

THRILLING EXTRA-LONG DETECTIVE STORY INSIDE.

# THE NELSON LEE

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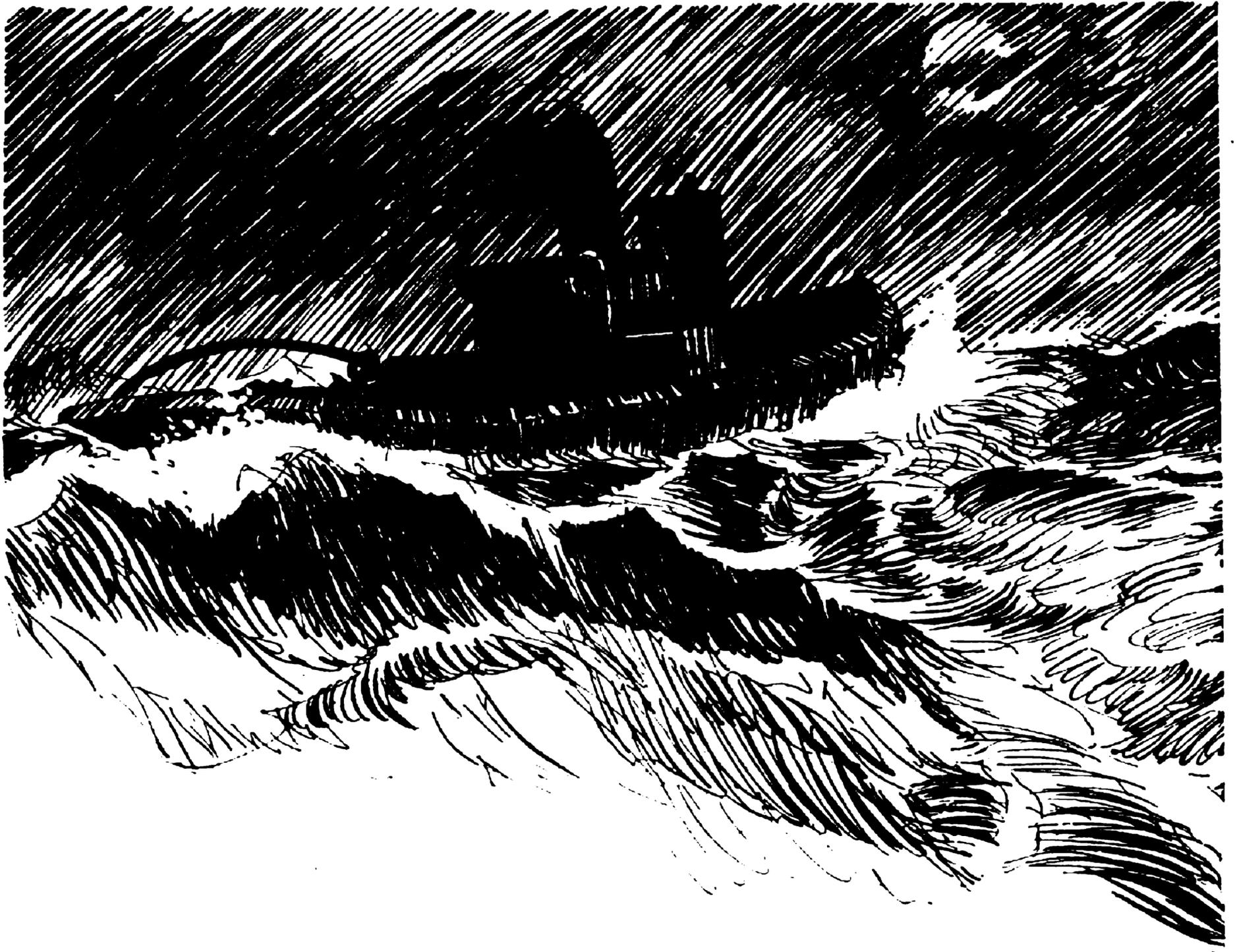
New Series No. 112.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

March 12th, 1932.

**EXTRA-LONG complete all-thrills story relating the—**

# THE QUEST *of the*



**From Sussex to Cornwall, then to Paris and Spain—it is a long and perilous trail that Nelson Lee takes to recover a small statue known as the Silver Dwarf. On that same mission, too, embarks Professor Rymer, and the result is a titanic battle of wits between master-detective and master-criminal.**

## CHAPTER I.

### A Deathbed Confession!

“IS there no hope?”

“None whatever. It would be cruel to deceive you. You may possibly linger until to-night, but that is the best I can promise you.”

The doomed man shivered and closed his eyes. He was still comparatively young—he was barely forty-seven—and only a couple of hours ago the stream of life had been coursing through his veins with the vigour of a youth of twenty-one. Mounted on his favourite hunter, he had been following the Easington Hounds in an early morning cross-country run. Dozens of envious eyes had marked his well-set figure, his hand-

some, aristocratic face, his faultless horsemanship.

“There goes Lord Easington, the richest man in Cornwall” had been the remark which had passed from mouth to mouth. And as often as not the remark had been added: “What a pity he never married!”

Two short hours ago, and now he was dying. In attempting a difficult leap his horse had fallen and had rolled on top of him. He had been carried to the nearest house, which happened to be Penleven Grange, the Cornish home of Jack Langley, a famous young electrical engineer. The village doctor had been hastily summoned, and had found that his illustrious patient was suffering from a fractured spine. And this was the verdict:

—amazing exploits of Nelson Lee, the famous detective.

# SILVER DWARF



"You may possibly linger until to-night, but that is the best I can promise you."

For a moment or two the ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece was the only sound that disturbed the brooding silence. Then a tall, young fellow, with a handsome, troubled face, stole over to the side of the bed and gently laid his hand on Lord Easington's pallid brow. It was Jack Langley.

"I have wired for Professor Rymer, your cousin," he said. "Is there anybody else you would like me to send for?"

The doomed man slowly opened his eyes. His features twitched convulsively. It was plain to be seen that a terrible mental struggle was taking place. Then a look of determination came into his face.

"Yes," he said in a scarcely audible voice. "Send for Nelson Lee."

Jack Langley gave a start. He knew that Nelson Lee was the famous private investigator, and that was why the dying man's request surprised him. For what reason did Lord Easington wish to see a detective of

Lee's repute? There was no suspicion of foul play.

"For Nelson Lee?" repeated Jack.

Lord Easington nodded his head.

"Tell him to come by aeroplane, if needs be," he said. "'Phone or wire him at St. Frank's College, Bellton, Sussex. Tell him to come at all costs."

In a whirl of bewildered surprise Jack Langley left the room.

He went downstairs and entered the library. He seated himself at his writing-desk, and five minutes later one of the servants was running down to the village post-office. Three-quarters of an hour later the following wire was handed in to Nelson Lee at St. Frank's.

"Lord Easington met with fatal accident. Brought to my house. Sinking fast. Wishes to see you, reasons unknown. Come at once. No time to be lost. Doctor says may not last the day out. Wire reply.

"LANGLEY, Penleven."

THE famous detective-headmaster frowned. He knew Lord Easington well, and this news of the earl's accident greatly distressed him.

Despite his official position as headmaster of St. Frank's, Nelson Lee's first interest in life was still his detective work. He had taken up one or two cases of late, and had found them a welcome relief from the strain of his school duties. During his absence he always left charge of St. Frank's in the very capable hands of Mr. Wilkes, the Ancient Housemaster. The detective's young assistant, Nipper—who was captain of the Remove Form—had helped him in his work when circumstances permitted.

Instinctively Lee realised that this telegram was the beginning of another mystery which he would be called upon to unravel. Otherwise, why should Lord Easington have sent this urgent message?

The detective, with a curious feeling of satisfaction scribbled his reply in one word—"Coming." He gave this to the telegraph-boy and tipped him to rush it back as hard as he could go to the post-office. Then Nelson Lee sent for Nipper.

"Called away to Cornwall," he said, hurriedly explaining what little he knew. "I'm going alone: it may be nothing much. I'll send for you if I need you."

Nipper looked disappointed.

"All right, gov'nor," he said. "I wish I were going with you, though."

Nelson Lee nodded sympathetically.

"So do I, Nipper," he replied. "But you are a pupil here, remember, and at the moment there is nothing to justify my taking you away from your school duties. But you can be sure that I shall send for you if the occasion arises. Cheer up, young 'un. Jump to it and have my car sent round ready to rush me to the aerodrome, then 'phone them up and charter me a 'plane."

Nipper raced off on his errand, and Nelson Lee went to his room and hastily packed a suitcase. Then he saw Mr. Wilkes, explained the circumstances, and by that time the car was waiting for him. He leapt in and the chauffeur drove off at top speed to the aerodrome, where a 'plane was already waiting, the pilot in the cockpit.

"The only machine available, sir," began the official in charge.

"It will have to do," replied Lee briskly, and after donning a crash helmet he climbed into his seat.

Within ten minutes the 'plane was circling the aerodrome then it levelled off and headed south-west for Cornwall. For some time all went well, but eventually the engine began to play tricks, and the pilot looked worried.

"Anything wrong?" asked Nelson Lee, through the 'phone.

"It'll mean a forced landing, sir. Engine trouble."

"Where are we?"

"Over Exeter."

"All right. We'll have to chance it."

The machine glided down into a meadow close to a village. Nelson Lee waited long enough to hear the pilot's verdict—"Conked out. Can't get her going again inside an hour." Then he hastened off to the village and hired a car.

"The station. The express stops there in ten minutes' time. I've got to catch it."

It was a mad ride into Exeter, but they did it, and Nelson Lee was on the platform as the Cornish Riviera express drew into the station. He took his seat in a first-class compartment, bought a paper, and the train was just about to start off again when suddenly the door was flung open and a porter's voice cried out:

"Hurry up, sir, or you'll miss it!"

The detective glanced up from his paper. Gliding across the platform with a peculiar, stealthy snake-like motion, was a thin, cadaverous-looking man, rather under the average height, with a Roman nose out of all proportion to the size of his face. His lean and somewhat lanky form was enveloped in a heavy, fur-lined coat. His shoulders were so bowed that he had almost the appearance of a hunchback. His dome-shaped forehead rode high and white above two deep-sunk, glittering eyes, proving him to be possessed of an immensity of brain-power, whilst his square, determined-looking chin was equally suggestive of strength of will.

Despite the porter's injunction to hurry he made no attempt to quicken his pace, and the train was actually on the move ere he reached the carriage door, dropped a sixpence into the porter's palm and leisurely stepped aboard.

He sank into a corner seat and fixed his glittering eyes on Nelson Lee, who had once more buried himself in his paper. For several minutes he favoured the detective with a furtive, searching stare, his eyes alternately narrowing and dilating in a curious, cat-like fashion that was uncanny. Then his thin lips parted in a cynical smile.

"Not a badly-shaped head, on the whole," he said. "Better than I expected, in fact, though somewhat flat in the region of the occiput."

The detective looked up.

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "Were you addressing me?"

The stranger smiled and blinked his eyes.

"I am afraid I was guilty of speaking my thoughts aloud," he said. "Accept my apologies, and at the same time permit me to express my regret that you should have been inconvenienced by this unexpected summons to Penleven."

The detective did not betray his surprise. He had shown Jack Langley's telegram to no one except Nipper.

"How do you know I am going to Penleven?" he asked.

The stranger gave a harsh, cackling laugh. He rubbed his well-gloved hands together triumphantly.

"I was close behind you at the booking-office when you bought your ticket. I took the privilege of glancing at that little leather attachment on your suitcase and so read your name, which, if I may say so, is world famous."

Lee frowned with annoyance. He had noticed somebody behind him at the booking-office, but preoccupied with his thoughts, had paid him scant attention. Obviously, however, the same could not be said for this stranger. The detective studied the other keenly, and then suddenly a gleam of recognition came into his eyes. And now he was not so puzzled at the man's interest in himself.

"I am flattered at the marked attention you have shown me—Professor Rymer!" he said suavely.

Professor Mark Rymer, D.Sc., F.I.C., professor of chemistry at Westminster University, and one of the ablest scientists in the country, gave a start of surprise.

"You know me, then?" he asked.

"I do." The detective nodded as he flung down his newspaper. "It's very sad about Lord Easington, isn't it?" he went on. "I gather there is not much hope of his recovery. You are one of his lordship's relations, I believe?"

"I am his only relation," said the professor.

"Then you are the heir to the title and the estates?"

The professor blinked his eyes and spread out the palms of his hands.

"For the title I care nothing," he said. "But I will freely confess that the estates, or rather, the income they represent, have a very solid value in my eyes. I am sick of the drudgery of scientific work. For years and years I have hungered for the time when I should be free to enjoy life as other men enjoy it—to have what I want, to go where I wish, without having to count the cost beforehand. All this is now within my grasp, for my cousin, as you doubtless know, was one of the wealthiest men in the kingdom."

"But your cousin isn't dead yet," said the detective quietly.

Again the professor's eyes narrowed to the merest slits. His face grew cold and pitiless.

"But he soon will be," he said, as he softly rubbed his claw-like hands. "Langley said in his wire that he was sinking fast."

"Ah! So you, too, received a wire from Langley?"

"Of course. Which reminds me, by the way, that I haven't yet asked why they have sent for you. There is no suspicion of foul play, is there?"

"I know nothing beyond the fact that my presence is required," replied Nelson Lee. "I should have been nearing Penleven now if the 'plane I chartered had not been forced down by engine trouble just outside Exeter. I considered it better to seize the chance of boarding this train than wasting more time by trying to find a fast car or another aeroplane."

"Quite," murmured the professor. "I was at Oxford when the telegram reached me. I travelled across country, so to speak, and picked up the express at Exeter. If I had gone back to London I might have missed it. But did my cousin ask them to send for you?"

"My telegram came from Langley," said the detective evasively.

"Yes, yes, I understand that, of course. But Langley would hardly have wired for you unless there was some suspicion of foul play, or unless my cousin had specially requested him to do so."

"We shall learn the truth when we get there," replied Nelson Lee.

He picked up his newspaper and began to read. The fact of the matter was that he had taken an immediate disliking to Professor Rymer. His gloating satisfaction at the prospect of his cousin's death filled the detective with something akin to disgust.

He knew that the professor was brilliantly clever, and no one had a greater admiration for cleverness than Nelson Lee. But even his admiration for Mark Rymer's cleverness could not conquer the dislike which he felt for the man himself.

The professor must have read his thoughts. For one brief instant his corpse-like face was distorted by an ugly, vindictive scowl. Then he, too, picked up a newspaper and followed the detective's example.

In this manner, and for the most part in silence, they travelled to Penzance. They could have continued to Penleven by a local train, but to save time hired a car. Nelson Lee made no objection to the professor sharing the car with him. They were both bound for the same house. They ordered the driver to get to Penleven Grange as hard as he could go.

**J**ACK LANGLEY met them at the door, and greeted the detective cordially. To Professor Rymer he was more constrained, though perfectly courteous.

"You will find your cousin bearing up well, considering what happened," he said. "In fact, the doctors are quite surprised at his extraordinary vitality, though they are inclined to think that it is merely his intense anxiety to see Mr. Lee which is keeping him alive."

Langley led the way, and the detective and Rymer followed him upstairs. In the bed-room, in addition to the dying earl, were the Penleven doctor, a second doctor from Falmouth, and a nurse. Lord Easing-

ton smiled a faint greeting to his cousin, and then turned to Nelson Lee.

"Thank heaven you have arrived in time!" said the earl, grasping the detective's hand. "Never in all my life have I longed for anything as I have longed to see you. But I mustn't waste time. The doctors say I haven't many hours to live. I have much to say before I die."

He paused and glanced significantly at the others. The Penleven doctor was the first to take the hint.

"You wish us to leave the room?" he asked.

"If you please," Lord Easington whispered.

"You don't wish me to leave the room?" said the professor in his thin, dry voice. "Surely you cannot have anything to say to Mr. Lee which I may not hear?"

The doomed man raised his eyes and regarded his cousin with a curious glance that had something of pity in it.

"No," he said at last. "You may remain if you wish."

The rest filed out of the room, leaving the earl alone with Mark Rymer and Nelson Lee. Almost before the door had closed behind them the earl turned quickly to Nelson Lee and once more grasped his hand.

"Twenty-five years ago," he said in trembling, agitated tones, "I was guilty of the most despicable act of cowardice which a man can commit. I cannot die until I have put matters right, as far as I can. My conscience has tortured me for years, and now I cannot rest until I have done what is right. You may call it a death-bed repentance, but that is better than no repentance at all. My pride has always stood in the way before. But promise, Mr. Lee, you will help me to make amends for the wrong I committed."

"I will," said Nelson Lee, little dreaming as he uttered those simple words that he was pledging himself to one of the most difficult and dangerous investigations he had ever undertaken. "What is it you wish me to do?"

"I wish you to find my son and heir," said the dying earl.

At the words "son and heir" the professor recoiled with a low, hoarse cry that was half a gasp and half a snarl.

"Your son and heir!" he hissed, regarding his cousin with blazing eyes. "What nonsense is this? You are mad. You have no son and heir. I am your only living relative, and your heir."

Once more the earl looked up, and once more that pitying look came into his pallid face.

"It's hard on you, Mark, I admit," he said. "For twenty-five years I have let you think that you were my heir. For twenty-five years I have posed as a man who never married. But, as a matter of fact, I was married in 1907. I had a son,

born in 1908, and to the best of my belief that son is still alive.

"My marriage was secret, and under an assumed name, and my wife never knew that her husband was the Earl of Easington. Shortly after the birth of my son my wife was taken ill and died a few days later. The nurse who attended her in her last illness was a middle-aged widow, and I gave this nurse a thousand pounds to adopt the child as her own. I did not tell her that I was the Earl of Easington, and a few months later, at my suggestion, she emigrated to one of the Colonies and took the little one with her.

"Five years ago, in a roundabout way, I made inquiries and learned that my son was alive and well. Since then I have made no inquiries whatever, and I have never until to-night revealed my marriage to a living soul. Now that I am dying my conscience reproaches me for the cowardly part I have played, and I want you to promise me, Mr. Lee, that after my death you will spare neither time nor expense to find my son and restore him to his rightful position. Will you do this?"

"I will," said the detective, for the second time. "But first you must give me all the information you can about your son, and all other details."

Before the earl could reply the professor leaned over the bed. His face was no longer distorted by passion and excitement, but was calm and impassive as that of a marble statue. On a small round table by the side of the bed stood a medicine glass and a bottle of champagne with a silver tap driven through the cork. Whilst his cousin had been speaking Mark Rymer had picked up the medicine glass and had filled it with champagne.

"You are faint and overworn," he said in a gentle voice. "Take a drink of this before you continue your story."

A feeble smile lit up Lord Easington's face.

"You are very good to me," he murmured. "I'm awfully sorry for you, Mark, but I dared not die until I had eased my conscience by confessing. Think as kindly of me as you can. I haven't treated you well."

"Don't you worry about me," said the professor quietly. "I've always managed to scrape along without your money in the past and I've no doubt I can go on doing so."

He raised his cousin's head and held the medicine glass to his lips. The doomed man drained it at a single gulp. But no sooner had he done so than a horrible change came over him. His face turned purplish-blue, his eyes seemed starting from their sockets, his features twitched convulsively.

With a startled cry, the detective thrust the professor aside, and caught the earl in his arms. As the professor staggered back,

he dropped the glass on the floor, and crushed it to powder under his heel.

"What have you given him?" demanded Nelson Lee brusquely.

"Champagne, of course," said the professor, with an evil smile. "From that bottle."

But the detective was not listening. The earl had motioned to him to lower his head.

"The proofs of my marriage——" he began.

Then a spasm of pain convulsed his frame, and his voice died away in an inarticulate moan.

Again he strove to speak.

"Go to my house——" he said.

Once more his utterance failed him. For a second or two he writhed and groaned, then he clutched the detective's arm in a feverish, vice-like grip.

"The Silver Dwarf!" he gasped.

And even as he uttered the words, his limbs grew stiff and his head fell back. The Earl of Easington was dead!

## CHAPTER 2.

### A Declaration of War!

**A**CROSS the dead man's body, one on each side of the bed, Mark Rymer and Nelson Lee—henceforward to be bitter rivals—stared at one another in grim, significant silence, for all the world like a pair of intending wrestlers measuring each other's strength before they grappled.

Then the detective spoke, and his words were harsh in their accusation.

"You poisoned him!"

The professor blinked his eyes and softly rubbed his hands.

"With champagne?" he murmured, peering into the detective's face like some ill-omened bird of prey—to which, indeed, his huge and hawk-like nose gave him more than a passing resemblance.

"You put something in it when I wasn't looking," retorted Nelson Lee.

"You are too free with your accusations," reproved the professor, and the smoothness of his tone was belied by the dangerous glint in his eyes. "Where is your proof?"

Lee, glancing at the little heap of powdered glass which lay on the carpet at Rymer's feet, realised only too well that he could not prove the other's guilt. That the wily professor had deliberately hastened the dying man's death, he was certain, but without the vital evidence, which had been contained in that glass, he could prove nothing.

"Very clever, Rymer—destroying all traces of your crime," snapped the detective. "But let me assure you that the matter does not end here. I shall ask for a post-mortem, and that will reveal that Lord Easington was poisoned. I have no evidence to connect you with the murder—it is only my word against yours—but I intend to get that evidence, and I shall leave no stone unturned to bring you to justice."

At mention of a post-mortem, Professor Rymer had shown momentary signs of fear,

but this quickly passed. As Lee had said, it was only the word of one against another. The worst that could happen would be the result of the inquest—a verdict of murder by person, or persons unknown. Nothing could be proved against Rymer.

Nelson Lee turned on his heel and strode towards the door.

"One moment," said the professor, holding up his hand. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to summon the others and announce the fact of your cousin's death," replied Nelson Lee.

"Indeed!" said the professor, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. "Does it not occur to you that you are overstepping the bounds of your position here? Surely it is my place, as the new Lord Easington, to do the announcing, and——"

"But you are not the new Lord Easington," said Nelson Lee. "The new earl is your cousin's son—hitherto unacknowledged."

The professor indulged in a deprecating gesture.

"Really, Mr. Lee, you surprise me!" he exclaimed. "Surely, you do not mean to say you attach any importance to the wild and meaningless words my cousin uttered a few moments before his death?"

"Most certainly I do!" said Nelson Lee.

"It's preposterous!" ejaculated the professor. "Why, my dear sir, the unfortunate man was wandering in his mind—raving, if you like. He was not responsible for what he was saying. All that cock-and-bull story about a secret marriage——"

"Was true," the detective interrupted him. "I believe every word of it, and what is more, I am going to do my best to find the missing heir and restore him to his inheritance."

The professor took hasty strides and planted himself in front of Nelson Lee. He fixed his eyes on the detective's face. Slowly, they began to narrow until they were mere slits, like those of a cat watching its prey; then they suddenly widened, and he crushed back a savage oath.

The detective laughed.

"It's no good, Professor Rymer. You can't hypnotise me!"

Once more he moved towards the door, and once again the professor held up his hand.

"Let us clearly understand each other, Mr. Lee," he said. "You are now going to repeat my cousin's statements to the others, and, after that, you are going to find his son?"

"That is my intention," replied the detective.

"Do you realise," asked the professor suavely, "that if you are successful in your quest you will deprive me of an inheritance worth over a hundred thousand a year? Am I likely, do you think, to give up such a prize without a struggle?"

"Knowing you for what you are—no!" replied the detective.

"It's dangerous to try crossing my path." "Your threats do not perturb me in the least," said Nelson Lee curtly.

"You still persist in your intention of trying to find my cousin's son?"

"I do! And now, if you have nothing more to say, I will call the others."

The professor bowed with mocking politeness. Lee opened the door, and a few moments later Jack Langley, together with the doctors and the nurse, came into the room and grouped themselves around the bed.

**W**HEN the doctors had examined the body and had announced that life was extinct, the detective turned to Mark Rymer, who was gazing at his cousin with an air of grief-stricken abstraction.

"Will you tell them, or shall I?" asked Nelson Lee, in a low voice.

"Tell them what?" said the professor innocently.

An impatient frown furrowed the detective's brow. He raised his voice and addressed the others. He told them just what Lord Easington had confessed—that there was a son and heir in one of the Colonies and that the detective meant to find him at all costs. Of his suspicions regarding the poisoning, however, he made no mention. Lee intended to make his request for a post-mortem to the Home Office authorities when he was in a better position to substantiate those suspicions.

At the conclusion of his speech all eyes were instantly turned on the professor, who was rubbing his hands and shaking his head, and staring at Nelson Lee with reproachful surprise.

"I am sorry that Mr. Lee has thought it necessary to tell you this," he said, "I do not deny that my poor dead cousin made the statement which Mr. Lee has repeated, but it was obvious to anybody that the patient was in the throes of delirium at the time, and was not responsible for his words. You will probably think that I say this from motives of self-interest. Yet I think you will agree with me that my cousin must have been raving, when I tell you that the very last words he uttered were a meaningless allusion to a silver dwarf!"

"That is perfectly true," said Nelson Lee.

"Well, doesn't it prove he was raving?"

The doctors nodded their heads. It was plain to see that they, at any rate, were of the same opinion as the professor. But the detective was not in the least discouraged.

"It proves nothing of the sort," he said. "I acknowledge that the words—'the silver dwarf'—sound meaningless enough when taken by themselves, but Professor Rymer has not told you all. As a matter of fact, the last words which crossed Lord Easington's lips were these: 'The proofs of my marriage—go to my house—the Silver Dwarf.' It seems to me, therefore, to be highly probable that the proofs of his lordship's marriage are connected in some way with a silver dwarf—probably to be found in his lordship's house. In other words, though

I cannot explain the meaning of Lord Easington's dying statement at present, I have every hope that I shall be able to do so after I have been to his lordship's house and have made inquiries on the spot."

"What will you do?" asked Jack Langley.

"At the earliest possible moment I shall go to Easington Towers," said Nelson Lee. "Is it far from here?"

"About eighteen miles by road," replied Jack. "You can go by train, or I can arrange for a car."

"We can fix that up later," said Lee. Then he turned to the professor. "You will want to come, too, I suppose?"

"You need not worry about me," replied the professor. "For one thing, I have arranged with an old friend of mine in Penzance to put me up for the night. And for another, I can find my own way to the Towers. I am very fond of walking, and the walk to the station would be a pleasure. I am not one who enjoys motoring."

It was plain that the professor did not want to be in the company of Nelson Lee a moment longer than he could help. He picked up his hat and walked over to Nelson Lee.

"Good-bye, for the present, Mr. Lee!" he said, holding out his hand, on the third finger of which was a curious antique ring.

"Good-bye," said the detective curtly, clasping Mark Rymer's hand in a cold and formal grip.

There was nothing cold and formal about the professor's grasp, however. He seized the detective's hand and gave it a hearty and vigorous grip. Even as he did so, a burning, stinging pain shot up the detective's arm, and the next instant, to everybody's amazement, he snatched away his hand and clapped it to his mouth.

"I'm sorry," said the professor blandly. "Did I grip too hard?"

For a moment the detective made no reply. He was sucking the wound in his hand, no bigger than a pin-prick. Then he walked across to the basin and spat out a mouthful of blood.

"That ring of yours wants filing down!" he said meaningly. "There's a jagged spike on the under-side which is dangerous."

The professor held up his hand to the light.

"Why, so there is!" he exclaimed, in tones of feigned astonishment. "I must have it seen to. I am sorry if I have hurt you. Good-night, everybody!"

And, peering and blinking, he bowed himself out, and vanished through the doorway.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Smuggler's Leap!

**Y**OU'LL want to go to Easington Towers as soon as you can?" queried Jack Langley.

"Naturally," replied Nelson Lee. "Have you a car here?"

Jack Langley shook his head.

"No; but I have a motor-bike, and if you don't mind riding on the pillion, I'll take you there," offered Jack.

Nelson Lee accepted the offer with alacrity, and a few minutes later he was on the pillion of Langley's powerful motor-bike, Jack was in the saddle, and they were roaring away down the road towards Easington.

The night was dark and a moaning wind was blowing from the sea. The road from the Grange to Easington ran for some distance along the edge of the cliff, and in places there had been falls of rocks that had made the road very narrow and dangerous.

In the middle of his sentence the silence was rent by a sharp crack of a revolver. The bullet tore the front tyre and it burst. The machine lurched in a terrific skid towards the precipice. Nelson Lee flung himself from the pillion, shouting to Jack.

"Jump for it!"

The bike went over the edge and clattered down the face of the cliff. Nelson Lee had picked himself up from the dust of the road and heard Jack Langley calling for help. Peering through the darkness, he saw the young engineer hanging by his finger-tips to the crumbling edge of the cliff!

In this special series of stories you will read about—

## NELSON LEE

the detective  
who "always  
gets his man."



## Professor RYMER

Clever — and  
unscrupulous.



"Not an easy road for night driving," said Nelson Lee.

"Oh, it's nothing here to what it is farther on!" said Jack. "Wait till we come to the Smuggler's Leap."

"What's that?"

"We shall be there in half a minute, and then you'll see for yourself. It's the name given by the fishermen to a deep, narrow inlet of the sea, which cuts into the cliff for all the world as though it had been scooped out of the rock by some gigantic cheese-cutter. The road runs absolutely to the very edge, with a low stone wall on one side and a sheer descent on the other side of over two hundred feet of perpendicular cliff. The story goes that a certain, notorious smuggler, being hard pressed by the Preventive men, leaped down from the road at this particular spot and was miraculously saved from destruction by falling into an enormous clump of gorse bushes half-way down the face of the cliff."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere they reached the place he was describing.

"This is the Smuggler's Leap," he said, throttling down. "Better go steady round the bend. One slight skid here, and we shall—"



**The Silver Dwarf**  
Just a statue—but the  
key to a fortune.

QUICK as thought the detective sprang to his assistance. Grasping Jack by the collar of his coat, he exerted all his strength to haul him up over the edge of the cliff. Before he could accomplish his purpose, however, a dark form vaulted over the low stone wall, darted across the narrow road, and gave him a violent push. The next instant both Nelson Lee and Jack Langley were rolling down the steep face of the cliff to the sea.

But the gorse bushes which were supposed to have saved the daring smuggler of the legend still grew there, and just as the detective and his companion had given themselves up for lost, the bushes arrested their fall and held them suspended for one brief fraction of a second.

It was only for an instant, however, for two men's weight was more than the bushes could support; but it served to break their fall, and when at last they plunged into the sea, they experienced no more serious hurt than a sudden shock and a moment's loss of breath.

"Are you safe?"

The question rose to both men's lips, in a spluttering gasp at the same moment.

"I'm all right!" panted Jack. "And you?"

"Not a bone broken," said Nelson Lee, as he brought himself alongside Jack with a couple of vigorous strokes. "Where's the nearest and best place to land?"

"There's a footpath runs down the face of the cliff, though I can't guarantee to find it first time in this darkness. I'll try, though. Follow me."

They swam to the foot of the cliff. For two or three minutes the young engineer explored its rugged face in vain. Then a cry of delight burst from his lips.

"Here it is!"

He grasped a projecting ledge of rock and hauled himself out of the water. The detective quickly followed his example, and five minutes later they were standing on the road at the top of the cliff.

"Jove, that's the narrowest shave I've ever had!" said Jack, as he stooped to wring the water from his trousers. "I thought we were goners when that scoundrel pushed us over. Who was it, d'you think? Surely——"

He raised his head and found that he was alone. For a moment he was thunderstruck. Then he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps farther down the road, and it suddenly dawned upon him that Nelson Lee had snapped into action.

The young engineer dashed after him. He overtook the detective at the top of the long, steep hill which ran down to a village in the valley. Between the spot where they stood and the village was a wayside railway station. A train could be seen there, waiting for the signal to drop.

"Where are you making for?" gasped Jack, racing along by the detective's side.

"For the station, of course," said Nelson Lee, without slackening his pace.

"But you can't possibly catch the train," said Jack. "It's in the station, now!"

The detective had guessed what Jack knew: that the train was from Penleven and would stop at Easington station. It presented a sporting chance of getting to the Towers quickly.

The guard had blown his whistle, however, and the train was beginning to move. And there were still some seventy yards between them and the station.

Pressing his elbows to his sides, Nelson Lee ran as he had never run before. Over the narrow gate which gave admittance to the station was an iron arch, in the middle of which was a lighted lamp. Under this lamp stood a porter, collecting tickets. The detective saw him and yelled to him to keep the train back for half a minute. But the sound of his voice was effectually drowned by the din of the engine as it drew the train out of the station, while the darkness prevented the porter seeing him.

Nothing daunted, the detective put on an extra spurt. But it was all in vain. By the time he dashed into the station, the tail-lights of the train were just vanishing round the first curve in the line.

"Why didn't you shout, sir," said the porter sympathetically. "If I'd known you were coming, I'd have kep' her back."

"I did shout, but you didn't hear me," panted Nelson Lee. "I suppose there's no other train to-night calling at Easington?"

"No, sir."

"And I must get there quickly. Listen. How many passengers boarded that train just now?"

"Three, sir. Three gentlemen."

"And was one of them a thinnish man, with a big nose and rounded shoulders? He was wearing a fur-lined overcoat."

"Yes, I saw that chap, sir. He wasn't any too soon to catch the train, either."

"Where did he book for?"

"Easington."

"As I thought. I suppose the only thing left to do is to go on to the village and hire a car."

The porter snorted.

"You won't get a car down there at this time of night, sir."

The detective made an impatient gesture.

"It is imperative that I reach Easington as soon as possible," he said. "Can you suggest——" He broke off as he saw a bicycle leaning against the entrance gate of the station. "Is that your bike?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, sir," replied the porter. "If you like you can borrow it. I haven't very far to walk home——"

"I'll buy it from you," cut in the detective quickly, and pressed some notes into the surprised porter's hand before that worthy had had time to make a decision.

He was agreeable, however—he knew that he had received double what the bike was worth—and Lee grabbed the machine and wheeled it away. Jack Langley followed; the famous detective's hustle and decisiveness left him rather breathless.

"Well, what do you make of the situation now, Langley?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Professor Rymer never went to Penzance. That is obvious," said Langley.

"He hadn't gone to Easington, either, until a few minutes ago. Why not?"

"I can't imagine."

"Then I'll tell you," said Nelson Lee. "Lord Easington's last words were, 'The proofs of my marriage—go to my house—the Silver Dwarf.' What he meant by the Silver Dwarf, I do not know, but it is evident, I think, he wished me to understand that the proofs of his marriage were at his house. Probably they are concealed there, and the key to their hiding-place is contained in the words—the Silver Dwarf."

"Now it is perfectly clear to me that Professor Rymer knows what his cousin meant by the Silver Dwarf. He heard me say that I should go to Easington Towers to-night, and he knew that if I went to the Towers, and repeated Lord Easington's dying words, I should find out where the documents were hidden. He decided, therefore, to prevent my going to the Towers, or, at any,

rate, to prevent my going there before he had been there himself and had secured or destroyed the proofs of his cousin's marriage.

"With this end in view he made out that he was spending the night with a friend at Penzance. After leaving the Grange he concealed himself behind that low wall at the Smuggler's Leap, and when we were driving past he fired at us—fortunately, missing both of us and hitting the bike. Finding that his plan had miscarried, and, maybe, his nerve failing him, so that he would not risk a second shot, he pushed us over the cliff, then hastened down here to catch the train to Easington. I'm afraid this has been a costly business for you, Langley. You've lost your motor-bike, but I will make it good."

"Thanks, Mr. Lee," replied Langley. "I am only too glad to have been of service."

He gave instructions as to the most direct and quickest route to Easington Towers, and a few moments later Nelson Lee was pedalling swiftly along the lane that led over the downs to Easington. He had this advantage—that he would arrive at Easington Towers without having occasion to enter the village itself, while Mark Rymer would have to make his way from Easington Station up the hill to the Towers. Even so, the professor was likely to get there before the detective, as he had a good start.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Foiled by Fire!

**T**HE detective was right. It was Mark Rymer who had pushed him over the edge of the cliff. The professor had known from the first what Lord Easington had meant by his mysterious allusion to the Silver Dwarf. More than this, he knew that if Nelson Lee arrived at Easington before him and made inquiries, he would soon have the proofs of Lord Easington's marriage in his possession.

The professor meant to prevent this at all costs. In the darkness his shot had missed, but he thought he had accomplished his nefarious purpose when he had pushed both Nelson Lee and Jack Langley over the cliff. He hastened down to the railway station and caught the last train for Falmouth, which would call at Easington.

Easington Towers was a fine old Elizabethan mansion, standing in an extensive and well-wooded park, about a mile and a half to the west of the town, which was really little more than a good-sized village. During the railway journey the wind had died down to a gentle breeze. It was a fine night, and the professor decided, therefore, to walk to the Towers instead of hiring a conveyance.

No sooner had he started out from Easington Station than two peculiar facts attracted his attention. One was that the sky to the west was illumined by a bright red glow, like the reflection of an enormous furnace. The other was that everybody he saw seemed to be going in the same direction as himself.

"There must be a fire somewhere," he mused.

He hailed a burly fisherman who was trudging along a few yards in front of him.

"Where are all these people going?" he asked.

"To see the fire, I expect," replied the fisherman.

"And where is the fire?" asked the professor.

"Easington Towers!"

The professor started as though he had been shot.

"Is Easington Towers on fire?" he gasped.

"I should say it was!" said the fisherman, pointing to the glow in the sky. "Look at that! It's the biggest blaze we've had round here for many a year!"

"What started it?"

"That's more than I can tell you. All I know is that they 'phoned for the fire brigade. The fellows turned out smartly, but when they saw the blaze they sent round for help from other places. There are four or five engines up there already, I believe, but from what I've heard there's not much chance of saving the place."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere a tradesman's van came along. Quick as thought, the professor sprang into the middle of the road and held up his hand.

"Are you going to the fire?" he asked the man at the wheel.

"Yes, sir. Would you like a lift?"

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the professor was seated beside him and had pressed some coins into his hand. Fifteen minutes later the van dashed through the handsome iron gates of Easington Park and pulled up at the end of the sloping lawns in front of the house.

The professor sprang out and stood for a moment gazing at the scene before him. From end to end the house was wrapped in a lurid sheet of flame. Four engines were playing on the blazing pile from different directions. There were ladders reared against some of the windows, and the helmeted figures of the firemen could be seen, some with valuable books in their hands, some with gold and silver plate, some with priceless pictures.

Servants and policemen were flitting to and fro, receiving these various articles from the firemen and conveying them beyond the reach of the flames. And all around the busy scene, in the form of a mighty ring, was a surging crowd of excited onlookers.

As soon as the professor had taken in these details he made an attempt to elbow his way to the front. For a time the spectators refused to give way, but presently somebody recognised him, and a shout went up that this pale-faced, big-nosed man was the new Lord Easington, the heir to the dead man's title and estates. As if by magic the crowd pressed back and made a way for him, and a few moments later he was standing at the foot of the terrace steps, in the full glare of the flames.

"Where did the fire break out?" he asked, addressing the late Lord Easington's butler.

"In the dining-room, sir," replied the butler. "It is thought that an old beam in

the chimney has been smouldering for some time, and that it burst into flames."

"Let me see," said the professor, stroking his chin. "The dining-room was next the library, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was anything saved from the library?"

"Oh, yes, sir! We got most of the things out of the rooms on the ground floor before the fire brigade arrived."

Again the professor stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"If I remember rightly," he said, "there was a silver statuette—quite a small thing, about ten or twelve inches high—on the library mantelpiece. It was supposed to represent a dwarf, I believe—"

"I know what you mean, sir," interrupted the butler. "The Silver Dwarf, we always called it."

"Was it saved?"

"I couldn't say, sir. I had nothing to do with removing things from the library. Pollock and Trelawney did that—the head-groom and the under-gardener."

"Where are they?"

The butler thought "they were somewhere round at the back of the house," and the professor accordingly set out in search of them.

"If the Silver Dwarf was left in the house," he muttered to himself, "the heat will have melted it by now, and the papers inside it will have been reduced to ashes. But I'm afraid that's too much to hope for. It's far more likely that some meddlesome idiots have rescued the thing, and the sooner I get possession of it the less chance will there be of anyone discovering its secret."

After half an hour's fruitless search and inquiry, he at last discovered the groom.

"One moment," he said, as the groom was about to hurry past him. "You helped to remove the things from the library, I believe."

"I did, sir."

"What became of the silver statuette on the mantelpiece?"

"The Silver Dwarf?"

"Yes."

"I don't know, sir."

"Didn't you remove it?"

"No, sir, but I rather fancy Trelawney did. I don't remember seeing it the last time I was in the room."

"Where is Trelawney?"

"They've taken him to Falmouth—to the hospital, sir. He was rather badly hurt in trying to save one of the pictures in the hall."

The professor crushed back a savage oath. The prolonged suspense was getting on his nerves. Yet he dared not rest until he had made sure of the fate of the silver statuette, in which, as he guessed, were concealed the proofs of the late Lord Easington's secret marriage.

He elbowed his way through the crowd again, and accosted the man who had driven him up from the station in the tradesman's van.

"How much to drive me to Falmouth?" he asked.

The man cast a regretful glance at the blazing house and murmured something about "missing the fun."

"Will five pounds tempt you?" asked the professor.

"It will," said the man with a grin. "Jump in, sir."

The professor jumped in, and a moment later he was on his way to Falmouth.

IT was half-past eleven when Rymer reached the hospital; but the mention of his name and rank sufficed to procure him an immediate audience with the injured gardener.

"I am told that you were one of those who helped to save the things in the library," said the professor.

"Yes, sir," said Trelawney. "Me and Pollock removed everything we could carry."

"Do you remember a silver statuette on the mantelpiece?"

"The Silver Dwarf we called it. You mean that, sir? I carried it into the garage, sir, along with all the other ornaments. You'll find it on the floor beside the old Panhard—the old car that's never used now, sir."

The professor slipped a note into Trelawney's hand and hurried away. It was not long before he had been driven back to Easington.

The garage, which, at one time, had been the coachhouse, was some distance from the house, and was approached through a large, square, stone-flagged yard. At one end of this yard was a big, wooden door, communicating with the drive; at the other end was a five-barred gate, leading into the paddock.

The professor opened the wooden door, and, even as he did so, the stable clock struck twelve. The bluish light of the moon, mingling with the ruddy glare of the flames, gave the place a weird and uncanny aspect. So far as he could see, the yard appeared to be utterly deserted.

He closed the wooden door and glided towards the garage. Suddenly he saw that the garage door was open. He quickened his pace. Then a startled oath fell on his ears, and the next moment a man dashed out of the garage with the Silver Dwarf in his hand and darted towards the five-barred gate, which led into the paddock.

In the twinkling of an eye the professor realised what had happened. Taking advantage of the confusion, one of the numerous roughs who had come to see the fire had stolen around the deserted outbuildings in search of loot. The Silver Dwarf had evidently struck him as being valuable and easy to carry away. Possibly he had only just laid hands on it when the professor's approaching footsteps had been heard. At any rate, he was making off with his booty as hard as he could go.

The professor whipped out a revolver.

"Bring that back!" he cried. "Stop, or I'll fire!"

Probably the man thought he was bluffing, for he paid no heed to the warning, but sprang to the gate and began to clamber over it.

True to his word, the professor fired; but his bullet flew harmlessly over the fellow's head, and before he could fire again the thief had cleared the five-barred gate and was scurrying across the paddock.

With a roar of baffled fury, the professor dashed after him. Whilst he was clambering over the gate a fireman dashed into the yard.

"Hallo, what's all this?" he cried.

"Thieves—the Silver Dwarf—stolen!" gasped the professor. "Quick—come along—help me catch him!"

Good-naturedly the fireman vaulted the gate, although chasing thieves was not his job at all. But his assistance proved of very little value, for his heavy uniform and equipment prevented him running at any great speed, and before they reached the end of the paddock he gave up the chase in despair.

Not so the professor, however. Revolver in hand, he tore across the moonlit paddock, clambering over a second gate, and found himself in a narrow country lane, bordered on each side by towering, leafless hedges. The thief was then about forty yards ahead, but was obviously slowing down, as though he were out of breath.

The professor dashed away in hot pursuit. At the end of the lane was a turnpike road which led towards Penleven. By the time the thief had reached this road, his pursuer was less than thirty yards behind. At the end of another half-mile the distance had been reduced to twenty. A little later it was ten, and the professor had just decided to try the effect of a running shot when the thief, with a swift and sudden movement, tossed the Silver Dwarf into the ditch and turned at bay.

Crack! The professor fired, and the thief fell forward on his face. Exultingly, Mark Rymer darted towards him, but even as he did so the cunning rascal—who had been merely shamming—leapt to his feet, knocked the revolver from the professor's grasp, and seized him by the throat.

Though taken completely by surprise, the professor never lost his presence of mind for a single instant. Quick as thought he clenched his fists and dashed them into his adversary's face. Following this, he flung his arms round the fellow's waist, twined one leg behind his knee, and exerted all his strength to bring him down. For a time his efforts met with no success; but at last, with a superhuman effort, he tripped up his assailant and flung him on his back.

Nothing daunted, the fellow scrambled to his feet and rushed at the professor a second time. A stinging blow between the eyes only served to add to his fury, and an instant later the two men were locked in each other's arms.

In point of physical strength, the professor was altogether outclassed by his burly, big-limbed antagonist. Despite this, however, he defended himself with such frenzied

vigour that for quite two minutes he more than held his own. Breast to breast, each with his arms around the other's waist, they reeled and staggered across the moonlit road in a fierce and desperate wrestling bout.

Then the professor's foot slipped on a loose stone, and in a second he was lying on his back in the middle of the road, with one of his adversary's knees firmly planted on his chest and two brawny hands encircling his throat.

"This settles it, I reckon, mister!" chuckled his opponent.

The professor gurgled some inarticulate reply. As a matter of fact, he was trying to come to terms, offering the man a handsome sum of money to surrender the Silver Dwarf and depart in peace. But the thief knew nothing of this. He only knew that at last he had gained the upper hand of the man who had tried to shoot him.

For a second or two he contented himself with gripping his helpless assailant's throat. Then he suddenly raised one ponderous fist and dealt Mark Rymer a violent blow behind the ear that deprived him of all consciousness. Flushed with triumph he then sprang lightly to his feet, and was groping in the ditch for the Silver Dwarf when he caught a glimpse of light along the road towards him and heard the tinkle of a bicycle-bell.

With a gasp of alarm he darted back into the middle of the road, and, even as he did so, his eyes fell on the approaching figure of Nelson Lee, who was speeding down the moonlit road on his way to Easington Towers.

FOR a moment the man seemed paralysed with terror. In spellbound fascination he gazed at the rapidly-approaching figure, then at the senseless form of the man he had stunned, and then at Nelson Lee again. Suddenly a sharp, short cry of astonishment fell on his ears. The detective had just caught sight of the motionless form in the middle of the road.

His startled exclamation broke the spell and galvanised the stupefied scoundrel into life. With a gasp of fear he darted across the moonlit road, and vaulted over a low wooden stile. An instant later he was racing across the fields like a hunted hare.

The detective spurred and pedalled down the road at breakneck speed.

"This looks like foul play!" he muttered to himself as he applied the brakes and brought his machine to a standstill beside the professor's prostrate form, and sprang out of the saddle.

As he uttered the words, he sank down on his knees by the side of the unconscious professor and rolled him over on his back. No sooner had he done so than the cold, clear light of the moon, falling on Mark Rymer's pallid face, told the detective who he was.

"Great Scott, it's the professor!" he exclaimed.

He unbuttoned the professor's coat and placed one hand on the region of his heart. It was beating—somewhat feebly, it is true,

but otherwise, normally and regularly. He examined him for injuries, but discovered nothing more serious than a swelling behind the left ear, evidently caused by a blow, and a series of livid impressions on his throat, evidently caused by a pair of muscular hands.

His examination finished, the detective mounted the stile and gazed over the fields, but by that time, Mark Rymer's assailant had disappeared.

"Pity I wasn't here a few moments sooner!" muttered the detective. "Still, the fellow's gone, and there's an end of him as far as I am concerned. In the meantime, I can hardly leave the professor here. I've got to take him somewhere to be looked after, and then I must get on to the Towers. I've got to find the Silver Dwarf, whatever else happens!"

Little did he dream, as he uttered the words, that the Silver Dwarf was lying at that moment half buried in the muddy ditch, less than fifteen yards from where he stood!

From his position on the top of the stile he was able to see the red roof of a small farmhouse, standing back some distance from the turnpike, at the end of a short, straight, cart-track. He raised the professor in his arms and carried him to the farmhouse, where he kicked on the door.

And even as the detective was kicking on that door a Falmouth fisherman, strolling down the road on his way back from the fire, saw the Silver Dwarf, picked it up, examined it, thrust it under his jersey, and calmly walked away with it!

The detective's summons was answered by a raw-boned youth about sixteen years of age.

"Where's your father?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Gone to the fire, I reckon," said the youth. "They've all gone to the fire, but me."

The detective, of course, had seen the red glow in the sky, but never connected it with Easington Towers.

"What fire is this, my lad?" he asked.

"At the Towers!"

The detective started.

"Easington Towers?" he inquired.

"Yes."

Without another word, the detective carried the professor into the farmhouse and deposited him on a couch, while the boy stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment.

"This is Professor Rymer, Lord Eastington's cousin," said Nelson Lee. "He has met with an accident, but isn't seriously hurt. He'll be all right in an hour or so; in fact, he is beginning to come round already. When he recovers, give him this."

He thrust one of his cards into the youth's hand, and left the house. Racing back up the cart-track, he retrieved his bicycle from the spot where he had left it under the hedge, and pedalled away as hard as he could go towards Easington Towers. The first man he met when he rode into the yard was Pollock, the head groom.

"I want a word with you, my man," he said crisply.

"And who might you be?" asked the man.

"My name is Lee—Nelson Lee. I am a detective."

"Oh!" gasped the groom in surprise.

"Shortly before Lord Easington's death," went on Lee, "he instructed me to come to the Towers and take possession of certain documents. He died before he had time to tell me where to find the documents, but the last words he uttered were: 'Go to my house—the Silver Dwarf.'"

"The Silver Dwarf!" exclaimed the groom. "Well, I'm blowed! His lordship's cousin, Professor Rymer, was here about an hour and a half ago asking about the very same thing!"

"About the Silver Dwarf?"

"Yes. He wanted to know if it had been saved from the fire."

"If what had been saved?"

"The Silver Dwarf, of course."

"But I don't understand you. What is the Silver Dwarf?"

"It's a silver statuette, about ten or twelve inches high, which used to stand on the mantelpiece in the library. It's supposed to represent a dwarf, I believe. At any rate, it was always known to everybody as the Silver Dwarf."

The puzzled look died out of the detective's face, and gave place to an expression of mingled relief and satisfaction. The mystery of the Silver Dwarf was a mystery no longer. At last he understood the meaning of Lord Easington's dying words.

The Silver Dwarf was evidently hollow, and within its hollow interior were concealed the proofs of Lord Easington's secret marriage. But where was the Silver Dwarf now? Had it been destroyed by the flames? Or had Mark Rymer secured it?

He put those questions to the wondering groom.

"Oh, yes, sir, it was saved from the fire," said Pollock. "But whether the professor has got it or not, I can't say. All I know is this: Mr. Rymer asked me if it was true that me and Trelawney—that's the under-gardener, sir—had removed the things from the library. I told him, yes. Then he asked me if we'd removed the Silver Dwarf. I told him I hadn't, myself, but that Trelawney must have done so. He asked where Trelawney was, and I told him, down in Falmouth hospital, because of him having been burnt. I don't know whether the professor went to the hospital or not, but I was told by one of the firemen, a little while ago, that— But there's the man himself. Hi, you there! Half a minute, will you?"

"What is it?" asked the fireman, who had entered the stabling in search of another ladder.

"I want you to tell this gentleman what you know about the Silver Dwarf," said the groom.

"Well, it was like this, sir," said the fire-



There came the sound of a revolver shot . . . and the motor-bike skidded wildly over the edge of the cliff, hurling Nelson Lee and Jack Langley off the machine.

man. "I was coming along the drive, about midnight, when I heard a revolver shot. I rushed into this yard, and was just in time to see a man jump over that gate with something bright and silvery in his hand. Mr. Rymer was running after him, and he shouted to me at the top of his voice that there was a thief what had stolen the Silver Dwarf, and he wanted me to help catch him. I scrambled over the gate, but I couldn't keep going, what with the weight of my uniform and equipment, and all. So I gave it up."

"And the professor went on?"

"Yes. The last I saw of him was him chasing the thief along the lane towards the turnpike."

Almost before the fireman had finished speaking, the detective was astride his bicycle again, and he rode away leaving them dumbfounded with astonishment.

"I see it all now!" he murmured. "The professor saw the thief making off with the Silver Dwarf. He chased him for some distance along the road, and at last the fellow turned at bay. There was a struggle

and the professor was overpowered and stunned. No doubt, the thief dropped the Silver Dwarf in order to defend himself. As soon as he had finished with the professor he set to work to find it again, but I came down the road and he fled for it, leaving the Silver Dwarf behind. If I go back and make a search, perhaps I shall find it in the ditch or behind the hedgerows."

Fired by these hopes, he pedalled away down the lane, round the corner, and into the moonlit road. As he neared the spot where he had picked up the professor he saw that a man, armed with a torch, was groping in the ditch. At the detective's approach this man stepped out into the middle of the road, and Lee recognised him as Professor Mark Rymer.

"You're recovered, then, Rymer?" said the detective, dismounting from his bike.

The professor favoured him with an ugly, vindictive scowl. He arched his rounded shoulders—like a cat arching its back—and his deep-set eyes narrowed to the merest slits.

"Why have you come back?" he snarled.

"To help you look for the Silver Dwarf!" said the detective cheerfully.

The professor started.

"Then you know?"

"Everything!" said Nelson Lee. "The Silver Dwarf is a statuette. It is hollow, and inside it are the proofs of your cousin's secret marriage. It was stolen by the man who stunned you. He dropped it when he attacked you, and afterwards ran away and left it behind. You have come back to look for it. Perhaps you have already found it."

As he uttered these words he suddenly darted forward and ran his hands lightly down each side of the professor's body.

"No, you haven't found it," he said, stepping back, just in time to avoid a blow from the enraged professor's fist.

Leaving the professor standing in the middle of the road, in a terrific temper, he began to explore the ditches on each side. For a while he sought in vain; then his eyes noticed a well-defined impression in the mud.

"Too late!" he murmured. "This is where the Dwarf lay, without a doubt. Somebody must have picked it up while I took the professor to the farmhouse."

Realising that nothing further was to be gained by staying here, Lee seized his bicycle and leapt upon the saddle. Without a word to Rymer, he pedalled away down the lane and was soon lost to sight.

## CHAPTER 5.

### The Trail of Peril!

**A**FTER leaving the professor, the detective rode back to Easington Towers. By that time all hope of saving the house had been abandoned, and the firemen were simply devoting all their energies to preventing the flames from spreading to the stables, kennels, the garage and the various outbuildings.

After chatting for a minute or two with the superintendent of the fire-brigade, the detective was introduced to the late Lord Easington's agent, and afterwards to his lordship's solicitor, both of whom had hurried up from Falmouth on receipt of the news of the fire.

Both these men, like everybody else, regarded the professor as the lawful heir to the Easington title and estates, and great was their amazement, when the detective told them of Lord Easington's death-bed confession, and all that had happened since.

"I see trouble ahead," said the lawyer, when the detective had finished his story. "The professor, no doubt, will insist upon assuming the rank of his dead cousin, and will demand that I should hand over the title-deeds of the estates."

"Which you will refuse to do, of course," said the detective. "I will call at your office to-morrow morning and file an affidavit, embodying Lord Easington's confession. Then should the professor take the matter to the courts you have only to produce my affidavit and the judge will order the action to stand over until I have had a reasonable time in which to produce the missing heir."

"Quite so," agreed the lawyer. "But suppose you cannot produce the missing heir? The proofs of Lord Easington's marriage have disappeared. If you can recover them, well and good. But suppose you can't? Suppose the Silver Dwarf is never seen or heard of again—what then?"

"Then the professor will take both the title and the estates, of course," said Nelson Lee. "But I have every hope that I shall be able to recover the Silver Dwarf and the papers it contains in ample time to prevent such a thing happening."

With these words he took his leave, and, still using his cycle, rode to Falmouth, where he put up for the night at the Crown Hotel.

Early next morning—or, rather, the same morning—he got into communication with several West-country newspapers by telephone and arranged for an advertisement to be inserted every day until further notice.

"£50 Reward!" it ran. "Lost, early on the morning of March 7th, in the neighbourhood of Easington Towers, a small silver statuette, or figure of a dwarf. The above reward will be paid to any person returning the same to the undersigned, or half the reward will be paid for any information leading to its recovery. No questions asked.—Nelson Lee, Crown Hotel, Falmouth."

Having settled that matter and despatched the cheques in pre-payment of the advertisements, he returned to Penleven to spend the day with Jack Langley, returning to Falmouth on the following day. Upon reaching the Crown Hotel, he interviewed the proprietor and ascertained that nobody had yet turned up to claim the fifty pounds.

He then walked to the lawyer's office, where the solicitor met him by appointment, and he signed the affidavit as arranged.

Following this, he returned to the Crown Hotel, engaged a bed-room and a private sitting-room for an indefinite period, and settled down to await the result of his carefully worded advertisement.

SIX days elapsed—six days during which the Silver Dwarf and Professor Mark Rymer might both have been non-existent for anything he saw or heard of them.

Then his patience met with its reward. At a quarter-past eleven on the morning of the seventh day a waiter knocked at the door of his sitting-room and informed him that a fisherman, who gave the name of Pennock, wished to see him.

"Show him up," said Nelson Lee, laying down his half-smoked pipe and pulling out his cheque-book.

The waiter retired, and presently ushered in a seedy-looking fisherman, who had all the appearance of just having recovered from a celebration.

"You have come to claim the fifty pounds, I hope," said the detective, when the waiter had withdrawn.

Pennock shook his head somewhat dolefully, and a look of disappointment crossed the detective's face.

"No, sir. Only the twenty-five," said Pennock.

"I see," said Nelson Lee. "You haven't got the Silver Dwarf, but you know where it is?"

"That's it, sir."

"Then where is it?"

"In Paris."

The detective started, and regarded the man with a keen and penetrating stare.

"In my advertisement," he said, "I promised that no questions should be asked. I meant by that, that if anybody brought the Dwarf back I would give him the fifty pounds and wouldn't ask him how he came by the statuette. But it's different in your case. You can hardly expect me to hand over twenty-five pounds on the strength of your simple statement that the Silver Dwarf is in Paris. I must have proof that what you say is true."

"So you shall," said Pennock. "First of all, however, I'd better explain that on last Monday afternoon—the day before the statuette was lost—a foreign-looking gentleman came up to me on the pier, and engaged me to take him for a row across the bay. While we were out together he told me that his name was Delafosse, and that he kept a big silversmith's shop in Paris. He had come to Falmouth on a short holiday and was staying at the Royal Hotel.

"Soon after we got back from our row I heard that Easington Towers was on fire, so I went off to see the blaze. As I was coming home, shortly after midnight, I found this 'ere Silver Dwarf, as you call it, lying in the ditch by the side of the road. There was nobody in sight, and nothing to show who

the thing belonged to, so I shoved it under my jersey and took it home with me.

"After dinner the next day I wrapped the thing up in brown paper and went to the Royal Hotel. I showed it to Mr. Delafosse, and asked him if he'd buy it. He examined it, and asked me if I had come by it honestly. I told him I had, and he offered me five pounds for it, and I let him have it. Next day he went away, and by this time I suppose he's back in Paris. And now, I'll collect the twenty-five pounds, please."

"One moment," said Nelson Lee. "Why didn't you come and tell me this before, instead of waiting nearly a week?"

"Well, you see, sir," said Pennock, with a grin, "it isn't often as I have five pounds to spend, like that. I had to celebrate it, somehow."

In spite of himself, the detective laughed.

"You haven't told your story to anyone else?" he asked.

"Not a soul, sir. I'll take my oath on that."

"Good!" said Nelson Lee, opening his cheque-book. "If I make the reward thirty pounds instead of twenty-five, will you promise not to tell anybody else what you have told me—say, for a week, at least?"

"Trust me, sir," said Pennock eagerly.

The detective wrote out a cheque for thirty pounds, and tossed it across the table.

"Now, remember," he said, as Pennock rose to go, "not a word to a living soul, for at least a week!"

"Right you are, sir," said the delighted fisherman. "Mum's the word. I won't forget."

He shuffled down the creaking stairs and emerged into the street. At the same instant a closely-muffled figure glided out of a lodging-house on the opposite side of the road and proceeded to follow him.

THE figure was that of Mark Rymer. For the past six days he had been lodging in this house, and for the greater part of that time he had been sitting at one of the upper windows with a pair of opera-glasses held to his eyes.

The window at which he had stationed himself was exactly opposite the window of the detective's sitting-room at the Crown Hotel, and the consequence had been that so long as daylight lasted, and as long as the curtains remained undrawn, the professor had been able by means of his glasses to keep an eye on all that had taken place in Nelson Lee's room.

Needless to say, his object was to ascertain if anybody answered Nelson Lee's advertisement.

For six days he had kept his vigil in vain; but as soon as he saw Pennock enter the room, and especially when he saw the detective hand him a cheque, he knew that at last the time had arrived for him to interfere.

Having hastily donned his hat and coat he hurried downstairs, waited until Pennock came out of the hotel, and stealthily glided after him.

As soon as they had turned the corner and were out of sight of the hotel, he quickened his pace and tapped the fisherman on the shoulder.

"One moment," he said in his silkiest tones. "You have just come from the Crown Hotel?"

"And what if I have?" retorted Pennock.

"You have given Mr. Lee some information concerning the Silver Dwarf," said the professor, peering and blinking at him in his usual owl-like fashion. "What have you told him?"

"Find out!" said Pennock bluntly.

He swung round on his heel and was about to walk away when once again the professor laid a detaining hand on his shoulder.

"Look at me!" he said in a sharp, commanding voice.

Scarcely knowing why he obeyed, the fisherman turned and confronted him.

For one brief instant the professor looked him full in the face, his narrow eyes glittering with a strange, unearthly light. Then he bared his yellow teeth in a sinister smile of triumph.

"Now tell me what you've told Mr. Lee," he said.

The hypnotised fisherman promptly obeyed, and repeated in a listless, mechanical voice the story he had told Nelson Lee.

"Good!" said the professor, when he had finished. "Now walk to the end of this road and take the first turning on the left. Count twenty paces from the corner, and at the twentieth pace you will awake from your trance, and forget you ever saw me!"

Like a man in a dream Pennock marched away, and Mark Rymer returned to his lodgings.

"Now let me consider what's best to be done," he mused, as he flung himself into an easy chair. "Nelson Lee will be bound to go to Paris——"

He started from his chair and went to the window; a startled exclamation passed his lips. Nelson Lee was at the door of the hotel, and the door porter was hailing a taxi.

Hurricdly the professor donned his hat and coat and raced out into the street. By that time the taxi had arrived and Nelson Lee was directing the driver.

"The aerodrome, as fast as you can go," he said.

Professor Rymer heard the words and hastened off to hail a taxi for himself. He might have known that Nelson Lee would not waste a second. He ordered the driver to rush him to the aerodrome, which was only a small one, and in all probability there would be only one machine available at a minute's notice.

But Nelson Lee had seen him, and when the taxi turned the corner he altered his directions to the driver. The detective was not to know that Mark Rymer had extracted Pennock's story from him. He thought that the professor was simply following him in order to discover his destination.

"On second thoughts," said the detective, "I shall not travel by air. Take me to the station."

The detective's taxi turned off down a side street, while the one in which the professor rode sped on its way.

At the aerodrome the professor was amazed to find no taxi and no sight of Nelson Lee, while an aeroplane stood in the hangar.

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" asked an official.

"As a matter of fact," said the professor, "I had an idea that a friend of mine would be here arranging to go to Paris on urgent business. I had a message for him."

"No one has been here to hire a machine to-day, sir."

The professor crushed back an oath. He had felt so certain that he had obtained the truth from Pennock and that Nelson Lee would go to Paris by the speediest method available. Now he began to doubt himself.

Pennock had definitely said that Delafosse, the silversmith, lived in Paris. But Paris was a big place. Nelson Lee might have more definite information on the point; and even if the professor went by aeroplane and the detective travelled by boat and train, the time thus gained by Mark Rymer might be lost in making inquiries.

The professor wanted to keep his eye on Nelson Lee. There was only one other place in Falmouth the detective could have gone to in the circumstances, and that was the station. Yet he had ordered his taxi-driver to take him to the aerodrome. The alteration in the detective's plans could only mean that he had known he was being followed by the professor.

That fact made it seem imperative to the professor to get on Nelson Lee's trail again, so he was driven back to the station, where he arrived too late. The London train had gone.

But while he raged up and down the booking-hall, wondering what to do next, he caught sight of Nelson Lee in the waiting-room. Accordingly, he went to the booking-office.

"I have an urgent message for a friend of mine and I've missed him," he explained, describing Nelson Lee skilfully. "Did he take a ticket to London?"

"No, sir. But a gentleman like the one you have described took a ticket for Southampton, and that train leaves in ten minutes."

"Then I'll travel with him. Please give me a ticket for Southampton."

Accordingly, although Nelson Lee did not

know it, Professor Mark Rymer travelled on the same train with him to Southampton.

"It is to be a neck and neck race," the professor muttered to himself. "I must keep an eye on Nelson Lee. I could get to Paris before him, but I fail to see what advantage I should gain, as I may not be in possession of all the facts. At any rate, he doesn't know I am travelling to Havre with him, and I'll take good care he doesn't find out. And there may be a chance of catching him napping and stealing a march on him."

With this end in view he exerted all his ingenuity in keeping out of the detective's sight, and so well did he succeed that when at last the detective stepped out of the train at Southampton he had no idea that Professor Mark Rymer had followed him all the way from Falmouth.

A few minutes before midnight the detective went aboard the Columbia. Unknown to him the professor followed suit, and shortly afterwards the Columbia slipped her moorings and started on her six hours' voyage to Havre.

The night was dark; a chill north-easterly breeze blew down the Channel, bringing with it occasional squalls of stinging rain.

When the steamer started on her voyage most of the passengers were on deck, but by the time the voyage had lasted an hour the great majority of them had sought shelter below. At the end of the second hour the number of passengers on deck had been reduced to half a dozen. At the end of the third hour there were only two.

One of these was Nelson Lee, and the other was Mark Rymer. The detective was leaning over the taffrail of the upper deck, quite close to the steamer's stern, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the choppy sea, thinking of the problem which lay before him, and the best way of tackling the situation in Paris.

The professor was sitting in a deck-chair on the opposite side of the deck, watching him with glittering eyes. He was muffled up with rugs, so that no one could possibly have recognised him in the dim light.

Presently the professor stood up. In his right hand was a long leather bootlace which he had purchased in Southampton and which he had fashioned into a running noose.

He had made up his mind what to do. If Nelson Lee were out of the way for ever it would not matter how long it took him to find Delafosse, the silversmith of Paris, obtain the Silver Dwarf and destroy the documents it contained.

With stealthy, cat-like steps he glided across the quivering deck. The detective heard nothing save the throb of the engines, the grinding of the screws and the whistling of the wind through the stays.

Suddenly, like a panther leaping on its prey, the professor sprang at his victim from

behind, knocked off his cap and slipped the noose over his head.

Quick as thought the detective flung up his hands, but even as he did so the bootlace tightened round his throat, biting deeply into the tissues of his neck, and strangling the involuntary shout of alarm.

The next instant he felt himself seized by powerful arms, and almost before he had realised what was happening, he was lifted off his feet and hurled into the seething foam of the steamer's wake.

## CHAPTER 6.

### A Race Across the Channel!

**P**RESENCE of mind is an excellent and desirable thing for all men. Fortunately Nelson Lee possessed that quality in abundance.

Half-strangled though he was by the bootlace round his neck, half-dazed by the force with which he struck the water, he quietly waited until the natural buoyancy of his body brought him to the surface again, when he calmly turned over on his back and set to work with the utmost coolness to slacken the noose which encircled his throat.

Owing to the fact that the knot of the noose was at the back of his neck, and owing also to the vicious force with which the professor had tightened it, his task proved long and difficult. And in the meantime he was subjected to all the horrors of partial strangulation.

Strange noises began to echo in his ears, and flashes of light danced mockingly before his eyes. His temples throbbed as though his head would burst, whilst an iron band seemed to encircle his chest with an ever-tightening grip.

Slowly but surely his senses ebbed away; yet never for an instant did his presence of mind desert him, and his cold, cramped fingers continued to pluck at the strangling noose as calmly and deliberately as if he had been in his study at St. Frank's.

Just when the last shred of consciousness were slipping away a sudden relaxation of the bootlace told him that his patient efforts had at last borne fruit. A moment later he had flung the bootlace aside and was filling his lungs with deep, exhilarating draughts of salt sea air.

By that time the stern light of the Columbia was a good three-quarters of a mile away, and to have shouted for help would have been a waste of breath. Nelson Lee was in a tight corner indeed, but he was a man who did not know the meaning of panic. He trod water and looked about for the lights of a passing vessel. His chances were small, but he did not despair.

Although he had never seen his assailant's face, he had not the smallest particle of doubt that it was Mark Rymer who had thrown him overboard.

"In some way or other," he muttered to

himself, "he has got to know that the Silver Dwarf is in Paris. If he were following me to find out where I am going he would not have got rid of me in this fashion so soon. Now he'll get to Paris first and secure the proofs."

At that moment his reflections were abruptly interrupted by the sight and sound of a small tug which was bearing down upon him through the darkness at half-speed.

With one or two powerful strokes he swam out of the line of danger, and as the tug steamed past he raised his voice in a lusty shout for help.

A cry from the man on the look-out, followed by another from the man on the bridge, told him that his shout had been heard, and in a very short time the tug was hove-to, a lifebelt was thrown to him and he was hauled aboard.

"Where's the captain?" was his first question, as he scrambled aboard.

"Here!" said a grizzled man who was clad from head to foot in glistening oil-skins. "How did you get in the water, and—"

"I'll explain all that later," said the detective hurriedly. "Where are you bound?"

"Southampton."

"Chartered?"

"No, but—"

"Then there's nothing to prevent your turning her back to Havre?"

"You mean you want me to take you to Havre?"

"Yes. How much will you do it for?"

The skipper scratched his head.

"I dunno, sir. If I asks twenty and the wind blows to a gale it won't pay me butting into it all the way back. Burn twice the amount of coal, y'see."

"Will thirty cover it?"

"I'll do it for thirty pounds, sir."

"Done!" said the detective. "You see those lights? They're the lights of the Columbia."

"I know," said the skipper. "We passed her just afore we picked you up."

"Can you catch her before she gets to Havre? I'll make it fifty if you can."

"Impossible, sir," he replied. "The Columbia can make twenty-five knots to our eighteen, and she doesn't get under the weather like we do. We're lower in the water, not so much free-board, and we've got to watch the rollers, sir."

The detective sighed regretfully.

"Well, bank up your fires. Get me to Havre as soon as ever you can. Land me on Havre quay before eight o'clock and you won't lose by it."

The skipper bawled an order to the man at the wheel and another down to the engine-room, and immediately the tug swung round and headed off towards the south.

The skipper then escorted Nelson Lee below, where he provided him with a change

of clothes and a cup of steaming cocoa. Over a friendly pipe the detective briefly described the nature of the mission on which he was engaged, and then after giving instructions that he should be called as soon as Havre was sighted, he turned into the skipper's bunk in search of a few hours' sleep.

**D**URING the course of the next four hours and a half the tug not only broke all her previous records, but nearly broke her engines as well. Her furnaces roared, her steam-pipes throbbed and hummed, her screws churned the sea to creamy foam under her counter, and from stem to stern she quivered like a thing alive.

But it was all in vain. It was a quarter-past seven ere she sighted the light at the entrance to the harbour; eight o'clock was striking as she passed between the harbour heads, and by the time she had been made fast to the quay and the detective was free to step ashore, the Paris train was just in the act of gliding out of the station.

The station was some distance from the quay so that the detective was spared the mortification of seeing the train depart. He knew, however, that it was useless to attempt to catch it, and as soon as he had settled up with the skipper of the tug he went aboard the Columbia, which was berthed a little farther along the quay.

"Hallo, sir!" exclaimed the steward upon seeing him. "Then you haven't gone on to Paris with the rest?"

"No. Maybe I'll go by a later train," said Nelson Lee. "I've come back for my bag which I left on the saloon table."

"Ah, yes. I wondered whose it was," said the steward, who knew nothing, of course, about the attack upon the detective's life. "I'll get it for you."

He hurried below, and presently returned with the detective's suitcase.

"By the way," said Nelson Lee, as he slipped a coin into the steward's hand, "do you happen to know Professor Rymer by sight?"

"Well, I didn't until last night," said the steward. "He was one of our passengers."

"I thought as much!" said the detective. "He's gone on to Paris by train, I suppose?"

"Now that's funny you should say that, sir. That was his intention, I believe. But during the night I happened to come on deck and saw him standing by the taffrail, staring at the lights of a tug that was monkeying around astern of us. Never know what those tugs are up to, you know, sir. Well, the professor seemed concerned about it, but I don't know why. Anyway, he suddenly turned and asked me if there was an aerodrome at Havre and the best way to get to it. I told him there was an aerodrome at the back of the town, and

the best way to find it was to take a taxi and trust to luck, which he did, sir. I heard him tell the driver to take him to the aerodrome."

"Thanks," said the detective grimly. "Then I'd better be getting along. Good-morning."

"Good-morning, sir."

The meaning of all this was perfectly clear to Nelson Lee. The professor had seen the tug heave-to. He could not know whether his intended victim had escaped with his life or not, but he was not leaving anything to chance. That much was certain.

So Nelson Lee also went to the aerodrome.

"He's got a good start of me," he muttered to himself. "I can't overtake him, that's clear, but I think I can put a spoke in his wheel, all the same."

While his suitcase was being examined by the Customs authorities and his papers were being scrutinised, he busied himself talking on the 'phone to the Prefect of Police, in Paris.

"I am coming to Paris to interview a silversmith named Delafosse. But I don't know his address. Can you find it for me and have the information waiting for me at Le Bourget Aerodrome in a couple of hours time?"

Shortly afterwards he was in a speedy 'plane flying towards Paris. But the professor had all the luck that morning. A dense fog began to settle down over France. Fortunately for Mark Rymer, he was able to land at Le Bourget before it got too thick to stop flying. But Nelson Lee's machine had to make a forced landing at a village some thirty miles west of Paris.

Chafing impatiently at this delay, the detective went to a telephone-booth and again called the Prefect of Police, to ascertain if anything had been discovered about the silversmith, and explaining his awkward plight.

"Well, m'sieur," came the reply, "there are two silversmiths named Delafosse in Paris—Hippolyte Delafosse, 49, Rue de Rivoli, and Jules Delafosse, 73, Boulevard de St. Germain. Both highly respectable citizens. Nothing known against either."

"Thank you very much. I must do what I can."

It was a race against time now. He decided to hire a car and a driver who knew the road to Paris and who would be willing to drive through the fog. But before he started the journey he sent off two telegrams to the two silversmiths.

"Urgent and important. If you are the man who bought a silver statuette from a fisherman at Falmouth, England, on March 7th, you are hereby warned against parting with it or giving any information concerning it to anybody

but myself. Great interests are at stake, and your neglect of this warning will entail the most serious consequences. Am coming to Paris immediately, as fast as the fog will allow, and may call upon you at any moment.

"NELSON LEE, Detective."

"There! If the French Post Office is smart that ought to put a spoke in the professor's wheel," he muttered to himself, as he went in search of a car. "He can't apply to the police for information as I have done, so that in all probability it will take him the best part of an hour to discover the silversmiths' addresses and interview them both. Even if he hits on the right shop first time there is a sporting chance of my telegram getting there first, and his little scheme for obtaining the Silver Dwarf will be nipped in the bud."

It was a comforting thought, but Mark Rymer was not a man to be easily beaten or disheartened.

## CHAPTER 7.

### The Professor Shows His Teeth!

**A** THICK yellow fog hung over Paris when Mark Rymer groped his way into the city from Le Bourget. It was like a dead city. Traffic was practically suspended, and the deserted streets and boulevards no longer echoed with the hooting and rattle of motors, or the deafening clang of tram bells. In the Place de la Concorde and along the Champs Elysees, the arc lights glimmered through the stifling fog like monstrous, floating glow-worms.

Mark Rymer made his way, not without difficulty, to the Hotel de la Republique, where he asked for and obtained the loan of a Paris directory. After ten minutes' patient search he discovered the fact—as Nelson Lee had already done—that there were two silversmiths in Paris of the name of Delafosse.

He made a note of the addresses and sent for a taxi. Owing to the fog, a quarter of an hour elapsed before the taxi could be obtained. It was after twelve o'clock, therefore, when he left the hotel.

"Seventy-three, Boulevard de St. Germain," he directed the taxicab driver, deciding to try this address first.

Parisian taxis are famous for their reckless speed, but on this occasion the fog reduced the speed of the professor's vehicle to a crawl. Exactly on the stroke of one it came to a standstill at the door of No. 73, and Mark Rymer stepped out. He paid the driver and dismissed him, then he entered the shop.

The only person in the shop was a youngish-looking man, with closely-cropped hair and a tiny waxed moustache. He came round from behind the counter when the professor walked in, and greeted him with a sweeping bow.

"Are you M. Jules Delafosse?" asked the professor, closing the shop door and blinking

at the young man like some ill-omened bird of prey.

"No, m'sieur," replied the young fellow. "M'sieur Delafosse has just gone out to take his lunch."

"Where has he gone?"

"To the Café Napoleon."

"Where's that?"

"It is the second café round the corner of the next street on the left."

"What time do you expect him back?"

"Not before two o'clock, m'sieur."

The professor crushed back an impatient oath.

"Perhaps you can tell me what I want to know," he said. "Are you M'sieur Delafosse's assistant?"

"Yes, m'sieur."

"Was your master in Falmouth recently?"

"Yes, m'sieur. He was in Falmouth a week ago."

The professor's eyes began to sparkle.

"Do you know whether he bought anything in Falmouth?" he asked.

"Yes, m'sieur; he bought a small silver model of a dwarf."

The professor's eyes gleamed with triumph.

"Can I see that silver model?" he asked eagerly.

"Impossible," said the assistant, shrugging his shoulders. "M'sieur Delafosse sold it yesterday to a——"

At that moment the shop-door was suddenly swung open and in marched a telegraph boy.

"Pardon, m'sieur—one moment," said the assistant, as he took the envelope from the boy's hand.

He tore the envelope and drew out Nelson Lee's telegram. A startled look came into his face as he rapidly perused its contents, and he favoured the professor with a furtive glance of suspicion. Then he quietly folded the telegram and placed it in his pocket.

"There is no answer," he said to the boy.

The boy withdrew. For a moment there was silence—silence in the dimly-lighted shop, silence in the all but deserted street outside.

"You were saying," resumed the professor, arching his rounded shoulders and blinking his deep-set eyes, "that your master had sold the Silver Dwarf to a——" He paused, but there was no reply. "To whom did he sell it?" he snarled.

"That is a question I am not at liberty to answer," said the assistant stiffly. "Monsieur Delafosse will be here in an hour's time. You had better call again."

For one brief fraction of a second the professor's face was convulsed with rage. Then he smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. "I will call again to-morrow morning. In the meantime, I have a small diamond here which I will leave for your master's inspection. I am desirous of selling it if I can get a fair price."

He half-turned, so as to conceal his movements from the assistant, and drew from his pocket a small black leather case in which were a number of oval-shaped capsules.



"Hands up!" commanded a ringing voice. Figures at Nelson Lee and the other travellers. They were

Slowly and deliberately, Mark Rymer removed one of the capsules from the case and replaced the case in his pocket. He then took out his pocket handkerchief as though to polish his "small diamond." Instead of polishing it, however, he placed the capsule in the middle of the handkerchief, and then, with a swift and sudden movement, he crushed the capsule between his finger and thumb, leaped upon the unsuspecting assistant, and clapped the handkerchief over his face.

One gasp of terrified surprise, one choking, half-articulate moan, and all was over. The man staggered back, threw up his arms, and fell dead at Mark Rymer's feet.

Quivering with excitement, the professor darted to the door and turned the key in the lock. A moment later he was reading the detective's telegram.

"So this is why he refused to answer my question, is it?" he grated. "The wire came



peared from behind the rocks, and rifles were pointed being held up by La Navaja, the notorious bandit!

from Nelson Lee. So that tug did pick him up! Thank you, Mr. Nelson Lee! Forewarned is forearmed!"

He thrust the telegram into his pocket and glided behind the counter. He opened a desk and took out one or two sheets of paper, stamped at the top with the silversmith's name and address. Then he switched off the electric light, opened the door, pocketed the key, and vanished in the fog.

**F**IVE minutes later Professor Rymer stood in the Café Napoleon.

"Which is Monsieur Delafosse?" he asked, addressing one of the waiters.

The man pointed to a fat and prosperous-looking individual who was lunching alone at one of the small side tables. The professor hurried across to him.

"Monsieur Delafosse, I believe," Mark Rymer said. "I have been directed here by your assistant. When you were in Falmouth

last week you purchased a small silver statuette, fashioned in the shape of a dwarf. You were told, I believe, that it had been picked up in the road. As a matter of fact, it had been stolen, and I am trying to recover it. Your assistant informs me that you have sold it. Is that true?"

"Perfectly," said the silversmith. "I sold it no later than yesterday afternoon to a Spanish nobleman named Don Jose de Vadillo."

"And is Don Jose now in Paris?"

"No; he has been staying here for the past few weeks, but he left for Madrid this morning."

"Does he live in Madrid?"

"Oh, no; his home is in the extreme south of Spain, in the mountainous region between Algeciras and San Roque."

"Is that where he has gone now?"

"Yes."

"Can you give me his exact address?"

The silversmith drew out a pocket-book and turned over one or two pages.

"Ah, here it is!" he exclaimed at last. "Don Jose de Vadillo, Torre Esperanza, Province of Cadiz, Spain."

The professor copied the address into his own pocket-book, thanked the silversmith for his information, and once more sallied forth into the fog-enshrouded streets.

"I must act quickly now!" he muttered, glancing at his watch. "I haven't too much time. Luckily, Laroche's place is close at hand."

He turned up a narrow side street, threaded his way through a labyrinth of squalid courts and alleys, and finally entered a low, disreputable-looking café.

A man was lying half-asleep on a low wooden bench in front of a stove. He sprang to his feet when Mark Rymer entered the room, and greeted him with a cry of mingled welcome and surprise.

"It is the professor!" he cried. "And I did not even know you were in Paris. How long have you been here?"

"About a couple of hours," said the professor. "I need your help, Laroche."

"What is it?" asked Laroche, closing the door and waving him to a seat. "If the pay is as good as it was last time, what you desire is already accomplished."

The professor lowered his voice.

"I have come to Paris," he said, "in search of a silver statuette which is known as the Silver Dwarf, and which contains important documents worth thousands a year to me. I have just learned that it has been sold to a Spanish nobleman, who is now on his way to the south of Spain. There is only one man likely to stop me reaching this grandee and getting from him what I want. That man is Nelson Lee."

"The detective?" gasped Laroche.

The professor nodded his head.

"Nelson Lee is also on the track of the Silver Dwarf," he said. "He is on his way to Paris now. He may be here at this moment. How he is coming I do not know.

All I know is that he will go to the silversmith's shop of Jules Delafosse in the Boulevard de St. Germain. When I leave for Spain I want to be sure that Nelson Lee does not follow me. You understand?"

Laroche grinned.

"I understand," he said. "It is your intention to prevent the detective discovering what has happened to this Silver Dwarf!"

"Not only that," said the professor. "I want to put a stop to his meddling interference—for ever."

"You have a plan?"

The professor bent his head and whispered something in Laroche's ear. The Frenchman nodded.

"I know the very house for your purpose," he said. "It is in the Avenue Boulanger. It has been empty these seven months."

Again the professor whispered, and again the Frenchman nodded his head.

"Easily," he said.

The professor took out his fountain-pen and one of the sheets of paper he had stolen from the silversmith's shop. He wrote a note, placed it in an envelope, and handed it to Laroche.

"You have been of service to me before," he said. "If you succeed in this I will make you rich. I am now returning to the Hotel de la Republique, opposite the station of St. Lazare. Report to me there as soon as you have done your work. In the meantime, here is something on account."

He flung a wad of notes down on the table, and the next moment he had passed through the doorway, and the fog had swallowed him up.

## CHAPTER 8.

### Trapped!

THE fog necessarily delayed Nelson Lee, so that Laroche had plenty of time in which to lay his plans. The detective had motored into Paris from the village where his plane had been forced to land, but once in the city itself, where the fog was much thicker than in the open country, it was as quick to walk as to ride.

Like the professor, the detective headed for the Boulevard de St. Germain first, and groped his way along the pavement, peering at the names over the shop fronts. He saw a car standing by the kerb, but paid no attention to it, until he realised that it was outside the shop of Jules Delafosse, the silversmith.

But before he could do anything, Laroche stepped out, politely touching his peaked cap—the Frenchman being now dressed as a chauffeur.

"Pardon, are you M'sieur Lee, and are you looking for M'sieur Delafosse, the silversmith?"

The detective nodded.

"He has been called away to the other side of Paris—a sick relative, m'sieur. He asked me to wait here until you should arrive, and give you this letter. Will you please read it at once."

Nelson Lee took the letter, and, stepping

into the light of the car's head-lamps, tore the envelope, extracted the note and read it.

"I regret profoundly," it ran, "that I am unable to see you, as I have to go away to the death-bed of my aged mother. But I can help you in the matter of the Silver Dwarf. I have already sold it to General Montrouge, 95, Avenue Boulanger. I have seen the general this afternoon, and he permits me to say that he will be pleased to accord you an interview at his house as soon as you arrive. In case you do not arrive in a taxi, and the fog makes it difficult to procure a conveyance, I have the honour of placing my car at your disposal, and you may instruct my chauffeur as you desire.

"JULES DELAFOSSE.

"P.S.—A gentleman called here about one o'clock and inquired after the Silver Dwarf, but in accordance with your instructions I refused to give him any information whatever.—J. D."

The letter, of course, had been written by Mark Rymer. It was artfully worded, while the postscript alone added to its apparent genuineness; and the door of the shop was closed and locked, giving the impression that M'sieur Delafosse had gone away as the letter purported.

"Very thoughtful of him," murmured the detective, half aloud, as he thrust the letter into his pocket. "I must call upon him before I leave Paris, and thank him for his kindness."

He took his seat in the car, and instructed the chauffeur to drive him to 95, Avenue Boulanger.

It was a fairly long drive, and the slow pace through the fog made it appear even longer. After half an hour the car passed through an open gateway and entered what appeared to be the private grounds of a large and important-looking house.

"Is this the general's house?" asked Nelson Lee, as the car came to a standstill and Laroche alighted.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Laroche, opening the door for the detective to alight.

The detective looked round intently. Owing to the fog he could see little of the house but a dark, blurred mass at the end of the drive.

"But—the house appears to be empty!" he said, stepping down to the gravel of the drive.

The words had hardly crossed his lips ere Laroche whipped out a revolver and levelled it at his head, whilst at the same time a couple of men sprang out of the fog—one on each side of the car—each of them armed with a long-bladed knife.

One second's hesitation, and the detective's fate would have been sealed.

But Nelson Lee did not hesitate. For the detective, although he had not actually suspected that the supposed letter from Delafosse

had been faked, was prepared for any emergency. Thus he was not caught completely unawares; and the fact that the car had drawn up before an empty house had immediately aroused his suspicions.

His fist flashed out and struck up Laroche's arm. The Frenchman's finger had already begun to press the trigger of his revolver, and even as his arm flew up the air was rent by a loud report, and a bullet shot upwards into the sky.

Then Lee brought his other fist up and round in a smashing upper-cut that knocked Laroche to the ground. One of the other men dashed at Nelson Lee, his knife raised in the air to strike. The detective had time to spin round to face him. He parried the savage blow and grappled with the man round the waist.

The other accomplice came round from the other side of the car, his knife held ready. Nelson Lee exerted all his strength, and lifting his assailant bodily from his feet, hurled him at the newcomer, so that the pair of them fell heavily on the gravel and rolled over and over in a confused heap.

By that time, however, Laroche had recovered his dazed senses and was rising to his feet, his revolver still in his hand. He raised it and fired twice, but in the dim light he missed his aim, the bullets whistling unpleasantly close to the detective's check.

The other two ruffians hastily scrambled to their feet and, realising that his plight was desperate, Nelson Lee took stock of the situation as rapidly as possible. Laroche was coming forward, crouching menacingly, and taking careful aim.

The detective had lost his revolver in the sea when Mark Rymer had hurled him overboard, so that he had only his fists and his wits wherewith to defend himself. His quickness of thought saved him.

He did just what Laroche and the assassins never expected he would do. He went backwards into the car from which he had alighted and slammed the door. He was in the tonneau, and, in any case, he did not have time to start the engine which Laroche had shut off.

The ruffians shouted with triumph, thinking they had him boxed up, and they rushed forward, their weapons ready. But Nelson Lee opened the door on the other side and leapt out.

With the car between him and his assailants he sped away into the fog, tearing across the grounds like a hunted hare. Two bullets in quick succession flew harmlessly over his head, and a moment later he vaulted over a low stone wall and vanished in the fog.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Nelson Lee Takes Action!

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later the detective stood in Jules Delafosse's shop in the Boulevard de St. Germain.

"Monsieur Delafosse?" he asked, address-

ing a fat and prosperous-looking Frenchman behind the counter.

The Frenchman bowed.

"My name is Nelson Lee," said the detective, coming to the point immediately. "I wired to you this morning——"

"Pardon!" said the silversmith, interrupting him. "Monsieur is mistaking me for someone else. I have never received any wire from you, either to-day or any other day."

"You are Jules Delafosse?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, I wired you, on my way to Paris, asking you if you were the man who had bought a small statuette from a fisherman in Falmouth. When I arrived here about an hour ago, I was stopped in this street by a man representing himself as your chauffeur. He handed me a letter, signed with your name, in which you stated you had sold the Silver Dwarf to General Montrouge, and giving me permission to use your car to go to the general's house in the Avenue Boulanger——"

"It is false!" cried the silversmith indignantly. "I never received your telegram, and I never wrote any such letter as you describe. Show me the letter!"

The detective drew the letter from his pocket and, without unfolding it, handed it across the counter. The silversmith unfolded it, glanced at it, and shrugged his shoulders.

"This is a joke, I presume," he said, somewhat stiffly.

"It is a joke which nearly cost me my life," said Nelson Lee. "Although not entirely unsuspecting, I allowed the man to drive me to the Avenue Boulanger, where I was set upon by three armed men, and I am lucky to be here now. If that is your idea of a joke——"

"But—I do not understand you," said the silversmith. "Did you not say that the man who met you gave you a letter?"

"Yes, that letter you hold in your hand."

"But this is not a letter; it is merely a sheet of paper—quite blank."

"What!"

The detective snatched the letter from the silversmith's hand, and stared at it with an air of surprise and chagrin. Jules Delafosse was perfectly right. Except for the printed heading, the sheet was blank. The letter had been written in what is known as "vanishing ink," and every scrap of writing had absolutely and completely disappeared!

For a second or two the detective was lost in a maze of bewildered conjecture. Then a dim suspicion of the truth began to steal into his mind.

"You said—at least, the letter said—that another gentleman called here——"

"No one called here as far as I know," said the silversmith. "I was here until five minutes to one. Then I went to take my lunch at the Café Napoleon. I had not seen your telegram, but the gentleman you speak of found me there, and——"

"One minute," said Nelson Lee. "Did you lock up the shop when you went to lunch?"

"No. I left the shop in charge of my assistant."

"Then, if the telegram arrived whilst you were at lunch, it would be delivered to your assistant?"

"Yes."

"Can I see him?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm sorry to say he died, or committed suicide, while I was at lunch!"

The detective started. He was more than ever convinced now that his suspicion was correct. Before he could make any comment, however, the silversmith resumed:

"You say you wired to me with reference to a silver statuette," he said. "I have already told you I never received such a telegram; but while I was at lunch a gentleman came into the café and asked me the same questions that you are asking about this Silver Dwarf. I told him——"

"Wait a bit," said the detective, interrupting him. "How did this gentleman know that you lunched at the Café Napoleon?"

"He had been to my shop, and my assistant had told him where to find me."

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "That is just what I thought. What was the gentleman like?"

The silversmith described him, and the detective's suspicion became a certainty. The description was that of Professor Mark Rymer.

"I told him," continued Delafosse, "that it was I who had purchased the statuette, but that I had sold it yesterday afternoon to a Spanish nobleman named Don Jose de Vadillo, who had recently been staying in Paris, but who had left this morning for Madrid, on his way to his home in the South of Spain."

"Can you give me Don Jose's address?" asked Nelson Lee, taking out his notebook.

"That is precisely the question the other gentleman asked," said the silversmith. "I told him that Don Jose lived in the mountainous region between Algeciras and San Roque, in the extreme South of Spain, and that his postal address was: Don Jose de Vadillo, Torre Esperanza, Province of Cadiz."

"I must write him at once," muttered Nelson Lee, as he entered the address in his notebook.

"Pardon me," said Delafosse, who overheard the remark. "You are anxious to recover this statuette, I presume?"

"Certainly!" said Nelson Lee.

"And for that purpose you intend to follow Don Jose to the South of Spain?"

"Of course. I don't know yet just how I shall go there. But I shall certainly wire to Don Jose, and ask him not to part with the statuette on any pretext whatever until I have seen him."

"You will address the wire to the Torre Esperanza?"

"Yes."

"Then it will be useless."

"Why?"

"Don Jose informed me in the course of conversation that he was not going straight back home, but was going to break his

journey at some place, the name of which I have forgotten, in order to be present at the wedding of a friend. The consequence is that, however you go, you will arrive at Torre Esperanza before Don Jose, and find your wire waiting there unopened."

"I will wire all the same," said Nelson Lee. "Did you tell all this to the gentleman who visited you at the café?"

"No. As soon as I had given him the name and address of the nobleman who had bought the statuette, he thanked me and hurried away. After that I returned to the shop, and found to my surprise that the door was locked. I burst it open, and discovered to my dismay that my assistant was lying dead on the floor. I communicated with the police, and the body was taken to the mortuary. The judicial inquiry will be held to-morrow."

For a few minutes longer the two men chatted; then Nelson Lee bade the silversmith adieu, and made his way to the telegraph office.

HAVING sent off a wire to Don Jose de Vadillo, in the terms he had described to Delafosse, the detective made inquiries about the telegram he had sent to the silversmith, and found that it had been delivered at the shop a few minutes after one o'clock, or, as near as he could judge, when Mark Rymer was there.

He asked to see the boy who had delivered it.

"To whom did you give the telegram?" he asked.

"To M'sieur Delafosse's assistant," replied the youth.

"Was there anybody else in the shop?"

"Yes, m'sieur. There was a foreign-looking gentleman, not so tall as m'sieur, with a very big head, and a nose like the beak of a parrot."

Again, the description was that of the professor.

Half an hour later the detective was shaking hands with the genial Prefect of the Parisian Police, in his cosy private office. In a few well-chosen sentences he told the Prefect of Lord Easington's dying confession, and of the subsequent race between himself and Mark Rymer for the possession of the Silver Dwarf. He related his adventures in the Avenue Boulanger, described his interview with Jules Delafosse, and his visit to the telegraph office.

"Now, my theory is this," he said in conclusion. "Rymer murdered Delafosse's assistant, and robbed him of my telegram. He stole a sheet of the silversmith's notepaper, and wrote the letter which lured me to the Avenue Boulanger—a plot that was intended to be the end of me. Rymer is now somewhere in Paris, seeking for the quickest way to get to Madrid, in pursuit of Don Jose de Vadillo."

"I have not the smallest shadow of doubt that what you say is perfectly true," said the Prefect. "At the same time, from the description of Mark Rymer, I very much fear

that he will have covered up his tracks, as you English say, and that we shall be unable to find any evidence to convict him of the crime of which you accuse him."

"I'm sure you won't," said Nelson Lee. "Mark Rymer is far too clever to leave any clues behind him. I have already told you that the letter was written in vanishing ink; and I am sure as I am standing here that when the doctors examine the body of the dead assistant they will be utterly unable to discover the slightest clue or symptom of foul play. But that need not prevent your detaining him for inquiries, need it? He was the last person, so far as is known, to see the assistant alive, and that fact alone gives you every right to call him as a witness at the judicial inquiry."

The Prefect's eyes began to twinkle.

"You are clever, Monsieur Lee," he said, smiling all over his fat, good-natured face. "I see the idea. You start for Spain in pursuit of the Silver Dwarf. Unless we interfere, Mark Rymer will also start. You know quite well that we shall never be able to prove anything against him, but you want us to keep him in Paris for at least twenty-four hours, so as to give you a clear day's start."

"Exactly," said Nelson Lee unblushingly. "Will you do it?"

"I will," said the Prefect readily. "I would even go to greater lengths than that in order to assist so distinguished a colleague as yourself."

He touched a bell and a gendarme appeared.

"Professor Mark Rymer arrived in Paris by aeroplane this morning," said the Prefect. "Find out for me at which hotel he is staying."

The gendarme saluted and withdrew.

"I wonder that you English have never adopted our system of hotel registers," said the Prefect, turning to Nelson Lee again. "As you know, every traveller who arrives at an hotel in France is compelled to enter his name, profession, where he comes from, and what his business is, in a book that is specially provided for the purpose. These entries are copied out and sent to the headquarters of the police every night at seven o'clock. If Mark Rymer were in London you would have some difficulty in locating him. Here, in Paris, it is a matter of minutes. That gendarme will simply have to call up the hotels, and——"

While he was speaking the gendarme returned.

"Monsieur Rymer is staying at the Hotel de la Republique, opposite the station of St. Lazare," he said.

"Good," said the Prefect. "Make out the necessary document, and serve him with a notice that he is requested to attend the judicial inquiry on the body of Monsieur Delafosse's assistant, at half-past two tomorrow afternoon. Set a watch upon the hotel, and upon all stations and aerodromes. Watch the roads also, as he may try to get away in a car. If he should attempt to leave

the city before the inquiry, arrest him and detain him in custody."

The gendarme saluted and retired.

"Does that meet your wishes?" asked the Prefect.

"Perfectly," said Nelson Lee.

And, after thanking the Prefect for his ready help, the detective bowed himself out and left the building.

## CHAPTER 10.

### Captured by Brigands!

NELSON LEE flew from Paris to Madrid, and from Madrid to Algeciras, but owing to the prevailing fog he was not able to leave the French capital until the following morning after his interview with the Prefect of Police. That was unfortunate, but as Mark Rymer would not be able to leave Paris until after the official inquiry into the death of Deiafosses's assistant, the detective had that much start, and meant to make the most of it.

There is no need to describe his journey in detail, as it was entirely devoid of incident of any kind. Suffice it to say that he arrived at Algeciras about noon, where he promptly made his way to the British vice-consulate and interviewed the vice-consul.

"Do you happen to know Don Jose de Vadillo?" he asked, after the customary greetings had been exchanged.

"Oh, yes!" said the vice-consul. "Why, I dined with him last night."

"Then he has returned?"

"Yes. He arrived last night. He had intended going to a large estate twenty miles from here to attend the wedding of a relative, but the bridegroom has been taken ill and the ceremony is postponed, so Don Jose decided to continue on his way home. But why do you ask? Surely he isn't 'wanted' for anything?"

"No," smiled Nelson Lee. "He has merely been guilty of buying a silver statuette which I want to buy back from him."

"A statuette fashioned in the form of a dwarf?"

"Yes. Have you seen it?"

"Yes. Don Jose showed it to me at his hotel last night."

Outwardly the detective appeared calm, but actually he was feeling elated. The Silver Dwarf had proved to be an elusive quarry, but now it seemed that he was well and truly on its track.

"Where can I find Don Jose?" he asked.

"As I told you, he is now on his way home," replied the vice-consul. "He only spent the night here, and left for Torre Esperanza this morning."

"Torre Esperanza is the name of the house, I presume."

"The house and estate."

"Where is it?"

"Away in the mountains, about thirty to thirty-five miles from here."

"How is he travelling?"

"He himself is on horseback. His three servants and the baggage are on mules."

"Horses and mules—at this period of civilisation?" exclaimed the detective.

"Ah, but you must never forget!" said the vice-consul. "You can have motors and trains and aeroplanes only where circumstances permit. In the mountains around Torre Esperanza the roads are only rocky paths on the edges of precipices. Motors would be useless, and aeroplanes dangerous, for there is no safe landing for miles around."

"About what time did he start this morning?"

"At ten."

"And mules do not travel very fast. If I procure a good horse and a guide, there is a good chance of overtaking him before he reaches home."

"Certainly."

"Can you find me a trustworthy guide?"

"Half a dozen, if you need them."

"And provide me with a horse?"

"Yes, and with lunch as well."

"Thanks. I'll have the horse but not the lunch. I shall not feel easy in my mind until that silver statuette is in my possession, and I should like to start in pursuit of Don Jose at the earliest possible moment."

The vice-consul rang for his man.

"Do you know where Pedro Guardiola lives?" he asked.

"Yes, senor," replied the servant.

"Then go to his house and tell him I have a friend here who is about to start for Torre Esperanza, and I wish him to act as guide. Tell him he is to bring his own horse, which I know to be a good one, and he is to be ready to start in a quarter of an hour."

The servant departed, and the vice-consul conducted Nelson Lee to his stables, where he offered him the choice of a couple of thoroughbred horses. The detective chose a speedy-looking bay, and almost before they had finished saddling him the servant returned with Pedro Guardiola.

Five minutes later, or almost exactly on the stroke of one o'clock, the detective and his guide rode out of the consulate grounds and started on their journey.

**F**OR the first five miles their route lay through smiling fields and vineyards; but after that the aspect of the country grew wilder and more desolate at every step.

By half-past two, by which time they had covered twelve miles, they had left all traces of civilisation behind them, and were surrounded on every side by barren mountain peaks, interspersed with rugged ravines and narrow, rocky gorges.

Another hour passed, then the detective turned to his guide.

"It is now half-past three," he said. "We ought to see some sign of them soon, or——"

His sentence ended in an exclamation of delight, for even while he was talking they turned a bend in the winding mountain road, and there, not thirty yards in front of them, were the men whom they were following.

Don Jose de Vadillo, mounted on a milk white horse, was riding at the head of his

little cavalcade. Behind him were half a dozen mules, three of them laden with baggage, and the other three carrying his servants, who were all armed with rifles slung over their shoulders.

Upon hearing the detective's shout Don Jose wheeled swiftly round and shouted out an order to his servants. In the twinkling of an eye the three men sprang off their mules and drew them across the narrow road so as to form a barricade. At the same instant Don Jose dismounted and whipped out a revolver. There was another short, sharp order, and the next moment, to the detective's bewilderment, he found himself covered by three rifles and a revolver.

"Another step and we fire!" cried Don Jose.

The detective pulled up and turned to his guide for an explanation.

"Have no fear, senor," said the guide. "They mistake us for brigands, that's all. Hold up your hands and ride forward, and all will be well."

The detective dropped the reins on his horse's neck, held up his hands, and slowly rode forward. The guide remained behind. The three rifles still continued to point menacingly at his head.

"Who are you?" asked Don Jose sharply.

"I am Nelson Lee——" began the great detective; and no sooner had he mentioned his name, which was famous all the world over, than Don Jose lowered his revolver and hurried forward to meet him.

Don Jose signed to his servants, who silently lowered their rifles.

"I trust you will forgive us for receiving you in this somewhat startling fashion," he said, turning to the detective. "The fact of the matter is that these mountains are infested by a rascally band of brigands, under the leadership of the notorious Javier Lopez, otherwise known as 'La Navaja.'

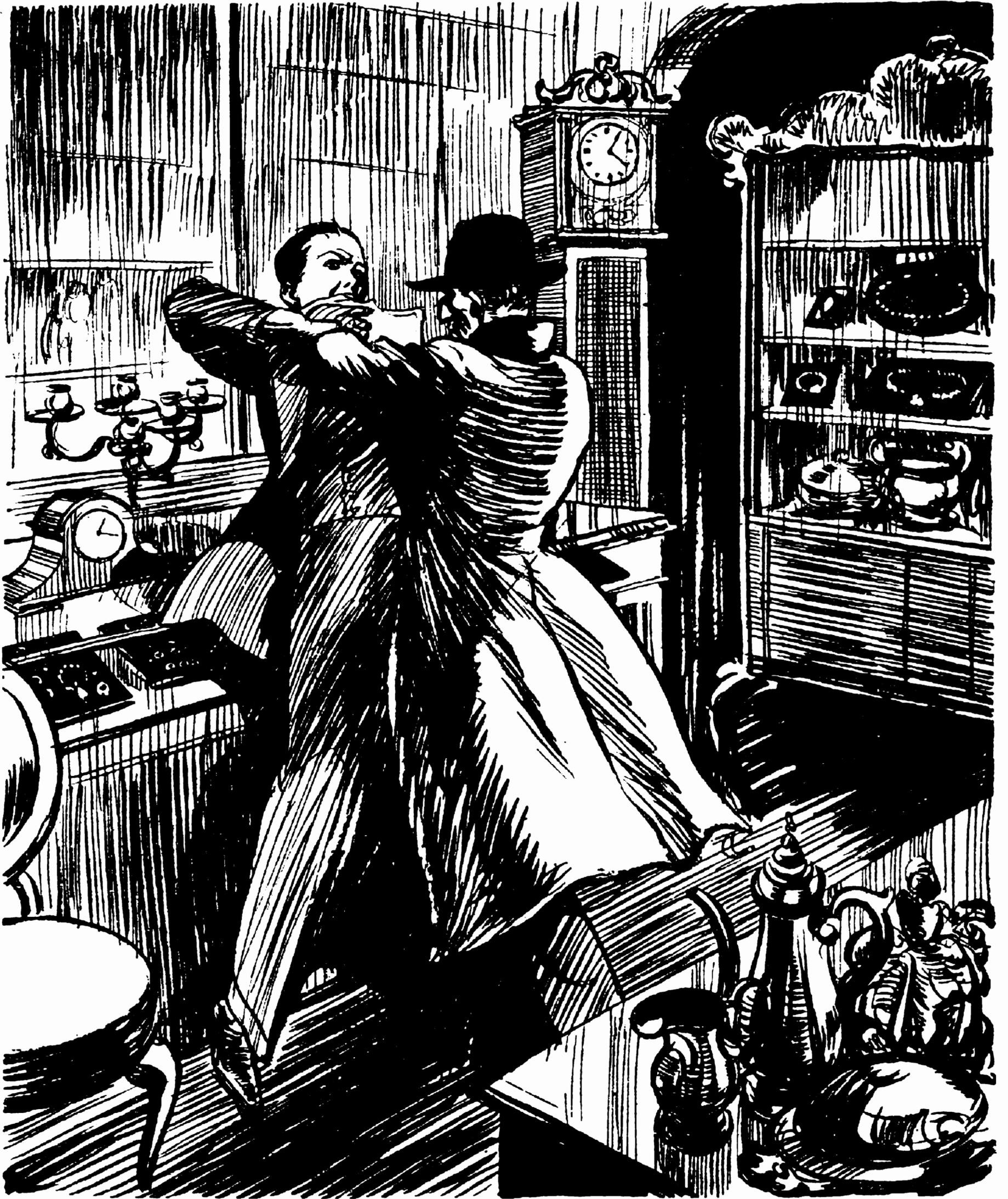
"No less than four separate parties of travellers have been waylaid and plundered by these ruffians at this very spot within the last three months. The consequence was that when I heard your shout and saw you ride round the bend, I mistook you for the advance guard of La Navaja's band. May I ask if you are travelling far in this direction?"

"I hope not," said the detective with a meaning smile. "In fact, I trust I have now reached the end of my journey. I came to talk with you, Don Jose."

"With me?" cried the Spaniard in amazement.

"Let me explain," said the detective. "When you were in Paris, you purchased from Monsieur Delafosse, in the Boulevard de St. Germain, a small silver statuette in the shape of a dwarf. Am I right?"

"Perfectly," said Don Jose. "I went to Monsieur Delafosse's shop in order to purchase a wedding present for a friend of mine—a wedding which is, unfortunately, postponed owing to the illness of the bridegroom. However, whilst I was in the shop, I saw the silver statuette, and, being struck by its quaint and grotesque design, I bought it for two thousand francs."



Swinging round suddenly, Professor Rymer caught hold of the unsuspecting shop assistant and clapped the drugged handkerchief to his face before he could offer any resistance.

"Is it in your possession now?"

"Yes. It is amongst my baggage there. But why do you ask?"

"Because I have every reason to believe that the statuette is hollow, and that within its hollow interior are concealed certain important documents, which are absolutely essential for the clearing up of a mystery which I have been commissioned to investigate."

"And you wish me to give back this Silver Dwarf, as you call it?"

"Not exactly. I do not ask you to give it

back, but to sell it to me for the same price you gave for it."

"No, no!" said Don Jose. "If the thing was stolen, I shall only be too delighted to restore it to its rightful owner without any compensation."

"Not at all," said the detective firmly. "You gave two thousand francs for the statuette, and it is only just that you should be refunded."

"As you will," replied Don Jose. "Do you wish me to give you the statuette now, or may I hope that you will do me the honour

of accompanying me to my house and spending the night there?"

"Time is everything to me just now," said Nelson Lee. "I would rather have the thing now if you can give it to me without too much inconvenience."

Don Jose turned to one of his servants.

"Unstrap that box," he said, pointing to the luggage on one of the mules.

The servant obeyed, and laid the box on the ground at Don Jose's feet. Don Jose drew out a bunch of keys, but even as he stooped to insert the key in the lock, a rifle-shot rang out, and one of the servants threw up his arms and pitched forwards on his face.

The next instant, from behind a dozen rocky boulders, a dozen heads appeared and a dozen rifle-barrels gleamed.

"Hands up!" cried a stentorian voice. "Every man is covered, and any who moves gets a bullet through his heart!"

Don Jose glanced at the speaker, and then at Nelson Lee.

"La Navaja!" he gasped.

**R**ESISTANCE would have been useless. Three rifles were levelled at Nelson Lee, three at Don Jose, two at each of the remaining servants, and two at the detective's guide.

Twelve pairs of glittering eyes were watching them like cats watching mice, waiting only for a single suspicious movement on their part, for a single word from La Navaja, to send them to their doom.

"You can lower your weapons," said Don Jose bitterly. "We surrender!"

Led by their chief, the brigands swarmed from behind the rocks; the luckless travellers were disarmed and stripped of their valuables.

At a sign from La Navaja, two of the brigands then advanced towards Don Jose de Vadillo and pinioned him.

"Why do you bind me?" demanded Don Jose haughtily.

"The orders of La Navaja, senor," answered one of the men.

Don Jose turned to La Navaja.

"Why have you ordered me to be bound?" he asked. "Surely you will permit us to resume our journey now that you have plundered us of all we possess?"

The brigand chief took off his plumed hat and made his captive an ironical bow.

"Carajo! You insult our hospitality, senor," he said. "It is not every day that we have the opportunity of entertaining so distinguished a guest as Don Jose de Vadillo."

Don Jose shrugged his shoulders.

"In other words," he said, "you are going to take me to your stronghold and keep me a prisoner, in the hope that my friends will ransom me?"

Again La Navaja bowed.

"And my servants?" asked Don Jose. "Are they to be taken prisoners, too?"

"One is dead," said La Navaja, with an air of mock distress. "The other two will be set at liberty in a moment or two."

"And my friend here?" continued Don

Jose, glancing at Nelson Lee. "Will he also be set at liberty?"

"That remains to be decided," said La Navaja. "Who is he?"

"He is an Englishman," replied Don Jose. "It is a dangerous pastime to meddle with English people."

La Navaja uttered a scornful laugh.

"Danger is part of our trade, senor," he said. "What is this Englishman's name?"

"Nelson Lee."

"Carajo! Then we have captured two prizes instead of one!" cried La Navaja exultingly. "We are in luck. There will be two fat ransoms instead of one."

He signed to two of his followers, and the detective was pinioned in the same fashion as Don Jose. The latter's servants and Nelson Lee's guide were then provided with a mule apiece and ranged in a line before the brigand chief.

"You two," said La Navaja, addressing the servants, "will now proceed to Torre Esperanza and inform la senora that her husband is our prisoner. Say to her the ransom we demand for his release is two hundred thousand pesetas. The money must be brought to this place at midnight on Wednesday night. The person who brings it must place it on that boulder and ride away without looking behind him. If my orders are honourably obeyed, Don Jose will be set at liberty on Thursday morning. If treachery is attempted he will be shot. Now go!"

The servants urged their mules to a trot—which was as fast as the animals would go—and rode from the spot, only too glad to have escaped with their lives.

"As for you," continued La Navaja, turning to the guide, "you will return to Algeciras, and report to the British vice-consul that his distinguished fellow-countryman, Senor Nelson Lee, has been captured by La Navaja. You will say to the consul that the ransom we demand for Senor Lee's release is the same as for Don Jose de Vadillo—two hundred thousand pesetas. You have heard the instructions I have given to Don Jose's servants. Repeat them to the consul, and tell him the same conditions apply to Senor Lee. That is all."

The guide wheeled his mule and rode away in the direction of Algeciras as fast as his mule would deign to go. The brigands waited until he was out of sight, and then, having blindfolded their prisoners, they started off for their mountain stronghold.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Gain—and Loss!

**H**ALF an hour's steady riding brought the brigands to their secret lair, which consisted of a spacious cave at the foot of one of the lesser mountain peaks. The only way by which this cave could be approached was through a deep and narrow ravine, bounded on either side by perpendicular walls of rock fully two hundred feet in height, and as smooth and as bare as the side of a house. At the end of this

ravine, and in front of the cave, was a semi-circular space which the brigands had enclosed with a wooden stockade. Within this stockade were a number of roughly constructed sheds, which served as stables for the mules. In the centre of the stockade, opposite the mouth of the cave, was a massive gate, padlocked and bolted and barred.

Having stabled their mules and horses, the brigands led their prisoners into the cave and removed the bandages from their eyes.

La Navaja called to one of his followers.

"Bind these men securely and carry them to the inner cave," he said. "You are appointed their gaoler, and your life shall answer for it if they escape."

Their arms were already pinioned to their sides, and as soon as the fellow had lashed their legs together and had tied their wrists behind their backs, he partly dragged them and partly carried them into a smaller cave, which opened out of the back of the larger one. Having flung them down on a heap of straw on the floor of the cave, he left them to their own reflections, whilst he went outside to assist his comrades to unload Don Jose's baggage mules and carry in the plunder.

Don Jose glanced at Nelson Lee helplessly; but the detective smiled reassuringly. To the other's amazement, Lee quietly put out a hand and touched the Spaniard on the arm.

"Carajo! Is it possible that you have already freed your hands?" he gasped.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said the detective coolly. "It is part of my profession to be able to slip bonds in that manner, although it is not always possible. These brigands know little about tying up prisoners."

Further conversation was interrupted at this point by the entry of the brigand who had been told off to guard them. Evidently he reckoned the job would be easy enough, with the prisoners securely bound, for he merely strode into the inner cave, cast a careless glance at the two men on the heap of straw, and then returned into the larger cave, where his comrades were busily engaged in unpacking Don Jose's baggage.

For the next three or four hours the cave re-echoed with the sounds of revelry. The brigands were celebrating their luck. Then La Navaja, overcome by the fumes of the potent wine, curled himself up on the floor and was soon fast asleep. One by one the others followed his example, until at last the only man who remained awake was the one who had been ordered to keep watch on Don Jose and Nelson Lee.

Knowing that he was responsible for their safe custody, he had drunk sparingly of the contents of the wine skins, and at frequent intervals he had stolen across to the entrance of the inner cave, and had satisfied himself that his prisoners were still there.

When the last of his comrades had succumbed to the effects of the wine, he plucked a blazing faggot from the fire and once more stole into the inner cave. Finding that the two men were apparently sound

asleep, he returned to his seat by the fire, unslung his rifle, and placed it across his knees. Then he buried his chin in his hands, and settled down for an all night solitary vigil.

**M**EANTIME, and in spite of their gaoler's frequent visits, the detective had contrived to loosen his remaining bonds, though he had been shrewd enough to leave the ropes in such a position as to convey the idea that they were still securely knotted.

With infinite caution he now wriggled out of his loosened ropes, and set to work to free Don Jose's arms. When this had been accomplished he placed his mouth to Don Jose's ear, and whispered, in a scarcely audible voice:

"The rest you can manage for yourself. I'm going to take a look round."

Without waiting for his companion's reply, he moved cautiously forward to the opening between the two caves. The scene which then met his eager gaze was picturesque to the last degree.

One half of the outer cave was enshrouded in black shadow, whilst the other half was illuminated by the fitful and uncertain light of the flickering fire. Their gaoler was seated on a low, wooden stool with his back towards the entrance and eyes fixed on the fire.

All around him, some stretched out at full length and others curled up, were the sleeping forms of La Navaja and his ten companions. In one corner was a stack of rifles, and in another a pile of plunder.

And mounting guard, as it were, above the sleeping brigands, placed on a rocky shelf, was the quaint, fantastic figure of the Silver Dwarf—now glittering in the flash of the leaping flames, now swallowed up by one of the snake-like shadows that ever and anon shot to and fro across the silent cave.

"There's only one way," muttered Nelson Lee, beneath his breath. "It would be foolish to tackle him in this cave. However quietly I did it, there would always be the risk of awakening some of the others. I must lure him outside."

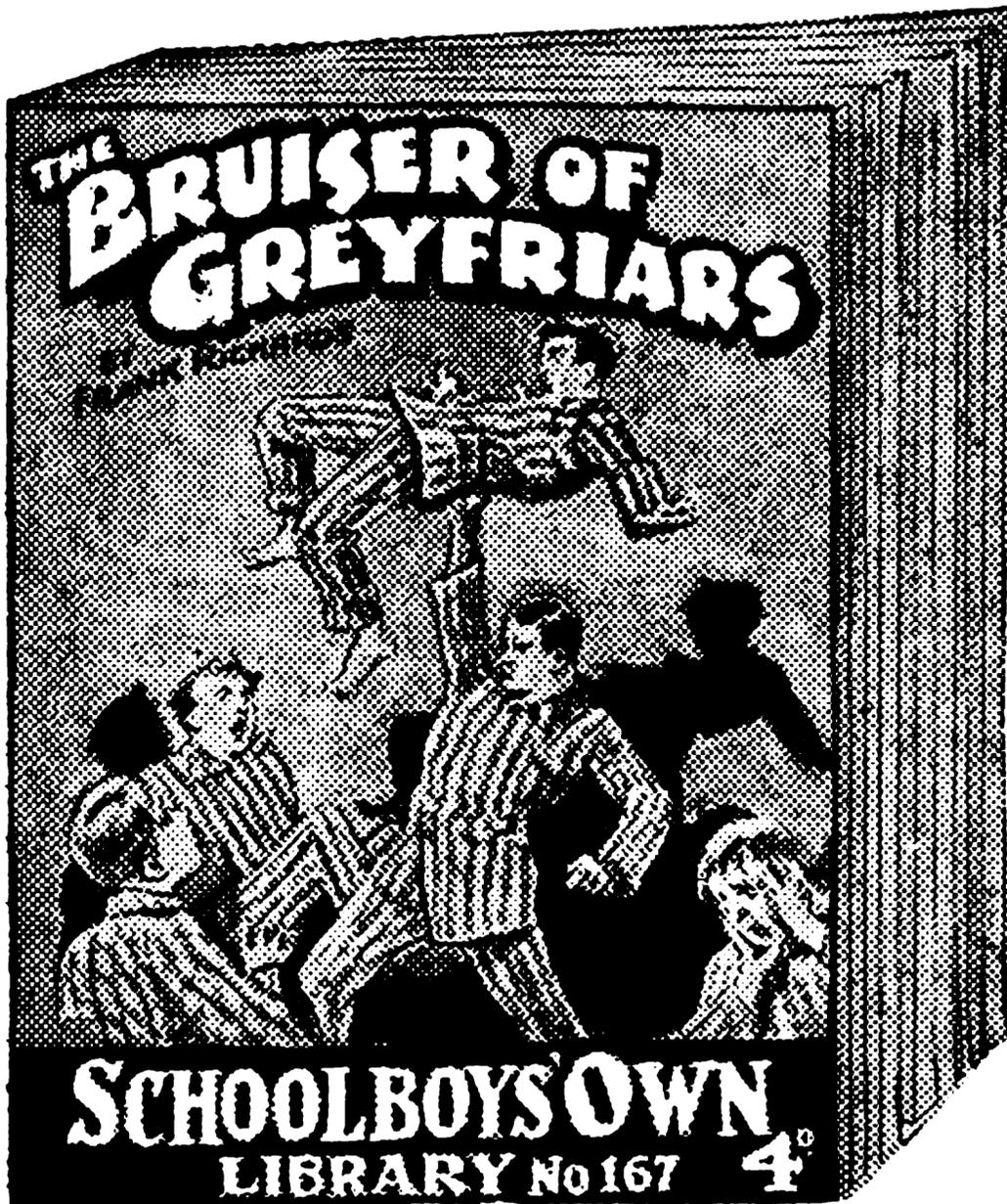
He lowered himself until his body was absolutely flat on the ground. Like a Red Indian stalking an unsuspecting foe, he dragged himself inch by inch round the dark side of the cave, and at last reached the entrance. Then he rose to his feet, and silently glided to the middle of the enclosure.

His escape was now as good as accomplished. He had only to scale the stockade and take to his heels, and the danger would have been passed. But no such thought ever crossed his mind. In the first place he had left Don Jose behind and in the second place he had not yet secured the Silver Dwarf. Instead of making his escape, therefore, he concealed himself behind a rocky boulder, and uttered a low and doleful whine.

The man in front of the fire pricked up his ears, and glanced towards the mouth of the cave.

(Continued on page 33.)

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## The Quest Of The Silver Dwarf

(Continued from page 31.)

"Carramba! That's odd!" he muttered. "We've no dogs here, and yet if that wasn't a dog, I'll——"

The whine was repeated.

"It is a dog!" he exclaimed. "I must look into this. If it's one of Don Jose's, which has followed him here, the sooner I make an end of it the better!"

He stole on tiptoe to the mouth of the cave and peered into the pitch darkness outside. He whistled to the supposed dog, but the only answer he received was a low, impatient yelp.

"It's outside the stockade gate," he muttered.

He slung his rifle over his shoulder and pulled out a great key. He hurried across the enclosure, unlocked and opened the gate.

"Where is the brute?" he growled, striving in vain to pierce the inky blackness.

He pursed his lips to whistle again, but even as he did so a stealthy footstep behind caused him to spin round with a gasp of alarm. The next instant a pair of sinewy hands encircled his throat, and a low voice hissed in his ear:

"One cry, and you're a dead man!"

Too late, the brigand realised that he had been tricked. Despite the detective's warning, he strove to shout for help, but the fingers that gripped his windpipe strangled his cry, and a moment later, with a swift and sudden movement, the detective tripped him up and planted one knee on his chest.

The man still fought desperately, however. There was a flash of steel as he plucked a dagger from his belt, and aimed a furious blow at the detective's heart. But Lee was quicker. He loosened one hand from his opponent's throat and seized the uplifted arm. With a dexterous twist that nearly wrenched the arm from its socket, he forced the man to drop his weapon, and then, clenching his fist, he dealt the brigand a vicious blow between the eyes that momentarily stunned him. Then, before the fellow could recover his scattered wits, the detective dragged him across to one of the sheds, gagged him with a pocket-handkerchief, and bound him hand and foot.

Flushed with triumph, Nelson Lee then stole back to the cave. By that time Don Jose had removed the last of his bonds, and a moment later, with the Silver Dwarf tucked under the detective's arm, the two men left the cave and made their way to the stables.

They had saddled their horses, and were leading them across the enclosure, when suddenly, from the direction of the cave, a startled cry fell on their ears, followed a second later by an ear-splitting chorus of shouts and yells.

"Quick! Ride for your life!" gasped Nelson Lee, as he vaulted into the saddle.

He had scarcely finished speaking before a number of brigands rushed out of the cave with blazing faggots in their hands.

"There they are!"

Half a dozen rifles were immediately unslung, but before the brigands had time to fire, the detective and Don Jose had vanished through the open gateway and were galloping down the winding ravine.

"To the right!" cried Don Jose, when they reached the end of the ravine. "That's the nearest way to Torre Esperanza!"

"You know where we are, then?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Perfectly! I know every inch of these mountains, every road and bridle path."

"Good! I was wondering how we were to get back to civilisation. Do you think they will pursue us?"

There was no need for Don Jose to reply, for even while the detective was asking the question the thunder of hoofs was borne upon the wind. But the mules of La Navaja's band were no match for the milk-white Arab of Don Jose, and the thoroughbred Cleveland bay which Nelson Lee had borrowed from the consul. For about half an hour the dull thud of the pursuing hoofs was still to be heard in the rear; but after that the sounds grew fainter and fainter with every passing minute, until at last they died away altogether.

"We've shaken them off!" exclaimed Nelson Lee thankfully. "My quest is ended! I have secured the Silver——"

But he had spoken too soon! They were riding at that moment down a narrow, winding mountain path. On their right was a sheer drop of five hundred feet, at the bottom of which was a smiling valley, dotted with fields and vineyards. And even as Nelson Lee uttered the words his horse tripped over a loose stone and stumbled on its knees.

Nelson Lee was pitched forward on to its neck. Instinctively his hands went out to save himself from falling off the animal—thus releasing his hold of the statuette, which he was carrying under one of his arms. To his mortification, he saw the Silver Dwarf fall to the ground; saw it balanced on the edge of the path. Next moment it rolled over and vanished into the valley below!

## CHAPTER 12.

### The Professor's Trick!

AT noon the following day Mark Rymer arrived at Algeciras. In accordance with the Prefect's promise to Nelson Lee, the professor had been detained twenty-four hours in Paris in order to give evidence at the judicial inquiry into the death of the silversmith's assistant.

The police, of course, had not been able to secure any evidence of the professor's guilt, and as soon as he was released he had set out for Spain by aeroplane, as Nelson Lee had done—hoping for the best.

Like Nelson Lee, his first act upon reaching Algeciras was to seek an interview with the British vice-consul.

"What can I do for you?" asked the consul, when Rymer had introduced himself.

"Do you know Don Jose de Vadillo?" asked the professor.

The consul started, smiled, and nodded his head.

"Do you know whether he has returned yet?" continued the professor.

The consul laughed outright.

"What an odd coincidence!" he said. "Do you know, I had Mr. Nelson Lee, the famous detective, here yesterday asking the very same question!"

Not a muscle of the professor's corpse-like face either twitched or quivered. He arched his rounded shoulders, blinked his deep-set eyes, and softly rubbed his claw-like hands.

"How strange!" he said, in a purring voice. "I didn't know that Mr. Lee was acquainted with Don Jose."

"He wasn't," said the consul. "But he's acquainted with him now, by all accounts."

"What do you mean?"

"Haven't you heard the news? All Algeciras is humming with it."

"I have only just arrived, and you are the first person I have spoken to. What has happened?"

"Well, it seems that when Don Jose was in Paris he bought a silver statuette, which is known by the name of the Silver Dwarf. For some reason or another, Mr. Lee is very anxious to secure this statuette, and for that purpose he followed Don Jose to Algeciras. He arrived here at noon yesterday and came to see me. I told him that Don Jose had left a few hours before for Torre Esperanza on horseback. Mr. Lee asked me to provide him with a horse and guide, which I did, and at one o'clock he started out in pursuit.

"About seven last night the guide returned with the news that they had overtaken Don Jose's party, but that shortly afterwards they had all been surprised by a band of brigands under the leadership of the notorious La Navaja. Don Jose and Mr. Lee had been carried off to the brigand's stronghold, and the guide had been sent back to inform me that La Navaja demanded the sum of two hundred thousand pesetas for Mr. Lee's release.

"I immediately wired to my government for instructions. I received my instructions this morning, but I need not weary you by repeating them, for by the time they arrived the necessity for interference had passed away."

"How? Has Mr. Lee escaped?"

"Yes. The news was brought into Algeciras about an hour ago by one of Don Jose's servants. He reports that his master and Mr. Lee arrived at Torre Esperanza shortly after breakfast this morning, but immediately collected a number of servants and returned to hunt for the Silver Dwarf."

"To wrest it from La Navaja, you mean?"

"No. Mr. Lee managed to bring it away with him when he and Don Jose escaped, but as they were riding along the edge of the valley which runs down to San Roque, Mr. Lee's horse stumbled and fell, with the result that the Silver Dwarf was jerked out

of his hand and fell some four or five hundred feet into the valley below. Owing to the darkness it was useless to hunt for it then; but as soon as they reached Don Jose's house they collected a number of servants, as I have already explained, and returned to look for it."

"Have they found it?"

"That is more than I can say."

"Where was it lost? Did they say?"

The consul described the spot. The professor had travelled in the neighbourhood the year before, and knew to within a hundred yards where the place was situated.

"I think I'll go there at once," he said.

"To help hunt for the Silver Dwarf?" said the consul laughingly.

"Oh dear no!" replied the professor. "I know nothing about the Silver Dwarf, and care less! But I have an urgent message to deliver to Don Jose, and it seems to me, from what you have just told me, that I shall be more likely to find him at the place you have described than at Torre Esperanza."

He thanked the consul for the information and bowed himself out. A quarter of an hour later he was galloping towards San Roque as fast as his horse could cover the ground. He might have taken a car, but if circumstances sent him up into the mountains a horse would be infinitely easier to handle, and of more service. The great majority of the mountain roads was impassable to wheeled traffic.

IT was almost dark by the time Rymec reached the lower end of the valley described by the consul. Pulling up at a wayside inn—the Taberna do los Montes—he dismounted from his pony and called for a glass of wine.

"Do you happen to know Don Jose de Vadillo?" he asked, when the landlord had served him.

"Yes, senor," replied the landlord. "Everybody hereabouts knows the good Don Jose."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"Yes, senor. He rode up the valley this morning with an English senor, and a party of servants."

"Is he up the valley now?"

"I think so, senor. I have not seen them return."

"Then they haven't found the—er—the thing they are looking for?"

A blank expression crossed the landlord's face.

"I do not understand the senor," he said. "I did not know that Don Jose was in search of anything. What is it he looks for?"

"A silver statuette, in the form of a dwarf."

"Cojones! And I never knew!" gasped the landlord. "Why, I found the thing myself this morning. It was lying amongst the vines in my vineyard at the foot of the hill."

"You have it now?" cried the professor, with a fierce thrill of exultation.

"Yes, senor."

"Show it to me."

The landlord dived back into the house, leaving the professor standing by the side of his pony at the door. Scarcely had he disappeared when a clatter of hoofs was heard. With a gasp of alarm, the professor spun round, and even as he did so Don Jose and Nelson Lee cantered round a turn in the road, not more than a hundred yards away.

Quick as thought, Mark Rymer sprang to the door and vanished into the tavern. At the same instant the landlord came out of a room at the end of the sanded passage with the Silver Dwarf in his hand. The professor darted down the passage, seized the astonished landlord by the shoulders and pushed him into the room.

"Look at me!" he commanded, in a harsh voice.

Paralysed with bewilderment, the dull-witted Spaniard obeyed.

For a second or two the professor stared him full in the face, his eyes meanwhile contracting to the merest pin-points, and glittering with a strange, weird light. Then he calmly took the Silver Dwarf from the landlord's hand and held it up before his widely staring eyes.

"You have never seen this in your life!" he said, speaking slowly and deliberately. "You have never even heard it mentioned. You know nothing about it!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth ere the clatter of hoofs was heard outside the tavern door, and an instant later the voice of Don Jose was heard calling for the landlord.

The professor made a quick pass in front of the landlord's face, and pushed him out of the room.

"Go! Your customers are calling you," he said.

The landlord pulled himself together, like a man awakening from a dream, and shuffled off towards the door. The detective and Don Jose had reined up outside the tavern, but had not dismounted.

"Are you the landlord?" asked Don Jose, when that worthy appeared.

"Yes, senor," replied the landlord respectfully.

"Then you are the owner of those vineyards at the foot of the hill?"

"Yes, senor."

"My friend——" Here Don Jose glanced at Nelson Lee. "My friend and I have been searching all day for a small silver statuette fashioned in the form of a dwarf. It was lost in the early hours of this morning, somewhere in the neighbourhood of your vineyards. We have taken the liberty of thoroughly exploring them, but have failed to find it. It has occurred to my friend that perhaps you found it yourself before we arrived."

The landlord shook his head.

"No, senor," he said. "I have neither seen nor heard——"

Before he could complete the sentence, his

wife, who was plucking a fowl in one of the front rooms of the tavern, suddenly thrust her head through the open window, and interrupted him with a cry of indignant surprise.

"Manuel—Manuel!" she cried, addressing him by his Christian name. "How dare you tell such lies to the good Don Jose?"

He stared at her in blank amazement.

"Puneta! Have you taken leave of your senses, woman?" he growled. "What lies have I told Don Jose?"

She lifted up her hands in horror.

"Forgive him, senor!" she said, turning to Don Jose. "He has been at work in the vineyards since early morning, and the hot sun has affected his brain!"

She turned to her husband.

"I'm ashamed of you, Manuel!" she said. "You know that you found the silver mannikin in the vineyard and brought it home with you. Surely, you can't have forgotten so soon? Why, only a moment ago you were telling the other Englishman——"

"The other Englishman?"

It was Nelson Lee who spoke, his voice vibrating with suppressed excitement.

"Yes, senor," said the landlord's wife. "That is his pony beside the door. He arrived a few minutes ago and spoke of the silver mannikin. My husband told him he had found it, and went to fetch it from the room at the end of the passage. The Englishman followed him, and is now——"

The detective waited to hear no more, for at that moment the click of an opening window fell on his ears.

Hastily dismounting, he thrust the startled landlord aside, and darted down the passage. He dashed into the room at the end, and found it was empty. He sprang to the open window, and eagerly peered out.

The light was fast failing, and night was coming on swiftly. For an instant he saw nothing save a spacious, ill-paved stableyard. Then his eyes fell on the all-too-familiar figure of Mark Rymer, who was just in the act of climbing over the low stone wall which divided the yard from the fields below!

**O**WING to the treacherous light, the detective was unable to see whether the professor had the Silver Dwarf or not. But he argued to himself that

Mark Rymer was not the sort of man to leave the tavern empty-handed, when he knew that the dwarf was there, to say nothing of the fact that if the professor had not secured the Silver Dwarf, there was absolutely no reason whatever why he should have taken flight. Without a moment's hesitation, therefore, the detective scrambled through the window, and raced off in hot pursuit.

Down the lane, across a number of fields, over the bridge which spanned the river, and for upwards of two miles along the road to Linea, he chased Mark Rymer, gradually reducing the space between them until at last he was less than a dozen yards behind.

Suddenly, to Nelson Lee's amazement, the professor pulled up, seated himself on a grassy bank by the side of the road, and drew out his cigarette-case.

"So you've given in at last, have you?" panted Nelson Lee, pulling up in front of him, and glancing eagerly around for some sign of the Silver Dwarf.

"I beg your pardon—oh, it's Mr. Lee, is it?" said the professor, carefully selecting a cigarette and replacing the case in his pocket. "Given in? I don't understand you."

"You understand right enough," said the detective grimly. "Where is the Silver Dwarf?"

The professor lit his cigarette.

"The Silver Dwarf?" he repeated, between the puffs. "I don't know what you mean. How should I know where it is?"

The detective moved away, frowning thoughtfully. His keen eyes searched the nearby ditch and every likely place in the vicinity where the professor might deliberately have dropped the statuette—but of the Silver Dwarf there was no sign. Nelson Lee returned to where Rymer was sitting, still puffing at his cigarette calmly. He rose as Lee approached, and the detective could see that his enemy was not hiding the small statue in his coat.

"Have you lost something?" the professor began blandly, but stopped and laughed un- casily as he found Lee's piercing eyes fixed upon him harshly.

"Rymer, I am not in the mood for pleasantries. You will tell me what you have done with the Silver Dwarf, or it will be the worse for you. Remember, we are not in England now. I shall have no com- punction in taking the law into my own hands. Out with it! Where is the statue?"

The professor threw away his cigarette and stamped on it savagely. Rago convulsed his face—but his eyes betrayed the fear that he felt for the man before him.

"I won't tell you what I've done with it!" he snarled. "But I'll tell you this! Neither you nor I, nor any other human being, will ever set eyes on the Silver Dwarf again!"

Like a man who fears the consequences of a rash action, he turned on his heel and began running in the direction of Linea. For a moment the detective stood irresolute; then, with sudden decision, he made his way back to the Taberna de los Montes.

## CHAPTER 13.

### The Sinister Shadow!

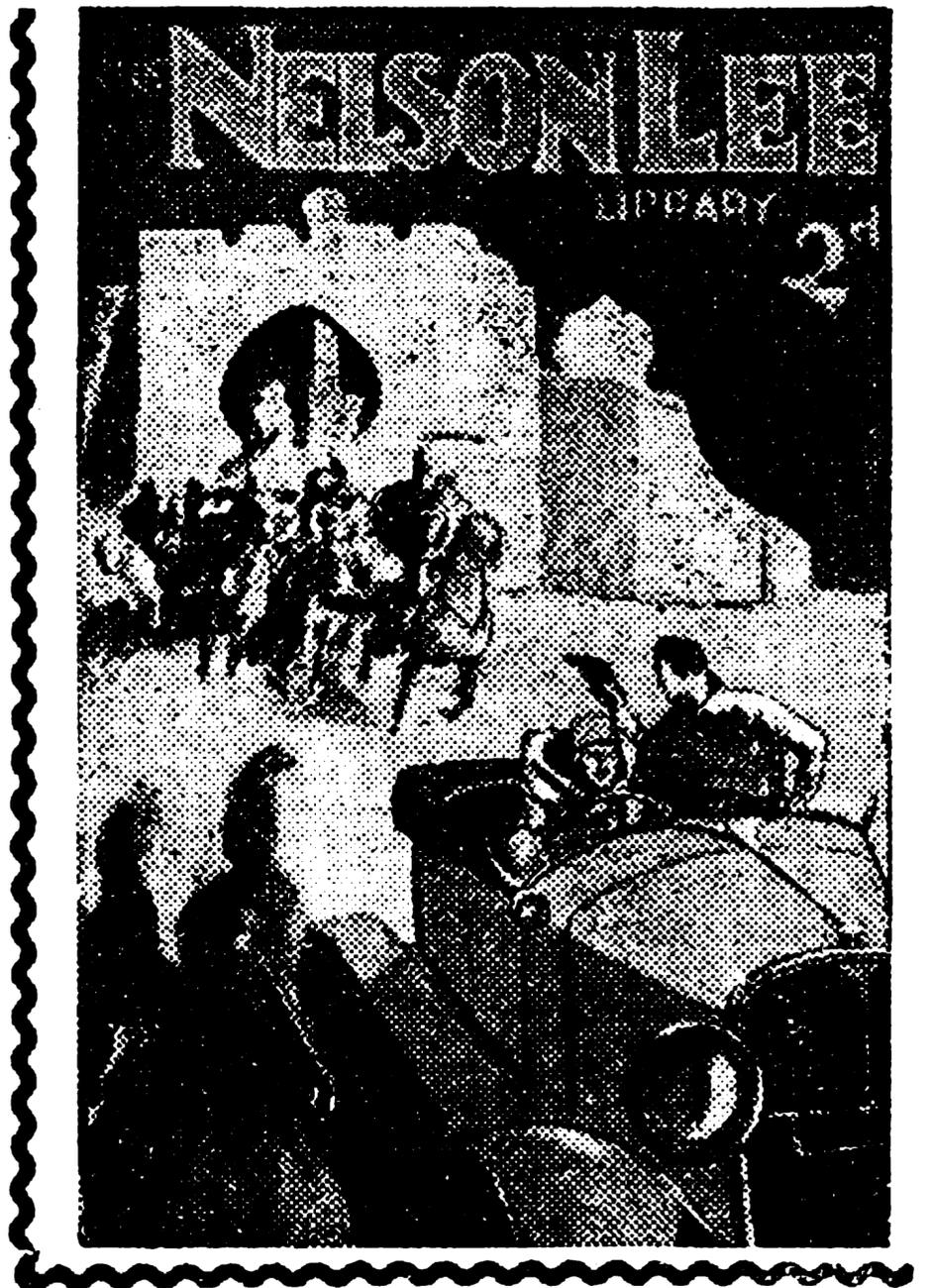
**T**HE Rock of Gibraltar is connected with the mainland of Spain by a nar- row neck of land about a mile in length and three-quarters of a mile in width. This narrow strip is known as the "neutral ground," and neither the British nor the Spanish may erect any houses or build any fortifications upon it.

At one end are the gates of Gibraltar, which are closed every night and opened every morning. At the other end is a long row of

iron railings, about eight or ten feet in height, pierced by a single gate. These railings, which stretch right across the isthmus, represent the Spanish frontier, and behind them is the frontier town of Linea.

After bolting from Nelson Lee, Mark Rymer continued to run until he saw that the detective was not giving pursuit. Only then did he slow down, but even so he walked at a swift pace and eventually arrived at Linea, where he engaged a bed-room at one of the hotels. He knew, of course, that the gates of Gibraltar would be closed, or he would have continued his journey to that place straight away.

## COMING NEXT WEDNESDAY!



By the time he went to bed, his fears had evaporated and given way to a feeling of elation. For he firmly believed that he had spoken the truth when he had prophesied to Nelson Lee that neither he nor any other human being would ever see the Silver Dwarf again. In fact, so sure was he of this, that he went to sleep, happy in the conviction that all that now remained for him to do was to go to Gibraltar the next day, to return to England at his leisure by the first available boat, and to take his place without any further trouble as the undisputable heir to the Easington title and estates.

He had sufficient reasons for this comfort- able frame of mind. When Nelson Lee had pursued him from the Taberna de los Montes, and was gradually gaining upon him, he thought that he would fail after all.

Accordingly, he cast about in his mind for some method of destroying the Silver Dwarf, in order to prevent its falling into his pursuer's hands. While he was still racking his brains for the best plan to adopt, he came to the bridge which spans the river that runs down from San Roque to the sea.

By that time it was so dark that although Nelson Lee was less than fifty yards behind him, he knew that the detective would be unable to see what he did.

Without slackening speed, therefore, he tossed the Silver Dwarf into the river, and then continued to run for another mile and a half, when he suddenly pulled up, quite pre-

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pared to face Nelson Lee and taunt him with his failure.

He felt sure that Nelson Lee had failed in his quest, and so he was well pleased with himself. He spent the night in Linea, rose next morning, and was in Gibraltar shortly after seven o'clock. His intention was to take the first boat to England. He had already spent more money over chasing the Silver Dwarf than he cared to think about, and he could not hope to obtain any of the money connected with the Easington estates until his right to it had been established.

He thought of a way of getting over his immediate money difficulties, which were rendered worse by the fact that he had left all his baggage at Algeciras. He made his way to the house of a Jewish money-lender named Solomon Barnascone, whom he knew.

He was confident that the Jew would advance him a sufficient sum of money, at a suitable rate of interest, of course, to pay for his passage back to England.

Upon reaching Barnascone's house, however, he was informed that the Jew was out, but was expected back at any moment, so he had to wait with what patience he could muster.

He sat there thinking of Nelson Lee, beaten, foiled, returning to England a disappointed man.

**B**UT Nelson Lee had not returned to England. After Mark Rymer had walked to Linea, the previous evening, Nelson Lee had made his way back to the Taberna de los Montes in a thoughtful mood.

What had Rymer meant by saying that neither he—Lee—nor anyone else would ever again see the Silver Dwarf? Nelson Lee had two theories. Either the professor had dropped it somewhere during that chase, unseen by himself in the darkness, or, alternatively, perhaps Rymer had left it in one of the outbuildings at the inn, and had deliberately run away to lure Lee on a false scent.

"If that is the case," murmured the detective thoughtfully, "he will doubtless return during the night to remove it. Right! I shall be ready—and waiting—for you, Professor Mark Rymer!"

At all speed he returned to the Taberna de los Montes, where he not only searched the buildings in the stable yard, but every room in the tavern as well. But his search was in vain, and although he questioned the landlord at considerable length he was just as wise at the end of the cross-examination as he had been at the beginning.

"I'm afraid the professor spoke the truth," said Don Jose, who had waited at the tavern for the detective's return. "You will never see the Silver Dwarf again."

"Perhaps not," said the detective. "But I'm not going to acknowledge myself beaten yet. It is evident that the professor took the thing away with him when he left this place. It is equally certain that he had not got it when I overtook him. Clearly, then, he must have thrown it away while I was chasing him. I mean to make every effort to find out just what has happened to the statuette."

"How?"

"I shall remain here for the night, and to-morrow morning, as soon as it is light, I shall start to explore every inch of the route we covered this evening. I shall make inquiries at every house and tavern on the way, and although I may not be lucky enough to find the Silver Dwarf, I shall at least hope to receive some news of it."

He was as good as his word. Despite Don Jose's pressing invitation to spend the night at Torre Esperanza, he engaged a room at the tavern. But before he retired for the night he was told that a peasant named Pedro Gonzalez wished to see him.

In spite of the late hour Nelson Lee went down to confront his visitor. He found Gonzalez to be a villainous-looking fellow, standing in the sitting-room twirling his broad brimmed hat in his grimy hands.

"Are you the Englishman who is seeking the silver figure of a dwarf?" he asked, when Nelson Lee appeared.

"I am," said the detective eagerly. "Do you know anything about it?"

"Yes, senor," said the man. "My youngest son discovered it in the bed of the river."

The detective felt a thrill of satisfaction. His theory was right. Mark Rymer had tossed the statuette into the river, but in the darkness he had overlooked the fact that owing to the scarcity of rain, the river between San Roquo and the sea—which was little better than a fair-sized brook at the best of times—had been gradually dwindling for the past few weeks, and at last had dried up altogether.

Partly owing to his haste and partly owing to the darkness, Mark Rymer's ruse had failed. Instead of dropping the Silver Dwarf into several feet of water, as he flattered himself that he had done, he had merely tossed it on to a shelving mudbank, from which it had been rescued by a ragged urchin—the youngest son of Pedro Gonzalez.

By the time Mark Rymer had reached Linea the moon had come out from behind a low bank of clouds, and the boy had seen the statuette half-embedded in the oozy mud, glittering in the pale rays. He had picked it out and taken it home, treating it more as a bauble than anything else.

"So you have brought it to me?" said Nelson Lee.

"No, senor. It is at my humble house. You see," said Gonzalez apologetically, "I have been working all day in the fields. I have not heard how the English senor and Don Jose de Vadillo have been searching for the silver statuette. Then I come home and see my son playing with what he found in the mud of the river. Still, I think nothing. But I come to the tavern in the evening to see my friends and for a glass of wine, and I hear much talk of this silver statuette."

Nelson Lee reached for his hat.

"How far is it to your house?" he asked.

"One league, senor."

"Then I will come with you immediately."

"At this hour, senor?" queried the peasant.

"Certainly. It is too important a matter to be left for a moment."

"Is the statuette so valuable, senor?" asked Gonzalez, studying the detective.

"Yes. Not only is it made of silver and is unique in design, but it is hollow and contains important documents, more valuable than itself."

A gleam of avarice crept into the peasant's eyes, and he shuffled uneasily on his feet.

"I am no judge of such matters, senor," he said gruffly.

"You need not worry," said Nelson Lee.

"I will reward you well. The moment you place the Silver Dwarf in my hands I will give you one hundred pesetas!"

Gonzalez gasped. Such a sum of money was almost unthinkable to him. He turned towards the door.

"Come, senor," he urged.

NELSON LEE went out with him into the night. The moon was now shining brightly. The two men walked along the road towards the river where the professor had cast the statuette over the parapet of the bridge.

Not a word was spoken. Nelson Lee could scarcely credit his good fortune. Mark Rymer must be very confident that he had finished the affair of the Silver Dwarf once and for all, and that he could return to England and take up his position as the new Lord Easington, to live in comfort for the rest of his life on the vast income which went with the estates.

But the sharp eyes of a ragged urchin in the south of Spain had ruined all his plans. In a few moments the Silver Dwarf would be in the possession of Nelson Lee, together with all the proofs of Lord Easington's secret marriage. The detective would simply have to trace the rightful heir and Mark Rymer would be foiled.

As for Gonzalez, he was thinking of the hundred pesetas that would soon be his. The palms of his hands were literally itching at the thought of so much money. At the same time, he was annoyed with himself. If he had only stopped to think he might have guessed how valuable that Silver Dwarf was—and demanded more than a hundred pesetas.

He remembered all the talk he had heard at the tavern about the statuette. They had said that this Englishman was eager to find the thing, that Don Jose de Vadillo had been hunting for it, and that yet another Englishman had been after it, and had actually mesmerised the landlord of the Taberno do los Montes and had stolen it.

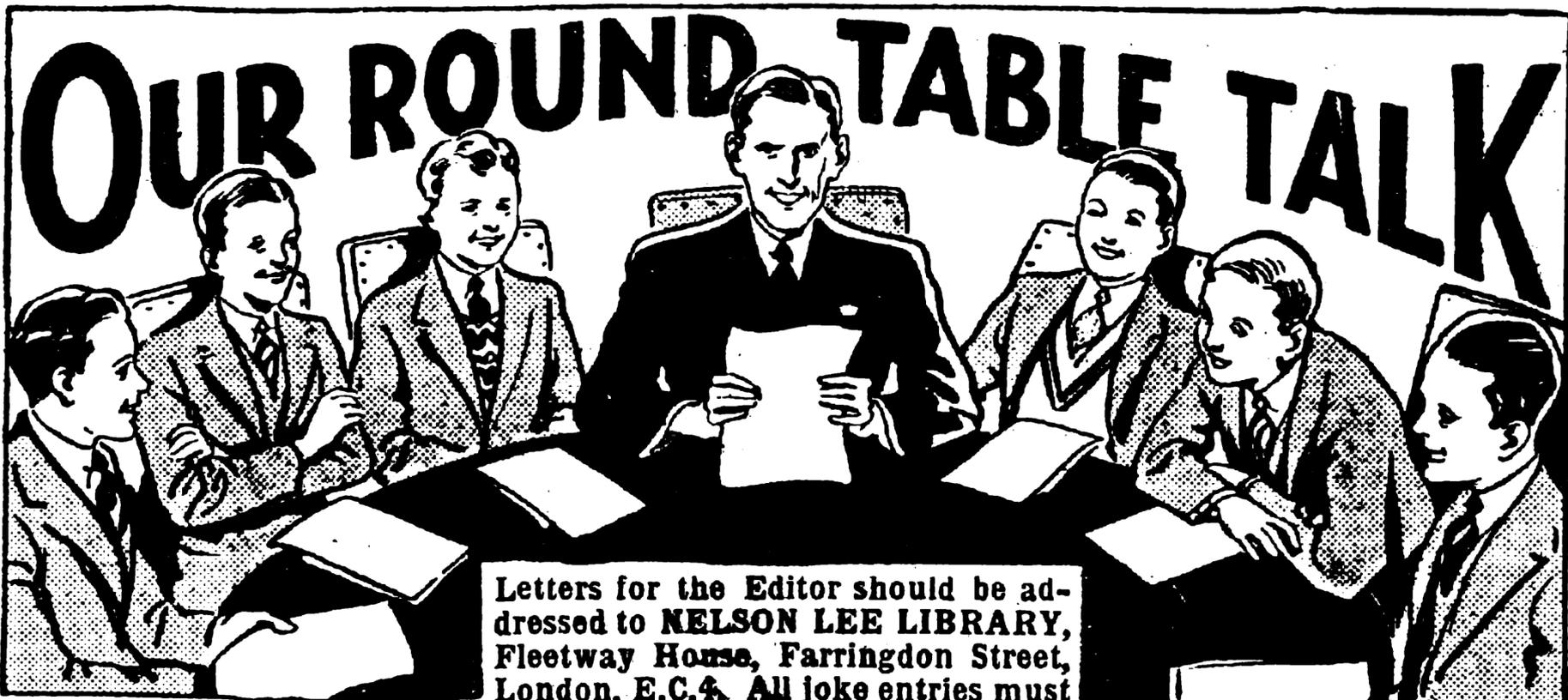
Of course, Pedro Gonzalez had no means of telling how the thing had finished up in the mud of the river, but one thing was very clear to him. More than one person was anxious to secure it, and if one man was prepared to pay what seemed to him the enormous sum of one hundred pesetas for it, the other might pay three times that amount.

But Pedro Gonzalez was greedy. Why should he be satisfied with three times a hundred pesetas? Let this Englishman pay one hundred and take the Silver Dwarf. And after that—might he not lose it again? And if Pedro Gonzalez found it again, and found, also, the other Englishman, or someone willing to pay the price, then he would get yet more money.

Pedro Gonzalez lived in what was little more than a grimy hut. Nelson Lee entered with Gonzalez, and saw a ragged urchin squatting on the mud floor playing with the gleaming statuette. He was busily cleaning

(Concluded on page 43.)

*Watches, pocket wallets and penknives awarded for good jokes every week.*



Letters for the Editor should be addressed to **NELSON LEE LIBRARY**, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. All joke entries must

be sent to The Joke Editor, **NELSON LEE LIBRARY**, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

**W**ELL, chums, by now you will have read this week's grand long story—the first of the special treats I have been promising you—and I have no fear what your verdict on it will be. Nelson Lee has returned, for a space, to his old love, that is, detective work pure and simple. Not that there is anything simple in this amazing case—Professor Rymer sees to that.

This remarkable man—a genius in his way—stops at nothing to attain his villainous ends, and it requires all Nelson Lee's bulldog courage and determination, as well as his world-famous skill and quick-witted resource, to keep pace with his redoubtable enemy. Next week's magnificent yarn is entitled:

**"The Trail of Fortune!"**

and in it the mystery of the Silver Dwarf takes the two rivals into the most dangerous places and through the most amazing adventures.

Tell all your pals about this great series of yarns which is everywhere making a host of new friends for the good old paper.

At the conclusion of the present special detective stories Nelson Lee returns to St. Frank's, and his return will coincide with a magnificent new series of school stories featuring Nipper & Co. Details of these yarns—which introduce Professor Cyrus Zingrave—will be published later, and I can assure you that it is a real top-notch series in which popular E. S. Brooks has excelled himself.

This week, owing to the extra-long detective story, I am including our "Smilers" feature in this chat. The best joke has been sent in by J. Kramer, 296, Mile End Road, London, E.1, and the watch therefore goes to this reader. Here is his joke:

**AND TEACHER'S CANE DESCENDED.**

Teacher: "Give me a sentence with the words 'Heroes' and 'Attack' in it."

Dunce: "A man sat on a tack, and he rose quickly."

**UP WITH THE LARK.**

Butcher: "I need a boy about your age, and I will give you fifteen shillings a week."

Ambitious Boy: "Will I have a chance to rise, sir?"

Butcher: "Oh, yes. I want you to be here at four o'clock every morning."

(*W. Hartshorn, 10, Sidney Street, Wolverhampton—a penknife.*)

**APPROPRIATE.**

President of Newly-formed Boxing Club: "Now there is the question of colours. Any suggestions?"

Member: "I suggest black and blue."

(*D. Ward, 49, Queen's Drive, Nottingham—a pocket wallet.*)

**NOT FAIR.**

"Have you anything to say before sentence is passed?" enquired the judge.

"The only thing I'm kicking about," said the burglar, glaring at the chief witness, "is being identified by a man who kept his head under the bedclothes all the time I was in the room!"

(*C. Parker, 19, McKenzie Street, Melbourne, Australia—a useful prize.*)

**HIS OCCUPATION.**

First Tramp: "Hallo, Bill! Are you out of work?"

Second Tramp: "Yes, they've pulled down the house I used to lean against."

(*C. May, 45, Larkfield Road, Rawdon, near Leeds—a penknife.*)

**JUST SUIT HIM.**

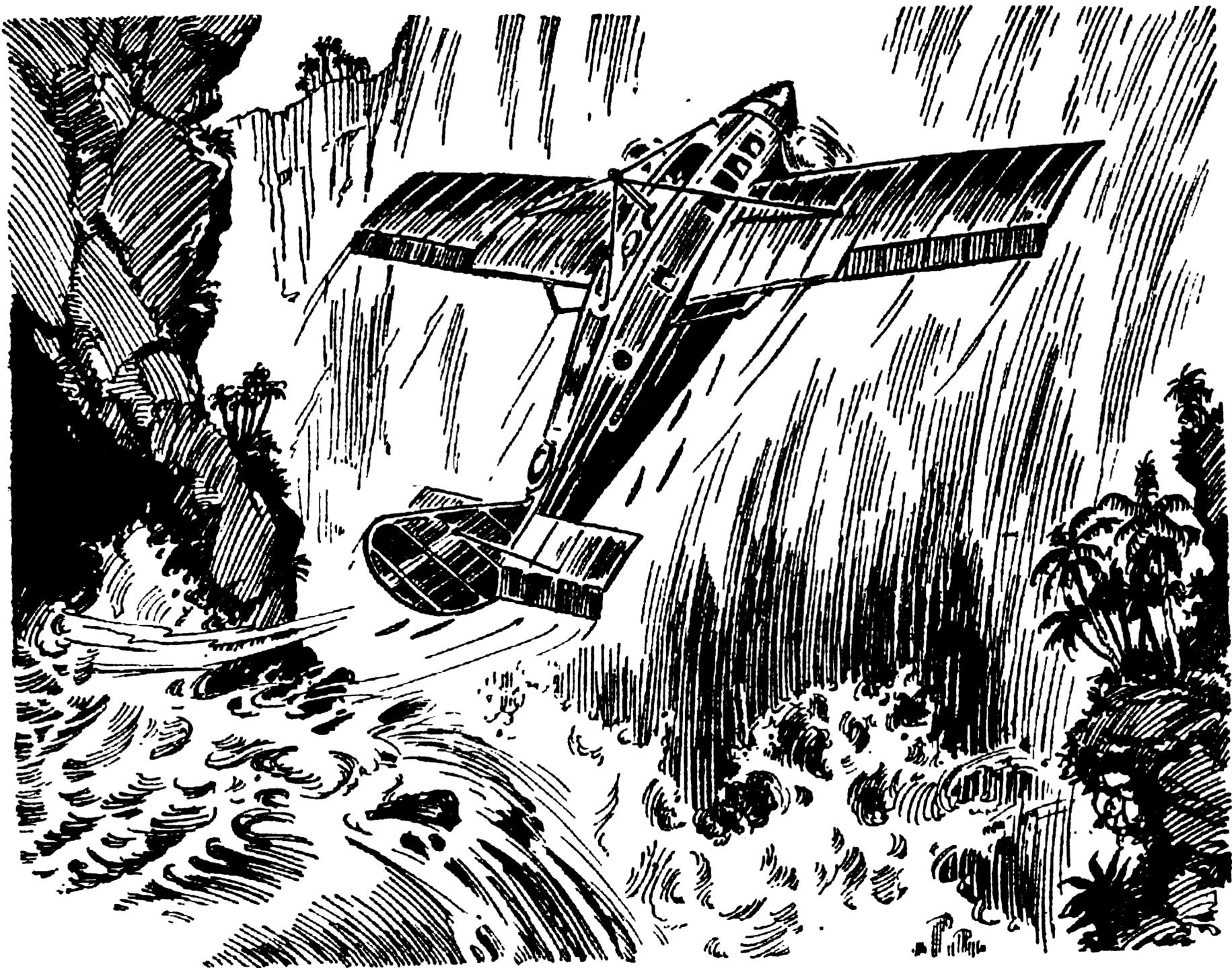
Lazy Youth: "What I want, dad, is a job where I can have most of the day to myself."

Father: "Then you'd better get a job as a night watchman!"

(*B. Wilson, 12, Pole Street, Nottingham—a pocket wallet.*)

***A gripping story of treasure hunting in darkest Africa!***

# *The* CITY of GOLD!



*By* HERBERT FORD

---

**On the eve of departure for a lost land of gold in the remotest regions of Africa, tragedy hovers over the Zambesi trading station of Phil Cook. The old trader is critically injured by a lion; Lulu the Zulu is badly mauled in fighting that lion—leaving young Tom Cook and his cousin Alva Vandeck a prey to all sorts of fears and worries.**

---

### **The Treasure Quest Begins!**

**T**HE trader and Lulu had been rushed down to the hospital at Livingstone in record time, for Al had made the Flying Fish show her paces as she never had before.

In a couple of days the doctors announced that Lulu was out of danger, and the huge Zulu was actually limping about the hospital grounds, little the worse for his fight with a lion. Phil Cook's hurts were serious, however. His badly broken leg would leave the trader with a permanent limp, whilst for some days he was raving in fever.

When at last he could receive visitors and talk, sitting up in bed with his mending leg suspended in a sling, he insisted upon Tom "carrying on" without him.

"I'm nothin' but a crock, lad, and shali be for some considerable time. Lulu's pretty well all right again, but it'll be months before I can even hobble, and, meantime, I'm standin' in your light. Now I'll give you th' original map au' also a detailed plan which was made by another feller who has been farther towards the City of Gold than any white man since the Italian. Go, and if you can find the City and the diamonds that

Torella said were there for the picking up, so much the better; we can do with the wealth they'll bring."

Naturally, Tom protested at the idea of leaving his dad there in hospital, but the trader was firm, and at last prevailed.

"There's one thing I can't make out, Al," said Tom, as he and his cousin sped back to the station to pick up some stores and make final arrangements. "That is where you're going to store petrol enough to last the journey. We can't pick it up on the road."

Al grinned and pointed down to the Zambesi.

"So long as we can get enough water we're all right, old bird!" he grinned. As he spoke he took a long aluminium tube from his pocket and shook a few greyish-looking pellets into his hand. "This old 'bus doesn't depend upon petrol. Dad found a method of releasing gas by dropping these little chemical pills into water; something like acetylene, you know, only tremendously more powerful. One pill will give us enough power to cruise about five hundred miles or fly about a hundred. Not only that, but— Look!"

He steered the Fish over until they were skimming past the thick jungle of reeds.

"'Sst, look at that big feller!" he whispered, pointing to a huge crocodile which was wallowing in the mud at some two hundred yards distance. "That's a man-eater, and, therefore, well rid of. Watch!"

He touched one or two levers; and Tom saw a long, slender barrel appear from the bows. There was a very faint report, hardly a sign of vapour, and the hideous body of the crocodile seemed to melt into thin air!

"Compressed gas, firin' a tiny bullet filled with the same gas which explodes with the result you see!" he explained. "I don't use 'em as they're not exactly sportin', but they're mighty useful things to have at a pinch, and with that little gun—why, I'd make a whole reg'ment of soldiers like a punctured tyre in two minutes by the clock!"

Two days later they started out on their voyage for the City of Gold, with the ancient map and two or three copies of the more modern one as their guide.

### The Voice of the Mountain!

**T**OM soon learnt enough about the running of the Flying Fish to be able to relieve Al at the helm. Despite her many ingenious "gadgets," the Vandeck invention was marvellously simple, both as to her engine and controls.

The little chemical pellets would supply power for many weeks' travelling, but Al wisely decided to conserve their power as far as possible in case of urgent emergency. So they kept to the surface of the river, maintaining a steady speed; for it took very much more power to sustain the heavy "ship" in the air.

As the adventurers had little notion how long their journey was going to take them, or its actual distance, it naturally behaved

them to use their "power pills" as sparingly as possible. Although the maps gave them direction, there were no distances marked upon them, and the explorers were, to a great extent, "goin' it blind," as Al said.

For three days they travelled upstream, tying the boat up at night and going ashore occasionally for a bit of shooting. They were saving the tinned stores they had brought with them, relying upon fresh meat and fish, of which there was an abundance, for they were passing through the game country.

For centuries upon centuries the animals had roamed wild and un hunted upon the great tracts of free, untouched land, and when Tom and Al set forth to hunt they found it absurdly easy to get what they wanted. The animals had probably never seen a human being before, and so they showed no fear and made no attempt to run away.

"Gosh, it's like murder, old man!" Al said as he leaned on his rifle and contemplated the fine bush buck he had just shot. "If it wasn't that we need the grub I couldn't bring myself to do it!"

It appeared that Ben Bold was also an enthusiastic and skilful fisherman, so their diet was a pretty varied one.

"Sufferin' tomcats, look what we've got to get the other side of!" Tom exclaimed on the evening of the fourth day.

He pointed north, and indicated the position on the map where they now were. There was the inscription as his father had translated it from the Italian:

"Due north here, over Balaam's Ass."

In the distance, shrouded in mist, was a range of great mountains which seemed to rise one behind the other in serried ranks.

"I don't know which is Balaam's Ass, but it's that we've got to make for," Tom said. "Al, I don't reckon your boat's goin' to be so much good, after all, for we can't expect her to fly over those mountains, can we?"

Al rubbed his chin and whistled thoughtfully as he surveyed the range of mighty peaks, the summits of which were lost far up in the clouds.

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"She could do it all right, but it'll be putting a big strain on her, and it'll use up a dickens of a lot of power. If there was some other way—Balaam's Ass seems a funny sorter name to give a mountain, and there may be some other explanation. Let's have a squint at that map. I can read Italian slightly."

He studied the crabbed and faded letters of the old Italian professor's original map.

"Your dad's simplified the Italian a bit, thinking to make it easier for us," he said, "but he's made a mistake. 'Voce,' that means 'voice,' 'exposione' means 'show.' It should read, 'The voice of Balaam's Ass shall show-ye the way.' I don't know what it means, and I never heard of a mountain with a voice yet, but I guess we'd best tie up for to-night and wait events. Maybe we can think something out before morning. I don't want to have to fly those mountains with their unseen summits 'way up in the clouds if I can help it."

"I reckon I shall dream about Balaam's Ass to-night," grinned Tom. "He was the animal that turned around and gave his boss back-chat, wasn't it? Told him he was going the wrong way, or something? Maybe this one'll tell us something of the same sort."

He awoke in the night with a start, and after listening for a while, dug his cousin in the ribs.

"What the dickens is that row?" he whispered. "And something seems to be trying to move the boat. Hear that grinding? Let's go up and have a look. Bring your gun!"

The two boys stole up on to the whaleback deck and peered over the side. The Flying Fish seemed to be moving and straining at her anchor uneasily, whilst there was certainly a rubbing and bumping going on beneath her.

"Listen!"

From somewhere over on the northern bank there came a weird, long-drawn, moaning sound that swelled high, and then died away again. They were used to strange noises from the bush, but this was uncanny!

As they watched the shore, with its thick belt of trees, it seemed as if the vessel were moving and swaying, and they realised that the Fish was tugging at her anchor-chain with the pull of some powerful current in the river. Al switched on a light and focused it on some object that was moving rapidly shorewards. It was an immense log, and it seemed to gather speed and disappear under the overhanging creepers.

Then, at that moment, came that eerie sound again, this time six times louder, and unmistakable in its braying discord.

Hee-haw! Hee-haw-augh-augh-augh-augh!

Tom gave a shout of laughter and banged his cousin on the back.

"Balaam's Ass, you ass, and me, too! That's the voice all right, and well named, but it's an outsize donkey! Al, there's a powerful stream runnin' through that thick bush, and if that big log can get through—

we can. Up with the mudhook, old man, and let's go and follow the call of the Ass!"

Al moved the levers that controlled the folding wings, and the Fish was transformed into an ordinary narrow, slender boat. With Tom stationed forward, working a powerful headlight, they glided through the bushes into a tunnel-like opening whence the voice of the "Ass" brayed out in seeming raucous triumph.

For half an hour they moved swiftly on the stream, with just enough engine power to give steerage way. Then the narrow tunnel suddenly opened out until its roof was lost in the steamy mist that was rising from the surface of the water. The atmosphere became closer until the sweat was running down their faces in streams, whilst a hot sulphurous air almost choked them. Al put on speed, and the Fish's nose rose until they were spinning along on her tail, with the tunnel walls seeming to race past them. Then, above the occasional braying of the voice, there came another sound—the thunderous roar of tumbling waters!

"By gum!" exclaimed Al. "There's a gigantic waterfall ahead somewhere, but whether it tumbles into this stream or the stream tumbles— Tom, hop below and tell Ben to take every order on the jump. I'm thinkin' we'll have to do a bit o' quick work, or we're goin' to be wrecked right here in this tunnel!"

Tom obeyed, disappearing below swiftly. Directly he had dived through the little hatch, Al turned a lever which slid a cover over it. He himself remained in the pilot's cabin.

"They're better off inside if what I expect is coming." He spoke through the telephone to the engine-room. "Ben, stand by for full power and instant elevation. We may have to fly quick and sudden. Get me?"

"Ay, ay, boss!" came Ben's muffled voice.

The Flying Fish swirled round a corner, and Al gave a gasp as he saw what was ahead of them.

Waves ten feet high were dashing against each side of the tunnel. The stream disappeared down a yawning chasm, whilst into it there poured from a tremendous fall an immense mass of water from some unseen river overhead. Both streams met each other at the end of the tunnel, forming a whirling maelstrom in which no craft could live.

Hurriedly Al adjusted his safety-straps. Taking a deep breath, he crouched in the pilot's seat and signalled for full power. Then he turned the switches until the Fish's wings crept out to either side. With the propellers racing madly, the flying craft rose, her nose pointing almost vertically upwards as she leapt from the surface of the underground stream and climbed, like a fly crawling a wall, sheer up the face of that thundering fall!

*(More thrills in next week's stirring chapters of this magnificent treasure-hunting story—don't miss reading them!)*

## The Quest Of The Silver Dwarf

(Continued from page 38.)

it with a wisp of rag and making it shine until it reflected the rays of the oil lamp with dazzling brilliance.

"Ah, you will break it!" cried Gonzalez, snatching it from him. Then he turned to Nelson Lee. "See, senior. Is that the statuette you seek?"

"It is," replied the detective. "And it has suffered no damage. I will be generous, Gonzalez. I will pay two hundred pesetas."

He paid the money, and the peasant received it with trembling hands. But the boy began to cry when he saw that his new plaything was lost to him for ever.

"Come," said the detective. "There is no need for tears. Here! Catch!"

He tossed several silver coins to the boy, who caught them deftly. Immediately his tears changed to laughter.

"I am rich!" he cried in a shrill voice. "I wish I could find statues every day!"

"Who knows!" murmured Gonzalez significantly. "You may find such things every day."

"Not so valuable as this one, nor so important," said Nelson Lee, with a laugh. "But the hour is late. I had better get back to the tavern."

So, wishing Gonzalez good-night, he left the hut and went out into the pale glare of the full moon.

Pedro Gonzalez pocketed the money and stood staring at the door which had closed behind the detective.

"Two hundred pesetas!" he muttered. "It would take me years to earn that much in the fields. But why should it stop now?"

He seized a stout stick from a corner of the hut and cautiously went to the door. Peering out, he saw that Nelson Lee had turned the bend in the road and was out of sight. Accordingly, he went out and walked swiftly, but silently, towards the tavern, keeping well in the shadows of the hedges.

Unaware of the menace that lurked behind him, Nelson Lee continued on his way back to the tavern with the Silver Dwarf tucked securely under his arm.

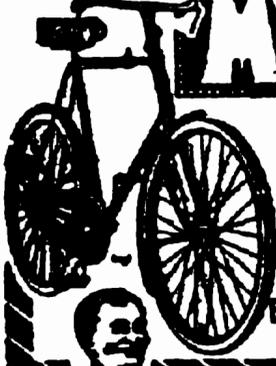
The first round of the battle with Professor Mark Rymer had been won. Now he could return to England, where, with the necessary proofs now in his possession, he would be able to start his search for the missing Lord Easington, heir to the Easington fortune.

Thus Nelson Lee mused as he made his way along the lonely track in the heart of the mountains. And behind him, like a sinister shadow, crept Pedro Gonzalez, cudgel in hand, wary, watchful—waiting his chance!

THE END.

(Follow the further amazing adventures of Nelson Lee in next week's complete novel-length detective story, which is entitled: "The Trail of Fortune!" Order your copy to-day.)

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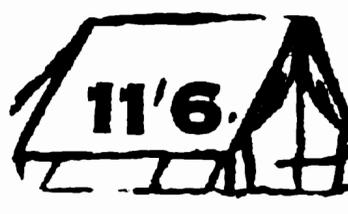
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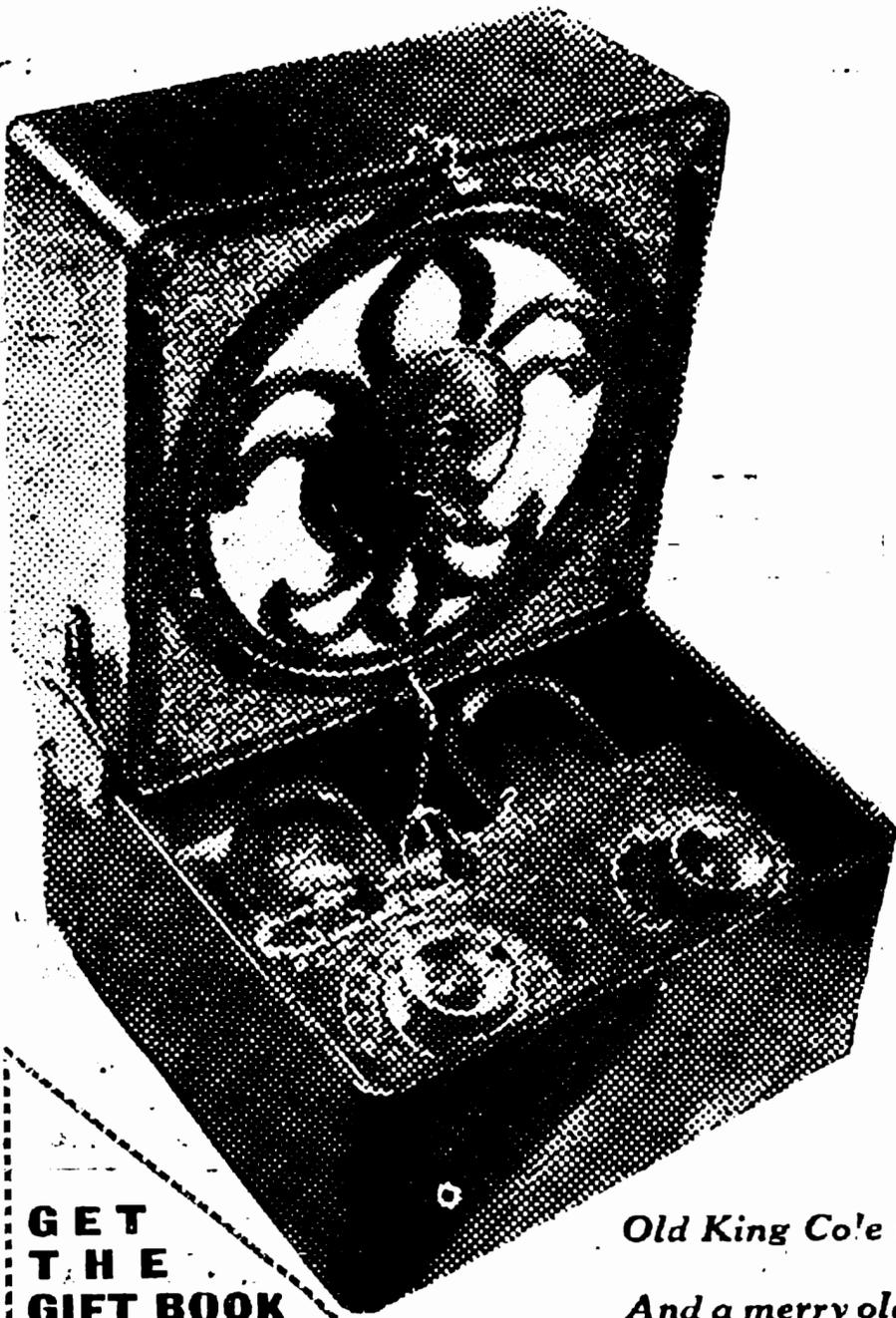
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