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THE BEGGAR OF KASHAPORE!

New Series No. 121.

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THE BEGGAR OF



CHAPTER 1.

The Chest of Doom!

TWO figures moved slowly along the dark road that wound bewilderingly through low-lying fields of rank grass. Away in the distance lights from the city of Kashapore, capital of Puljara, in the north-west of India, twinkled and blinked. The dark smudge across the land was the high wall guarded day and night by the orders of His Highness the Rajah of Puljara, Mahommed Ali Khan.

"In a little while from now the treasure will be ours." The smaller of the two figures almost hissed the words through thin, villainous lips. His giant companion nodded with grim satisfaction.

"Our plans have worked with the smoothness of oiled wheels," again murmured the smaller of the pair. He walked with stooping shoulders, and swung long, ape-like arms. His head seemed twice the normal size. He was, in fact, the most dangerous crook in the whole world, a man of tremendous scientific knowledge and experience—and his name was Dr. Zenn.

... In This Gripping Thriller of Nelson Lee and Nipper!

KASHAPORE!



A wonderful treasure chest, containing fabulous wealth is stolen . . . spirited away from under the very noses of its vigilant native guards. That chest must be recovered at all costs to avert political complications between two countries. And to Nelson Lee, the famous detective, well-known for his skill and steadfast courage, is given the stupendous task of restoring the stolen property.

Drama and intrigue move swiftly from London to far-off India and in this mighty continent with its surging masses of strange people, its Oriental glamour and hidden mysteries, Nelson Lee and Nipper are faced with the most perilous adventures of their lives!

His companion was none other than Count Ivor Otho.

"We have gained the gratitude of Colonel Bryce and his daughter by saving them from the hands of bandits—our bandits." Dr. Zenn chuckled. "Chandra Lal did his job well. We have been invited to stay at the rajah's palace as guests of Bryce. The

colonel is conveying a chest of gold to London, a present from the rajah to Britain. That is my information.

"We have prepared our ground here in Kashapore and in London, at Downe Square; everything possible has been arranged. If the rajah sticks to his plan—still decides to hand over the chest to Colonel Bryce for

safe transit from Puljara to London—then we have little to worry about. The ten lakh of rupees are as good as ours.”

“We’ve got to get Colonel Bryce to ask us to join his party when he starts,” said Otho.

“I’ll bet you that he does that to-morrow! Why shouldn’t he?” Zenn smiled to himself in the dusk. “We’ve proved ourselves very useful, even as a bodyguard. No, you need have no fear on that point, Otho. When his Excellency, Colonel Bryce, military adviser and British representative at the Court of his Highness, the Rajah of Puljara, leaves for England on a very important mission, he will have two additional members of his suite—you and I.”

The lights of the city presently loomed in front of them, and they entered the gateway, a sentinel moving out to open the wide gates. For in Kashapore, in common with many other cities in India, the main gates of the city were still closed from sunset to sunrise.

Under ordinary circumstances Otho and Zenn might have been forced to spend the night in one of the dak-bungalows that are always to be found close to a big city for the use of belated travellers, but this time they were allowed in at once.

“His Excellency, the colonel sahib’s orders,” was the reply which the tall sentinel gave when questioned by Zenn.

The magnificent gift which the Rajah of Puljara had promised to England—ten lakh of rupees, in gold—had caused no little stir when it was first announced. The object was, of course, to set on record the rajah’s patriotism and friendliness towards Great Britain, and his eagerness to help in the recent financial crisis. He had more gold than he knew what to do with, while Great Britain was suffering from an acute shortage of that precious metal.

The rajah himself had arranged that he should hand over the treasure in person, and the Indian potentate was to travel to London to perform that ceremony. It was this news that had first stirred the cupidity of Zenn and Otho. They studied up every detail concerning the gift. They read every report and discovered the following facts.

The money, in solid gold, was kept in an iron and gold-bound chest in the palace at Kashapore.

The chest itself was an historical one, for it had been presented to his Highness by his people on ascending the throne. Zenn, setting to work in his grim way, soon found a photograph of the chest in a local museum, together with an exact description of its measurements. The curator of the museum little dreamed to what use his information concerning the treasure chest would be put. That same night Zenn sent off a long letter to a certain address in London, where an antique dealer, a perfect master of the art of faking old furniture, lived. This man’s name was Anton.

The two crooks also discovered that Colonel Bryce, the British representative at Puljara, was a great favourite with the old rajah, and that the colonel had been commissioned to take charge of all the details concerning the gift. He had to travel to England with the precious chest and await the arrival of the rajah, who was due to follow by a steamer about a week later.

“Here, then, was the best opportunity to steal the chest. A project that fascinated the master intellects of the two crooks. It wanted courage and daring and skill, attributes which both men had to a high degree.

It was Otho who discovered that Colonel Bryce owned a house in London, in Downe Square. He got the address of the house, and, to add another link to their long chain, another letter was sent off, this time to a certain Flash Harry, one of Otho’s old gang.

The rest of the plot consisted in the two men worming their way into the confidence of the genial colonel, and this, thanks to a very old but useful trick, had been accomplished.

“We have absolutely nothing to fear,” said Zenn that evening, as he and Otho sat in the quietly furnished room that they had rented in the carpet dealer’s house. “Chandra Lal would never betray us; he would be clapped into the rajah’s gaol as an accomplice as quickly as possible. To-morrow, at the very urgent entreaties of our friend, the colonel, we will take up our quarters in the palace, and remain there until the party starts for England.”

He rubbed his lean hand over his bald skull, grinning the while.

“This is the sort of affair I delight in,” he said. “There are risks attached to it.”

Otho had flung his huge frame on a low divan and was pulling at a long pipe. He blew a fragrant cloud of smoke from his lips before making a reply.

“You seemed pleased to find it difficult,” he put in at last. And I suppose you’re right. There is only one thing I hope, and that is that a certain man, whom we both know, is kept out of it.”

Across Zenn’s face the shadow of a scowl spread. He leaned forward menacingly.

“I swear that if Nelson Lee crosses my path this time I will not rest until one of us goes under,” he muttered, his voice thin with suppressed feeling. “Too long has he been a thorn in my side. There must be an end to one of us, and if he intervenes now, let him look out for himself! I mean it! And now, let’s get ready for our visit to-morrow.”

He seemed to be assured of his welcome at the palace, for he packed everything in readiness for the move. And neither he nor Otho were disappointed. Colonel Bryce met them on the marble steps that led into his private suite, and the colonel’s handshake was of the warmest.

“I was afraid that you would not come,” he admitted, leading the way down a tapes-

try hung corridor, and into a spacious, well-lighted room, where at a table a sturdy youngster was seated, in neat-fitting khaki, hard at work on a heap of documents. "Vernon, here is Count Kaldross and Dr. Kay. They have turned up, you see."

Lieutenant Vernon, attaché to the colonel, drew his long legs beneath him and arose to shake hands. He had a keen, bronzed, good-looking face, a typical young officer such as one meets anywhere in clubland.

Nothing could exceed the warmth of the welcome that the two arch-scoundrels received. Muriel Bryce was particularly kind to them both; and Vernon, head over heels in love with the beautiful girl, was inclined to scowl a little when he found himself so much in the background.

It was arranged that Zenn and Otho should take up their residence at the palace, and they did so. It was also arranged by the colonel that they should travel to England together.

"My dear chap, it is my convenience I am studying," the colonel admitted. "I might tell you that this journey of mine is going to be a most anxious one."

THEY were seated at the dinner-table with cigars and liqueurs. Otho had cunningly suggested that the presence of his companion and himself might embarrass the travellers.

"In what way, colonel?" Zenn's voice was quite steady.

"Well, I'm taking with me a chest with a king's ransom in gold inside it," the colonel returned. "And 'pon my word, I don't like the job one little bit."

"Colonel Bryce is referring to the rajah's gift of gold to the Government of Great Britain," Vernon put in. "I suppose you've heard about that?"

His grey eyes were fixed on Otho, but that individual was a master of the art of self-control.

"I'm afraid I haven't," he replied. "Zenn and I have been in the hills—Tibet and Darjeeling—for the past two months. We were quite out of touch with civilisation."

The colonel rose to his feet.

"Well, if you care to come along with me, I'll show you the thing we've got to travel with. It might interest you."

Colonel Bryce led the way down a narrow flight of stairs and into a small, vaulted room. He lit a lamp and held it aloft.

"There is the war-chest," he said.

It was a massive, solidly-made receptacle. The gold carving was deep and toned with age. Iron bands, riveted through the solid wood, gave it an appearance of strength.

Zenn and Otho stepped forward to examine the chest. Despite the fact that they had nerves like steel, neither could control the swift thrill that ran through their veins. Here was the very treasure they had set out to obtain. A king's ransom.

"You do not seem to take much trouble to guard it, colonel," Otho said. "I did not notice any sentries."

Colonel Bryce laughed.

"No man in the world could shift that chest from here," he said. "Try and move it."

Otho caught at the stout handle and put out all his vast strength. The chest did not budge an inch.

"Gold is heavy, you see," their host went on. "It takes four men to shift it. Besides, there is not a soul in Puljara would dare even to lay his finger on that chest. It is the rajah's property, and sacred. It means death to anyone who touches it without his permission."

The two rogues followed him back to the dining-room. Zenn was quiet and thoughtful, leaving the conversation to his companion.

For as they stood over the chest there had come to the wizened doctor a foreboding that he could not define. The breath of some far-off danger, chilling his soul.

"Death to anyone who touches it!"

CHAPTER 2.

The Death Tube!

THAT'S the worst of a great, hulking dog like you, Wolf. You can't be taken out in the day-time, like an ordinary pup. You're too big and hefty, and people want to make a fuss of you."

Nipper, his hand tight on the strong leather leash that was attached to the collar of the great Alsatian, Wolf, voiced his grumble in what was rather a kindly tone.

As a matter of fact, the young detective was only too glad to snatch every opportunity he could get to take the big dog out for a stroll. Wolf, under ordinary circumstances, usually lived with Nipper at St. Frank's, where there was plenty of room for him to run and gambol to his heart's content.

But Nelson Lee had been engaged upon a case in which he needed the uncanny trailing power Wolf possessed, and had sent for Nipper and the dog to stay with him for a few days in London. The chief trouble was that there was very little convenience for such an enormous dog at Gray's Inn Road, and the housekeeper there was forever grumbling.

Still, Wolf had learned to stow himself away under Nipper's bed whenever the housekeeper was about and so make himself as inconspicuous as possible, while in the evening Nipper would take him to the park for the exercise his great frame needed.

They had turned westward and headed for Hyde Park. As time was no object at the moment he was shaping a rather erratic course.

"Well, if that isn't most annoying!"

Nipper was almost within touching distance of the stooping figure before he realised that it really was a human being. The voice was charming, and Nipper came to a halt. As he did so the girl looked up and gave vent to a little gasp as she saw the slender youngster with the huge dog by his side.

"Goodness, you frightened me!" she gasped, rising to her feet.

It was quite thirty yards to the nearest lamp-post, and the overhanging trees cast a dense shadow, but there was just sufficient light to allow Nipper to see that the face turned towards him was a pretty one, and that the girl was in evening dress, without a hat.

"I'm very sorry, miss," Nipper began, raising his hat. "But can I help? Have you lost something?"

"Yes, and I'll never be able to find it, either. It is a jewelled bracelet—I had a pair. They are very valuable. An Indian rajah made me a present of them on my last birthday. I believe they are worth about fifty pounds each."

"Phew! You don't want to lose a thing worth that amount."

In a moment Nipper decided to help. He knew that there would be very small chance of getting the bracelet back again if she waited until the morning.

"I don't see how any human being could find my bracelet on such a dark night as this," she said, with a little sorrowful shrug of her shoulders.

Nipper smiled, and his hand slipped down the leash, loosening it.

"You're quite right, miss," he replied. "No human being could find your bracelet; but there's an old fellow here who has something better to guide him than eyes."

"That dear dog!" she said. "Do you really mean to say that he can find—"

"Give me your other bracelet," said Nipper.

The girl handed him the jewelled ornament from her wrist, without a moment's hesitation. It was a little proof of instinctive trust which made Nipper all the more eager to help.

"Here, Wolf!" he said. "Seek, old man—seek!"

There came from the dog a half-impatient snuffle. Wolf glanced first at Nipper then at the intent, eager girl by his side. Then the big dog stepped out on to the roadway, and his soft muzzle nosed at something on the ground.

With a quick laugh and a cry of delight the girl darted towards the dog, stooped and lifted the object.

"He—he thinks we were both such sillies!" she cried, tucking one slender arm around Wolf's massive throat. "And so we were, you dear old thing."

"Did he find it?" Nipper asked.

The girl held up her hand, and the

bracelet was sending a dull, red glow from her shapely wrist.

"Of course he did. Don't you see what it was? Those great big eyes of his had found it long ago, and he was just thinking to himself how foolish we both were."

Nipper grinned, and reached out, replacing the leash on the dog's collar.

"But you mustn't go like that!" his companion said. "I—am really very much obliged, and—and—"

She was about to offer some sort of reward, but the movement that Nipper made brought her to a halt. She flushed in the darkness, then with a laugh, held out her hand.

"My name is Muriel Bryce," she said. "I live at number five. Won't you please give me your name? I should love to come and see this dear old dog some time."

Nipper hesitated for a moment, then gave his name and address.

"I'm afraid that you won't have much chance of seeing Wolf there, however," he added. "It is only now and again that we are in town."

"Well, I'll risk it, and—and thank you so much again. Good-night!"

Muriel and Nipper shook hands, then, after a pat on the dog's head, the slender figure tripped off down the pavement and turned into the porch of a small house. She waved her hand to Nipper as she vanished, and the lad raised his hat.

AT the corner of the square he glanced up and read the name.

"Downe Square—never heard of it before."

Nipper went on down the street that led from the square and presently there turned the corner a slow-moving taxi. The driver was keeping close to the kerb and was looking up at the houses as he moved along. Catching sight of Nipper and the dog the driver slipped his clutch for a moment.

"Where's Downe Square, mister?" he asked.

Before Nipper could reply an extraordinary thing happened. The door farthest away from the pavement opened and a figure in a dark cloak leaped out, swinging towards the driver.

"Keep your mouth shut, you fool!" a harsh voice rasped. "If you don't know the way, keep quiet!"

Nipper saw the cloaked figure lean forward and knock the driver's foot aside, so that the spinning clutch was re-engaged and the taxi shot forward.

"Here, what the dickens—"

There was a jar and a crash, and the driver took control of his vehicle again. The taxi stopped, and the driver, infuriated at this high-handed procedure, leaped from the cab, obviously prepared to do battle.

"Here, you—" he began, striding towards his passenger.

He never completed his remark. As he rushed at the cloaked form an arm was ex-

tended, and Nipper heard a faint, coughing sound. There was no flash, no report, but the driver, as though struck by some deadly missile, threw up his hands and fell flat on his back in the middle of the road. The cloaked figure, wheeling round, without as much as another glance at the heap at his feet, sped off up the street and vanished.

It was only then that Nipper really moved in the matter. Wolf, for some unaccountable reason, had commenced to strain and whimper at his leash. Nipper stepped out towards the man lying in the road.

gave the man the bare details of the affair, and also the identity of the speaker. Nipper and Wolf, as the assistants of Nelson Lee, were well known to the London police.

Wolf still strained and whimpered, and it was only when Nipper, at the suggestion of the constable, took the dead man's place at the wheel of the taxi, that the dog gave up his importunities. The driver had been lifted into the vehicle, and, with the constable inside with his gruesome charge, and Wolf on the step beside him, Nipper drove the taxi to St. Hugon's Hospital.



As Nipper crouched back in the shadows he saw the black-cloaked stranger raise an arm towards the onrushing taxi-driver. There came a faint choking gasp—and the driver dropped in the roadway!

“Come along, old chap!” said Nipper, stooping forward. “You can’t be so badly hurt as—”

He touched the driver, and at the pressure of his fingers the shoulders moved round and the head fell back. Nipper peered for a moment into the upturned face, with its fixed, dull eyes and drawn-back lips. A cry of utter amazement broke from the youngster.

“Dead!”

There was no mistake about it. The unfortunate man had been terribly punished for his brief and natural anger. The discovery shocked Nipper, and for a moment he stood irresolute; then, realising the need for instant action, drew a police-whistle from his pocket and sent a shrill summons through the deserted street.

An answering call came, and two minutes later a stalwart constable rushed upon the scene. A half-dozen words from Nipper

“I SHOULD say that he died of suffocation,” the house-surgeon gave his verdict in the uncertain voice of a man in doubt. “Yet, on your story, it does not seem possible.”

Nipper and the constable, with an inspector who had come from the nearest police-station, were standing in the surgeon's room. The brief examination of the body had just concluded.

“It beats me!” the young detective returned. “As far as I could see there wasn't a blow struck. The other man simply stretched out his hand, and there was a soft sort of cough, and the driver went down like a nine-pin!”

There was nothing further for him to do at the hospital, and he and the inspector went out together. The officer was obviously ill at ease.

"A nice sort of case to have to tackle," he grumbled. "No blow struck, the surgeon not really sure how the poor beggar came by his end, and—and not so much as a clue to go on to find the man who did it!"

"Except that he had asked the driver to take him to Downe Square," Nipper put in.

The inspector shook his head.

"We're not even sure of that," he replied. "The driver asked you for Downe Square, but how are we to know that his fare was actually going there? It might have been one of the streets off it, or the driver might have been looking for a short cut."

When he parted with the inspector, Nipper was strangely quiet.

Suddenly a thought flashed into his mind, and he came to a halt.

"Gosh! Is it possible that the murderer recognised me?"

He remembered that he had been standing under a lamp-post when the taxi drew up. Anyone inside the vehicle could easily have seen his face. Then Wolf's strange behaviour formed another link. Had the dog, with its deeper sagacity, recognised some old enemy?

It was too late to do anything, now, however. The crook, stranger or ancient enemy, had made good his escape.

"No, you've got clear away, whoever you are," Nipper muttered. "And the only question that concerns me now is—why did you want to keep the address that you were going to away from me?"

He could find no answer to that problem then, and, indeed, clever though the youngster was, he was not to be blamed for that.

Nipper could not know that it was the sight of his keen, well-remembered face, and more particularly the sinewy shape of the great dog, that had roused a sudden panic of fear in the heart of a rogue.

Dr. Zenn's iron nerve had deserted him for the moment—for it was he who was seated in the vehicle. He had come back from a momentous visit. Earlier that afternoon he had gone to the address of the antique dealer, and had been shown the result of his letter.

A great chest, the exact counterpart—carving, iron bands, everything—of that which stood in the strong room in No. 5, Downe Square! A taxi had been chartered, and Zenn had seen the chest safely handed over to a lynx-eyed individual, who had been introduced to him by Otho as "Flash" Harry.

It was the initial move of their great scheme in London, and the doctor had been weighing over the various details on his return journey to Downe Square. Then, as though by sheer chance, he had caught sight of the lad and dog—the loyal servants of the only man in the world whom Zenn hated and feared.

And what followed had been the result of that panic. His death-tube that he always carried had not failed him, and he had escaped.

But he was in a welter of fear as he entered the quiet home of the men he intended to victimise, and he made for his bed-room at

once, to pace up and down, hands behind his back, his vulture head on his breast.

He had killed a man, but that thought did not trouble him. It was the appearance of Nipper so close to Downe Square that kept the brooding man pacing up and down long into the night.

CHAPTER 3.

The Theft of the Treasure Chest!

IN one of the rooms on the second floor of No. 4, Downe Square, there had gathered three men—Dr. Zenn, Count Ivor Otho, and the third, an overdressed, sleek rascal, known to his associates as Flash Harry.

The house, situated next to No. 5, had long stood vacant, and the agents had been only too glad to let it on a short lease. Flash Harry, representing himself as the confidential secretary to a wealthy man who desired to remain anonymous, had told the agents a plausible story. He made out that his employer had become interested in the work of a certain specialist, and was intending to equip the house as a private nursing-home for the treatment of special diseases.

The first three months' rent had been paid in advance, and a number of workmen had been engaged on the place. Carpenters and plasterers were constantly in and out of the house, lending colour to Flash Harry's story. He himself furnished a couple of rooms and gave out that he would take up residence there as soon as the alterations were completed.

The local firm of builders who had undertaken the work of altering the house little dreamed that their legitimate business was serving to cover an elaborate fraud.

None of the neighbours thought that there was anything wrong when they heard the sound of hammer and chisel going long into the night. It was known that the work was being pushed forward at express speed, so that the place might be ready for its future inmates as soon as possible.

Zenn's active brain had organised the whole affair, and now he was there to make his final arrangements.

"I don't see what you've got to worry about, gents," Flash Harry commented. "Everything has gone just like clockwork. I've had the grate and the wall pierced, and there's a gap big enough for four men to walk through into the room next door. And the job has been done by my own pals—who daren't give me away."

He crossed to the black marble mantelpiece that looked solid enough, and tapped it.

"That's safe enough," he remarked. "And the chest is a good fake, too."

"I give you all that," nodded the doctor grimly. "It is not the chest nor the work that you have performed here that I am troubled over. It is the fact of meeting that young cub, Nipper."

He had made a confidant of Otho in the matter, but the broad-shouldered crook shook his head.

"I think you have been mistaken this time, Zenn," he returned. "There is no conceivable reason to connect Nipper's appearance with our presence here. It was just a coincidence."

He dismissed the matter with a wave of his hand.

"I am prepared to give in to you, perhaps," replied Zenn. "If you think that Nelson Lee knows nothing about us, then let us carry out the final move."

"Now?"

Zenn rose to his feet.

"Why not? It is just five o'clock. The faithful Abul will be squatting outside the door of the treasure-room, tulwar over his knee, his keen ears on the alert. Colonel Bryce and Lord Eagley, of the Foreign Office, both inspected the chest and its contents this afternoon, assuring themselves that everything was correct. You heard the colonel say that that was to be done. We could not choose a better moment."

The strong face of the tall crook lit up in a quick, sarcastic smile.

"I think you're right," he said. "Now is the time."

He slipped out of his jacket and rolled up his sleeves, revealing the great bulging muscles of the forearm. Flash Harry also removed his coat, but Zenn did not follow their example.

Then, with a quick, light tread, Otho reached the chest and nodded to Flash Harry.

"We'll get it as near the fireplace as we can," he whispered, in a low tone.

The chest had been weighted with heavy blocks of lead, and it was all that Flash Harry could do to carry his end across the room. Zenn had already removed the rugs and fire-irons from the hearth. He looked up at Otho, who nodded his head.

"Right," the powerful man muttered.

Zenn, stooping down, caught at the bars of the grate and pulled. Noiselessly the whole back portion of the fireplace swung upwards and outwards, leaving a gap four feet high and about four feet wide. Through the gap it was pitch dark, but the light from the room they were in shed a faint gleam into the interior beyond.

"At last!" muttered Otho.

"The glim—quick—out with it!" Harry breathed.

And Zenn, leaping back to the gas, turned out the flame.

Otho lowered the corner of the chest, and, stepping into the open gap, listened for a moment. There was no sound, and at last he turned his head.

"Torch!" he breathed.

And a long, slender tube was thrust into his hand. A little blob of light leaped from between his fingers and raced for a moment over the carpet to settle at last on the square outlines of the rajah's treasure chest.

"Right! Come on! Careful, now!"

The faked box was lifted, and with noiseless steps Otho and Flash Harry entered the other room, dipping low to avoid the uplifted grate. They tiptoed across the chamber, and, resting their own burden for a moment, tackled the heavy treasure chest. It was almost more than they could manage; Otho, strong as a bull, was capable of swinging his end, but Flash Harry, tug though he did until the sweat stood out in beads on his forehead, could not make it stir. Suddenly the man felt a breath at his side, and the voice of Zenn sounded.

"Now lift!"

The great chest came up in answer to the combined efforts, and the slow, painful journey towards the gap began. It was well for them that the chest had been deposited quite close to the grate of the room. They had only to carry it some ten or fifteen feet; and yet, by the time that it had been set down in the other room, Otho was panting for breath. Flash Harry collapsed over the top of the chest with a stifled groan, but when Zenn had given him something to drink he quickly recovered.

"Put the other chest into its proper place," Otho whispered. "Come along!"

This time Zenn took no part in the business beyond holding the torch so that his two confederates could put the false treasure chest exactly over the place occupied by the real one. They had worked with feverish energy, and the moments had seemed as long as hours, yet no more than ten minutes could have passed from the moment that Zenn raised the grate until, after a careful inspection on his hands and knees by Otho of the carpet in the other room, it was lowered into its place.

"We haven't left a mark behind us," he said, brushing the dust from his knees as he straightened up. "I think that that has been very neatly done."

Zenn bent over the wonderful carved box. The gas had been lit again. The master-crook's beady eyes were flaming with the old avaricious glare.

"Gold, my friend!" his thin tones piped. "Solid gold! If the burden had been twice as heavy we would have managed it."

The man leaning against the wall laughed.

"I didn't think you were so strong, doctor," he admitted. "You certainly helped me. I couldn't have managed my end alone."

Zenn chuckled.

"That was not strength—simply will power," he returned. "I willed that we should lift the chest. And we did."

There was something uncanny about him, and Harry turned away with a half-shiver. He had always been afraid of Zenn. Otho was more of his type of leader.

"Well, now we've got it, what's to happen?"

He put the question in a bantering tone, and Otho smiled.

"We have a safe place for it," he said, "but we cannot remove it just now. To-night we will call for it, and you must keep your

eye on it until then. And don't forget about this," Otho went on, indicating the grate that he had now closed. "Your workmen will have to get busy at once bricking in."

The chest was removed to the corner, and the piece of tapestry arranged over it so that it looked like a couch.

Zenn and Otho left No. 4 by way of the narrow garden at the back of the house. It let them out into a narrow lane once used by trades-people of a bygone generation, but now given over to a few stray cats. It ended in a range of stables and garages down one of the side streets that led into the square. The two crooks had tidied themselves before leaving No. 4, and there was no trace of the mighty effort he had made on Otho's face as he rang the bell and entered the home of his genial host, Colonel Bryce.

The colonel himself was just descending the stairs as the two crooks entered. He came forward with outstretched hand a picture of kindly welcome.

"I am hoping that your search for berths has been unsuccessful, Count Kaldross," he cried.

Otho shook his head.

"Then I am afraid I must disappoint you, colonel," he returned. "Doctor Kay and I have fixed up to sail in the White Star boat from Liverpool to-morrow morning."

"That is unfortunate," Bryce went on. "I do wish you could wait over the week-end. I believe his Highness will be in England by Tuesday at the very latest. I am sure he would be glad to see you, for I have mentioned your valuable services to him."

"We did very little, colonel," said Zenn in his bland tones.

"Well, I don't know so much about that," the officer replied. "You took your turn at watching the chest on board ship, and would have done the same here if I would have allowed you. That's a jolly sight more than most people would care to do."

"It was a very small return for your many kindnesses, colonel," put in Otho. "And now I'm afraid that the doctor and I must get to work on our packing. We really ought to catch the midnight express for Liverpool to-night."

They went on up the stairs and along the corridor. Beneath a shaded electric bulb was seated the great turbaned figure of a trooper of the rajah's bodyguard. The man sat motionless, as though carved out of bronze, his curved sword across his massive knees, the keen blade shining beneath the reflected light from the bulb above.

The face of the doctor twisted into a mocking grimace as he went down the passage and into his own room. He found one of the colonel's valets at work laying out his evening dress.

"I'm packing up to-night, Carter," said Zenn. "The count and I sail for America in the morning. You might get my clothes together."

"Very good, sir," the servant replied.

CHAPTER 4.

Discovery!

TRUE to their statement, Zenn and Otho left No. 5, Downe Street to catch the Liverpool express. Their baggage, a very light load—for they had given it out that most of their heavier traps were returning to America direct—was stacked up in the taxi that had been sent for, and the farewells took place in the lighted hall.

In the darkness of the cab Zenn leaned back in his seat, and Otho heard him chuckling softly.

They reached the station, and Zenn called to a porter directing him to take the baggage to the night express. This was done so that the taxi-driver might be able to prove his fares had really gone to the station and taken train there. But on the platform the two crooks claimed their luggage again and had it removed to the cloak-room, then left by another exit.

"It would have been better for us to have travelled to Liverpool," said Otho, "but we cannot risk that. Flash Harry is straight enough, but the responsibility is too great for him. We can't expect him to guard that chest himself."

"We don't want him to," snarled the wizened man by his side. "We have got to get that chest away from Downe Square to-night. I don't suppose the loss will be discovered for some time."

In that Zenn was right. The loss had not been discovered when Lieutenant Vernon came out of his room the following morning.

"Good-morning, Abul," he said.

Vernon came to a halt in the corridor and nodded to the great, shrewd Indian trooper. Bright-eyed and sleepless, Abul, faithful servant of his master, the Rajah of Puljara, acknowledged the greeting with the stately dignity of his race.

"Good-morning, sahib."

"You have not tired of your watch yet?"

"No, sahib."

"Well, you won't have long to wait now. His Highness is due in London on Tuesday."

"That is good news, sahib."

It was about nine o'clock in the morning, but most of the household were up and about. Colonel Bryce, an early-riser himself, saw to it that the others followed his example. The breakfast gong began to rumble, and Vernon, with a nod to the native trooper, hurried along the corridor and descended the stairs.

"Thank goodness we'll soon have the great load taken off our minds!" said the colonel at breakfast. "I've had a cable from his Highness. He arrives in London at ten o'clock on Tuesday morning."

"Have you engaged his suite of rooms, sir?"

"I'm going to see about them to-day," said Bryce. "As a matter of fact, the Ritz has promised to keep their best apartments for him, and I think they will suit."

As soon as breakfast was over the colonel rose to his feet.

"Come along Vernon," he said. "We've got to make the usual visiting rounds."

Every morning and evening the senior officer and his subordinate had made it their duty to enter the room in which the chest was stored and see that everything was correct. Very often Muriel accompanied them, and she, too, arose.

The colonel led the way upstairs, Muriel and Vernon behind him. As the grizzled head of the veteran appeared above the stairs, Abul, the sleepless, leaped to his feet and stood to attention.

The morning ceremony was gone through.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Visiting Rounds!"

"Advance, Visiting Rounds. All's well!"

The colonel stepped forward, and Abul, taking the key from his belt, held it out. The lock on the door clicked, and Abul, pushing the door aside, entered. The room was a small, square one. It was empty save for a strip of wonderful carpet in the centre of the floor and the big treasure chest. There was curtain in the window, and Vernon, stepping up to it, drew it aside so that the faint light might fall full on the chest.

"All is well, Abul," said the colonel, nodding towards the heavy box; "and soon I will be able to meet thy royal master and tell him how well thou hast kept thy bond."

Abul's eyes glinted.

"I am my master's slave," he said, with proud humility, that sat well on his powerful face. "I have but done my duty."

Muriel had crossed the room, and was now close to the window where she stood talking to Vernon in a low tone. Her eyes were wandering aimlessly, and presently they concentrated on something that seemed to be jutting out from beneath the great treasure chest.

"What is that?" she asked, pointing at it.

Vernon stared a moment, then crossing to the chest he stooped.

"What is it, Vernon" the colonel's voice rang out sharply.

The young officer was looking at something in his hand, and there was a puzzled frown on his tanned face. At the colonel's question he straightened, then came forward, his hand outstretched.

"Did you—did you move the chest yesterday, sir?"

"Move it? Certainly not! How could I?"

"I—I thought that you might have done, for—for I have just found this sticking to one corner."

It was a fragment of tapestry of a cheap quality, and small though the scrap was, there was sufficient to show that it was new and unsoiled.

For a moment the colonel looked at the innocent scrap of material, then his eye travelled to the chest and riveted itself there.

He was looking at the stout iron handle. Anton, the expert in faked antiques, had done his best even in that detail, but the

skilled faker knew that there was his only weakness. Newly-wrought iron can never be made to resemble old. The Hindu who had fashioned the original handles had done so using only hammer and chisel, fashioning it slowly and laboriously.

"By heavens! That is not the rajah's chest!"

Colonel Bryce almost screamed the words as he darted forward and dropped on his knees in front of the fake. His hands were clutching at the iron handle, and as his fingers passed over it, doubt became certainty. The handle was smooth to the touch, whereas the old handle had been pitted by the taps of the maker's hammer.

With an effort the grizzled veteran rose to his feet. His face was grey as it turned first to Vernon then to his daughter.

"Get me my keys, Muriel, please," Colonel Bryce said in a voice that was strained and hoarse.

Muriel fairly flew along the corridor and into her father's bed-room. There was a secret drawer in the little bureau which only her father and Muriel knew. The bunch of keys was found and the pale-faced girl hurried back to the room. When she entered Abul had just been trying to lift the chest, and had succeeded. Horror was visible on the faces of the two Englishmen as she looked at the huge trooper. Abul had never been able to move the treasure chest single-handed before. There again was proof that something was wrong.

Muriel never forgot that moment of breathless doubt that followed. Her father's hands trembled slightly as he found the gold key that fitted the lock of the treasure chest. Slowly the various locks were tried, and the key did not fit. Anton had only been able to produce the outer appearance of the locks. He had nothing to guide him so far as the hidden mechanism was concerned.

"It will not open!"

"Oh, dad! Try again! Perhaps——"

"Your sword, Abul!"

The trooper held out the great curved blade, and, stepping back, the colonel swung the tempered steel aloft. A fury seemed to descend on Colonel Bryce as he smote at the faked masterpiece. Great swathes of wood flew out at each powerful stroke, and at last the lid was cut away from its fastenings and slipped down on to the carpet.

"We have been betrayed," the colonel said in a thin voice. "Look! The rajah's treasure has vanished!"

The dull bars of lead on the heap of rags at the bottom of the chest could not be mistaken. Vernon reeled against the wall of the room, sick and dazed.

"Gone! Gone!" he muttered, scarcely able to realise the truth.

It was Abul's voice that sounded at last. The trooper reached out a powerful hand and placed it on the colonel's sleeve.

"We have been tricked by cunning thieves,

sahib," he said. "But the fault is not thine. It is I, Abul, who must bear the burden of shame."

His bearded face twitched, and into the eyes there came a look of deadly menace.

"I have been false to the trust that my master placed upon me," the man went on in deep, vibrating tones. "I am in the dust. Allah help me."

He made a sudden move forward, and his hand caught at the sword in Colonel Bryce's grasp. Instantly Muriel realised what was going to happen, and with a stifled



cry she leaped forward, gripping at Abul's arm.

"No, don't do that, Abul!" she breathed. "It is not your fault. No one could have been more faithful than you."

She drew him away and looked into the bronzed face.

"I will tell his Highness," she vowed. "He will not blame you, and your life is too precious to be taken as you mean to do."

She had averted a tragedy. Abul lifted her small hand and placed it against his forehead.

"My life is in the mem-sahib's hands," he said slowly.

It was Muriel who brought the tension of the situation to an easier pitch.

"After all, none of us is to blame," she went on. "We have done everything in our power to guard the chest. If some evil wretch has stolen the treasure, how can we be blamed?"

She had the woman's instinct to bring solace to her troubled menfolk, and she succeeded. Colonel Bryce passed his hand across his forehead and sighed.

"What is to be done?" he asked wearily. "The treasure has vanished—spirited away. What can we do?"

"The police——" Vernon began.

Muriel turned to him with a quick shake of her head.

"We have to try to keep it out of the papers if we can," she said in her wise way. "Don't let us give up hope so soon. There may be just a remote chance of getting the chest back before the rajah returns."

Her brave words had a very slender foundation, yet they brought a certain amount of comfort with them. Bryce placed his hand on her shoulder.

"You are the pluckiest of us all, Muriel," he said. "This discovery has been a terrible



Silently the secret fireplace swung open, and the light from the crook's torch stabbed the darkness. It came to rest on the rajah's treasure chest. "At last!" muttered Otho.

shock to me. But we *must* do something—and at once!"

His haggard face and tired voice fairly wrung Muriel's heart. Her lips quivered for a moment, and then suddenly there came into her mind a great inspiration. Vernon had crossed to the chest and was leaning over it. Muriel cried out to him.

"Come away, Mr. Vernon. Please don't touch it. I—I have thought of someone who—who might be able to help us."

She drew her father towards the door and beckoned to Vernon to follow. Abul, his head hanging, his sword, which the colonel had now handed to him, swinging aimlessly in his strong hand.

"Close the door and lock it," Muriel said in a low voice. "Let Abul mount guard again, just as though nothing had happened.

We must keep this from the servants as long as we can."

Abul was listening to her eagerly, and took up his post again beside the door, while the colonel turned the key in the lock.

"You are in charge, dear," the old officer said with a faint smile. "But I confess that I do not see what good it will do."

"You must have patience," his plucky daughter returned. "I am going out, and—and I thought Mr. Vernon might come with me. I am going to bring someone here who is just the cleverest thing in the world."

Her intense eagerness carried everything in front of it. She hurried into her own room and put on her hat and coat. In five minutes she was ready, and had joined Vernon in the hall. Outside the door a taxi was waiting, and they entered the vehicle.

"Grays Inn Road," said Muriel to the driver, giving Nelson Leo's address.

"Who lives there?" asked Vernon curiously.

Muriel told him of her meeting with Nipper and Wolf.

"Why, I've heard of Nelson Lee, of course," exclaimed Vernon. "I believe you are doing a wise thing, after all."

CHAPTER 5.

Nelson Lee is Called In!

NELSON LEE was at home, and it was not long before they were ushered into his room. The keen, clean-cut face, the deep-set, steel blue eyes and the general air of alert and steadfast confidence impressed Muriel at once.

"I'm afraid that we are disturbing you, Mr. Lee," the girl began.

"That's quite all right, Miss Bryce," Lee returned—for she had sent up her name by the housekeeper—"I know that it must be something important that brought you from Downe Square so early."

"Then you—you know me, and where I live?"

"Nipper told me of a little adventure he had," Lee explained.

The girl nodded her shapely head.

"Yes, yes. And it is really through that adventure that I am here now. I want Wolf. Is he here?"

Neither Nipper nor Wolf had yet been sent back to St. Frank's. There was too much to be done in London for that. Lee stepped to the door and gave a low whistle. Wolf came slipping round the edge of the door to be pounced upon by Muriel at once.

"I want him to come with me this morning," she said. "There—there is a big task in front of him, but I think he can manage it. Will you lend him to me?"

"Or, better still, perhaps Mr. Lee will come with Wolf," Vernon put in. "Perhaps it is asking rather a lot from you, Mr. Lee, but I can assure you that the matter is a most important one, and would probably interest you."

He glanced at Muriel, who gave an encouraging nod. Both of them felt that they could not trust their secret to better hands than those of this quiet-voiced, clever man.

"A thief, or thieves, I should say, for it is the work of more than one person, have removed a certain valuable article from Number Five, and it is absolutely vital that it should be traced at once."

"What is it that has been stolen?" asked Lee.

Vernon lowered his voice.

"I take it that you will treat what I say as strictly confidential," he went on; "for, as a matter of fact, there are very grave political issues hanging on to it."

"You have my promise," said Lee.

Vernon lowered his voice.

"Good! Then you must know that it is a treasure chest, with over ten lakhs of rupees in gold, that has been stolen. It is the property of the Rajah of Puljara, and was in the keeping of my chief, Colonel Bryce."

"It seemed to Vernon as though Lee was paying very little attention to his statement. The detective was leaning back in his chair and there was a curious light, half smiling, half thoughtful, in the steel-blue eyes.

"The matter is most urgent, Mr. Lee," Vernon said, a trifle annoyed.

Lee hurriedly arose.

"Quite so, and I will come with you now."

Wolf's leach was produced and adjusted on the wide collar, then a start was made for Downe Square. It seemed to Muriel that Lee hesitated for a moment as he passed the house on the left of Number Five.

"It is the next house, Mr. Lee," she said, and the detective turned his head and smiled.

"Yes, I know. That is Number Four."

Colonel Bryce eyed the strange man and the Alsatian rather dubiously when they entered his study, where he had been pacing to and fro. But as soon as Muriel introduced Lee, the colonel's manner altered.

"Delighted to meet you, Lee!" the old Indian veteran said, giving the detective a warm grip. "Your reputation has reached all India, and you are something of a tradition there."

"We are in luck, sir," Vernon put in; "for Mr. Lee has promised to help us in this terrible affair."

They climbed the stairs, and Abul arose at their coming. Lee's eyes rested for a moment on the bronzed face of the trooper; then a kindly light came into the steel-blue eyes. He saw that the man was suffering agonies of mental torment, and, in his kindly way, Lee had to speak a few words of comfort.

"Have no fear," he murmured, using the clipped speech of the hillmen; "thou art not yet disgraced. Thy treasure is safe."

Into Abul's eyes there came a flame. Who was this man who spoke to him, not in the usual Hindustani of the British, but in the exact vernacular of his own people?

"Thou sayest, O Protector?"

"I bid thee have courage. Thy hour of dismay has passed."

The door of the room was opened now, and Lee entered. He gave one glance at the damaged chest, then, to the astonishment of the little group behind him, Nelson Lee flung back his head and laughed.

"So much for Anton's masterpiece!" he said aloud.

Bryce looked indignant.

"I hardly see anything to laugh at here, sir."

Nelson Lee turned quickly, a swift apology on his lips.

"I'm sorry, colonel! It was rather thoughtless of me. I forgot that you do not know as much as I do concerning this chest and its owners."

"Do you mean to say that you know—"

A faint sound came to their ears, and brought the colonel's protest to a halt. Nelson Lee flung a quick glance around him;

then, crossing the room, picked up a fragment of the broken chest and struck on the wall—three quick taps.

To the utter amazement of Bryce and his companions there came an answer to the signal—two taps, and after a pause, a third.

Using the piece of wood deftly, Lee began to tap out a message. Vernon, a skilled signaller, clutched at Muriel's arm.

"It's Morse," the young officer whispered breathlessly. "Jove, this is a thriller if you like!"

"O.K. This is Lee here." The officer read the message.

Again a silence, then a rumbling sound as though someone had loosened a handful of bricks in the chimney. Then, at last, the whole grate itself began to move, and a cry broke from Muriel's lips.

"Look—look!" she gasped.

Back swung the massive grate, revealing the adjacent room, and a slender figure standing in the gap, supporting the hinged portion.

"All right, gov'nor," came the voice of Nipper.

Nelson Lee turned to his watchers.

"I think we might as well go through, colonel," he said in a laconic tone.

Like a man in a dream Bryce moved forward, stooping to avoid the edge of the grate. As he passed out of sight Muriel heard him give vent to a great cry. Darting after him, the girl saw her father kneeling in front of a square, black object in the corner. The colonel's arms were stretched over the top of the chest, and he was drawing great sobbing breaths of joy.

"The rajah's chest! It's here—here!"

Muriel was by his side in a moment, and her hand slipped around his shoulders.

"Oh, dad—dad!" the girl breathed, tears of relief streaming down her cheeks. "It—it's a miracle—a miracle!"

But the colonel arose to his feet and faced Nelson Lee.

"I can never thank you enough for this, Lee," he said. "But it is obvious to me that you must have known a great deal about the affair before you came here."

"I knew something," Lee admitted, "but Miss Bryce's visit to me supplied the missing links and formed the complete story. If you will permit me to explain, starting at the beginning.

"Miss Bryce first met Nipper and Wolf one dark evening when she had the misfortune to drop one of her valuable bracelets in the road. Wolf found the ornament for her. After she had left him, Nipper went on towards the park, and a taxi drew up close to him, and the driver asked to be directed to Downe Square. This request seemed to infuriate the passenger in the taxi, for he abused the driver to such an extent that the man alighted from his cab and was about to use his fists upon the wizened, cloaked fare.

"Then something strange happened. The passenger merely raised one hand; there was

a queer, coughing sound, and the taxi-driver fell dead. The passenger took to his heels and made good his escape, leaving Nipper to summon the police."

"Why, I read of that crime in the papers," exclaimed Muriel.

"Well, Nipper came to me," Nelson Lee continued. "The case interested me and I began to investigate. I made inquiries amongst the taxi-drivers of London, and, to cut a long story short, I found that this taxi-driver had first taken his strange fare to the shop of an antique dealer who, besides being an expert in faking antiques, happens also to be known to the underworld of crime as a suspicious character. This man's name is Anton. I visited him and induced him to tell what he knew.

"He explained that he had been commissioned by the wizened man to construct a treasure chest from photographs and detailed descriptions with which he was provided. I have seen those photographs, and I can assure you that what Anton was making was a replica of the rajah's treasure chest, although I did not know that at the time. Even Anton did not know it.

"Later I learned from another taxi-driver that he had taken two men to Anton's shop—one was a huge, broad-shouldered fellow, and the other a sleek, well-dressed man of medium build. These two men had fetched out the strange box and had taken it to the cloak-room at Paddington Station. But that was only a blind. They had called the next day with a plain van and had taken the box away to an unknown destination. Thus the trail of the box was lost.

"But the murdered taxi-driver had been trying to find Downe Square, and Nipper had told me that Miss Bryce's father was Colonel Bryce. It was easy to find out that you, colonel are the representative of Great Britain at the court of the Rajah of Puljara. I naturally wondered what you were doing in London. Then Nipper let drop the information that Miss Bryce's valuable bracelets were a gift from the rajah. I began to forge links in the chain of evidence. I turned up the files of the newspapers and stumbled across the story of the rajah's gift

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of gold to the British Government to help our country in its crisis during the gold shortage. From that it was easy to learn that his Highness was expected shortly in London, and that the treasure chest had been entrusted to Colonel Bryce. Then I began to understand!

"Last night I came to Downe Square. My first impulse was to call on you, then, colonel. If I had done so I should have been too late. I should have found the treasure chest and nothing left to show how it had been stolen. But I heard a strange knocking proceeding from Number Four, which is next door to your house. I investigated, and through a chink in the blind I saw a man I have met before—a known criminal named Flash Harry. He was busy bricking up this fireplace again.

"I turned burglar then and effected an entry into the house, surprising the man. And, to be brief, colonel, I persuaded him to talk, giving him his liberty in exchange for his information. I found the treasure chest

there, and had Nipper to come to guard it. Flash Harry bolted as soon as he had the chance. But before he went he told me the names of the two thieves—the giant of a man and the wizened, domed-headed dwarf. Their names are Zenn and Otho."

"I've never heard of them," said the colonel.

Nelson Lee regarded him with a quiet smile.

"Have you never heard of two who would fit the description?" he asked.

Muriel gasped and stared at the detective. "Kay and Kaldross!" she cried.

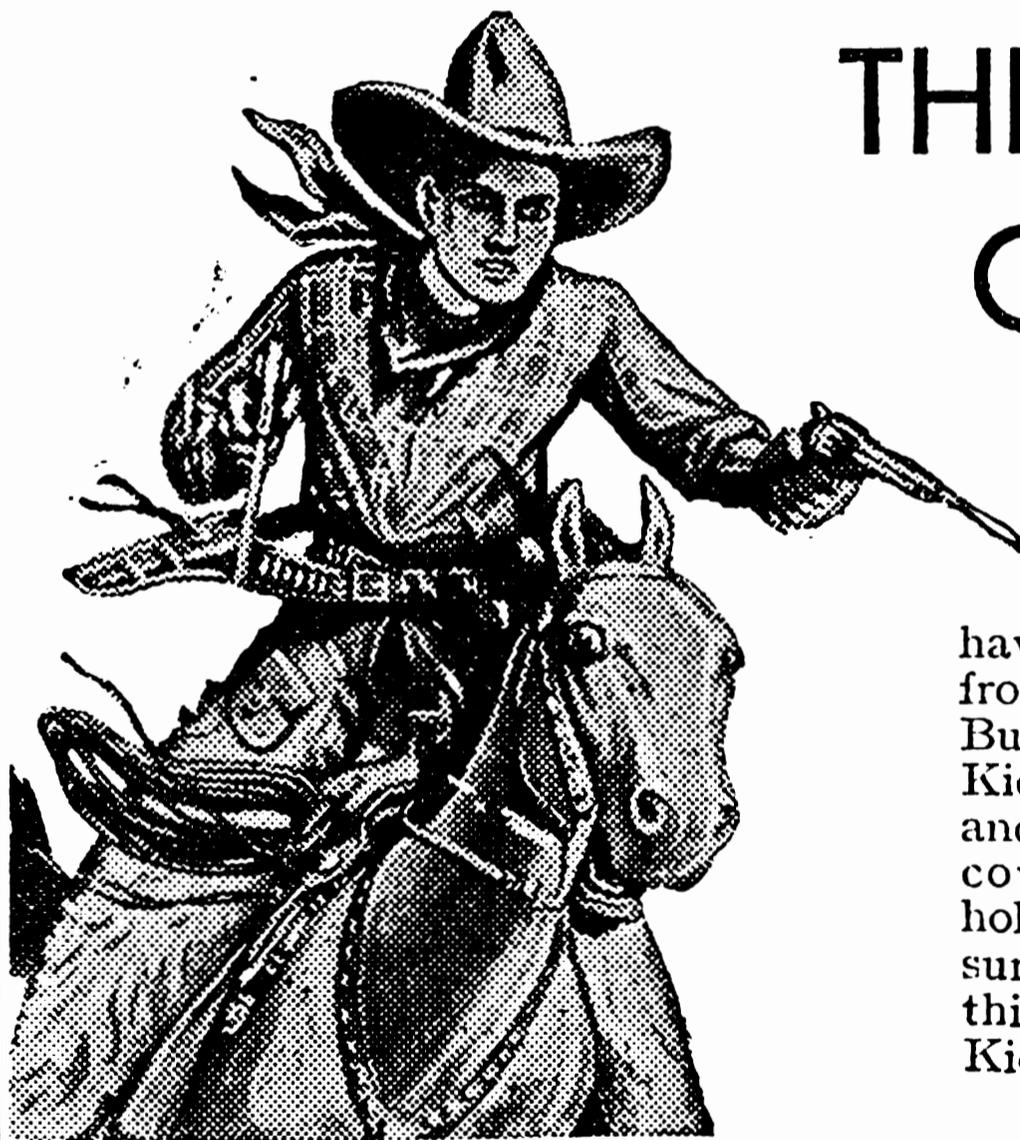
CHAPTER 6.

The Arrival of the Rajah!

"It seems incredible!" Colonel Bryce said, a pained look on his fine face. "These men were my guests, and I was under a debt of gratitude to them."

They had removed the treasure chest into

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the colonel's house, and stood in the room which Abul had guarded for so long.

"They are absolutely unprincipled scoundrels," said Lee slowly. "There is no deed too vile, no artifice too low for them to use, provided they can attain their object."

The evidence that Nelson Lee placed in front of them was too strong to be refuted in any way, and so the ugly truth was forced on Colonel Bryce. He had been duped and deceived.

"I suppose you blame me, Mr. Lee," the clean-minded old officer said, with a swift glance at the detective. "And, on the face of it, it certainly looks as though I were not the proper person to be in charge of a great treasure."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I cannot see that any blame can be attached to you, sir," he returned. "These men wormed their way into your confidence, and from what I know of them, they would act in such a manner as to remove any possible shadow of doubt being attached to them."

"That is quite true, Mr. Lee," Vernon chimed in. "For I must confess that I had my suspicions that all was not fair and above board with them, but, although I watched them at every possible opportunity, I never once caught them napping. They must be men of iron nerves."

"They are," said Lee, "and it is only by the merest chances that I succeeded in thwarting them. Had I been an hour or two later the chest would have disappeared, and I doubt very much if it could have been traced."

The colonel made a quick gesture with his hand.

"Don't speak of it," he said. "It is too terrible. What could I have said to his Highness? He had trusted me, and I had failed. The rajah is a very just and upright man, but he never forgives a mistake."

"He need never know," said Lee. "There is no reason why he should be told."

"But that will mean that these rogues will get off scot-free," Muriel put in indignantly.

"That cannot be helped," said her father thoughtfully.

They left the treasure chamber at last, and Nelson Lee noted that Abul had taken post inside the room this time. A sudden misgiving ran through the detective's mind.

"Jove, I'd forgotten that Abul understands English," he muttered to himself. "He has heard the whole story. That might prove deucedly awkward."

He kept his misgivings to himself, however, and, after arranging a few minor details with the colonel and the inspector of police, Nelson Lee left No. 5.

In order to keep the real crime a secret, Lee had told the inspector that a gang of thieves had tried to break into the colonel's house by way of No. 4, but that he, Lee, had got wind of the affair, and had spoilt the game before the ruffians could accomplish their object. The half-bricked grate lent colour to this story, and as the colonel backed him up, the detective felt that no further

inquiries would be made concerning the affair. Nor was he mistaken.

The Tuesday afternoon papers recorded the arrival of his Highness, the Rajah of Puljara, and suite, at the Ritz. A paragraph followed dealing with the ceremonial presentation of the chest of gold to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer at Downing Street, and mentioned that Royalty would be present, and Nelson Lee and Nipper received cards enabling them to be there.

If Zenn and Otho had succeeded in their job, it might have meant a split between the rajah and the Government," said Nelson Lee to Nipper later on, in his study. "For that reason alone I am glad that we are able to get the better of the heartless ruffians."

Nipper sighed.

"And they're getting away with it, gov'nor," the lad muttered gloomily. "It does seem rotten. They deserve to be punished."

"I'm afraid that our hands are tied, Nipper," Lee replied. "I had a word with the Foreign Office about it, and they are absolutely against making any sort of fresh move in the matter. Their chief anxiety is to keep the affair away from the rajah, and so long as they do that they are quite content."

Yet, despite all the precautions taken, the Rajah of Puljara heard the news!

On the evening after his splendid reception, the great man was alone in the magnificent chamber of his suite in the hotel when one of his personal attendants entered.

"Abul of the guard desires a word with thee, Protector of the Faith."

"Admit him."

The long-limbed trooper swung into the room, halting on the threshold with a low salaam.

"Well, Abul, what is it?" The rajah spoke in quiet English with scarcely an accent. It was the tongue he favoured when addressing his soldiers, most of whom had served their time with the British Indian troops.

"Thy servant's heart is heavy," said the trooper, advancing across the chamber. "A secret weighs upon it."

"Let me hear it, Abul."

And so, in the quiet tones of his trooper, the rajah heard the truth. How near his treasure chest had been to being stolen—of the miraculous way that the great English detective had intervened, almost at the eleventh hour.

Yet, as he listened, it was not the fact of his gold being removed that seemed to rouse the great man's ire.

"They laid hands on the sacred chest," he muttered through his crisp black beard. "By Allah, but that demands a punishment."

He leaned back in the armchair, resting his bearded chin in one strong palm. Abul, standing stiffly to attention, waited for his master to speak.

"They have set their evil hands on a sacred thing, and have soiled it with their touch," said the rajah slowly. "Had I known I would not have offered it, soiled as it was, to the British Raj. They have made a mock

of me and a jest, and I dare not the British Raj of this meanness that has befallen me."

His lips lifted suddenly, transforming the whole face. There was something tigerish and remorseless in the slow, cold smile.

"But all they have done they shall pay for," said the Rajah of Puljara quietly. "And I take the oath now. Allah aiding me, these miscreants shall taste of my vengeance. I swear it!"

He arose to his feet and crossed to a small bureau, from which he drew a small, plain-bound notebook. Turning over the leaves for a moment, his Highness found what he sought—an address.

"Nazra Ali Ben Dhur, Cheapside, Oriental agent," he read aloud.

Abul's eyes quickened. He had heard that name before. It was well known in Kashapore: Ben Dhur was his Highness' secret agent in London, as well as the trade representative for Puljara.

"Thou wilt wait until I call thee, Abul," said his master. "I have a letter that thou hast to deliver for me."

The trooper's eyes were flames of keen contentment as he bowed himself out of the chamber.

Ten minutes later an envelope was handed to him, addressed to Ben Dhur. Late though it was, Abul started off on his errand at once. It was eight o'clock before the trooper reached Cheapside, and he had some difficulty in finding the number. It was up a dim courtyard, and Ben Dhur's offices were on the second floor.

Abul went on up the stairs, and presently he found himself in a room filled with the odours of the East—sweet-smelling spices, dried fruits and spices!

"I might be back in the bazaars of Kashapore," said the man, as a figure in European clothes came shuffling out of a small inner office. "Thou art Ben Dhur?"

"That is my name."

Abul thrust out the note.

"A message from his Highness, the rajah," he explained.

Ben Dhur adjusted a pair of spectacles on his hooked nose, and peered at the envelope with his small, weak eyes.

"Come into my room," he said. "It will be safer there."

Abul followed him and stood like a statue, while Nazra broke the seal of the envelope. The letter seemed to cause him a great deal of dismay. He read it twice, then his thin fingers went up and caressed his beardless chin.

"Hast thou knowledge of these men and what they have done?" he asked.

"Dogs!" returned Abul. "They tried to steal the rajah's treasure. They have to be punished." He came a pace nearer. In his eyes a grim light was shining. "I will help thee to the end of my strength, Ben Dhur," he went on. "For these men played a double part with me and his Excellency, Colonel Bryce. Under the guise of friendship they stole into his house, and cloaked their designs with soft words. Revenge awaits me

if I can but get them into the hands of my master."

"And where art thou to be found should I require thee in haste, O revengeful one?" the wizened dealer asked, a smile on his twisted lips.

"No. 5, Downe Square; the home of Colonel Bryce," came the answer.

"Good, friend! Await a message from me there."

Abul left the dingy office with a feeling that the weird proprietor would not fail.

CHAPTER 7.

Zenn is Puzzled!

THERE is a quiet courtyard, not very far from Finsbury Square, which the average Londoner has no knowledge of. Tucked away as it is behind tall buildings, chiefly offices Mardal Court consists of a dozen houses, most of them dilapidated, shabby places, where a curious type of tenant lives. No doubt there are one or two respectable families in the court, but they, in common with the others, keep themselves very much to themselves.

Flash Harry, when in funds, lived at No. 6. It was into this quiet house that Otho and Zenn vanished on the night of their great failure. As Nelson Lee had anticipated, Flash Harry, fleeing from capture, was just sufficiently brave to go and seek out Zenn and Otho, and tell them what had happened. He found them at the stables where the van in which the treasure chest had to be removed was waiting, the horse ready between the shafts. They had only just arrived from the station, and as Flash Harry's report, that Nelson Lee had surprised him and had taken possession of the chest, fell on their ears, a cold fury descended on Zenn.

He turned to his broad-shouldered companion, his eyes glinting like coals of fire.

"Well, my friend, what have you to say to it now?" he rapped out. "After all, my suspicions were not so far from the truth. That sleuth-hound, Nelson Lee, has turned up, just as I dreaded he would!"

Otho was silent for a time. He was leaning against the side of the stables, his great arms folded over his chest, a look of sullen rage in his eyes.

"What could have put him on to the affair?" he asked at last. "There was no possible chance of his knowing the exact moment when we shifted the chest. We had not made any definite plans. How did he know that we had completed our job at No. 5?"

"Someone gave us away," croaked Zenn, little dreaming that his ungovernable passion and panic when he had killed the taxi-driver had set Nelson Lee on the trail.

Their game was up, and it was obvious to them both that they would have to get into secret quarters for a while. Flash Harry's suggestion that they would find safe lodgings

with his aunt was accepted, and Zenn and his confederate took rooms there.

They had ventured out only once during the days that had followed, and that was on the afternoon that the rajah visited Downing Street. Zenn's face was a study as he saw the carriage with the precious chest swing past, and he went back to Finsbury in a gloomy silence that Otho made no attempt to break.

"There is not sufficient room in this world for Nelson Lee and me," was his only remark. "One of us will have to give way."

At about ten o'clock on the evening of Abul's visit to Ben Dhur, the latter gentleman turned into Mardal Court, followed by another dusky-skinned man, who seemed very loath to do more than enter the quiet back street.

"The house is No. 6, Ben Dhur, and it will not be good for me to be seen with thee."

Ben Dhur allowed him to go, and, approaching No. 6, knocked on the door. It was the hard-faced aunt of Flash Harry who answered his soft knock. She glanced doubtfully at the stooping figure of her visitor.

"Who told you that a gentleman named Zenn lived here?" she asked.

Ben Dhur spread out his hands.

"A friend," he returned. "A friend who has his interests at heart. Tell him that I only desire a few moments' speech—and I am quite alone."

She closed the door in his face, leaving him to cool his heels on the step, while she went up the stairs with the message. Zenn and Otho were together in the sitting-room, and Zenn's hairless brows drew together in a quick frown as the woman made her report.

"A Hindu, you say?" the professor muttered. "What can he want with me? How does he know I am here?" Zenn hesitated some time before he finally made up his mind to take a risk. "All right, send him up."

As soon as the woman had vanished he turned to Otho, and, thrusting his hand into his breast-pocket, he drew out his deadly, nickel-plated tube of death.

"Turn the light out in your bed-room, and stand just inside the door," said Zenn. "At the first suspicious sign, level that tube and touch the button. Be careful of your aim, for it is instant death."

Otho took the terrible weapon with the air of a man accepting a snake.

"I'd rather trust to a revolver," he said.

"And waken the whole neighbourhood," came the grim retort. "If this man is a spy, we've got to silence him, and get away from here at once."

There was the sound of a footfall on the stairs, and Otho, with noiseless strides, crossed the sitting-room and vanished into the room on the left. The light in the bed-room went out, and Otho, turning round, took up position in the half-opened door, standing well back in the shadows, the tube poised between his powerful fingers.

"Come in."

Zenn's thin voice sounded in reply to the knock, and Ben Dhur entered. He stopped for a moment, his dreamy eyes blinking in the bright glare. Zenn had taken up a position that made it possible for him to watch his man closely.

"What do you want with me?"

Ben Dhur cringed.

"Do I address the great sahib-doctor, Zenn?" he asked.

His voice was the true whine of the servile native, his whole attitude that of a vast abasement.

"That is my name," said Zenn.

Ben Dhur came farther into the room.

"If I give the doctor-sahib some good news, will he pay for it?"

Instinct had made Ben Dhur strike the right note. Zenn knew the East like an open book, and was

aware of the fact that every native of India has his price.

"It depends on the news—and the price," came the reply.

"My news is worth fifty pounds—and not a penny less. It concerns someone whom the doctor-sahib has cause to hate beyond all other men—Nelson Lee!"

Zenn leaned forward, staring into the grey-bearded face, for Ben Dhur had adopted a disguise.

"How do you know I hate this man?" he rasped.

"We have ways of finding out things, sahib. You know that even here, in this cold country, news travels among us wanderers."

It was quite true, and Zenn knew it.

"What is your news?"

"His Highness, the Rajah of Puljara—may Allah protect him—has heard that a gang of thieves came near to stealing his treasure."

A half-smothered sound came from Zenn's lips, to be checked almost as soon as it came.

"Go on!" he muttered.

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"His Highness, the Rajah, does not know how near he came to losing it, but he has heard that this Nelson Lee played a big part in the thwarting of the thieves, and so he has decided to honour him. To-night, when his Highness returns from the theatre, he desires that Nelson Lee and his companion, the youth they call Nipper, should have audience with him. And he is presenting this man, Lee, with a diamond neckiace worth much money—ten thousand pounds has it been valued at."

Zenn gave vent to an oath. He had no reason to doubt this man's story. He knew that the ruler of Puljara was vastly rich and was given to make generous impulses. If it was true that Lee's deed was known, there was every possibility that the rajah, out of sheer gratitude, might lavish some valuable gift on the fortunate man.

"Ten thousand pounds!" Zenn muttered aloud, twitching at his thin lips. "What a reward!"

Ben Dhur came a little nearer.

"Does the doctor-sahib relish the thought of his enemy receiving this vast present?"

"I'd rather see him dead at my feet," the arch-scoundrel broke out in sudden passion. "But why should this story interest me?" he went on.

"Because in it there is a chance of the sahib finding a sweet revenge," said Ben Dhur, in a low tone. "I can help the sahib to trick this detective out of the jewels."

"How?"

Ben Dhur had never even glanced at the dark doorway on his left, but now he jerked his thumb towards it.

"Thy friend, who standeth in the shadows there, will have to play a part," he began.

THERE was a creak, and Otho strode out of the doorway, eyeing the stooping figure from beneath ruffled brows.

Den Dhur gave him a low, cringing salute.

"Thou hast heard all, so I need not repeat my story, sahib," he went on imperturbably, although there was a glint in his eyes that revealed how he had enjoyed the quick surprise he had sprung upon the two nonplussed criminals.

"If you have a plan, out with it," Otho snapped, throwing himself into a chair.

"My brother is the messenger that his Highness has chosen to go and bring the detective Lee and his assistant, the youth known as Nipper, to his suite of rooms," Ben Dhur went on, "and my brother likes not his task, for the jewels are of value, and there will be no reward for him out of the giving of them."

He nodded towards Otho.

"His Highness, the Rajah, starts for Puljara early to-morrow morning, and there is no chance of his knowing that a deceit has been practised upon this man, Lee."

The alert brain of Zenn read the riddle that lay behind the guarded words. He leaned forward, tense and eager.

"You suggest my friend and I impersonate Lee and Nipper?"

A smile spread over Ben Dhur's wrinkled face.

"The doctor-sahib is right," he said, "but if he does this, my brother and I will want our due rewards. Fifty pounds for me, and a hundred for my brother."

"Jove, and you shall have them!" Otho roared, leaping to his feet.

Zenn indicated a chair.

"Sit there," he said to Ben Dhur. "My friend and I will have to consider this thing."

He stepped into the bed-room, followed by Otho. Zenn lit the gas, then turned round.

"Well, what d'you think of it?" he asked slowly.

"There's enough risk to frighten anyone," he admitted; "and yet, after all, there's a fighting chance of carrying it off." He laughed aloud. "His Highness never met us while we were at Kashapore, and he has never met Nelson Lee or Nipper. You are a master of disguise, Zenn, and I don't think that this is beyond you. Lee is about my height, and you are slim enough to make a good Nipper. If we could pull it off we'd have turned the table on that sleuth-hound to some purpose."

It was really that part of the scheme that appealed to them both. The thought of impersonating Lee, of receiving the reward that he was entitled to, was tempting beyond words. But, in his cautious way, Zenn put in a word.

"It might be a put-up job!"

"In what way?"

The question baffled the wizened doctor. If it was one of Lee's schemes, why should he go to all this trouble. He knew where they were—the fact of the Hindu visiting them would prove that, if he were in Lee's pay. Why not arrest them at once?

"If Lee or the police were behind this, we'd have been under lock and key by now," Otho went on; "and Lee is the only one who knows our connection with the affair—if he really does know that!"

Another point came into Zenn's mind, and he slipped into the sitting-room for a moment. Ben Dhur was seated exactly as he had left him, on the extreme edge of the chair.

"Will Colonel Bryce be accompanying his Highness?"

Beneath his heavy brows the eyes of Ben Dhur blazed for a moment. From that question he drew a favourable response to his schemes.

"No. His Excellency the colonel is no longer in favour in the sight of his Highness, the Rajah."

It was a cunning response, for it was just what would have happened under ordinary circumstances, when the rajah heard of the incident of the treasure chest.

Zenn withdrew his vulture-shaped head.

"We'll risk it," he said to Otho. "If that man is lying, then he's the cleverest man in the world—or the best actor!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Rajah's Ruse!

ZENN had often given proofs that he was a master of the art of disguises, but his skill surely reached its greatest height that evening, when he and Otho turned up at the Ritz to be granted an audience with the Rajah of Puljara.

It had been a fairly easy matter to disguise Otho, and the big criminal was a striking double of Nelson Lee. But it was on his own individuality that Zenn had made the greatest transformation. Wig and grease paint, false eyebrows and paraffin wax, used with the deft touch of the master, had worked a miracle on the wizened face. The glow of youth was on it now. It had been filled out, made young, and his step was as light as that of a lad's as he followed the taller rascal across the pavement into the lounge.

Abul, his beard dyed grey, blue-tinted spectacles over his eyes, had to stare for a long moment before he realised that the men crossing the hall were indeed the two rascals he had lived with so long. It was a case of diamond cut diamond, but neither Otho nor Zenn did more than cast a perfunctory glance at the gorgeously robed figure who arose and came towards them.

"Thou art Mr. Lee and his assistant, Mr. Nipper?"

Abul put the high pitch of age into his voice. He spoke loud enough for the porter to hear him.

"Yes, that is correct," Otho returned.

"His Highness, the Rajah of Puljara, is awaiting thy coming."

Abul wheeled with another low bow, and the two men followed him in silence. The last lingering suspicions that Zenn had died then. They were in one of the finest hotels in the world, and they were met as honoured guests.

"A steady nerve, old chap, and we've won," he whispered in a low aside to Otho, an unusual cheerfulness in his thin voice.

They found themselves in a narrow corridor at last, and presently their guide halted and knocked on a door. A strong voice sounded, and the door was opened by the robed guide, who stood aside to allow them to enter, following them through the doorway.

Standing beside his desk was the regal figure of the rajah. His breast was a blaze of orders, and he looked every inch a prince.

"The English detectives, your Highness," announced Abul.

The rajah waited for the two men to approach, then he bowed.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Lee," he said in perfect English. "I have heard of you, even in far India, but have never had the pleasure of meeting you before."

Otho could play the game of bluff as well as most men, and he slipped into the part he was playing easily enough.

"I trust that your Highness has enjoyed your visit to our country," he said.

Across the heavy lips of the rajah a fleeting smile passed. These men were certainly cool villains, and the rajah always appreciated courage, even in the evil.

"My visit would not have been so pleasant were it not for you, although others tried to keep that story from me."

"It was very little I did," the mock detective went on, "hardly worth mentioning, in fact."

The rajah turned and lifted a wide, morocco-covered case. Opening it, he allowed the case to tilt forward. The rays of light from the shaded electric bulb behind him sent a dazzling light over the shimmering gems. They seemed to sparkle, to take fire, and against the velvet lining of the case their radiance found a perfect setting.

An expert in gems, Count Otho had no need to be told that the necklace was worth every penny of the price that the mysterious stranger had mentioned. Diamonds have their market value the world over.

The rajah lifted the necklace from the case and turned round.

"I desire to reward you," his strong voice continued. "Your deed must not go unrewarded."

There was a double meaning in his words, although both Zenn and Otho failed to see it at the moment.

"Would you accept these jewels from me as a fair return for what you and your companion did?"

Again there was that mocking tone in his voice. The stern-jowled man was deliberately playing with words, and was enjoying the grim comedy to its utmost.

"If you consider what we did as worthy of a reward, your Highness, of course, we will accept anything you might choose to bestow upon us."

"Anything, Mr. Lee?"

The rajah stepped aside a little, and made an almost imperceptible gesture.

Otho bowed.

"We will accept anything at your hands."

"Good! By Allah, you have sealed your own doom out of your own mouths."

As the words left the rajah's lips, Otho heard a footfall behind him. Before he could move there descended over his head a thick, muffling cloth. At the same moment Zenn, standing a little to the left, was served in the same way. Instantly the cat-like cunning of the doctor asserted itself. Instead of trying to struggle with his assailant, he dropped straight down on the floor. The result was that Abul, who had cast the cloth over the doctor's head, stumbled forward, tripping over the wizened form and dragging the cloth away with him.

"Help! Help——"

Knowing what lay before him, Zenn, in sheer desperation, raised his voice in a shrill appeal; but before the second cry was completed, Abul had recovered himself, and his

brown hands closed through the folds of the cloth, pressing against Zenn's lean throat.

A heavy thud beside him told the doctor that Otho had been thrown on to the thick carpet of the room.

"Strangle that old hound!"

It was the rajah's voice, commanding, arrogant, and it came to Zenn through the thick folds of the heavy cloth. The powerful fingers of Abul were tightening their grip, and at last there came the last violent effort, and Dr. Zenn gave up the fight. His clawing hands fell back on the carpet, and his twitching limbs were still. Then, and not until then, did Abul glance around him.

Close to the desk lay Otho. He had put up a fierce fight, but a blow on his head had stretched him unconscious on the carpet.

Tough though the fight had been, it had only lasted a few moments. The rajah, stepping quickly to the door of the room, opened it, and looked up and down the narrow corridor. There was no one to be seen, and he turned towards Abul again.

"Go to the top of the corridor and wait there," he said. "In a few moments, Mr. Lee and his companion will leave here. See to it that they are safely escorted out of the hotel."

Abul salaamed and went out into the corridor, walking up to the head of it and waiting patiently. Ten minutes later the door of the rajah's study opened, and two figures appeared. The taller one was carrying a morocco-covered case, and in the dim light of the corridor Abul saw that the face was that of a white man.

In silence he led the two through the hotel and out into the darkened street. A taxi was waiting close to the portico, and someone thrust his head out of the window.

"Come along, Mr. Lee," a sleek voice said.

The porter of the hotel opened the door, and the two men in European clothes entered. Abul stepped back, allowing a swift smile to cross his lips, for the voice that had sounded from the depths of the taxi had been the voice of a certain cunning man known as Ben Dhur!

CHAPTER 9.

Nelson Lee's Promise!

"THANK goodness you've arrived at last, Mr. Lee. The chief has been 'phoning all over the place for you."

Lord Witherly, assistant secretary to Sir Milder Dane, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, tucked one arm under Lee's and led him along a carpeted corridor.

Sir Milder certainly looked a trifle annoyed, very different from his usual urbane self. He and Lee were old acquaintances, and Lee was rather surprised at the cold, formal bow that the Foreign Minister gave him.

"Morning, Lee. I'm glad you turned up at last. I've been waiting in for you all morning."

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LS ABOUT THIS GREAT SCHEME.

There was a movement close to one of the big windows, and a tall figure came forward towards the desk. Nelson Lee recognised the aristocratic features of Colonel Bryce, and gave him a low bow. The colonel's mood was frigid in its severity. A slight shade passed across Lee's face. One of the most even-tempered men in the world, he was yet quite independent, and not used to greetings of this kind.

"I only arrived at my chambers to-day," he said. "I did not leave any address, so my assistant could not forward your message."

"You were not in Paris by any chance?" Sir Milder asked. "I know that you have some diamonds to dispose of and Paris would be the readier market at this time of the year."

Nelson Lee's clear eyes widened, and his lips lifted in a smile.

"Diamonds to dispose of?" he repeated. "Is this a joke?"

"I never joke during office hours," returned the Minister. "I am quite serious on this matter, Mr. Lee."

There was a cold note in his voice that made Nelson Lee stare.

"I see that there is some sort of story attached to your question. Perhaps you will be good enough to explain," he said.

"Need I tell you? I am simply hinting at the fact that his Highness, the Rajah of Puljara, made you a present of a very handsome diamond necklace previous to his sudden departure for Kashapore, last Tuesday."

The explanation was so astounding that Lee threw back his head and laughed. But a moment later he checked himself, as he noted the grave looks of the other men.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Milder," the detective said hurriedly. "But, really, your story is so amazing, I had to laugh. I have never met the Rajah of Puljara in my life, and I certainly see no reason why he should give me a necklace—or anything else for that matter."

Colonel Bryce who had been a silent listener until that moment, suddenly chimed in.

"But we have proofs that you called on his Highness on the night before his departure, and that you were with him for some time, and when you and your assistant—"

"What? Is Nipper in this as well?"

"Our witnesses state that he accompanied you," came the curt retort. "And when you left the hotel you were carrying a morocco-covered case, the description of which I recognised at once. It was ordered by me at his Highness' request, two years ago, and contained a diamond necklace that his Highness deeply prized."

Nelson Lee was looking just a trifle bewildered now, and Sir Milder, leaning back in his chair, studied the keen, clever face.

"All this sounds to me like the veriest rubbish, Colonel Bryce," the detective said. "I can assure you that I was never near the hotel, nor was my assistant. I did not know that his Highness had gone until I read it in the afternoon papers on the following day."

The Foreign Minister leaned forward.

"Perhaps I might explain," he said. "His Highness, the Rajah of Puljara, is a prince with whom the British Government desire to keep on friendly terms. We had arranged a programme of entertainments for him, and suddenly, without a word of warning, he announces his attention of going home. His message was not received until the morning, and when I sent up to the Ritz it was to discover that he had already started for Southampton. Naturally, we made inquiries at once."

He reached out and drew a small sheaf of folded blue papers towards him.

"Here are the various reports from the men I sent out," he went on. "In the first place, it was discovered that his Highness only booked berths late on the same evening, somewhere between eight and ten o'clock. It was done by 'phone to the steamship offices at Southampton. I sent a man to the hotel, and his inquiries proved that orders to pack were not given to the rajah's suite until quite late that same night. Indeed, there was some difficulty in chartering the requisite number of cars."

"He went to Southampton by road. Why?"

"We do not know. But he certainly did travel by car, and so did all his suite."

Nelson Lee was leaning back in his chair, now, listening intently.

"Finally, this report was handed to me," the Foreign Minister went on. "And I must say that when I read it first it seemed scarcely credible. It stated that you and your assistant, Nipper, were received by his Highness, somewhere about midnight; that the story which the hotel servants heard from the rajah's staff was to the effect that you had rendered him a great and valuable service, in return for which he had made you a handsome present. You were seen to both enter and leave the hotel; on the latter occasion carrying the case that Colonel Bryce identifies by its description."

"I am beginning to read this riddle a little," Lee said. "I take it that you heard this report, and promptly came to the conclusion that I had told the rajah about the treasure chest."

His voice was rather cold, and Bryce moved uncomfortably.

"If I have been mistaken, I can only apologise," the polished old gentleman said quietly. "But I think that you will admit it has been a most trying time for me."

"Colonel Bryce is, perhaps, the worst off of us all," Sir Milder explained. "He waited on the rajah that evening and was refused admittance. That, in itself, was a severe blow to anyone like the colonel, here, who had been on such friendly terms with his Highness. Then again, the fact of the rajah leaving England without even telling Colonel Bryce that he was doing so, hints pretty clearly that the old feeling of friendship between them has vanished."

He dropped his official manner for a moment, and looked at Lee.

"It is beastly serious, Lee," he said. "We cannot afford to quarrel with the rajah, and Bryce here was the only man we could really trust at Kashapore. You can understand how awkward it will be now. We do not know whether it is advisable to send Bryce out again to Puljara."

The colonel drew a deep breath.

"But I mean to go," he said. "If the Government does not send me as their representative, then, by Jove, I'll go as a mere, ordinary visitor. I'm going to get at the bottom of this matter if it takes me the rest of my life."

"I quite understand," said Lee. "But I can assure you of my innocence in this matter. I have never met his Highness, and if he has heard about the treasure chest it is certainly not from my lips."

He spoke the words slowly, with the ring of sincerity in his tones that could not be mistaken. Sir Milder gave vent to what was little else than a grunt of relief.

"I'm glad of that, Lee," he broke out. "I was really dreading to hear you say something else. For, you see, any ordinary man might have been justified in telling the rajah, and claiming a fair reward. We know that it was only your skill that prevented that daring robbery from being successful. Now, they state that you saw the rajah, and that you walked off with a pocket full of diamonds. You say that is false, and I believe you, Lee. Well, now what I want you to do is to find out the truth and let me have the true report."

"And you shall have it, Sir Milder," the detective returned, in a grim tone.

It was seldom that Lee allowed his feelings to interfere with his usual routine, but he certainly felt that in this matter he had been served rather badly.

CHAPTER 10.

The Clue!

NELSON LEE took his leave of the Foreign Secretary and went out into the street with the colonel, who was profuse and sincere in his apologies.

As they walked they discussed the matter fully, without coming to any solution of the mystery of what happened at the hotel.

"Why not visit the hotel," suggested Colonel Bryce.

"That is just where I am going," said Lee.

He soon had cause to forgive any doubts that might have arisen in the mind of the colonel. For the big porter on duty at the door came to a halt as Lee and the colonel approached. He was the same man who had been on duty when Otho and Zenn entered the hotel. Proof of the wonderful skill that the doctor had displayed in his disguising of his ally were speedily evidenced.

The porter touched his cap.

"So you've met Mr. Lee, colonel?"

Sorely troubled though he was, Colonel Bryce could not repress a smile.

"You recognise this gentleman, then, porter?"

The porter grinned.

"Rather!" he said. "And I only wish I was in his shoes. It isn't everybody who can walk out with a pocketful of jewels."

It was not worth while for Lee to attempt to put the man right, but he realised now that a subtle and deep trick had been played on the hotel and its staff.

They found the manager in his office, and Lee introduced himself, then gave the manager the true side of the story.

"Of course, it has nothing to do with us, Mr. Lee," the manager said, "but it seems as though his Highness has been tricked by someone."

Lee was silent for a moment.

"Is the suite that the rajah occupied still vacant?" he asked.

"Yes. Would you like to see it?"

Lee nodded, and he and Bryce went along the splendid corridor. Bryce indicated a side corridor at the end.

"His Highness' private study was down there," he said. "I know that, for he kept me waiting for two hours, and then sent word into the corridor that he did not want to see me."

The manager unlocked the door of the small room, and Lee entered it.

"I'm sorry to say that it hasn't been tidied up yet," he explained. "We are working the hotel with a very small staff just now, and the most I could do was to have the floors swept."

Nelson Lee crossed to the desk, and, halting there, glanced around him. Bryce and the manager, standing in the doorway, saw the face of the detective change slowly. The eyes, always unfathomable, became luminous, and the clean-cut features drew together in a strained, intent expression.

Lee's eyes travelled to the floor, along the walls, and suddenly he stepped forward and tilted a chair back. There was a fragment of something attached to the leg of the chair—attached so firmly that Lee had to take out his knife and scrape it off. Bryce saw him peer at the little object in his hand, then a quiet laugh sounded.

The colonel came forward and glanced down at Lee's palm. It seemed to him as though it was a scrap of hair that lay in the hollowed hand.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A false eyebrow," came the reply. "Just goldbeater's skin and cleverly-placed hair. A little of the spirit gum is still attached to it—and I had to remove it forcibly from the chair."

"But how on earth did it get there?"

"If you look closely at it you will note that there is a little human skin attached to one portion, colonel," the detective went on, indicating a small whiter patch against the transparent goldbeater's skin background,

"and that can only mean that it was wrenched violently from the person who was wearing it at the time!"

He folded the scrap and placed it in his pocket-book.

"And there is one other point about it that I don't suppose you could have noticed," he added. "That eyebrow is exactly the same shade and shape of my assistant's, Nipper."

"Then it means that the manager is right, and someone else did impersonate you here? Jove, the rajah ought to be warned!"

It was proof of the old officer's loyalty that he should still think of his old chief—even though that chief had left him without a word of farewell.

"I should not be in a hurry to do that, colonel," Lee put in quietly, "for the rajah might not be pleased to learn that he had been tricked. Our first duty is to trace the trickster and try to recover the jewels. Then perhaps it might be worth your while to travel to Kashapore and hand them back to his Highness."

The colonel struck his hands together.

"If that were only possible," he broke out, "it would put everything right."

But that was an event that was never to happen, as Lee was soon to realise. He went carefully through the remainder of the suite of rooms, but found no other trace of the mysterious visitors.

A tradesman's account lying on a littered table caught Bryce's eye, and he picked it up and glanced at it.

"I see that his Highness has gone off and forgotten to pay this bill," he said. "I'll settle it for him."

Lee glanced idly at the bill. It was from a local stores.

"Two seven-foot by four-foot wicker baskets, lined and padded, with double hasps and extra locks, to be delivered immediately."

The date on the bill proved that the baskets had been delivered on the last day of the rajah's visit to England.

"I think I remember about them," the manager said, after a short pause. "They were brought very late. In fact, it was rather a special favour on the part of the stores, as they were closed when the rajah gave the order about nine o'clock."

Lee turned to the colonel.

"It seems that his Highness only made up his mind to leave England somewhere between eight o'clock and midnight," he observed.

"It certainly appears so," the officer agreed, "and it's very curious, for his Highness is not the sort of man to change his plans so quickly. The average eastern prince likes to move entirely by a set programme."

"But something very important happened," said Lee in his quiet voice, "something so important and interesting to his Highness that all other ideas gave way before it."

As there was nothing further to be gained by staying at the hotel, and at Bryce's invitation, Lee and he went on to No. 5, Downe Square together. Muriel came out of

the drawing-room as soon as she heard her father's step. The girl's eyes brightened with delight when they rested on Nelson Lee, and she hurried forward with outstretched hand, a warm greeting on her lips.

"I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Lee," Muriel cried. "I've had to listen to such a lot of

The girl gave a petulant stamp of her tiny foot.

"Yes, I'm glad," she repeated, "and I don't care who hears me say so! He's an ungrateful creature, and there is only one person worse than him—and that is Abul!"

Lee looked at her.



nonsense about you that I have been quite worried to death."

They went into the drawing-room for a moment, and Muriel fired off a torrent of quick inquiries to which Lee gave accurate replies.

"I knew that you had never been anywhere near the rajah," Muriel affirmed stoutly, "and, for my part, I'm glad that he has been swindled!"

"Hush, Muriel!" her father began.

"What has the faithful Abul done?"

"Abul has gone," she said, "but I don't blame him exactly. I suppose he heard that his Highness was going, or his Highness may even have ordered him to accompany him. After all, Abul was only father's orderly, and was really the servant of the rajah. Still, he ought to have told us, and it's very suspicious. I am beginning to think that if his Highness did know about the attempted robbery, it was Abul who told him!"

A CROSS the slender shoulders of the girl the eyes of the men met. Lee nodded his head.

"You know the East as well as I do, colonel," the detective said, "and don't you think that Abul would not be able to keep his secret from his master? You know what sort of fellows the native troopers are. They regard their rulers as small deities, and to keep a secret from his prince must have been a terrible burden to Abul."

Colonel Bryce drew a deep breath.

"I have been trying to convince myself

"I am less concerned about that now than I was," he admitted. "After all, I can prove that neither Nipper nor I was near the Ritz that evening, and it occurs to me that it is hardly worth while pursuing the investigations further. The only one who has lost anything by it is his Highness, the rajah. He is the poorer by the diamond necklace, but as he does not complain, why should we?"

"That is not my opinion," replied the colonel. "After all, I am still his Highness' military adviser and English attache. I am also still the British representative in Puljara.



The rajah gave an almost imperceptible signal and in a moment the two burly native guards sprang upon the unsuspecting crooks. Madly the two fought against their dusky opponents, but from the beginning they had no chance of getting away.

that Abul had nothing to do with it, Lee," he said at last, "but I'm really afraid that it is as you and Muriel suspect. The poor fellow simply could not keep his peace, I suppose. That would explain his Highness' anger with me, and I do admit that it was perhaps justified. But you have yet to fit in the other part of the story—the visit of the two individuals who passed themselves off as you and Nipper."

Lee shrugged his shoulders.

If his Highness has been defrauded, it is my duty to see that matters are put right. So, Mr. Lee, for my sake, if not for your own, I hope you will not let the matter rest, but continue your investigations."

It was then that Lee asked a question over which Muriel puzzled her head for the rest of the evening.

"I will do so on one condition. It is this. If I start on the case you will not attempt to withdraw from it at any future time. I

mean, that whatever developments take place, I may rely on your aid, no matter who may be implicated."

Colonel Bryce was silent for a moment, then he held out his hand.

"I do not follow your meaning, sir," he said, "but there is my hand and my promise. No matter who may be drawn into this matter, you will have my active aid and support."

THEY exchanged grips; then, a few moments later, Nelson Lee left the quiet house, refusing the colonel's invitation to stay to dinner.

He had made one or two simple deductions, and his own observations had filled in the blanks.

The fact that he had found the false eyebrow wedged on the bottom of the chair-leg was proof enough to him that the story of the bogus detective's visit to the rajah was right enough, and they had actually been in the same room as his Highness.

But how came it that one of the false eyebrows, with a piece of the wearer's skin attached to it, was found in the room. It meant that the disguise had been torn off during the visit!

No other explanation was possible. By design or accident, the individual disguised as Nipper had lost part of his disguise, and lost it in what must have been a painful way, for it had been torn from its place.

Yet the hotel staff testified that the two detectives had walked out of the hotel apparently unharmed, bearing their treasure with them.

Then his mind turned to another channel. How did the rajah come to associate his name and that of Nipper's with the stolen treasure chest? Here a simple reply was forthcoming. Abul had told the rajah.

Abul had told his Highness everything, for Abul knew the whole story from start to finish, knew the cunning parts that Zenn and Otho—that Zenn and Otho—

"Jove, can it be possible?"

As a man moving through a fog, Lee began to see a light dimly in front of him. He remembered how Abul had vowed vengeance on the two rogues. The chest was a sacred thing in the eyes of the rajah himself. Was it possible that all that masquerade had taken place was nothing more nor less than a drama of revenge?

Had Abul tricked Zenn and Otho into delivering themselves into the very arms of the man they had tried to rob?

For over two hours Lee trudged along street after street in a brown study, his clear mind tussling with the intricate puzzle.

And gradually, by eliminating all other possible solutions, building the whole fabric up on the slender evidence of the false eyebrow and its strip of human skin, Nelson Lee came as near to the true solution of the matter as it was possible for mortal to do.

"The rajah knew these men were trying to swindle him for the second time. Abul,

no doubt, was at the bottom of it. Zenn is a master of the art of disguise, and under his hands Otho could easily pass himself off to a stranger as me," he thought. "They went into the Ritz, but they never left it. These baskets"—his retentive memory picked up that point suddenly and clearly—"these baskets, ordered at such a late hour, were intended for human freight. That was why they were padded. Yes, I am willing to stake all I possess on that. Otho and Zenn are in the hands of their enemy, the Rajah of Puljara."

He came to a halt and looked about him, to discover that his wandering footsteps had taken him into Regent's Park. He turned, and headed back for Gray's Inn Road.

"I will make sure first," thought Lee. "Zenn and Otho were always difficult rogues to trace, but Flash Harry is a different proposition. I will have a word with him and see if he knows where they are. If they are still in England, then all my fine theories are vain dreams. If not, then I will be satisfied that there is something in the deduction method after all."

He had no difficulty in finding Flash Harry, and that worthy was only too willing to talk. He told the detective how Zenn and Otho had been in hiding in the house of his aunt at Finsbury, how they had been visited by a wizened Hindu, how they had been called for by another Indian, had gone off with him in disguise, and had never been heard of since.

"It's my belief, Mr. Lee," he said, "that nigger prince has got hold of 'em. Maybe they're criminals; but it isn't right for any black man to torture white men."

"I agree with you," replied Lee. "Although an Indian is no more a black man than you are."

He had made up his mind what to do, and having done so, nothing could change it. For the sake of the white man's prestige in the East, Zenn and Otho must be rescued from the hands of the Rajah of Puljara.

CHAPTER 11.

The Beggar of Kashapore!

KASHAPORE, the changeless, was shimmering beneath the heat of an ardent sun. In bazaar and narrow streets the natives lolled in the shade or walked along close to the low-roofed houses. Now and again a pack of scavenger dogs would raise a din of snarls and yelps as some one of their group settled a quarrel; but these were the only creatures that seemed to have any sort of energy. It was noon, when the sun was at its fiercest, and most of the wealthier natives were safely sheltered in their homes, in room shaded with long, heavy sunblinds.

In a white-painted house, which by its cleanliness and general air of care, stood out in marked contrast to those around it,

under a striped awning on the roof, a girl in a cool white summer dress was seated in a comfortable chair, swinging a fan to and fro.

By her side on a strip of carpet sat a lithe young officer in white drill.

"What's interesting you, Muriel?" asked Vernon, looking up lazily. He saw that the girl's eyes were fixed on some distant object. Muriel came back to earth with a start.

"Interesting me?" she cried. "Oh, the usual place. His Highness' palace—that we are no longer allowed to enter."

From the roof of the white-painted house Muriel could see the towers and minarets of the great palace, a quarter of a mile away. In the blazing sun they stood out clear, like alabaster, against the cloudless sky.

"Oh, hang the palace!" Vernon returned. "Between ourselves, Muriel, I would much rather be here. There was a bit too much of the ceremony business when we lived in the palace."

The British Residency was certainly a comfortable place, occupying a little niche of rising ground close to the river. A garden of about a couple of acres kept it slightly aloof from neighbouring houses, and, as Vernon said, his life there was much more simple.

Colonel Bryce and his small staff had not been long in following the rajah back to India. The Foreign Office had decided that it was best that Bryce should return at once, and the old soldier, well accustomed to constant moves and changes, had started off on the long journey, ten days after the rajah had sailed. The rejoicings over the return of their ruler had only just terminated in Kashapore when the Bryces arrived to take up their quarters at the residency. The rajah had granted Bryce one very short interview, and that was all, and apart from presents frequently sent from the palace to the residency he ignored the British representative officially, and there was no invitation for the colonel to take up his old quarters within the precincts of the palace.

"I don't understand it," said Muriel. "The rajah seems to be friendly, and yet he won't have us near him. Why should that be?"

"Give it up," said Vernon lazily. "I never was very good at riddles, and, besides, it's too beastly hot to think."

Muriel leaned back in her chair again and looked across the shimmering roofs of the city spread out like an intricately-patterned carpet. The residency stood high, and the whole of the city could be viewed from the wall of the roof. Across the gap stood the rambling structure of the palace. Suddenly a bright flash from one of the high towers caught the girl's eye. She shaded her eyes, staring at the tower, and once again the flash came. The sun was striking on some bright object, and its rays were being reflected across the city.

Muriel picked up a pair of field-glasses from the table and adjusted them. There was a long silence, then the girl drew a quick breath.

"What interests you now?" asked Vernon.

"It's his Highness," she said. "He seems to be very interested in something that is going on in the palace. He is watching from the tower and is using a pair of glasses. I caught the flash from one of the lenses a few moments ago. Do look, Mr. Vernon."

Vernon drew himself up and took the glasses that were held towards him. He leaned on the low wall and levelled the binoculars. The powerful glasses picked up the top of the tower. The tall figure of a man in a dark, close-fitting robe was leaning over the edge of the tower, glasses raised to his eyes, watching something that was happening below. There was no mistaking that burly figure.

"Yes, it's the rajah right enough," said Vernon; "but what the dickens does he find to amuse him up there?"

Vernon changed his glasses round, trying to pick up the other man's view. The high wall of the palace made an unbroken line, and the object that held the rajah's attention was hidden behind it.

"The prison lies in the direction that he is staring at," the young officer commented at last; "but I'm hanged if I can see anything."

He returned the glasses to Muriel, who levelled them again at the tower. She watched for a minute or two, then suddenly the attitude of the man on the tower changed. He lowered his glasses from his eyes, and straightened up. Quite clearly Muriel Bryce saw the rajah fling back his head in an unmistakable laugh. He beat his hands together as a man might do who had seen some act worthy of applause.

"This is really too much," the girl cried. "I shall simply die of curiosity in a minute. What is it that's going on in the palace?"

Two minutes later the rajah had vanished from the tower, and although Muriel waited, hoping that he would reappear, he did not do so. But on the following day at exactly the same time and in exactly the same place the rajah appeared again. His actions were almost similar to the previous day. First the long watch, then the applause and the retirement.

This time Muriel was the sole witness, for the colonel and Vernon had gone off together early that morning and were not expected back until sunset.

"If I could only get a word with Abul," the girl thought, "I might be able to get something out of him. I'll really have to find out what it is that interests his Highness so much, and always at the same hour of the day. It's a mystery, and I hate mysteries."

But Abul, the huge trooper, had been very careful to keep within the confines of the palace ever since the colonel and his staff had arrived at Kashapore. This, in itself, was

quite sufficient to satisfy Muriel that her surmise concerning Abul had been correct.

She arose from her chair and leaned over the low wall for a moment, glancing down into the little courtyard beneath. Beyond the courtyard stood a beautifully wrought-iron gate which opened into the roadway.

Muriel caught sight of a dirty, ragged figure beyond the gate. The man raised his arm and suddenly jerked it forward. Something shot past Muriel's head and fell on the carpet beneath the chair. She glanced round, alarmed, and saw the missile. It was a sheet of common notepaper tied around a small stick!

"Why, what on earth——"

Muriel dropped on her knees and fished out the stick from beneath the chair. The note was tied to it with a piece of soft rag. With eager fingers the girl untied the knot and opened the note.

"If Miss Bryce would like to meet her old friends, Nelson Lee, Nipper, and also Wolf, she can do so by coming to the East Gate at sunset this evening."

Muriel had to read the note twice before the meaning of it dawned on her. Then, with a quick run, she was leaning over the wall again. Glancing to the left at a spot where she could command a view of the roadway running between the houses, Muriel saw the figure of a beggar pass, and after him, at the respectful distance that disciples must move, strode another slender form, at whose

heels there plodded a great Alsatian dog.

Nelson Lee in India! And in Kashapore of all places!

"I feel as though I am moving in a sort of dream," Muriel finally admitted. "There is no mistaking Wolf, even if the others were only disguised. I must go to the East Gate."

CHAPTER 12.

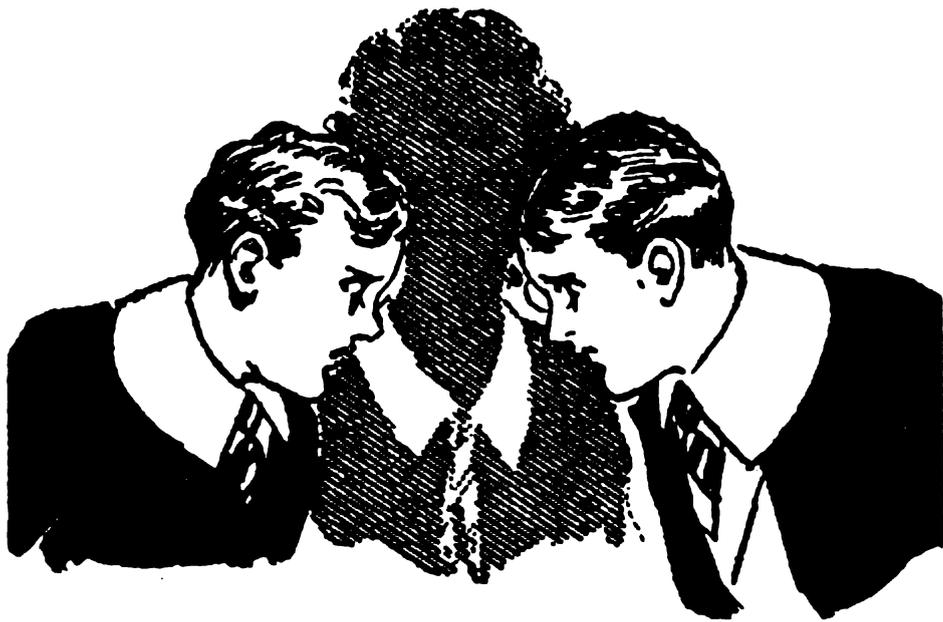
Chundra Lal!

SUNSET found Muriel riding through the narrow streets on the polo pony her father had given her. Half an hour saw her reach the East Gate, and she cantered beneath the wide arch, taking the red roadway on the left. The lighted guard-room, occupied by the gate's sentinels, made a yellow background against which her slender figure stood out clearly.

Something came snuffling out from the dusk, making the pony shy. Muriel rode astride, and in a moment she had swung herself out of the saddle and was kneeling in the red dust, patting the flanks of the great dog, who panted his delight at this meeting.

"Good-evening, Miss Bryce," a quiet voice said.

Muriel looked up at the ragged figure standing in front of her. The begging bowl, attached by a cord to the sunburnt throat,



The GEM - - 2d.

Every Wednesday

The RIVALS

Young Gussy's Cousin Ethel is
a girl we all admire ;

But when a fellow looks at her
it rouses Gussy's ire.

And Ethel really seems to like
young Figgins of the Fourth ;

But every time she looks at him
it rouses Gussy's wrath !

Their rivalry is priceless, because
Gussy's on his dig.,

A fact for which young Figgy
simply doesn't care a fig !

So if you want a hearty laugh
at Gussy and his whims,

Take our advice, and spend two
pence on "Salesmen of St.
Jim's !"

Ask for to-day's GEM.

the long staff, the naked-dust-covered feet, were all in keeping with the dusky face and straggling beard. But the voice and accents were those of an Englishman, and one that she recognised at once.

"Mr. Lee," she said, rising to her feet and holding out her hand.

Nelson Lee extended the bowl as though it was a present that the girl offered him.

"I am the Wandering One for the time being, Miss Bryce," he said, "and I am always to be found outside the little Temple of the Vines."

The slender girl in her neat riding habit was walking along the roadway, Nelson Lee by her side, while the slender figure whom Muriel recognised as Nipper, and Wolf, followed them at the respectful distance that a disciple should keep from his master.

"But you are perfectly splendid," Muriel went on, glancing with critical admiration at Lee. "I never saw anything like it. You would deceive the eyes of the sharpest native."

"It is more than likely that I will have to do that sooner or later," said Lee in a dry tone. "Always assuming that the one you refer to is the head of his people."

"You mean, the rajah!" She halted and stared at him. "Is it because of something that the rajah has done that you are out here in this disguise?"

"Because of something which I think the rajah has done, Miss Bryce," he corrected grimly.

"This is very interesting," the girl went on. "You know, I suppose, that dad and all of us are in disgrace. That is to say, his Highness refuses to give us our old quarters in the palace."

"But his Highness sends you very many presents for your table," said the disguised detective. "For instance, there was a fine buck brought over yesterday."

"Goodness! You know as much about our business as we do. How long have you been in Kashapore?"

"Nipper and I arrived just exactly three days behind his Highness."

"But what was all the hurry about?"

The man by her side spoke softly. The roadway was in darkness now, and there was no sign of other pedestrians.

"I cannot take you into my confidence yet," Lee said, "but I promise I will do so as soon as I clear up one or two points. Meanwhile I want you to help me."

"I'm sure I'll do anything I can."

"I want you to find out what his Highness did with a very fine specimen of a Bengal tiger which arrived in Kashapore on the same day as I did. This tiger has quite a history. During the journey I had a word with the man in charge of it. It is a man-eater, and has never before been in captivity. I understand that his Highness is well pleased with his latest pet. But why he bought it I cannot tell."

"Well, it is all news to me, Mr. Lee," said Muriel, "but I'll try my best to find out.

Unfortunately, our changed conditions make it rather harder than it might have been."

Nelson Lee was silent for a moment.

"Don't you think that his Highness might desire to keep you away from the palace, for reasons apart from the ones you think?"

"But I am sure it is all through that unfortunate robbery!" Muriel cried.

"Yes, Miss Bryce, I agree that the robbery is at the bottom of it, but the point I want to decide is if the rajah is still nursing a grievance against Colonel Bryce. In this case, I don't think that he would trouble to send so many presents. I should imagine that the rajah is the sort of man who makes an enemy and allows him to remain one."

"I see your point, Mr. Lee," said Muriel thoughtfully. "And it certainly does seem strange. If the rajah feels friendly enough to send us gifts, he ought to feel friendly enough to give us back our old quarters. They were lovely," she went on, with a half-regretful sigh. "Right in the inner courtyard. Just a little tower by itself. It was reached by a passage from the main buildings, of course, but we could close an iron door in the passage, and were completely shut off from the others."

"Perhaps you would describe the tower to me?"

"It was eight-sided, and three stories high. The ground floor was divided into two rooms, one we used as the dining-room, and the other the kitchen. Upstairs were the study and one bed-room, and there two other bed-rooms on the next floor. Above that was a flat roof, and in the centre of the roof was a building that we used as a store. In summer-time I've often slept up on top of the little store. It was a delightful place. It had a wall about four feet high all round it, and it was fairly well sheltered by the other towers of the palace."

Then Lee asked a question which made Muriel draw back a pace.

"It would be possible for anyone in one of the higher towers to see the whole of the roof and the little store, of the quarters you once occupied?"

"Why, of course! Good gracious, how foolish of me! I've only just thought of something most extraordinary!"

Lee took the words out of her mouth.

"You mean that you have found out why the rajah keeps such a steady watch, during the two hours of the afternoon?"

"You have seen him, then?"

"No. But you forget that I am a very wise fakir, Miss Bryce. And even the palace servants come to have a word with the wise."

"What is it, then, that amuses the rajah so much?"

"That is more than I can find out," said Lee, in a stern voice, "but I mean to do so. You, perhaps, might help me. When his Highness sends another gift, try and have a word with his messenger. Say that you think it a shame that the rajah should have

turned a man-eating tiger into your old rooms."

"But—has he really done that?"

"The messenger's manner will soon prove whether he has or not," the detective returned grimly. "I particularly want to know!"

He drew back from her with a low salaam.

"I am always to be found at the Temple of the Vine," he went on, and now his voice had changed into the sing-song whine of a beggar; "the mem-sahib can always see me there."

A tall native, white-robed and turbaned, had appeared, striding out through the dust. Muriel, with a final nod to Lee, mounted her pony and rode homewards. Her brain was in a whirl. Nelson Lee had not asked her to keep his presence in Kashapore a secret, but instinct told the girl to do so, until he gave her permission to speak.

She could not tell what the detective's object was, but one thing was sure. He was there to watch the rajah, and by doing so he was taking his life in his hands. Only a man with vast courage would dare to stay in Puljara with such a mission to perform. It was like going into the lion's den, for the rajah's word was law in his own little kingdom.

Nelson Lee had made his way to the little temple in the midst of the paddyfields when he left Muriel, and on reaching the shelter, Nipper and Wolf came up to him.

"I suppose you heard most of the chat, Nipper," said Lee.

"Yes, gov'nor. She's a brick, and she'll help us."

"I'm sure of it," said Lee.

Nipper might have been one of the thousands of slim native boys who are to be found swarming in the East. A ragged robe, half opened at the breast, revealed the clear, amber skin; the white teeth and black, sleek hair were typical of the race. His feet, naked in the dust, had the real hard sole now of one who goes barefooted in all seasons.

Nipper had entered the temple and had lit a small native lamp and began to prepare supper of rice and dates and coffee. He had adjusted a scrap of ragged cloth over the narrow door of the temple, so that they might be concealed from any chance wayfarer, although a wanderer there was not likely, as the natives thought the place was haunted by ghosts and knew it to be infested with snakes.

After supper, Lee sat down to smoke, when suddenly Wolf growled a warning. The quick panting of a man was heard, and a hand reached out and tugged the flimsy cloth aside. Lee saw a white-robed figure standing in the dusk, then the newcomer staggered forward through the door and closed the cloth over it again. The detective watched the sweat-covered face, and noted the quick, laboured breathing. The stranger was covered from head to foot with dust, and

there were thorn scratches on his face and hands.

"Thou art pursued, perhaps?" Lee asked in the native tongue.

"I do not know," replied the man. "I heard no sound of it. But they saw me as I climbed the gate, and fired. Look!" He held out his left hand, showing blood on his wrist. "Only a scratch, as it happens," he went on. "But I have escaped. The rajah hoped to capture me, and to watch my terror, but I have escaped from his men."

LEE had not moved, but his eyes were as hard as granite as he watched the face of the intruder.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is Chandra Lal, but that will convey nothing to thee. But when I tell you that I was a friend of two men, Otho and Zenn, here in Kashapore, and that I know of your mission, Mr. Lee—"

"What, you even know my name?" Lee feared treachery.

"There is but little mystery in it, sahib," said Chandra Lal. "I have a brother in London, Gulga Lal, who writes to me. He sometimes does services for a certain Ben Dhur, who is a cunning fox. Ben Dhur is the man who tricked Otho and Zenn into going to his Highness. My brother helped him in the task—but my brother did not know that I had once served Otho and Zenn."

Little by little the story came out. Chandra Lal's brother, little dreaming that Chandra was in any way implicated in the matter, had written a long account of the trick by which Otho and Zenn had been induced to impersonate Nelson Lee and Nipper, and so walk into the trap the rajah had prepared for them. And he had added this information: that by some means or other, known only to himself, Ben Dhur had found out that Nelson Lee, Nipper and Wolf had left for Kashapore in a mad attempt to save the guilty men.

This last item of information must have leaked out through Flash Harry. Ben Dhur had, no doubt, set someone to talk to the fellow, and Flash Harry was a known talker.

"And when did you receive this letter?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Only yesterday, protector," said Chandra Lal; "but some of its information was stale news to me. I knew that the sahibs, Otho and Zenn, were prisoners at the palace, before it came. By Allah, I had plenty of proof of that."

He explained that two days after his Highness' arrival from London, one of the ruffians who had been hired by Chandra Lal to carry out the mock attack on Colonel Bryce had been brought before the rajah charged with another offence. In order to try to save his own skin the man had told the story of the trick Zenn and Otho had played upon the British representative.

"I was warned just in time by a friend," said Chandra Lal, "and guessing that the



The morning light was full on his face, revealing the lines around the eyes, the sunken cheeks and the unkempt beard.

Slowly the huge man arose to his feet, stretching his arms as one who was still weary. In the centre of the narrow circle was an iron trapdoor, and beside it stood an earthenware jug and a platter filled with a heap of rice.

Nelson Lee and Nipper stared up suddenly as the sounds of footsteps came towards their hiding place. Next moment the door curtain was torn aside and a native staggered weakly into the temple.

rajah would search for me, I hid and made good my escape. My brother told me of you, and your companion and the dog. It was easy to guess that the ragged beggar fakir was Nelson Lee, and so I determined to seek thee out, for, as thou art here as an enemy of the rajah, it might be that thou wouldest help me to get away from this accursed state. I have no money."

"And is that so difficult?"

Chandra Lal shrugged his shoulders.

"They say that no man can get away from Puljara if its ruler desires otherwise," he said. "But I know of a secret way out. That we can use. Outside the city I can obtain horses. At the moment you choose to command everything will be ready."

CHAPTER 13.

A Terrible Vengeance!

THE grey fingers of the dawn came out of the east, and as the light increased a man lying on a heap of unsavoury rugs below the four-foot wall of the round-shaped building on the roof of the tower that had once been occupied by Colonel Bryce, stirred uneasily, then sat up.

"Our usual supply," said Otho aloud, as he stepped towards the spot.

He lifted the jar to his lips and took a careful drink, knowing that it had to last all day. Then, holding the jar in one hand, he turned and crossed the narrow roof, to stoop over another bundle of rugs.

"Might as well wake up," said Otho; "it is the only hour of the day that is worth while."

The bundle of rugs moved, and out of their folds came the hawk face of Zenn, that bore visible traces of terrible sufferings.

"I'm not sure that I wanted you to wake me," he said. "I was dreaming—pleasant dreams."

Otho held out the jar and Zenn sipped at the fluid; then, with a smothered groan, he commenced to eat the rice. From the top of the wall to the flat tiles of the roof was a drop of about eighteen feet. The wall of the roof of the tower was about five feet high, just high enough to prevent anyone in the courtyard below seeing what was going on upon the other roof.

After the frugal meal Otho lay down to rest, but Zenn walked up and down the stone flags restlessly.

"Why not save your strength," muttered Otho eventually. "You will need it later on."

"How are we to get out of this?" said Zenn hoarsely. "There never was a prison yet but one could escape from it."

Otho nodded towards the trapdoor.

"There is the only means of escape," he pointed out. "It is not closed. A child can raise it. But neither you nor I dare do so."

The hawk nose of Zenn twitched as he looked at the trapdoor. He knew that it was unfastened—and knew that it had been left unfastened deliberately. Through it they could drop into the stores, and the doors were open that led from the stores on to the roof. All the doors were open, so that they could have descended down the tower to the ground level; but it was the guardian of the tower, wandering through the empty rooms below, that held them in bondage.

Noon came and went. The sun grew hotter and hotter. Zenn at last dropped into a sitting position, leaning against the wall. Suddenly a word from Otho roused him. The huge crook had risen to his feet.

"Get ready, Zenn. His Highness has just taken his seat for the show. Look, there he is!"

To the right there arose a tall tower, the tallest in the palace. A man's figure in dark robes came forward and leaned over the wall. The sun caught and reflected its light on a pair of glasses that the newcomer held in one jewelled hand. Then, from below the prisoner's tower, there came a chorus of noises, the shouting of men and the beating of drums.

"Look out for it!" said Otho. "They're driving it up from below."

He crossed to the low parapet, and watched the black gap in the roof below. A long minute passed, then to the ears of the two men there came a low, savage snarl, which, starting on a deep note, rose to a grating, hungry cry, and up through the black gap there came the sleek, evil head of a huge tiger. With an effortless bound the tiger came up out of the gap, and the iron trapdoor closed, blocking its escape. The tiger was a prisoner on the lower roof!

Otho had slipped out of his coat and had rolled up his sleeves.

The stroke of steel-like claw against the

side of the circular store sent a swift thrill through the listeners. The man-eating tiger had stretched itself full length up the wall, its jaws gaping, its head back. For a long time Zenn stared down into the cold, unwavering eyes beneath. Animal hate glared into human hate, then the sinewy beast dropped lightly on the hot roof and began to pad slowly round and round. And now began that terrible sentry-go, which the solitary witness on the high tower had watched so intently for days.

Round and round went the sleek, striped shape, and round and round above it moved the two ragged, weary men. Not for one instant dared they withdraw their eyes from the brute. They knew what was going to happen, and had to be ever on the alert.

"Ah!"

It was a half-strangled cry, almost of relief, that broke from Otho's parched lips. For the tiger, maddened by the steady watch above, had crouched suddenly, and made its spring. The great claws slithered against the edge of the parapet, seeking for a hold. Then Otho leapt forward, and with tremendous courage sent his fist crashing between the brute's eyes, sending it hurtling back.

Otho staggered back against Zenn, white to the lips.

"It—it nearly had me that time," the big man breathed. "It's more cunning. Sooner or later it will get us."

The rajah had dropped his glasses, and was clapping his hands together, but the two criminals could not waste time on their human tormentor. The tiger stretched itself, then started to cross the roof, heading for the higher wall.

It was that other wall that Zenn and Otho feared. For if once the tiger climbed on to its broad top, there would only be the narrow gap between it and the roof of the shed. Both Otho and Zenn realised that from the other wall it would be an easy matter for the powerful brute to launch itself clear across the gap and up over their low wall, on to the circular roof. And when it did that their fight came to an end.

Slowly the sun moved in over the brazen sky. The ordeal was telling even upon Otho. Three times did the tiger attempt to reach its goal, and once, for a terrible moment, its head was level with the wall. Its paw struck Otho down, without mauling him, however. Then Zenn picked up the platter containing the remains of the rice heap and tossed it into the brute's eyes.

The rice had been highly spiced and peppered—a cunning torture in itself, for it engendered a terrible thirst. But now it served another purpose, for the pepper stung the tiger's eyes, and, half blinded, it reeled from its hold and fell snarling to the ground.

It was only then that the rajah, bending forward slightly, gave any signs of anger. His hand was raised, and his voice sounded. A moment later, and the hard grate of a bolt being removed came to the ears of the panting, exhausted men on the sun-baked

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roof. Otho, tottering to the wall, glanced downward. The iron trap-door shot out of sight, revealing the black gap. The tiger seemed to hear the sound almost as soon as his still triumphant foe, for he arose, and with a couple of bounds had reached the trap-door. His sinewy limbs folded beneath him, and a moment later he had vanished into his lair.

"All—all over for this afternoon," Otho croaked through parched lips.

He reeled forward under an improvised awning.

RIGHT through the rest of the long, hot hours they sat together in the little shelter. When the day came to a close, Otho rose to his feet and went across to the wall.

Far away in the distance arose the low hills over which the high road ran. Suddenly Otho reached out his hand and caught Zenn in a fierce grip.

"Look!" he said. "Over there—just beneath the hills!"

In the blue dusk a light appeared, vanished—appeared, vanished. Long flashes and short flashes. Otho, who was able to read Morse, began to read it.

"It's a message!" he gasped. "My name!"

Zenn stiffened into attention at once.

"Remember the words," whispered Otho. "I will spell them out."

"Otho. Chandra Lal sends greetings. Have courage. Send reply if possible."

WRIGLEY'S under canvas

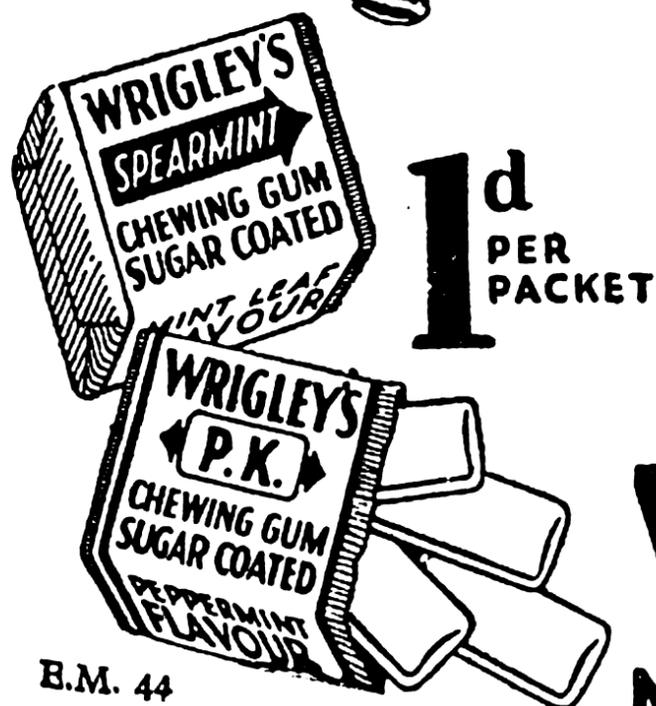
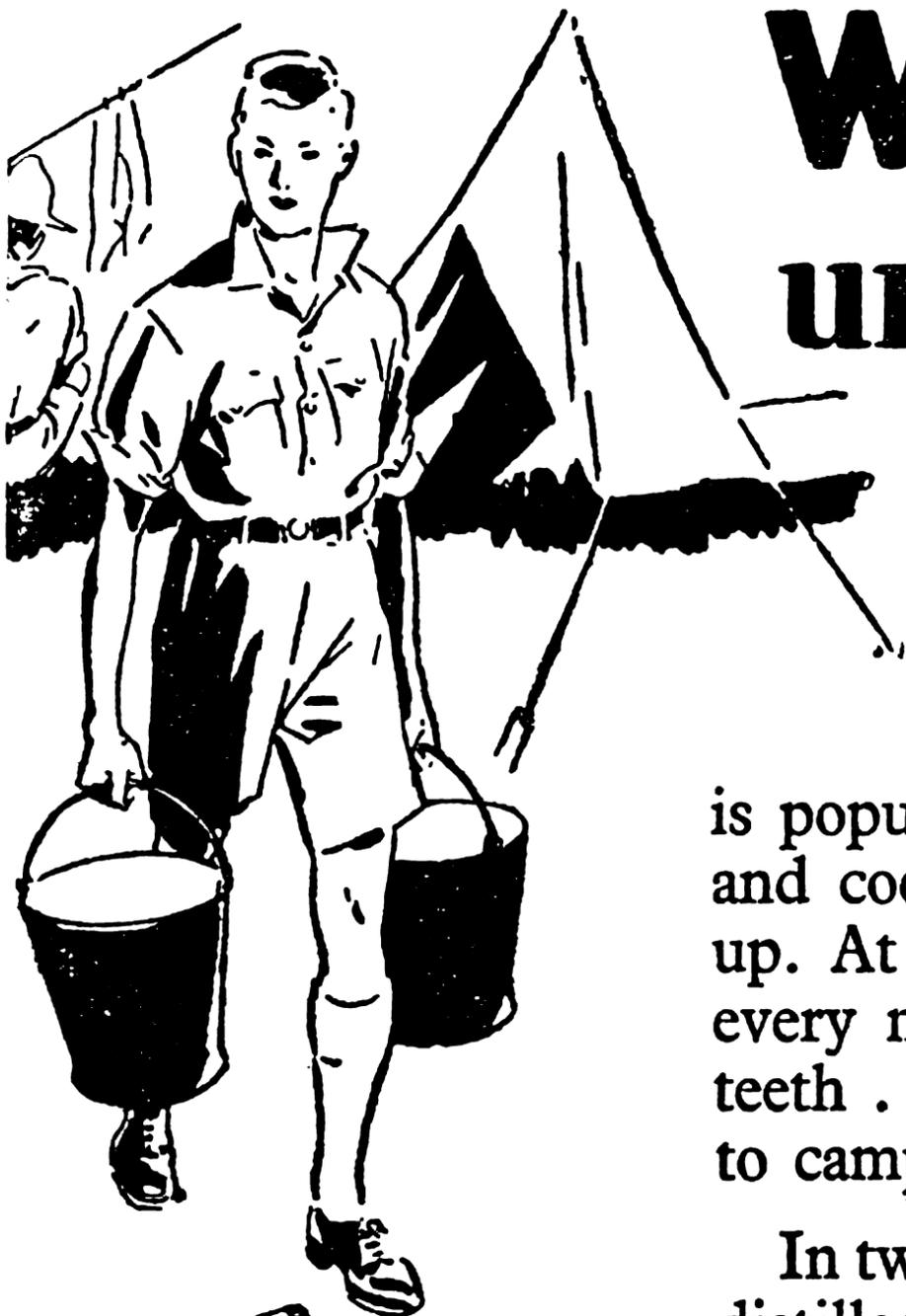
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Zenn darted across to his heap of rugs, and returned with a metal box. It was a petrol lighter, and had escaped the careful search of his gaolers, owing to the fact that he had slipped it into the torn lining of his coat.

One of the rugs was torn into strips. The hot sun had dried it until it was almost like tinder. It only took a second to light a bunch of rags, and Zenn waved the flaming material round and round his head until it burnt out.

There was a long moment of waiting; then, away in the distance, came an answering flash, proving that the flaming signal had been seen. Zenn dropped on to the circular floor of his prison, and peered up into the face of his companion.

"Who could have sent it?" he asked.

"I don't know," replied Otho. "Chandra Lal may have dictated that message, but he could not have sent it. He knows nothing of telegraphy. They must have been nine or ten miles away. The country round Kaspore is as flat as a billiard table, and they would have to travel to the foothills before they could reach a place where their light could be seen and read."

"They have taken a risk," the doctor returned. "For, if we could read it, so could others."

"Unless they knew the exact position of this tower, and trained the light on it," said Otho. "In that case, only the people in the palace and around its immediate vicinity could have seen the light, and they have chosen the very best hour to escape detection. They change guard just now, and the night watch relieves the day one. His Highness and his staff are at their evening meal. It is the very best moment they could have chosen."

"But who can it be? Who would worry about us? We are criminals, and outside the pale of both the law of the white man and the law of the Hindu."

"Someone out there thinks otherwise," returned Otho. "And there must be white men who would not hear of others being tortured in this diabolical way, even although they were as we are, outside the pale of the law."

ZENN turned away on his heel, shrugging his shoulders.

"I hope you're right," he said.

"But, candidly, I dare not feel too hopeful about these signals."

He walked across to his heap of rugs and stretched himself out on them. For some time Otho remained watching the darkness, but no further signals were seen. Then he, too, went to obtain rest.

In its way, the torture which the rajah was inflicting on these men was a masterpiece. Day by day the tiger would grow fiercer and fiercer as its hunger increased, while day by day the two wretched men would grow weaker and weaker, until the end came, when, too powerless to check the climbing brute, they would fall victims to its powerful paws.

CHAPTER 14.

How Lee Entered the Palace!

A MESSAGE had come across to the British representative that the rajah was about to send over a basket of fruit. Muriel received that message, and, knowing that Colonel Bruce was going to start at once on a hunting expedition, she kept the message to herself, otherwise her father might have postponed his departure to receive the rajah's gift in person, which Muriel did not want to happen.

It was about noon when the messenger from the palace arrived. Muriel saw the tall, uniformed figure, with the two black servants following behind, bearing the great basket, and her eyes were bright.

"Abul—at last!"

It was the stalwart trooper that the rajah had chosen as messenger this time. Muriel crossed the room and received him in the cool reception chamber. The two black slaves set the basket down and withdrew, while Muriel murmured her thanks. Abul was about to depart, but she stopped him.

"There is no hurry for a moment, Abul," she said, a smile on her lips. "I want to have a word with you."

Abul was ill at ease, but stood immovable before her.

"Why have you deserted us, Abul?" asked Muriel. "You used to say you were my slave and bondsman, Abul. Have you changed since then?"

"I have not changed, mem-sahib," he said huskily.

"You must have changed, for you left us without a word."

"I am sorry," said Abul. "Yet the mem-sahib must know that Abul also had to be loyal to his prince."

"Yes, I know, Abul, and for that reason I have forgiven you. You told the rajah about the treasure chest, but I forgive you for that, too. But I have not yet forgiven his Highness for keeping us away from the palace. He has turned a great, savage tiger out into our rooms. Why has he done that?"

She had been watching Abul's face, and she saw the quick startled look that flashed for a moment in the man's eyes.

"A tiger, mem-sahib?"

"Yes, Abul—a tiger!"

"Some other person has told thee, so that cannot be laid at my door."

His answer proved that Lee's extraordinary story was correct.

"But why has he done this thing, Abul?" asked Muriel.

Abul shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not in the confidence of my prince," he said, a blank look coming over his face. "The mem-sahib must ask his Highness for the reason of all this."

Muriel leaned forward.

"I know there is much hidden from us," she said. "His Highness shuts us out from the palace, yet sends us presents. It seems

The Editor and His Chums Chat Together!



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READERS WIN PRIZES FOR JOKES.

Lady: "Are you sure you're not the same man I gave half-a-crown to yesterday to buy food?"

Tramp: "Certain, lidy. Why, you said yourself I should be a different man after I'd 'ad some grub."

(*R. Woodhouse, 40a, Norfolk Rd., Brighton, Sussex. A penknife.*)

like childish spite, Abul, and were it not for being rude I would send his presents back to him. We are not beggars at his gateway."

Abul flushed beneath the scorn in her voice. "It is not in that light that his Highness sends the gifts," he broke out. "I know that he regrets the change that has taken place, but very soon it will be possible for the colonel-sahib to return to the palace."

"How soon?"

"Let the mem-sahib have patience," he urged. "By to-morrow his Highness expects

He came to halt swiftly, and his dark face flushed. He had said too much, and cleverly changed the subject.

"I must return, mem-sahib. I have been told to state that his Highness will send a further gift of some silken stuffs that have

Officer (to recruit who has missed the target every shot): "Good gracious, man, where are your shots going?"

Recruit (nervously): "I don't know, sir; they left here all right!"

(*J. M. Pirie, 34, Portland St., Aberdeen. A pocket wallet.*)

Jack (looking in shop window): "I say, Tom, what's that glass of water in the window for?"

Tom: "That's for the flies to wash their feet in before they walk on the buns."

(*A. M. Mulcahy, 12, Horringsford Rd., Aigburth, Liverpool. A penknife.*)

Visitor: "What brought you to this place, my friend?"

Convict: "Sneezing, sir."

Visitor: "Sneezing?"

Convict: "Yes, sir; it woke the gentleman up an' he nabbed me!"

(*G. Wilson, 13, Old Bridge, Egremont, Cumberland. A pocket wallet.*)

PEN PALS WANTED.

Alexander T. Dawson, 124, Bentinck Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancs, wants correspondents in Sweden, India, Egypt, South Africa and Turkey.

James Hutt, 18, Malcolm Street, Erskineville, Sydney, Australia, wants stamp correspondents—not England and Australia.

Thomas Underwood, 46, Wellington Street, East Perth, Western Australia, wants correspondents; ages 15-16.

Donald Cox, 13, Elizabeth Street, Tighes Hill, Newcastle, N.S.W., Australia, wants correspondents—Falkland Isles, Canada, Africa, etc.

Donald Grogan, 38, Dresden Road, Highgate, London, N., wants correspondents keen on films.

been brought to him from Kashmir. The messenger will arrive an hour after sunset."

He went out through the doorway, and Muriel sat for a long time thinking deeply. Then she summoned a servant.

"I want to consult a beggar, a most wise man, who lives in the Temple of the Vines," she said. "Take this letter to him and hear his reply. I want him to come hither this afternoon."

The servant obeyed, and late that afternoon the ragged beggar arrived at the Residency and was ushered up on to the roof where Muriel awaited his coming.

Lee murmured a greeting and dropped into the easy squatting position which the native of India always uses.

"What did the white girl want with him?"

he asked, so that the servant who was retiring might hear.

"I have heard of your wisdom and piety," Muriel returned, "and would hear advice to profit me."

The servant had vanished by now, and her mood changed.

"Abul has been here," she said rapidly. Briefly she told him all she had learned from the trooper, that there was a tiger in the colonel's former quarters, that the rajah was still friendly, and expected something to happen on the morrow that would allow Colonel Bryce to return to the palace.

"By to-morrow!" the disguised detective repeated. "That is worth knowing. It means that whatever has to be done must be done at once."

He looked at Muriel Bryce, then leaned forward:

"I must take you into my confidence now, Miss Bryce," he said. "I came here to Kashapore because I am convinced that there are two white men in the hands of the rajah and they are being tortured."

"You—you don't mean those two scoundrels who tried to steal the treasure chest?"

"Otho and Zenn are at present prisoners in the palace, and their quarters are in the tower you used to occupy."

"But—the tiger is there!" she gasped, horrified.

"Maybe that is the entertainment the rajah watches from the top of the tower," said Lee.

The girl rose to her feet and caught at Lee's ragged robe.

"You must do something, Mr. Lee. Those men are wicked, but they do not deserve such torment. You just try to save them!"

"That is what I am here to do, and to-night I must get into the palace."

Muriel was silent for a moment, then she drew closer to Lee.

"Listen, Mr. Lee. The rajah is sending another present, and the messenger is to arrive about an hour after sunset. The sentinel on the palace gate will be expecting his return, and of someone—someone bold enough—could make a prisoner of the messenger and take his place——"

"Excellent!" cried Nelson Lee, his eyes glinting. "Will the messenger be accompanied by anyone else?"

"I shouldn't think so as this will be a personal present to myself and not an official present to my father."

They plunged into an eager discussion of the details.

"It ought to work," said Lee eventually. "But I want a large piece of raw meat, the bigger the better. You can make it appear as a sort of gift to me."

Muriel had not the faintest idea why the detective should make such an extraordinary request, but when the ragged beggar left the residency he carried a large piece of deer flesh under his ragged robe.

That evening, after sunset, the rajah's messenger delivered the silks to Muriel, then made his departure. As he wore the livery of the rajah he was not afraid of anything happening to him as he made his way through the deserted streets of the city.

He reached an angle of the wall and turned to his left. As he did so there arose, almost at his feet, the shadowy feet of a ragged beggar, and the whining voice intoned:

"Alms, for the love of Allah, alms!"

"Out of my way, carrion!" cried the rajah's servant.

He knocked the begging bowl aside. Instantly the crouching figure stooped lower and a pair of wiry arms were suddenly wrapped around the servant's thighs. With one swing the man was lifted clean off his feet, and sent over backwards on to the hard roadway, the thud with which he struck the ground knocking the senses out of him.

"Quick, sahib," a low voice whispered, and a door creaked in the wall. The beggar caught at the senseless servant, and dragged him through the doorway, while the door clanged behind him. A moment later there was the spluttering of a match and a lamp was lit. Nelson Lee, for it was the detective, stooped and gagged and blindfolded the senseless servant.

It was not long before the man was stripped of his livery and safely bound and placed on a couch where he would be safely out of the way.

Lee studied the man's features, then set to work to make himself appear as the kidnapped servant. At the end Chandra Lal drew a deep breath of amazement.

"Thou art the twin brother of the man we have taken," he murmured.

He was right. Nelson Lee was as clever as Zenn in the art of disguise, and he proved it on this occasion. He was the palace servant, sleek, well-fed and arrogant.

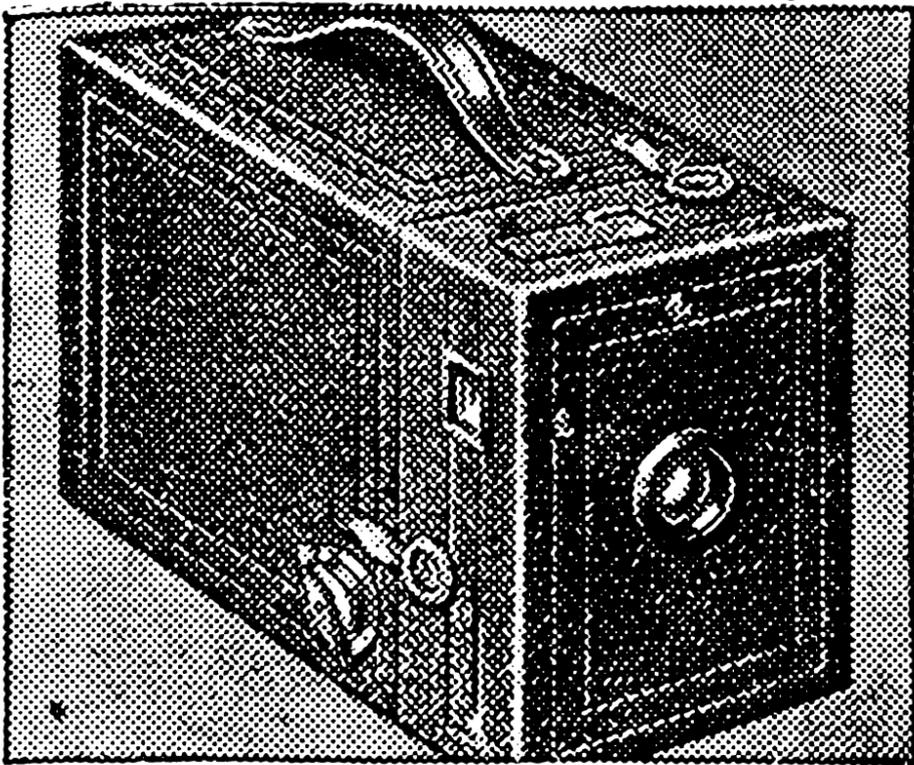
"You know what to do, Chandra Lal," he said, as he stepped to the door. "Go to the secret passage and await me there. Nipper will follow and we shall be away before anything is discovered."

"I am the protector's slave," replied Chandra Lal.

As Nelson Lee passed through the doorway he stooped and picked up a bulky package, which he slipped beneath the robe. In the street, he took the centre of it, and walked on boldly until he reached the high wall of the palace, and there a figure moved in the darkness.

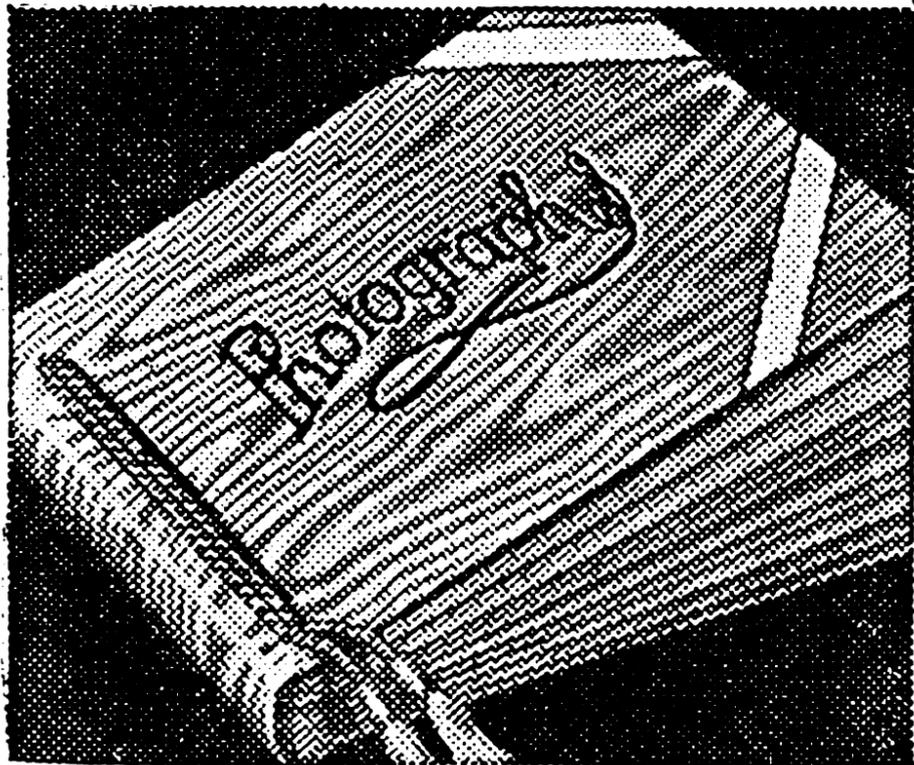
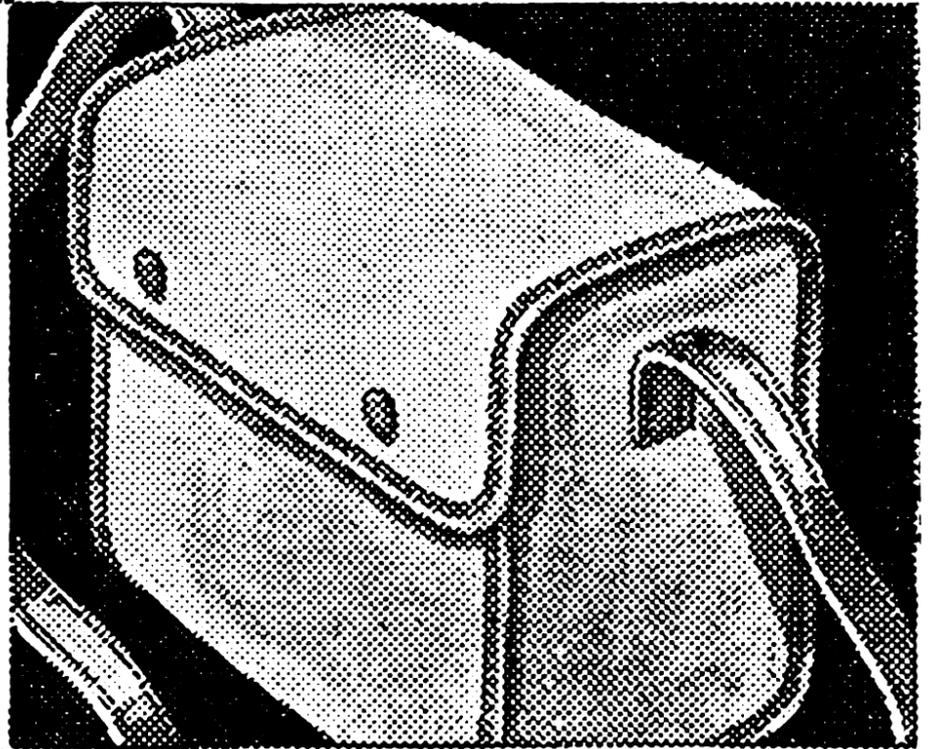
"Out of my way, dog!" said Lee, waving the figure aside. But a cunning eye might have noted that his hand, as it made the gesture, threw something into the lap of the huddled figure. Nipper clutched at the little bag, and it gave forth the musical tinkle of coins, and the lad's eyes followed the figure of the disguised detective and saw him enter at the gate. He heard the gate open and

(Continued on page 40.)



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shut, and the footsteps faded away in the distance.

"He's got through the guard—and that's a good start," muttered Nipper. "Now it's for me to make a move."

CHAPTER 15.

Rescued!

ONCE inside the big palace Nelson Lee found it easy enough to avoid detection. The rajah's palace was like rabbit warren, and he might have lost his way in the numerous passages, but Chandra Lal had described the way to the tower where Otho and Zenn were kept prisoners and had given him a rough map of the place.

He made his way to the garden surrounding the tower that had once been occupied by Colonel Bryce and his staff. He came to the garden leading to a lily pond. At the end of the lily pond was a little ornamental bridge of marble which spanned a sluice gate. A narrow channel of water ran on beyond the bridge under a dark archway on which a tower had been built. According to Chandra Lal, the channel led out into the river, and was the only possible means of escape from the palace.

The tower on which Zenn and Otho were prisoners was only fifty yards away. If he could get the men out they could make at once for the sluice gate, climbing it, and dropping into the deep channel beyond. Lee knew that Otho was a powerful swimmer, and Zenn—well, there was little that the wizened man could not do when put to it.

Cautiously Nelson Lee approached the foot of the tower and came to a window which like most native windows was devoid of glass. There came to his nostrils the hot unmistakable twang of cat—that fetid stench which hangs about the great lion-house at the Zoo. Lee withdrew hurriedly. The tiger was in that very room.

From beneath his robes he drew the chunk of deer flesh. He reached out and placed the meat on the window-ledge. As he did so a great clawed paw shot out suddenly from the darkness and the piece of raw meat vanished.

"Jove, the brute was just inside that window!" thought Lee. "That was as narrow escape as I want. Eat away, my friend. It's your last meal!"

He drew nearer to the window and listened. He heard the low gurgling purr as the animal fed.

The moments seemed to drag. Then a heavy thud sounded, followed by the awful sound of claws striking wildly at the woodwork of the floor. The sharp crackling of splinters as they were torn up by the great claws and at last thick, throaty breathing. The poison Lee had placed in the meat was having its effect. The tiger clawed up high over its head, then came the death rattle

in the savage throat. The tiger sank down over the ledge, its forepaws powerless now, hanging limply against the wall, the evil head between them.

Lee approached and ran his hand along the brute's flanks. The body was lifeless, though still warm.

"I thought as much," he muttered. "You have been kept short of food. Well, it was your life or mine, and I took the chance."

He forced his way into the tower by way of another window and went up the stairs to the roof. A moment later Nelson Lee was on the broad roof of the tower, and he looked at the little round store. Over one ledge of the low wall a fragment of dark material was hanging, and as Lee crept up to the tower and listened he heard the heavy, laboured breathing of exhausted men in deep slumber.

"Otho!"

Out from the dusk came that whisper, and the ears of the sleeper heard. Otho sat up, his nerves leaping.

"Otho! Are you there?"

Again the voice. With a gasp the big man drew himself to his feet and peered over the wall. He saw the dim figure of a man below.

"Who are you?"

The reply came in quiet English.

"A friend, come to get you out of this. The tiger is dead. I poisoned it. Is Zenn there?"

Zenn had heard and took up his stand beside Otho.

"Come, quickly! No time to argue. The tiger is dead."

The steady, confident tones assured the two rogues that the hour of their deliverance had come. Steely-nerved though they were, their ordeal had weakened them, and for a moment they were seized with panic. They flung open the trapdoor and rushed down from the roof of the store, but once out they grew steadier, knowing that they had to keep cool to get clear of the palace.

Otho peered into the face of the man who had come for them, but the detective's disguise was too skilful for him to penetrate in that dim light.

"Don't talk here," said Lee. "Follow me."

He led the way down the narrow stairs, Zenn and Otho following obediently. When they reached the chamber on the ground floor and the criminals saw the tiger perched there by the window they drew back, but Nelson Lee seized the brute by the tail and hauled until the ponderous body slithered sideways and dropped in an awkward heap.

"Dead," he assured them.

He climbed through the window, Otho following, and helping Zenn over the dead brute. They reached the courtyard in safety, and as if to help them the night seemed to grow darker. Lee explained in low tense whispers what there was to be done. Otho and Zenn scrambled over the sluice gate and

vanished into the dark channel, and Lee followed.

A dozen strokes saw the detective beneath the black arch, and the strong current dragged him on and on for a long minute; then suddenly he saw the stars above his head again, and as he drew near he saw the huge figure of Count Otho scramble up out of the river, then turn to help the stunted figure of his companion.

Nelson Lee reached the steps and climbed them. Otho and Zenn were waiting for him as he reached the top.

"Follow me," said Lee, and led the way into the darkness.

CHAPTER 16.

The Last Trick!

IT was not until the following day that the dead body of the tiger was found, and the flight of the prisoners traced.

The rajah was told that no living thing had passed through the gates that night. He thought the fugitives must still be in the city, and a house-to-house search was instigated. It took time, and during that time the gates were kept shut.

Even Colonel Bryce's house was entered by the rajah's troops, but as the Residency ranked as British soil the old colonel turned them out and lodged a formal protest, denying that any fugitives were present in his house, or ever had been.

At eight that same evening he went over to the palace and demanded an audience with the rajah, who received him sulkily.

"You have insulted me through my servants," said the rajah.

"You insulted me by sending your servants, sir," replied the colonel. "You may search my house, but you must first obtain my permission. That is international law. But something has happened that makes me doubt whether it is worth while searching any longer. Here is a letter handed to the British agent at Valghat, on the border of Puljara. It was forwarded to me at once, and reached Kashapore half an hour ago."

The rajah took the opened letter, glanced at it a moment, then his eyes hardened, and he read the long letter through from beginning to end. It was from Nelson Lee, and was a report of all that had happened.

"He entered my palace alone and unaided!" exclaimed the rajah. "By Allah, but this is a man after my own heart!"

Bryce leaned forward.

"No other man would have dared so much," he put in.

"Yet I doubt if these dogs he saved were worthy of the sacrifice," put in the rajah.

"It might have been better even for Great Britain if they were left here to die."

"I do not think so," returned Bryce. "We British do not see things with your eyes. Now you know the truth, and all that remains is to know what your Highness intends to do."

For a time the rajah was silent, then, sud-

denly he smiled, and proffered his hand in the English fashion.

"What is, is," he said. "I will give orders to have your old quarters prepared for you. I was in the grip of a fever that thirsted for vengeance, if you understand me. Now it is gone. Are we friends again?"

Bryce caught eagerly at the smooth brown hand.

"We are friends," he said.

ON the express that thundered its long way from Puljara through the plains down to the coast, late at night, the guard, chancing to lean out of his carriage, thought he saw two figures fall from one of the first-class compartments. The hour was late, and there was no moon, and as the guard's compartment flashed past the spot its occupant could see no sign of the accident.

"I must have been dreaming," the half-caste guard decided.

When the train arrived at its destination no inquiry was set on foot, and no one said a word.

But in the buffet of the station Nipper sat with Nelson Lee sipping hot coffee.

"You're not going to make a fuss, gov'nor?" he queried.

"No," Lee returned, "it would be of no use if I did. They chose their time remarkable well, and may be a hundred miles away by now."

He smoothed out the crumpled letter that Zenn had left behind. Four men had gone to sleep in a compartment one night, and in the morning there were only two—Nelson Lee and Nipper—and this letter was the explanation, and had been left behind in the compartment.

"We are taking French leave," it ran. "As the rajah left us without any kit we have ventured to borrow the two hundred rupees you had in your kit. We are by no means ungrateful for what you did for us at Kashapore, but as you stand for the opposite to us, there can be no real friendship between us. We start once again, as far as I am concerned, with clean sheets. You, of course, will not see it in that light. In your eyes I am still a convict at large, to be arrested at sight, if possible. If we had remained with you it would have been your duty to hand us over to the police, therefore we had to part.

"And the future to me will find us enemies as of old.

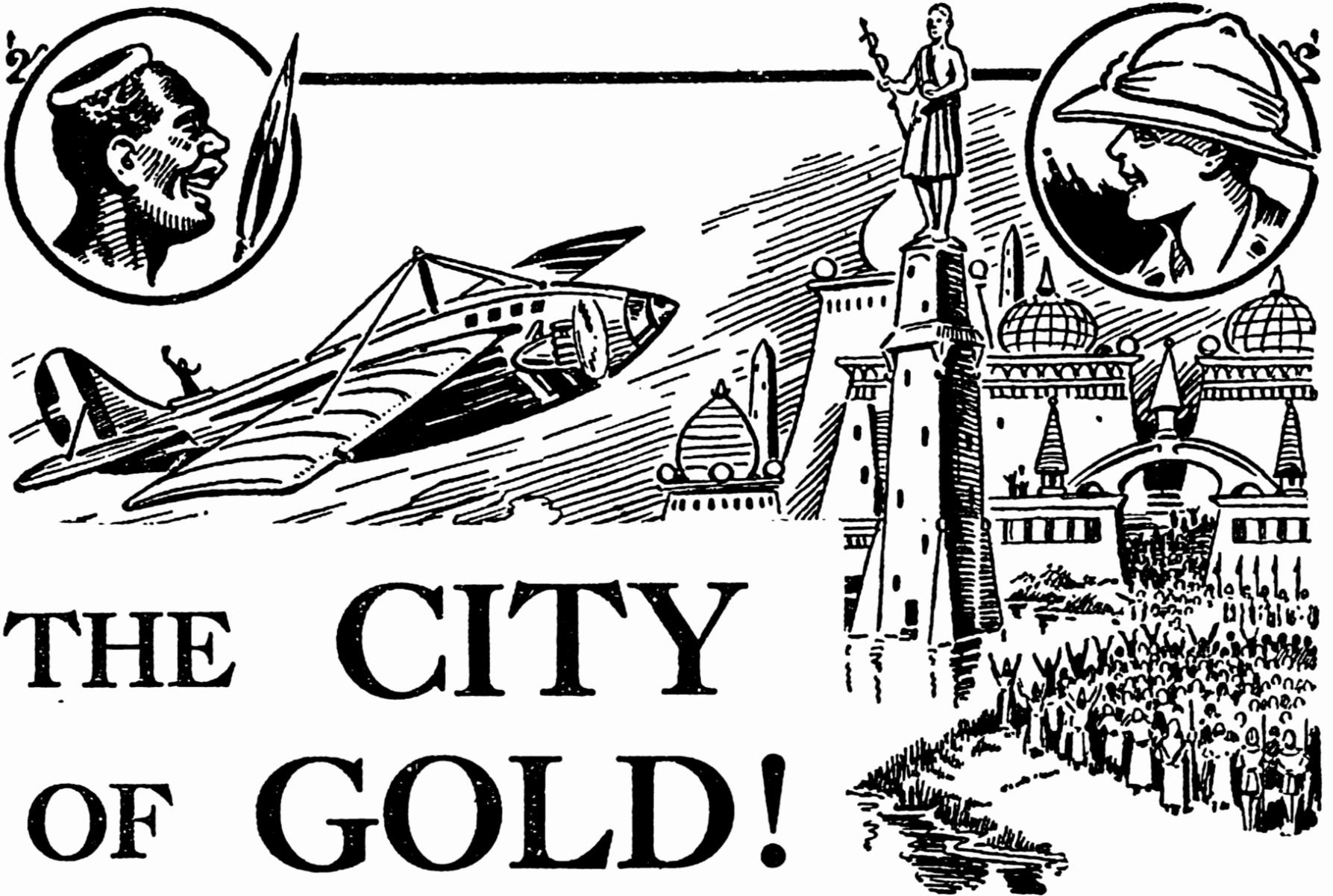
"Zenn—and Otho!"

"Perhaps it was the best way, after all," mused Lee, "but it leaves their many crimes still unpunished, and until they do pay the penalty we are enemies, as he says."

THE END.

(Next week's Extra-Long Complete DETECTIVE - THRILLER is a winner. You'll enjoy every chapter of: "THE DANGER SHIP!" starring Nelson Lee the famous detective and his boy assistant, Nipper!)

White Boy King Rules Mysterious African City!



THE CITY OF GOLD!

Tom Cook and his cousin Al Vandeck have travelled to a mysterious city in the heart of Africa in their wonder craft, the Flying Fish. Tom has been crowned king by the people of the Golden City, but the High Priest is madly jealous of the new ruler, and sets a horde of dwarfs against the city. Even as the dwarfs are about to march into the City, Tom forces Gobo to open out a secret exit in order to attack the enemy by surprise.

Lulu Leads His Warriors!

TOM heaved a sigh of relief. Evidently, Al had been in time to meet Lulu on the way and deliver his message. He heard the deep bass of the Zulu warrior roaring out:

"Two abreast—horsemen follow me! Spear-men follow after, fear not but slay—slay! Let nought dismay ye for know that I, the Elephant, Incoboo, whose breath is death, am your leader. Ow! I have slain my thousands and I will slay more this day! Behold, I come from the air with your king, my lord Tomkuk; together we rode the storm and dared the passage of the Voice that we might lead you to victory. Forward and fear not!"

Tom had to stand aside as the great rock sunk flush with the floor of the canyon, for with a rush the mounted men rode towards it. In the van was Lulu, whooping like a demon and flourishing a torch in one hand and a gigantic spear in the other. Coming out of the sunlight into the gloom of the canyon whose mighty walls seemed to reach to the sky in that narrow passage, nearly meeting at the top, he did not

see his "young baas" but carried on at a dead gallop with his troops following him with thundering hooves.

Tom, looking after his henchmen with a grin, did not notice old Gobo slip up amongst the rocks and disappear into one of the many caves with which the cliffs were honeycombed.

When the last of the horsemen had thundered through, leaving a thick pall of dust behind, he again essayed to leave the canyon, but this time ran up against the advance guard of the bowman and foot soldiers.

"Way!" he called, trying to shove his way through, forgetful of the fact that his face was smeared with sweat and dust, that the few clothes he had on were torn and stained, and that altogether he presented anything but a kingly appearance; "Way for your king!"

The men laughed and shoved him aside as they surged through four abreast, filling the narrow passage from side to side. Luckily he kept his feet, or he would have been trampled underfoot. Suddenly he bethought himself of the electric torch, and switching it on, he shone it on his own face and yelled at the pitch of his voice:

"Way there, WAY FOR TOMKUK, YOUR KING!"

Almost on top of him was a brawny young giant clad in a leopard skin with a great plume of ostrich feathers bound to his brow. He looked at Tom for a moment in astonishment, hardly able to believe that the dusty faced, dishevelled figure was actually the fair-haired divine being he had seen up at the palace.

But just then the syren of the "Flying Fish" blared out angrily, and he yelled to his men to halt, then thumped the haft of his spear on the ground and bellowed:

"Baihete, it is the King; Baihete!"

Instantly, the bowmen raised their bows and the chorus rang out, full throated:

"Baihete! Hail, Tomkuk, son of Tomkuk the Great! Baihete!"

Then the ranks opened out and the men stood at salute on either side as the fair-haired youngster hurried through. Overhead the Fish came zooming, dropping to fifty feet above the ground, then a looped rope came down and "Tomkuk" was hauled rapidly up out of sight of his soldiers as the Fish darted full speed ahead over the roof of the canyon.

"You did it then? Good old scout!" cheered Al, pumphandling away at his cousin's hand. "I hardly thought you'd get in before those little beetles charged into the canyon. Did yer stick ol' Gobo in the gizzard?"

"'Fraid not!" laughed Tom. "To tell you the truth, I forgot all about the little microbe. But I persuaded him to open the rock and that's the main point. See old Lulu scooting thro'? That old warrior's got blood in his eye all right!"

"Yep, he seems to be enjoyin' himself okay; but say, Tommy, we're not goin' to be outer th' scrimmage, are we?" asked his cousin anxiously; "I'm jest r'arin' to go an' Ben has used up a gallon of oil and six tins o' polish gettin' that li'l Lewis gun into condish like yuh said. Gee, it'd jest break his heart if we didn't take a hand in th' entertainment!"

"Yours too, I reckon, eh?" grinned Tom, who knew his cousin; "But don't worry, you'll have enough of it before we have finished! Say, Al, how many could you stow in this 'bus at a pinch?"

"Dunno; it depends on their size," replied the aviator scratching his head. "Average about thirty I reckon—with a squeeze."

"Over the mountains?" urged Tom.

"'Umph; wa'al, y-yes, but it'd strain her a bit," said Al, dubiously; "what's the great idea, chief?"

"You'll see!" replied Tom cheerfully. "Then when you've landed the thirty men and me and Ben and the Lewis gun, could you carry on flyin' by your lonesome and use that patent gun o' yours at the same time?"

"Can do; that's why we had that control leadi' aft so's one man can steer, control engines, and fire gun all simultaneous at the same time. Git muh?"

"Your meanin' is as clear as mud!" grinned Tom. "Then just drop down to earth again and we'll form a flyin' squad from the golden palace guard down below there that'll make those sawn off forest dwarfs sit up and wonder! Al, we're in for some fun!"

The Battle!

TOM had been taking observation over the edge of the Flying Fish and had discovered that evidently all the regiments had been picked according to size, which accounted for the gigantic bowmen he had encountered who led the van of the army.

But in the rear, still waiting for the order to advance, and fuming impatiently at the delay like anxious warhorses, was a regiment of youngsters of from fifteen to eighteen years of age; fine, sturdy fellows, with well-muscled limbs but short in stature, and weighing on an average perhaps in the region of nine to ten stone. They were captained by a smart-looking youngster of about Tom's own age, but bearing the scars of previous scraps and wearing the plumed head-dress of a commander.

"Take her down and drop me just in front of that regiment, Al!" commanded Tom shortly. "That's the son of Lousla, the general whom Gobo 'magicked' out of his way. I've heard about him. He's a real hot-stuff warrior!"

"Gorrumity, an' he looks it!" muttered Ben, who was leaning over the side whilst he filled belts for the Lewis gun. "Chec, what a welter-weight he'd make, bawss! I kin see th' fans at Madison Square Garden goin' haff cockeyed over him in th' ring!"

"Git below, yuh scrubby li'l gob!" frowned Al in pretended rage. "Yer a disgrace to th' ship; showin' yourself off like that, all coated up with oil and grease. Go clean yerself; we're goin' to have visitors aboard!"

"Better black meself all over, den!" muttered Ben, as he disappeared below. "Th' fairest o' this bunch is snuff an' butter colour. Ol' Lulu 'ud pass for a blonde amongst some of 'em!"

Tom swung just above the heads of the young regiment and surveyed them.

"Captain," he said, addressing the youngster who had been pointed out to him at the palace as the son of the late general, "great honour awaits your regiment. Pick a score and a half of your best bowmen. They come with Tomkuk in the boat that flies to the thick of the battle, there to gain great honour or a death of glory. Call for volunteers who will show their courage in defence of their country!"

"Who will fight with Tomkuk?" shouted the officer and like one man the entire regiment took a step forward, raised their bows and shouted: "Baihete!"

"Thanks, friends; but a score and a half a score is all. The rest shall have their share of fighting, never fear! Pick your best bowmen, captain!"

One by one the officer indicated youngsters with his own bow, and Tom hurriedly counted them.

"One more, captain," he said. "A score and half a score."

"I lead my own men, great Tomkuk!" responded the officer gruffly. "Seclosi is the best Bowman in the army!"

"Good Captain Seclosi, and when the battle is over—if we both live—Tomkuk will see to it that you and your men are not forgotten. Now, let others of your men fetch hither ox-hides, one for each man I take with me. Meanwhile, come hither."

One by one the men were hauled up into the Fish and stowed away in pairs as "opposite numbers" according to their weight, for Al had to be careful to preserve the balance of the flying boat so far as possible with such an unusually heavy load aboard.

The men stared about them at the various "gadgets" in bewildered awe, and muttered amongst themselves of "witchcraft." One of them touched an almost red-hot gearbox with his bare leg, and let out a yell that the "great bird" had bitten him!

"That's one thing: yuh cain't scorch yer trousers, seein' yer ain't got none!" grinned Ben. "That's right—rub a bit o' spit on it—kill or cure!"

"Now, what's the next move?" asked Al, after the men and ox-hides were all aboard and the Fish began to move slowly off. "This load's makin' th' old bus buck a bit, but she's takin' it like a good un'. I knew that was a big reserve o' power in those engines somewhere. Say, Tom, these fellers are a fine-lookin' bunch. Like a lot o' grey-

hounds, trained to a hair. What are you goin' to do with 'em?"

"Drop two or three at a time on the tops of those flat kopjies," replied Tom promptly. "I think they won't be in much danger there, for I don't believe those short-legged dwarfs'll be able to climb those smooth-faced slabs of rock, and at the same time they'll command a big area all around 'em."

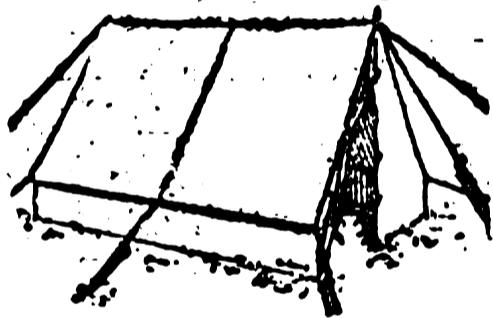
"Great work!" approved Al. "But what are the ox-hides for? That's what's puzzlin' me? Think it's goin' to rain?"

"Just that!" nodded Tom seriously. "Rain poisoned arrows! Those venomous little beasts don't trouble much about fairness in warfare, and every arrow will have it's tip poisoned so that the merest scratch means a rapid and very sticky death."

As they flew rapidly to their objective they had a wonderful bird's-eye view of the battle as it raged beneath them. The plain looked like a disturbed ant-heap as the dwarfs scurried in their thousands here and there, altogether at a loss what to do against the armoured horsemen who had made a straight-forward charge into the very thick of them.

(More exciting chapters of this Grand African Adventure Story in Next Week's Issue, Chums!)

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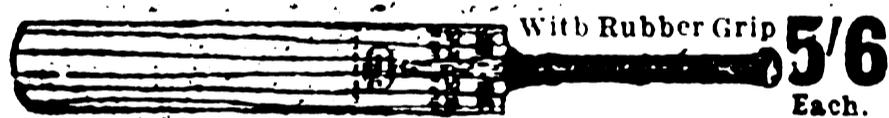


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