taking Margaret with him in his powerful grip. When he spoke again, his voice was as silky as ever. But his actions made the eyes of the two men watching him narrow to steel points.

"You know my errand," he smiled at last. "I want the secret of the Priests' Treasure, Sir John. Where you and your friends hid it after you found it. You have withstood me all these months, my friend. Now I am trying another plan!"

His gun moved swiftly, to the accompaniment of two gasps of horror.

"As you see, I place this silent muzzle against the temple of your pretty daughter, Sir John—so! I shall count three. If you have not begun to tell me by then—I shall shoot!"

Sir John's hands clenched and unclenched feverishly.

"You devil—you can't do that——"

"Can't I? Having done that, my friend, if you force me to, I shall use two more bullets on you both. After that I vanish through this window to find the treasure for myself. However, if you wish to save your daughter——"

Sir John was stricken into silence. There came no sound for a while, save the low hoot of an owl, hunting somewhere out in the dark garden. Thurston Kyle suddenly smiled with cold contempt.

"Alvarida, you are a poor, theatrical fool!" he pronounced. "Shoot me. I dare you!"

He rose boldly to his feet and stood beside his chair, a magnificent figure. The Spaniard grinned at him.

"The girl first—you second, Senor Kyle. Now, Sir John!" he snapped viciously. "The secret. One——"

"You—you——"

"Two! Thr——"

The gun in his hand pressed harder. They felt rather than saw his finger tighten. With a despairing cry, Sir John staggered from his chair, beginning to babble out his long-guarded secret. But the words were never finished.

Behind Alvarida, framed against the soft dusk, a gigantic figure loomed up in the window, vague and overwhelming. So softly did the giant move that he seemed a phantom—an enormous giant, terrifying in his vast size and smooth, deliberate movements.

Sensing danger, perhaps, Alvarida half-turn. As he did so, a great arm flashed over the sill, dragging him backwards, jerking his gun hand away from Margaret. A split second later, a second arm followed, the hand closing round the man's throat in a numbing grip. It was done with a silent, terrible deftness that was uncanny.

Backwards and downwards Alvarida was dragged and rammed to the floor. And like a mighty avalanche of bone and muscle, the mysterious giant heaved himself through the window from the darkness and dropped on the fighting, kicking Spaniard. Alvarida gave a single, terrified squeal. Thereafter he was stifled and still.

Thurston Kyle switched on the light.

CHAPTER 4.

Death In the Garden!

"WELL done, Scrapper!"

Thurston Kyle's voice rang with relief and amusement as the massive leader of his Kittens hauled the limp Spaniard to his feet and jammed him down hard in a chair. Scrapper Huggins grinned and touched his forelock.

"Sorry I was a bit late like, guv'nor. I was out when you 'phoned, but came down straight away. Thought I'd have a sorter scout round the place before reportin', guessin' as how you was busy. That's 'ow I saw an' overheard his nibs 'ere!"

"I heard your signal," smiled Kyle, turning to where Sir John and Margaret stood looking wide-eyed at the giant Kitten. They seemed scarcely to realise yet that the late peril had passed and the secret of the Priests' Treasure was still intact. Kyle made a gesture of introduction.

"My friends, this is Scrapper Huggins—one of the best. Scrapper—Sir John Alan and Miss Margaret, his daughter."

"By gad, delighted to meet you, Huggins!" boomed Sir John, striding forward with outstretched hand. The Scrapper took it firmly enough; but blushed pink as Margaret, too, slipped her hand into his ham-like fist.

Sir John wheeled on Thurston Kyle.

"But—but how in the name of all that's fortunate did Huggins get here so opportunely?" he asked.

"A little afterthought on my part!" laughed Thurston Kyle. "I 'phoned him just before leaving town for here. You see, John, it struck me that something like this might happen. It is not advisable, I think, to call for police protection—your return to England had best be kept secret until our second expedition is over—successfully, I hope. But, until we start, I feel you should be guarded. Therefore, from now on, your house is in the hands of my Kittens. And, believe me, I am confident you will be safe!"

"You think danger——" began Sir John; but stopped before Thurston Kyle's inscrutable glance. The scientist thought all manner of things about this queer case, but just now he was keeping them to himself—at the same time taking precautions.

The attention of the little company was drawn forcibly next instant to Alvarida. He had regained his lost breath and some of

his nerve. His eyes were dry and bright as a serpent's as they blazed at the scientist.

"You—you cunning fiend!" he began, realising more clearly every second how completely the tables had been turned.

Thurston Kyle cut him short. Remembering the man's words, he was desperately anxious about Snub in Paris.

"We have heard enough of your voice to-night, Alvarida!" he snapped with biting force. "John, you have a cellar here, of course? Then, Scrapper, take this man there—see that he has no hope of escape. I leave him to you. And, Alvarida"—the expression on his fierce face made the man suddenly cringe—"if anything happens to my assistant to-night—pray!"

With that vague but bitter threat he would have turned aside, leaving Scrapper to deal with the prisoner. Even as the Kitten laid his hands on the man, however, Alvarida groaned and stiffened. Clutching at his heart, he staggered from the chair and slid to the floor.

Margaret gave a little cry of alarm; even Sir John looked startled. But Thurston Kyle, staring coolly about the study, nodded and pointed to a decanter.

"Fright, probably," he drawled, without stirring a step towards the man. "Scrapper, give him a drink."

The Scrapper obediently took two strides—away from his captive. Whereupon the wily Spaniard came vividly and explosively to life.

In a single, tigerish bound he was on his feet, hurtling for safety. Thurston Kyle and the Scrapper dived for him together, missing by inches only as he sidled past. Before they could recover, he had ducked his head and shoulders, gathered himself for a spring, and shot like an arrow from a bow clean through the open window.

"After him!" snapped Thurston Kyle, his voice sharp with chagrin. The Scrapper was over the sill at lightning speed, the scientist half a pace behind.

Crash! Through the bushes below smashed

TRY ME FOR VALUE AND GIFTS

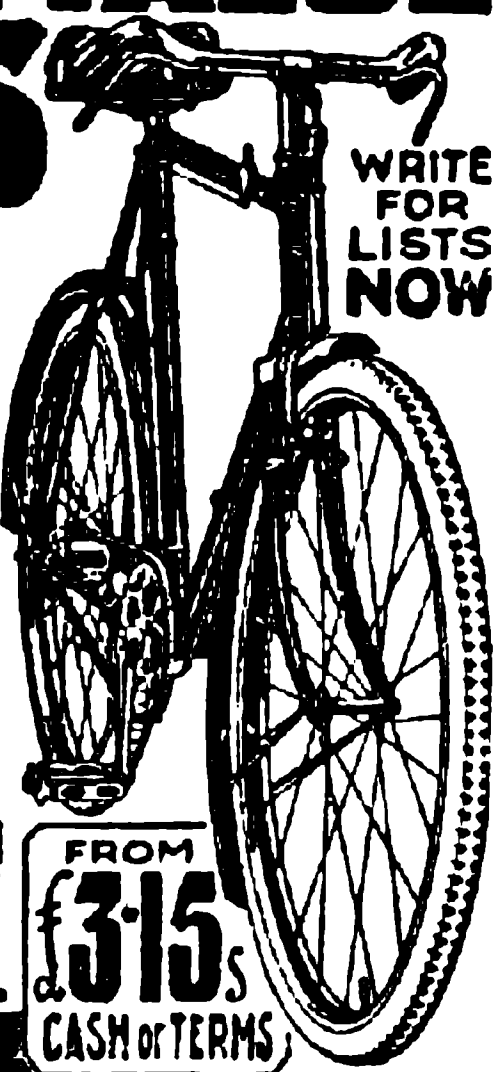
I GUARANTEE TO
SAVE YOU POUNDS
on any type of Bicycle you
require. Thousands of new
machines in stock.

**ALL MARKED DOWN
BY POUNDS.**

Carriage paid on approval.
FREE GIFT Accessories.
Write for my monster money-
saving Catalogue—it's Free!

Edw.

O'Brien Ltd.
THE WORLD'S LARGEST
CYCLE DEALER, DEP 17 **COVENTRY.**



Alvarida in frantic desperation. His feet could be heard spurning the gravel path beyond. Scrapper's hand flashed to his hip as he, too, cleared the laurels, but Thurston Kyle stopped him.

"No shooting. Bare hands!" he gasped, leaping to the van.

Round the angle of the house raced the fugitive, diving through more bushes, breathlessly lurching out on to the drive. For a moment he hesitated, casting a wild glance at Thurston Kyle's car; then, hearing his pursuers but a few yards behind, flew like the wind for the gates.

Wheeling on his track, Thurston Kyle and Huggins raced after him, each eager to grapple the man who had so neatly outwitted them. They saw his tall figure melting into the soft darkness ahead, set their teeth hard, snapped into an extra burst of speed—

A throbbing shriek, pain mingled with awful fear, shattered the quietness of the garden.

Instinct stopped them for a stride. Ahead of them Alvarida had stopped, too. He was weaving around on tottering legs, hands beating the air. Even in that faint light the watchers behind knew him for what he was—a man stricken to death. And then, as though a great hand had smitten him, he stiffened, crumpled—fell forward.

"Come on!" gritted Thurston Kyle. But this time he drew his gun, and the Scrapper did likewise. Stride for stride they raced to the fallen man. Thurston Kyle flung up his arm towards a dark clump of foliage just inside the gate.

"Carry on—get your torch—search there!"

The Scrapper raced on without stopping and plunged into the bushes, boldly and furiously as an attacking lion. Thurston Kyle knelt beside Alvarida.

Presently down the path, hobbling on two sticks, limped Sir John Alan, alone. He had sternly forbidden Margaret to follow, although she would have leapt after the runners. The explorer stopped dead as he saw Thurston Kyle on his knees beside a dim, outstretched figure. It was easy to guess what had happened.

"Is—is——"

Thurston Kyle stood up.

"Yes, it's Alvarida!" he said, his deep voice curiously hushed. "And I'm afraid his interest in the Priests' Treasure of Nagir is ended—for good."

As Sir John came closer, he pointed down at the Spaniard. Squarely over the man's heart projected the curious hilt of a throwing-knife!

THE two friends looked at each other strangely. Murder! But by whom? Who was this mysterious third party who had so suddenly cut in on the feud arising from the Priests' Treasure? A cold weirdness seemed faintly to breathe through the old garden. Thurston Kyle gripped his friend's arm with quiet force.

"This is no place for you, John. You must get back into the house—keep under cover!"

"But, good heavens——" began the other in indignant protest, only to relapse as the Scrapper came panting back.

"Nuthin' doin', sir; but I could ha' swore someone hopped over the front railin's as I rushed. I been down the lane, but it's too dark——"

"Mr. Kyle! Mr. Kyle!"

In a single movement the three men swung swiftly round, jaws hard. It was Margaret's voice calling loudly. It came again, this time from the front door. She came running down the steps, waving her hand. They moved forward with the same unanimity to prevent her from seeing Alvarida, and thronged around her. But her breathless words came as a ludicrous anti-climax.

"Trunk call for you, Mr. Kyle. It's Snub—from Paris!"

As though the life had suddenly gone from them, her three listeners relaxed with gasps of relief.

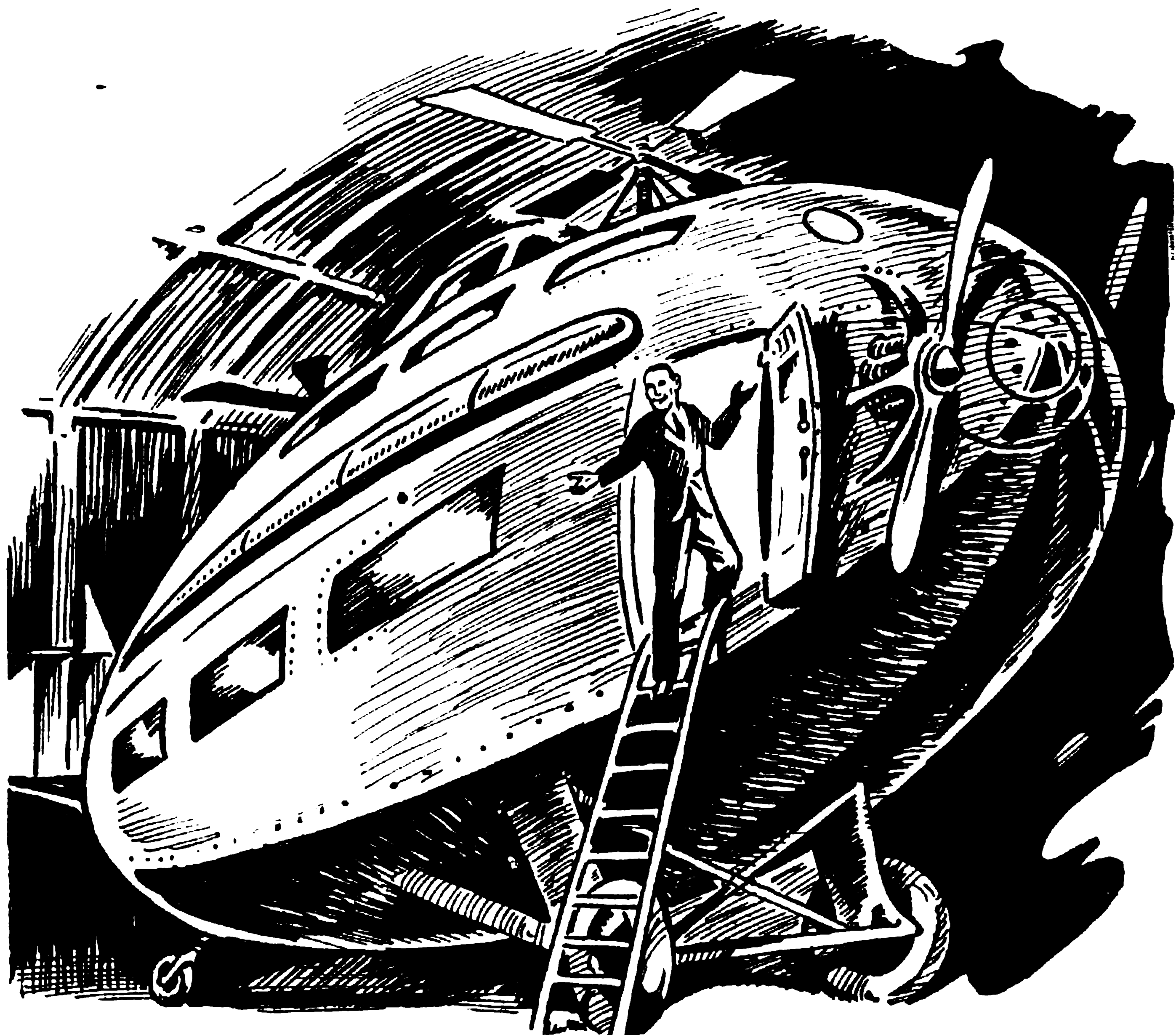
"Gosh!" growled the Scrapper hoarsely. "I thought someone had——"

He left the sentence unfinished; but the others knew what he meant. The same thought had gripped their hearts in an icy clutch—that Margaret was attacked. Thurston Kyle squared his shoulders and laughed abruptly.

"Darkness, strange visitors and—Alvarida—are making us all nervy!" he cried. "Come, John! Scrapper, stay here till I return, please. Let no one pass—and, for your own sake, be alert!"

"You betcha, sir!" grunted the iron-nerved Kitten. The others passed quickly into the house.





In spellbound amazement Sir John and his daughter beheld Thurston Kyle's latest and greatest invention—the "Thunderer."

Back in Sir John's study, Thurston Kyle seized the telephone eagerly. Snub's voice, faint but clear, answered at once, and the scientist gave a little contented sigh at the usual cheeriness in the boy's tone.

"Hallo, lad! How are you?"

"Fine, guv'nor! But, gosh, some hectic goings-on here!" called Snub, a chuckle of excitement in his voice. "I'm 'phoning from my bedside. I called up Hampstead, but got no reply, so I thought I'd try Reigate!"

"But what—what excitement, my boy?"

"That fake asylum, guv'nor, where you found Sir John"—Thurston Kyle caught his breath—"it's been raided!"

"By the police?"

"No fear! Darn sight worse than that! All Paris is talking about it—it's in all the papers. The asylum's been raided by—niggers!"

"Wha-at?"

"Absolutely! This morning, early. The police broke in this afternoon and found the dickens of a sight. Place must ha' looked like a battlefield. Five white men killed—four Spaniards and Leclerc, the boss—"

"Great Scott!"

"And two queer-looking niggers! There'd

been a devil of a scrap—all knives, no guns. People heard the rumpus, but thought some of Leclerc's loonies had broken loose. Anyway, the police looked in later—and that's what they found."

"Four Spaniards—a Frenchman—two negroes!" Thurston Kyle's eyes blazed. So Alvarida's men had been wiped out, too, as well as himself. The "third party" in this strange case must be a desperate one.

Snub's voice came again with renewed eagerness, ramming a more powerful shock than ever into his master.

"And I've had some, too!" he chirruped gaily.

Thurston Kyle's knuckles whitened round the telephone.

"You—you've been attacked?"

"And how, guv'nor! About an hour ago. I was sitting propped up in bed. I happened to move my head, fairly quickly, I suppose, to glance round at the clock beside me. Then—whoopee!—something flicked past my ear and chunked into the wood behind.

"Gosh, I moved quickly then! It was a whacking knife. I glanced at the window—I'd made 'em open it for a little

fresh air—and there was some dark shape busy clamberin' in to make amends for missing!"

"Good heavens! What did you do? Are you all right?"

"Fine, guv'nor. Do? Why, I just yanked my gun from under the pillow—where I'd kept it for comfort's sake—and let drive, you bet!" grinned Snub chirpily. "Got the bloke clean through the shoulder as he was half-way in. He dropped without a grunt—outside!"

"Ah!"

"About five minutes later there was a perfect avalanche of folk into my room—the manager, servants, gendarmes. They'd found the sportsman down on the ground—he won't chuck any more knives. And when at last I got a word in, I found he was a nigger, too. The same sort, in fact, as those who'd attacked the asylum."

Thurston Kyle set his jaw.

"Hold on, Snub!" he said quietly. "Order another call!" He wheeled to Sir John. The explorer heard the thrilling tale in silence, but at the finish his face was flushed and strained. He held up an imperative hand.

"Ask Snub what that knife was like! Ask him if it had a wavy edged blade, with the figure of a bird carved near the hilt!"

He dragged out the words as though reluctant to face a grim discovery. Briefly Thurston Kyle obeyed him. Snub's reply came at once.

"Rather, sir. That just describes it. The police have got the knife now!"

Thurston Kyle switched his eyes to Sir John, and nodded silently. His friend paled: drew a deep breath.

"Thanks! That—that's all!"

But though the explorer spoke calmly, his mouth was twitching under stress of great emotion. Seeing, Thurston Kyle spoke a hasty farewell to Snub, begging him to take care of himself, and promising to have him brought home by air within a day or so. Then he rang off and turned to Sir John.

"Well, old friend? What—"

Sir John cut him short with a significant wave towards the dark garden where Scrapper stood on guard over Alvarida. He said in a low voice:

"Get me that—other—knife, please, Kyle!"

Without a word, Thurston Kyle departed on his errand. When he returned, Margaret had been sent away from the study. Taking the heavy, vicious weapon in trembling hands, Sir John examined it—for just two seconds. When he laid it down on the table again, his expression almost alarmed Thurston Kyle.

"What is it, John? What does all this mean?"

The answer came, low and shaky:

"It means that a far worse foe than Alvarida has hounded me down!" muttered Sir John tonelessly. "Not content with following us to M'Bolo, they have come

to Europe for vengeance—on us all. Alvarida—Alvarida's men—all are gone! It will be my turn next!"

"But what—who?"

"The Nagirines!" said Sir John quietly. "For the secret of the Priests' Treasure!"

THURSTON KYLE grew cool and alert once more. He could see that all his calm nerve would be required from now on.

"Are you sure? From the depths of the Congo to France and England is a far cry."

"Not for those devils!" burst out the other passionately. "Their white leader is behind all this, I feel sure. He wants to know the fresh hiding-place of the treasure."

Swinging away, he began pacing the study in agitated strides.

"Man, it's easy to see. They tracked us from M'Bolo to France—Alvarida's party and me. As you see, they have wiped up the Spaniard's men. They must have seen you get tangled up with Alvarida—trailed you, too. You escaped because of the mysterious manner in which you left France. I also. But Snub had to return to the hotel, and they have tried to get him. Everyone connected with me is to be—killed!"

"I escaped, as I say. But probably they followed Alvarida, who was on my trail, and he led them here. Poor fool! He has paid! And I am the next!"

"Are you?" There was a grinding note in Thurston Kyle's words that seemed to crackle through the study. "I think not, John. No gang of African negroes, however organised, can beat me, my friend. No, by gad, not by a mile!" He thumped the table. "Pack your things, John. Margaret's, too. We're leaving this house—now! Your servant will be safe—also your sister. In any case, I will have three of my Kittens guarding the place day and night. You and Margaret will come to my place. You will be there but a short week, anyway. And, by heaven, the Nagirine who attacks you there will never see Africa again, I promise you!"

Twenty minutes later, Thurston Kyle's car nipped down the drive, headlights full on, and out into the lane. The hood was down, and Margaret was driving. By her side, keen eyes alert, sat Thurston Kyle, and a gun lay handy on his lap. Huddled in the back sat Sir John Alan, also armed.

They left behind them a house whose every door and window was bolted, while the great Scrapper roamed the place on ceaseless sentry-go. As the result of a 'phone call to the Whitechapel Gymnasium, two more Kittens were hastening down to Reigate. While, as a further afterthought, three others were on their way by cab to Thurston Kyle's house at Hampstead.

Swinging into the main road, Margaret trod on the gas, and the great car shot ahead at speed, away from the menacing shadow that had appeared so swiftly in the lives of her father and herself—the shadow of Nagir.

CHAPTER 5.

The Ambush!

THROUGH Purley and London weaved the car under Margaret's expert hands. Not a single word was spoken the whole way. Thurston Kyle, for one, was engrossed in thoughts, although his vigilance never relaxed for a moment.

He made no effort to blind himself to the serious situation that had arisen with the death of Alvarida, and Snub's extraordinary 'phone call from Paris. He and his friends—the latter especially—had wandered into deep and dangerous waters. Alvarida he had rather despised from the beginning as a mere adventurer—resolute, but not too formidable. The Nagirines, however,—these

strange, determined people from the Lost City—were different.

They had trailed Alvarida and Sir John to Paris—had even known Snub was left behind. They had struck with unerring accuracy the scent that led to Reigate—all pointing to ruthless, indomitable skill. But had they any designs on his own Hampstead mansion, too? Were he and his friends, in retreating from Reigate, running into fresh trouble there? Behind the scientist's mask-like face, anxious thoughts were brooding.

It was his latest invention he was thinking about chiefly—his "Thunderer" on which so much depended. Time enough to deal with the Nagirines if and when they attacked. But the great ship lay in a hastily-con-

(Continued on next page.)

One, two, three!



The flavour lasts — British made

STEADY does it!

Put a piece of Wrigley's in the mouth—it is ideal to "steady" you and give you confidence.

The pure cool flavour refreshes you because it refreshes your mouth like nothing else can.

Wrigley's "after every meal" also aids the digestion and cleanses the teeth.

In two flavours — P.K., a pure peppermint flavour; and Spearmint, a pure mint leaf flavour. Only 1d. a packet, but the finest quality money can buy.



WRIGLEY'S

1^D
PER
PACKET



EL42

structed frame hangar on the wide lawn of his house, and such a magnificent quarry the Nagirines would hardly overlook if they were bent on revenge for the loss of their own treasure. That would be the first thing, probably, they would attempt to destroy.

One ray of comfort remained to him, however, that the Thunderer was not left unguarded. True, there were no men there yet—the Kittens he had ordered out had strict instructions to wait for him at the end of his private road, for many reasons. But the airship, like the house itself, was encircled with defences far more powerful than an army of men. Defences that were invisible, too. Thurston Kyle allowed no strangers within striking distance of his house. If any did get in, they ran all the risks of a sudden end that his scientific brain could devise.

At last the private road leading to Kyle's house was reached and the three waiting Kittens glided out to meet their chief.

"Anything happened, men?"

"Not since we been 'ere, sir—fifteen minutes!" whispered Sam Smith. "No one's passed us. We ain't heard a sound."

"Right! Then climb on the running-board and keep your heads down. It may be a false alarm, but we'll take precautions!" Thurston Kyle's voice grew more intense. "If there is any trouble once we're in the grounds—no shooting. Get your men quietly—lay them out. We want no risk of police interest, understand. I've an important mission for you all in a few days—till then we must handle anything that crops up ourselves."

Three brawny fists tightened on the rubber coshes they carried; three expert rough-housers slid aboard the car, two on the running-board, one on the luggage-grid. Margaret, her heart bumping painfully, let in the clutch again. The car slid forward under sidelights only, down the dark lane to where the high wall of the house rose like a vague shadow.

Slowly, cautiously, the big iron gates loomed up. Thurston Kyle got out quickly to open them, gun held by the barrel, eyes vigilant. No sound; no signs of any intruders. He got back to his seat. The car nosed its way gently through the entrance and down the winding drive, bordered by bare black trees.

Suddenly, something streaked past Thurston Kyle from the gloomy trees—something that flicked the soft hat from his head and just grazed his scalp—something that whined with a venomous note. At the same time both front tyres exploded in twin reports, bringing the car to a grinding halt.

"Duck, girl!" he roared, and switched on the headlights. In a flash his strong hand had pulled Margaret flat on the seat. And in a flash, too, four dark, lithe figures appeared from among the trees, arms raised.

The Nagirines were here!

Then the Kittens nipped from hiding, and the fight was on.

Veterans at the game that they were, each Kitten picked his man in methodical grimness and piled in with a breath-taking, virulent speed that bewildered even the agile Nagirines. They knew what to do, too, when it was a case of dealing with knives. Each man as he closed made the same shattering stroke, a whistling slash of the rubber cosh aimed at the knife-fighter's elbow-joint. Blades tinkled on the gravel as they dropped from numbed grips. After that the coshes rose and fell, thudding soggly on head and shoulders.

The end came swiftly, and soon all four Nagirines were lying still on the ground.

There was a breathless chuckle of victory, stopped in its infancy by the scientist.

"Quiet—everyone!"

Leaving the little party there, he plunged into the trees deeper down the drive until he came to the ivy-clad roots of an old oak. He bent, switched on his electric torch, and by its light pulled back the camouflaged top of a small square cavity, lined with tiles. A faint musical hum, no louder than that of a bee, sounded the moment the hole was open; but in a second he had plunged in his hand and clicked back a tiny switch set in a block of vulcanite. The hum ceased at once. He closed the cavity again and ran forward across the lawn to where lay a monster, dark shed.

Flashing his torch around, a few seconds satisfied him that no attempt had been made to tamper with the Thunderer's hangar. But when he came to the small side-door of his house, he stumbled on fresh evidence of the Nagirine's visit—and grim evidence at that. On the steel grid let into the ground before the door lay a dark and crumpled figure.

Bending to examine the man, Thurston Kyle found him dressed in good European garments. His harsh, savage face, however, was clear and brown as a berry; and the wavy knife he had been holding when he put forth a hand to try the steel door handle bore the emblem of a bird on its blade.

Thurston Kyle straightened, lips set tight. The Nagirines, beating the Kittens to the house, had tried to invade his mansion, then, and this man had fallen to the invisible and drastic "defences"! The others, warned by the fate of their scout, had left him there with the callousness common to natives, and laid in patient ambush among the trees. But for Kyle's far-seeing precaution in ordering out the three Kittens, the four who had attacked must have been successful, too.

In little more than seventeen hours, the Nagirines had struck venomously at everyone connected with the Priests' Treasure, however remotely. Alvarida and his gang had paid; by a miracle of luck only had young Snub escaped.

Thurston Kyle smiled grimly as he ran back to his car with a coil of rope from the house in his hand.

"But Sir John and Margaret are safe!" he thought triumphantly, and glanced towards the dark blur on the lawn. "And so

are you, my beauty! We'll settle to-night's bill yet—in Nagir City!"

CHAPTER 6.

Aboard the Thunderer!

ARRIVED back at the closely guarded car, he gave his orders briskly. His first act was to toss the rope to Sailor Peters with a significant nod. In a few minutes the unconscious raiders were trussed hand and foot in knots from which there was no escape.

Taking Sam Smith aside, Thurston Kyle whispered instructions.

"I want these men taken care of for at least a week. Feed them, but keep them prisoners. And keep them hidden!"

"O.K., sir!" nodded Sam. "There's a cellar under Scrapper's gym. If they get outa that—well, they won't!"

"Also——" Thurston Kyle nodded his head back towards the house where that still body lay, and lowered his voice still more. And again the sturdy Kitten nodded, this time without reply.

Thurston Kyle smiled to himself. Good men, his Kittens—tried and proven. Still smiling, he strolled to the car and helped his friends out.

"Our troubles are over—for a time!" he cried gaily. "Now for a treat. You shall be the first to inspect—my Thunderer."

He led them across the lawn and into the dark shed. For a moment he left them in darkness; they heard him climb a small ladder, and then followed the murmur of a sliding steel door. Next instant came a blinding flash of electric bulbs, over a score of them. A magnificent sight stood revealed—a miracle of aircraft construction.

One hundred and twenty feet from tapering bow to streamlined stern, the Thunderer was a thing of glistening all-steel beauty, with side and top windows of bullet-proof glass, and a small ladder leading from the deck to a squat machine-gun turret on the roof.

Within the hull, shut off from the main deck by a curtain, was ample living space for nearly a score of men, with bunks and folding canvas chairs. An arms-rack stood in the centre of the deck; air-tight lockers for stores and water were let into the stern.

In general construction the Thunderer was a steel airship. But short, folding wings and a complicated system of ailerons and rudder flexibility gave the craft the elusive manoeuvring power of a large airplane. The twin engines, packed into the nose of the ship, were fed from a great, armoured reservoir of fuel. But even if the fuel gave out, there still remained the high-spot of the invention; for the Thunderer could be propelled by auxiliary rockets fired by compressed air through a series of slender tubes in the stern.

Long before the inspection was finished, Sir John and his daughter were silent with exhausted wonder.

Margaret summed it up at last in a still, small voice.

"Mr. Kyle, it—it's terrific! And to think you're taking dad and me to Nagir in this!"

The two men turned on her together.

"You?" they cried. Margaret stuck out her firm, round chin.

"Little me!" she nodded. "I'm coming. Mr. Kyle, I order you to rig me up a cubby-hole somewhere for sleeping. And I'm cook, nurse, and chief nuisance to this expedition, or—or daddy doesn't go, either!" she finished threateningly. Needless to say, Margaret got her way!

IT was a week later—midnight.

On Thurston Kyle's lawn, strange but orderly activity reigned. Fifteen tough men, grinning like schoolboys on a treat, marched aboard the Thunderer, and sat down quietly in the folding seats. Margaret and her father were there, tense and interested spectators from seats beside the turret ladder, Snub, too, still strapped up and weak from days in bed, but whispering cheery chaff from his bunk. Thurston Kyle, his handsome face sombre and absorbed, was settling himself on the control platform. His great Night Hawk wings, in their case, were stowed away in a special locker.

The blackness outside was intense. At his order, Scrapper switched off the lights. There came no sound but the hard-breathing of the Kittens as they sat in darkness. Then the click of a lever, a faint throb of engines muffled by powerful silencers, and the smooth lift of the deck beneath them.

The Thunderer was moving!

But not forward, as an airship would have done. On the roof, twin helicopters, fore and aft, lifted the ship straight from the lawn. Softly as a monster rising from the deep, the great craft rose into the night at the command of the quick-moving man at the controls, until the altimeter clocked off two hundred feet. Then another lever snapped home, the steel wings hissed from their grooves in the hull and locked.

From the controls sounded a sudden quiet laugh—a laugh that made the Kittens grin to themselves in the gloom. With a velvety headlong rush, the Thunderer, child of Thurston Kyle's brain, surged forward in a long, long climb, up and up until the altimeter said twenty thousand feet. Warm air, generated through automatic feeders, kept the temperature in the hull steady. The lights were switched on once more.

Safe from observation, filled by a smiling, cheery crew, the mighty airship swung south, heading at top speed for Nagir and the Priests' Treasure—and vengeance!

THE END.

(Next week: *The Night Hawk and his Kittens at the lost city of Nagir. Thrills, excitement and whirlwind adventure. Look out for this magnificent yarn: "Jungle Justice."*)



BETWEEN OURSELVES

Edwy Searles Brooks, popular author
of the St. Frank's stories, chats with
readers of the "Nelson Lee."

IT is so long since I last sat down to write this feature that I have almost forgotten how to do it! But I know that all you loyal readers will be pleased at its revival. The Editor and I have been having a number of "chin-wags" lately, and you can now look forward to a few lines from me every week as a regular thing.

I thoroughly enjoy writing this little chat, and the more letters I receive from you readers, the more enthusiastic I shall become. So, before I go any further, I had better remind you that my address is still the same—Edwy Searles Brooks, Care of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4—and that I shall be pleased to comment on this page upon any matters of general interest which your letters contain.

There's something of very great importance I want to get off my chest at once. The chief result of those chin-wags mentioned above is that the Editor has decided to hark back to the "good old days," when the St. Frank's stories filled practically the entire paper. In other words, the St. Frank's yarns, in a fortnight's time, will return to their old length. In fact, they'll be even longer! Longer than they ever were! And, to kick off, we're having an adventure series, with all the old crowd—including Lord Dorrimore—and re-introducing some favourite characters you old readers will all remember. But more of this next week.

Now to return to more personal matters, which is as it should be, since this page is provided by the Editor as a sort of "round table," at which I shall preside, and around which you readers will sit. A pretty hefty table, by the way, since it will encompass not only the entire British Empire, but the whole world. In the past I have had letters from the most amazingly odd corners of the globe, and I hope to have them again. Through the medium of this page, I have discovered that the Old Paper finds its weekly way into the jungles of Africa, the wide, open spaces of Australia, the prairies of

Canada, the labyrinths of China, the forests of the Malay Peninsula, the remote villages of India, and, nearer home, to France, Belgium, Germany, and Italy. You'd be surprised how world-wide the appeal of the Old Paper really is.

Well, here we are again, and I should like to receive letters once more from all those places mentioned above, and from all the places I haven't mentioned. I am anxious to regain touch with many regular correspondents whose letters gave me particular delight. I want them to grab their pens and write to me as soon as they read this—while they are in the mood. In fact, I want to hear from everybody who has ever written me before—and I can take it for granted that lots of new readers will join the fold at the round table.

But a word of warning. Don't write to me about the colour of the cover, the illustrations, the serial story; don't ask me how much it costs to travel by air to Timbuctoo, or how many square miles there are in the moon, or what the atmosphere in Mars consists of. Please confine your remarks to the St. Frank's stories, and the St. Frank's stories only. Praise if you feel in a praising mood, grumble if you think that a grumble is justified—grumbles can be very helpful—ask me questions about the St. Frank's characters, or the St. Frank's geography. Tell me how you started reading my yarns, and things of that sort. You may be puzzled as to who occupies Study No. 12 in the East House, or how the gymnasium is illuminated, or where the swimming baths are situated. Ask me questions like these, and I'll cheerfully answer them. Every letter I receive will be acknowledged. If I don't reply by post, or on this page, you will see your name and town in print here.

Edwy Searles Brooks

LADBROKE BLACK'S Magnificent Adventure Serial is a Succession of Thrills!

The VALLEY of HOT SPRINGS!

Jackson Enjoys Himself!

ERIC was horrified into inactivity. He could see Imatuk's arm raised above him, saw the long dagger in the man's hand. Yet he felt incapable of doing anything to save his life. He thought his end had come; closed his eyes to shut out the awful sight.

And then suddenly he felt Imatuk wrenched away from him, heard something clatter metallically to the floor. He opened his eyes, and gasped in relief. He was just in time to see Imatuk crash over as Jackson's fist caught him flush in the jaw. The captain of the guard lay still.

"Up you get, kid!" snapped Jackson, and his voice was harsh.

Eric staggered dazedly to his feet.

"It's Imatuk!" he gasped. "He was torturing her!"

"Yes, I calculated it was Imatuk, and I want him. Him and me are going for a little walk. I reckon Tormansuk could do with him." He stirred the figure on the floor with his foot. "Come on—jump to it!" he added grimly.

The man rose slowly and faced him.

"Walk!" commanded Jackson, and though the word was unintelligible to the other, Imatuk understood well enough the meaning of that shining barrel which covered him.

"I don't savvy who's in this exactly, but I reckon we'll put the wind up them for

good and all!" snapped Jackson harshly. "That girl over there has had something to do with it by the looks of her." He pointed at the squat fur-clad figure who was now leaning against the wall with staring, terrified eyes. "She'll do as a witness. I reckon she'll tell the rest. Now you!"

He shepherded Imatuk towards the outer door which communicated with the temple by that long passage. At a gesture from Jackson, the girl followed in his rear, and all three vanished. Sick and giddy, Eric leaned against the table, glancing with horri-

fied eyes at the motionless figures on the floor. But a moment ago they had been living men, proud of their strength, and their glittering armour. Now they lay there, each with a

horrible round mark on their foreheads—lifeless.

And then his gaze wandered to a white face framed in golden hair that was looking up at him. With a little cry he took a knife from his pocket and cut the leather thongs that bound her arms. A wan smile rewarded him. Supporting her head, he gently raised her till she was in a sitting position, with her legs dangling over the edge of the table.

"Those brutes—what were they doing to you?" gasped the boy, forgetting in the intensity of his feelings that she could not understand a word of what he said.

At that moment the curtains of the inner

THE FIERY CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD COMES TO A FIERY END!

HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

ERIC DENNING, a cheery, adventure-loving youngster, lives with his uncle, **PROFESSOR DENNING**. The professor, absent-minded and interested in nothing save his studies, is expecting a visit from John Peters, an Arctic explorer who has discovered a narwhal's horn, on which is written in Runic writing the key to tremendous treasure, in Greenland. The horn arrives, but not Peters. For Peters is dead—murdered by one of a gang of scoundrels, the leader of which is

BOSS MAUNSELL. Maunsell attempts to capture the narwhal's horn, but is frustrated, largely owing to the activities of

DANNY, the professor's man-of-all-work and an ex-pugilist. The professor deciphers the writing on the horn, and he and Eric and Danny travel to Greenland, and start out for the Valley of Hot Springs. They capture Maunsell, who has been trailing them; he gives his name as Jackson. Passing through a tunnel in the glaciers, they arrive at the mysterious valley. They are captured by the Angekok, or ruler of the valley, but he is killed by Jackson, who assumes his place of office. They make an enemy of Imatuk, captain of the guard, and Eric and Jackson find him torturing a girl whom they have befriended. The boy rushes to the rescue, but Imatuk gets him down, and, raising his hand, in which gleams a dagger, prepares to strike!

(Now read on.)

door were pulled aside, and Danny, followed by the professor, rushed into the room. On the threshold they halted, aghast at the shambles.

"That's Jackson, guv'nor!" exclaimed Danny. "I told you there was no need for you to interfere. There's his mark. Never a miss!" The ex-pugilist glanced queerly at Eric, then added: "What's the trouble, Mr. Eric? Anything happened along of Miss Sun? Where's Jackson?"

But the girl had begun to speak now in her soft musical voice, addressing the professor and pointing now and again to Eric, and once to that outer door which led to the temple.

"Torturing you, eh? Do you understand, Danny? Those blackguards were actually torturing this young woman. It appears that Imatuk and the guard broke into the sacred apartments and began searching for the Angekok, with the intention of killing him. When they couldn't find him they questioned the attendants. Imatuk was told that the Angekok had gone out. Imatuk knew, of course, that no one wearing the sacred ceremonial robes had been seen in the valley. He at once jumped to the conclusion that the Angekok had left behind him those symbols of his office."

He plucked agitatedly at his beard.

"Imatuk then began to question the attendants as to the whereabouts of the sacred helmet and the other badges of office, realising that, could he lay his hands on them, the power and authority would immediately pass to him. When the attendants could not, or would not answer him, he used threats. At last one of the girls accused the Daughter of the Sun of having concealed the symbols with the assistance of one of the white strangers. When she refused to tell him where she had hidden them he put her to the torture. And then——"

It was Eric who completed the rest of the story. The professor's agitation became more marked.

"This will never do. I object to violence and the unnecessary taking of human life on principle. Jackson is becoming intolerable. It cannot have been necessary to kill all these men. And what is he doing now?"

When Eric told him that he had gone into the temple with Imatuk and the girl who had betrayed the Daughter of the Sun, the professor rushed towards the inner door. Danny followed him. Eric, after a moment's hesitation, gave his hand to the girl, helped her to her feet, and brought up the rear of the procession. When they reached the threshold of that vast shadowy hall they came upon a scene which made them pause involuntarily.

A Dangerous Game of Bluff.

JACKSON was standing in the centre of the floor. Some twenty feet away from him Imatuk was lying stretched on the pavement, with the esquimaux

girl bending over him engaged in binding his wrists together. The professor was the first to recover himself.

"Jackson!" he shouted. "What is the meaning of this?"

Jackson's only answer was to wave the girl aside. Headed by the professor, the whole party began to rush across the floor. Before they had gone more than a few yards they saw Jackson stoop and touch something at his feet. Instantly Imatuk's prone figure began to tip, and at the same moment a lurid flame shot up to the arched roof.

They heard a stifled scream. The Esquimaux girl had flung herself face downwards on the floor. As the inclination of the revolving stone became more marked, Imatuk's body began to move. Slipping almost imperceptibly at first, it presently slid quicker and quicker. The flames were lapping his feet and legs. And then of a sudden he was gone. Even as they reached the edge of the fiery pit the stone began to swing back again; the flame vanished.

"That's the end of Imatuk, anyway."

Jackson, his right hand still gripping the revolver, was coming towards them, his face twitching. He was quite close to them as he spoke. For one second the revolver seemed to threaten the professor. There was an odd entranced look in the man's face, almost as if he was under the influence of some evil spirit.

"More of them guards!" Danny shouted. "Behind you! Look! Quick!"

Jackson spun round. As he did so Danny caught his right wrist in a vice-like grasp, and the next moment had taken possession of the revolver.

"That will do for you!" he said gruffly. "You ain't fit to be allowed out with that gun. It's my belief you'd have plugged the guv'nor just now."

For a moment Jackson glared at the old pugilist with his lips drawn back from his teeth in an animal-like snarl.

"None of that, Jackson!" snapped Danny.

The effect of those words was instantaneous. The strained, set look on Jackson's face vanished. His lips ceased twitching. He put up his hands to his forehead almost as if he were waking from a dream.

"All right!" he said shortly.

The professor looked at him perplexedly.

"You're a curious problem, Jackson. I have no wish to minimise all that we owe to your courage and resource, but this unrestrained violence—well, frankly, it shocks me. Besides which, you will arouse the People of the Valley against us, thus jeopardising our lives."

Little did the professor realise how true his words were to prove—and in the near future!

(Remarkable adventures still await Eric and his companions at the Valley of Hot Springs. Don't miss reading next week's exciting instalment.)

"THE PERIL OF THE MOOR!"*(Continued from page 25.)*

"There's no question, my lord, that two attempts have been made on your life, and on the life of your son," said Inspector Jameson gravely at length. "And Gatfield's part in the business is highly significant."

"How significant?" asked Lord Edgemore.

"Because he was Mr. Mortimer Carroll's private secretary," replied the inspector. "I happen to know that, more or less by chance. Mr. Carroll was staying down here for some days not long ago, and I happened to be introduced to him one evening in the Grapes Hotel. Gatfield was there then, and he was introduced to me, too. However, there's no direct evidence against Mr. Carroll—and I'm telling you frankly that we may find it very difficult to secure any such evidence."

As it turned out, Inspector Jameson was right—for once. The suspicions against Mr. Mortimer Carroll could not be proved.

But he was visited by the police and questioned, and it was significant that within a couple of days he left the country, taking his son with him. His wife was already abroad.

The High Court case, in which Mr. Carroll had intended to dispute the present Lord Edgemore's right to the title, was abandoned.

It was certain that the rancher-earl and his son would have no further trouble over their inheritance. They were definitely at Edgemore Castle "for keeps."

SO, as far as the St. Frank's fellows were concerned, the exciting affair was all over.

They remained at Edgemore Castle, enjoying the rancher-earl's hospitality, and the Easter holidays were still ahead.

"I want you, boys, to forget everything that's recently happened," said the earl,

smiling at his guests. "I guess I shan't forget—ever. I owe my life to you, boys, and now I'm figuring that this castle is just as much yours as mine. Get that, and get it right. You're as welcome here as Skeets himself."

"I'll say so!" said Skeets heartily.

"And now that that wretched business is over, I want you to enjoy yourselves—to enjoy your holiday," continued Lord Edgemore. "But, seeing that this district is kind of ugly for all of us just now, what do you say to getting out of it?"

"How do you mean, sir?" chorused the boys.

"Well, I guess I've got a swell mansion in the heart of Hovetown, along the south coast here," smiled Lord Edgemore. "Part of my inheritance, I guess. A regular, honest-to-goodness, slap-up residence, right on the front at Hovetown. I reckon I'll be needed in London for the next few days, and there's no reason why you boys shouldn't enjoy yourselves at the seaside. How does it go? Skeets will be with you, of course—and the house is yours. You can have a swell time."

"Thanks awfully, sir!"

"Jolly good!"

"Rather!"

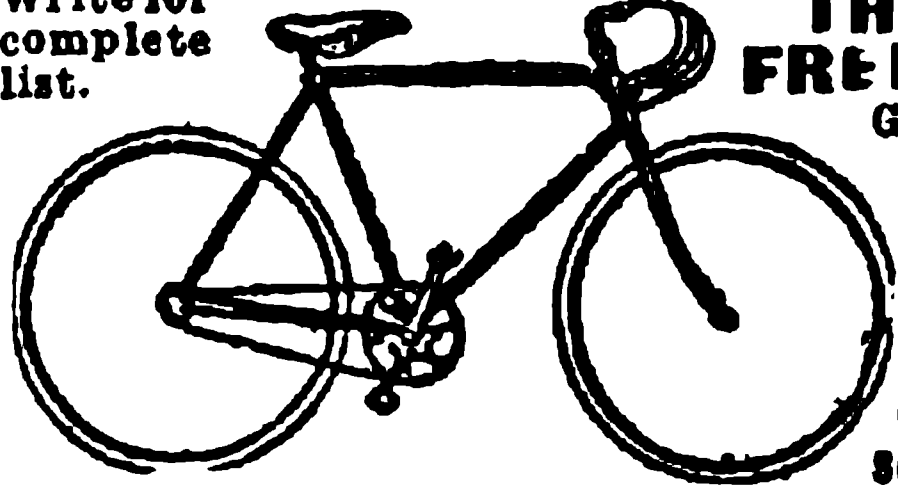
"I'll have it fixed pretty," promised Lord Edgemore. "And don't worry about money—I'll fix all that, too. I want your Easter week to be the dandiest you've ever had."

And Lord Edgemore's guests made merry, rejoicing at the prospect.

THE END.

(Special Easter-tide story featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's next week, lads. Don't miss this corking yarn—and order your copy in advance !)

Write for complete list.



THE "SPUR" FRENCH RACER.
Guaranteed for ever
55/- Usual retail £4-4-0
Frame enamelled in various colours
Genuine Hutchinson Red Cord Tyres

Deposit 14/- and 12 monthly payments of 4/9
GEO. GROSE & CO., 8, New Bridge St., London, E.C.4.

DON'T BE BULLIED! Send 2 Penny Stamps for some **SPLENDID LESSONS** in **JUJITSU** and Handsome Photo Plate of Jap Champions. The Wonderful Japanese Self-Defence without weapons. Take care of yourself under all circumstances; fear no man. You can have **Monster Illustrated Portion** for P.O. 3/9. Send Now to "YAWARA" (Dept. A.P.) 10, Queensway, Hanworth, Feltham, Middx. Practical Tuition only at 48, Carnaby St., Regent St., W 1

BE TALL Your height increased in 14 days or money back. Amazing Course 5/-. Send **STAMP NOW** for Free Book.—**STEBBING SYSTEM, 28, Dean Road, LONDON, N.W.2.**

Blushing Shyness, "Nerves," Self-consciousness cured or money back! Complete Treatment 5/-. details, striking testimonials. Free—**L.A. STEBBING, 28, Dean Rd., LONDON, N.W.2.**

BE BIG I am ready to send entirely free a copy of my two famous books, "How to Build Stature," and also "The Power of Evidence." These books will be the means of greatly improving your height, your health and physique. Why not send for these books **NOW**? If you are short, here is your opportunity. Sent privately for 2d. stamp.—**P. CARNE, 39, Lincoln Street, Cardiff, S. Wales.**

BETALLER! Increased my own height to 6ft. 3ins. CLIENTS GAIN 2 to 6 INS.; Fee £2 2s. **STAMP** brings FREE Partics.—**P. M. Ross, Height Specialist, Scarborough.**

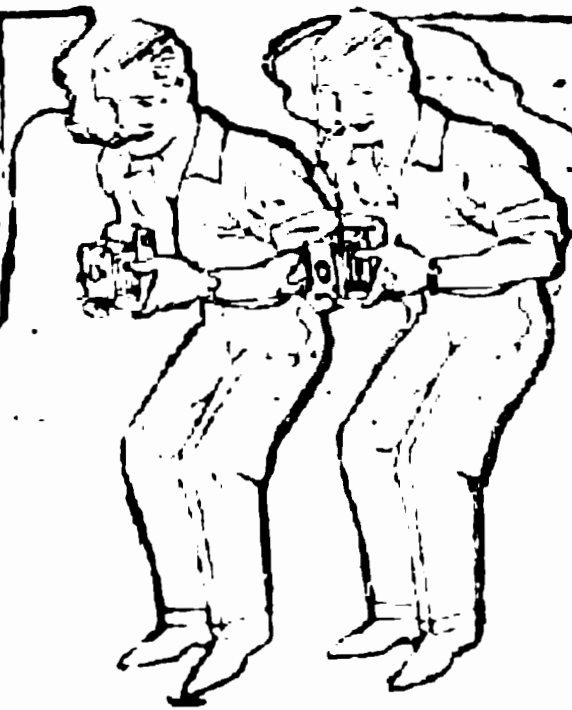
300 STAMPS for 6d. (Abroad 1/-), including Airpost, Barbados, Old India, Nigeria, New South Wales, Gold Coast, etc.—**W.A. WHITE, 30, Engine Lane, LYE, Stourbridge.**

All applications for Advertising Spaces in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, "The Nelson Lee Library," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

BOYS!

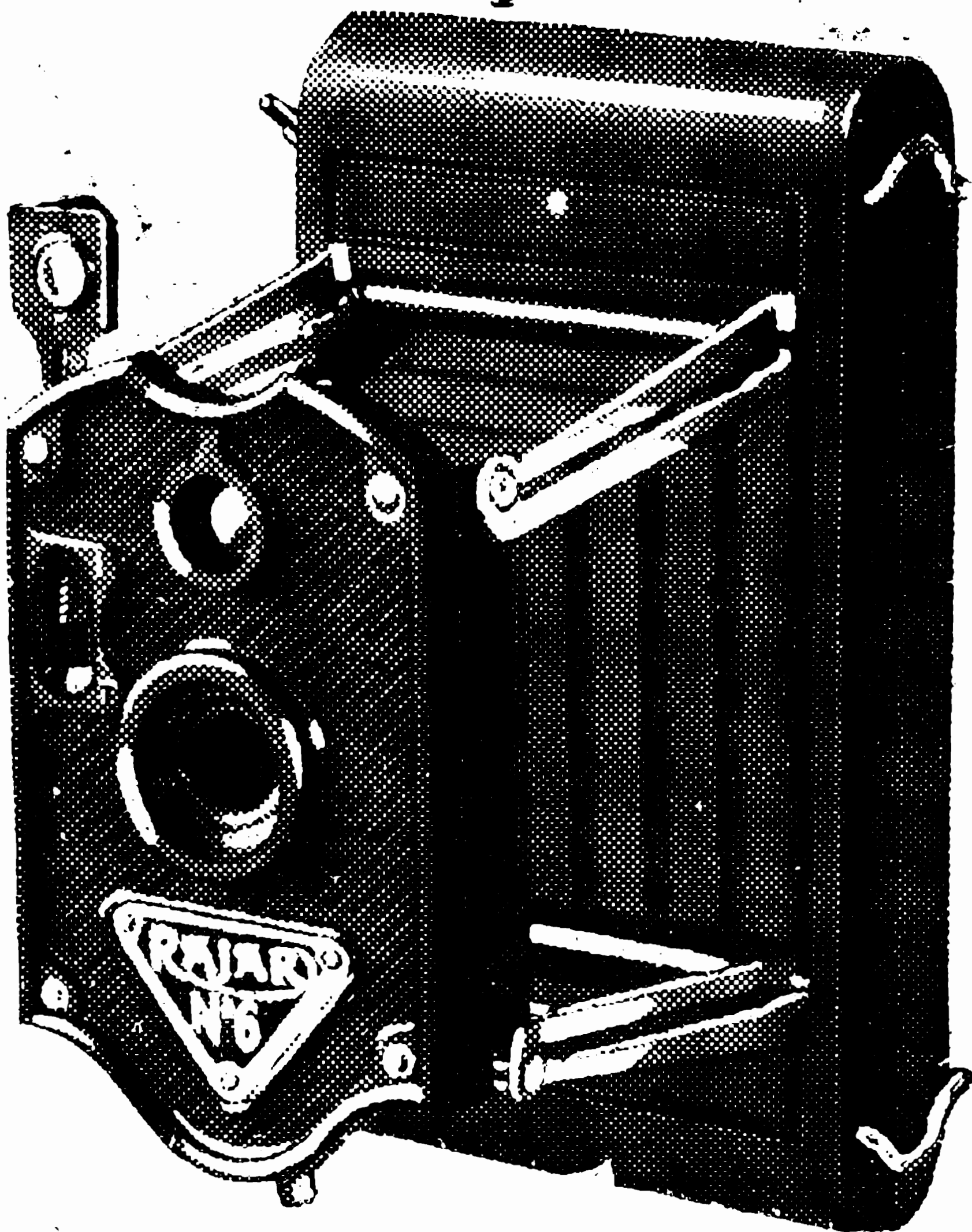
JUST THE
THING FOR
WHITSUN!

GREAT FOR
SUMMER
HOLIDAYS!



THIS GREAT ALL-BRITISH RAJAR CAMERA

Look at this! A fine folding camera of the type used by press photographers — FREE! — for B.D.V. coupons! Ask father, big brother—ask all your grown-up friends and relations—to smoke B.D.V. and give you the coupons. Swop for them at school, too!



150

COUPONS

—that's all you need! The 'Rajar' Folding Camera takes marvellous snaps, sharp and clear. And it is simple to use! Worth two guineas. Yet free for less coupons than ever before. Start saving B.D.V. coupons today. You'll be snapping by Whitsun.

"Rajar" all-British No. 6 Folding Camera. Takes snaps and time exposures 2½ in. x 3½ in. Double view finder. Fine Meniscus lens. Handsome black finish. All metal parts plated. Daylight loading. No awkward "gadget." Easily opened, easily set, easily closed.

B.D.V.

10 for 6d.

With 1 coupon worth 3 times other coupon values.

Even less coupons are required from B.D.V. tobacco. Each tobacco coupon being worth 11 cigarette coupons.

GET THE NEW GOLDEN GIFT BOOK

To
GODFREY
PHILLIPS, LTD.
(Dept. N.L.),
112, Commercial St.,
London, E.C. 1.

Please send me the new magnificent B.D.V. Golden Gift Book and 5 Free coupons.

Name

Address

G/A