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# THE **NELSON LEE**

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**"PLUNDER  
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**GREAT  
DETECTIVE-THRILLER  
INSIDE**

New Series No. 126.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

June 18th, 1932.

# PLUNDER LTD. !



## CHAPTER 1.

### Trapped!

**A**T the top of Ludgate Hill stood a handsome block of buildings, arranged in suites of offices, and known as Albion Chambers. On each side of the principal door was a curved brass plate, on which were inscribed the names of those who rented rooms on the various floors. One of these inscriptions ran as follows:

First Floor,  
JOHN LONGFORD,  
Consulting Electrical Engineer.

The man to whom this inscription referred was a stalwart young fellow, with a clean-

shaven, boyish face, and fair hair. Amongst his chums he was known as "Lucky Jack," for, although he was not yet thirty, he had already gained a reputation as an electrical engineer, which was second to none in the kingdom.

On a certain afternoon he was sitting in his office, writing out a report on a new electrical motor which had been submitted to him for examination. When his clerk ushered in a gentleman who was dressed in black.

"Mr. Simeon Flegg," said Jack, reading the name on the card.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Longford!" said the visitor, as he dropped into the chair Jack pushed towards him. "I haven't had the

“. . . we are the most up-to-date confederation for the execution of every kind of crime that pays. We are plunderers of the world's treasure chests . . .” As Jack Longford, inventor, stands gazing at the sinister chief of this ruthless gang of crooks only too well does he realise the menace that is paralysing society.

But unseen, unknown, with grim determination, one man is braving a thousand perils to stamp out this organisation—and he is Nelson Lee, detective!



pleasure of meeting you before, but I dare say you will know my name. I am Alderman Flegg, the chairman of the Electric Tramways Committee of the Denfield City Council.”

“Oh, yes, I am quite familiar with your name,” said Jack. “Very glad to make your acquaintance. Do you wish to consult me professionally?”

“I do,” said the man in black. “I came up to London three days ago intending to remain here until the end of the week. About four o'clock this afternoon, however, I received an urgent telegram from the Mayor of Denfield, informing me that a serious breakdown had occurred in connection with the tramways, and asking me to return at once and bring you with me. Unfortunately, there is not a fast train to Denfield for another hour, but I have my car outside, and can get you there as soon as the next express from St. Pancras. The point is, will you come?”

“Oh, yes,” said Jack. “I always keep a case at my office here in readiness for any sudden emergency; but it is only fair to warn you that I cannot consent to run down to Denfield for anything less than fifty guineas.”

“That is a matter of no importance whatever,” said the man in black, with a lordly wave of his hand. “Come with me to Denfield, show us what is wrong, and how to put it right, and any fee you choose to ask will be only too cheerfully paid.”

“Very well,” said Jack. “Give me five minutes in which to make my preparations and then I'm at your service.”

Jack Longford was a bachelor, and an orphan, without a relation in the world. He lived in a small house at Stoke Newington. This house was connected with his office by telephone, and as soon as he had rung up his housekeeper, and had told her not to expect him home that night, he locked up his papers, fished out his travelling case, put on his hat and overcoat, gave some instructions to his clerk, and then went down to the street with Simeon Flegg. They entered the big, powerful car that stood there waiting to whisk them off to Denfield.

There was nothing outstanding about the long drive northwards. It was one of the

most pleasant journeys Jack had ever made, for the day was warm, and the man in black proved an admirable companion, and the time slipped by so swiftly and agreeably, that when the car passed through the main street of Chesterfield the young engineer could scarcely believe his eyes.

"We're nearly there!" he gasped.

"Only another thirty miles to go," said the man in black. "And that is nothing to a car as speedy and powerful as this. Have a cigar, Mr. Longford."

Jack accepted the proffered cigar, and, leaning back against the luxurious upholstery, lit up, and puffed the hazy smoke up to the light in the roof of the car.

It did not strike him as curious that the man in black was not smoking. It did not occur to him that the man in black was regarding him in a strangely intent manner.

But after one or two puffs at the cigar his temples started to throb, whilst a certain numbness began in his legs and mounted rapidly to his head.

"What—what have you done—to that cigar?" he demanded, trying to rise to his feet.

"Nothing!" said the man in black, in tones of ill-suppressed triumph.

"You—you lie!" gasped the young engineer, reeling back in his seat again helplessly. "You've drugged me, you—you—"

The rest of the sentence died away in an inarticulate moan, and, after swaying to and fro like a drunken man, he slumped back in a heap against the cushions and lapsed into unconsciousness.

The man in black smiled grimly at the sight, and, picking up the tube, spoke to the liveried chauffeur.

"All right, Jim. You turn off at the next by-road. You know the way?"

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Underground Mint!

WHEN Jack recovered his senses he was lying on a couch in a large and handsomely furnished room. Two men were standing over him, each with a revolver in his hand, and almost before he had fairly opened his eyes he heard one say to the other:

"He's coming round! Ring for the Squire!"

The man addressed walked over to the bell-press, and then returned to the couch and favoured Jack with a prolonged and searching stare.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, I'm all right now, thank you!" said Jack, gazing round the spacious room with an air of bewildered surprise. "But where—where am I?"

"That is a question which is best left unanswered for the present," said the man. "It is enough for you to know that you are in our power, and that the slightest show of resistance will be followed by instant death."

He had scarcely finished speaking ere the "Squire" appeared—a tall, thin man, with a clean-shaven face and iron-grey hair.

"Mr. Longford, I believe?" he said, advancing to the couch with a courteous bow. "Allow me to congratulate you on your safe and speedy return to consciousness."

At the sound of his voice the young engineer gave a start of surprise.

"Are you Mr. Simeon Flegg?" he asked.

"I am not!" said the Squire bluntly.

"You are!" said Jack, in tones of profound conviction. "At least, you're the man who came to my office this afternoon, and gave that name to my clerk. You must have been disguised, but I recognise your voice."

The man laughed sarcastically.

"Well, you're right," he admitted. "I am the man who called himself Simeon Flegg and pitched you that yarn about the Denfield Tramways. Every word of it was false, of course. In fact, as you must have already guessed for yourself, the whole affair was a plot to lure you into our power."

"And may I ask what your object is?"

"Certainly!" said the Squire. "My friends and I are the owners of some electrical machinery. One of our machines has unaccountably broken down, and we want you to repair it. That's all!"

"But if that was your only object," said Jack, "why was it necessary to resort to trickery, a doctored cigar, and all that sort of thing? If you merely wished me to repair a broken machine, why couldn't you come to my office and tell me so in an open and straightforward way?"

"Because," said the Squire, "it was absolutely necessary, from my point of view, that you shouldn't know where you were going, or what it was I wished you to do, until you were safely inside my house. If I had been open and straightforward, it's a thousand to one that you wouldn't have come."

"Why not?" asked Jack, growing more and more bewildered.

"You will be able to answer that question for yourself very soon," said the Squire, with a peculiar smile. "In the meantime, you will perhaps allow me to remark that we are wasting valuable time, and that the sooner you set to work the sooner you will be free to depart."

"Then am I to understand," said Jack, "that if I consent to repair your machine I shall then be allowed to leave this house without any further molestation?"

"Certainly," said the Squire. "We shall take certain precautions, of course, to prevent you finding out where you have been, but otherwise you will not be interfered with in any way. I pledge you my word of honour on that!"

"Very well, then," said Jack, rising to his feet. "I have no wish to remain in this house any longer than is absolutely necessary, so please allow me to see the machine at once."

"Pardon me, but there's just one little precaution to be taken first," said the Squire, producing a black silk handkerchief. "You don't object, I hope?"

"Not at all," was Jack's careless reply. "Be as quick as you can—that's all I ask."

The Squire accordingly bound the handkerchief over Jack's eyes, and signed to his two confederates. The latter immediately ranged themselves on each side of their prisoner, linking their arms in his, and a moment later, in obedience to another signal from the Squire, they marched him out of the room.

It seemed to be a long tramp through endless passages, but at last the Squire called a halt. For a second or two they all stood perfectly still, and then, to Jack's dismay the ground began to sink from under his feet. His alarm, however, soon passed, for he suddenly discovered that he and his captors had merely entered an electric lift for the purpose of descending to some lower region of the house.

When the sinking motion ceased his guides let go their hold on his arms, and the Squire commanded him to take three strides in front of him and six to the right. When he had obeyed, he was turned round half a dozen times in rapid succession; and then, before he had time to recover from his giddiness, the handkerchief which covered his eyes was suddenly whisked away.

FOR a moment or two he was blinded by the dazzle of a dozen electric lights, but as soon as the eyes had become accustomed to the glare, he saw that he was in an underground vault—a vault which, he realised at once, was nothing more nor less than a coiner's mint for the minting of counterfeit coin!

At one end was a furnace in which the metal—which was stacked in ingots hard by—was melted, mixed and annealed. At the other end was a big electric motor, and between the two, ranged in a row down the middle of the vault, were intricate machines for rolling the metal into bars, for cutting out the blanks, for raising and milling the edges, and for stamping the spurious coins with the requisite designs. In fact, the whole place was a reproduction on a small scale—and not a very small scale, either—of the Royal Mint in London.

"So you and your friends are coiners?" he said, turning to the Squire and striving to speak calmly.

"It would seem so," said the Squire, picking up a handful of spurious coins and allowing them to dribble through his fingers. "Did I not speak truly when I said that if I had been open and straightforward with you the odds were a thousand to one that you would not have come with me?"

"You did!" said Jack. "Nothing in the world would ever have induced me to accompany you if I'd known for what purpose you desired my assistance."

"I knew that," said the Squire, with a

chuckle. "So I had to resort to trickery. But now that you are here you will doubtless see the wisdom of bowing to the inevitable, and doing what we wish."

"Suppose I refuse?" asked Jack.

"You will be shot," said the Squire. And he signed to the two men by his side, who instantly covered Jack with their revolvers.

"And if I consent to do as you wish?"

"Have I not already pledged my word?" said the Squire. "You will be placed in my car—blindfolded, of course—and driven to a certain spot in the middle of a lonely heath. You will then be released, on promising not to remove your bandage for the space of fifteen minutes, and at the end of that time you will be free to act as you please."

"Then it seems to me that I haven't any choice in the matter," said Jack. "Which is the machine you wish me to repair?"

"This," said the Squire, leading him to an electric dynamo. "It supplies the current to the vats in which we electroplate our coins."

Jack examined the machine and saw at a glance what was wrong, and in less than an hour the young expert had remedied the defect, and had made the machine, to all intents and purposes, as good as new.

"There! Thank goodness that's finished!" he exclaimed, when he had tested it and found that it was all right. "Will you now be so good as to order the car, and let me get away?"

"Well, no; I'm afraid I can't," said the Squire, beckoning to his two accomplices, who once more ranged themselves on either side of the young engineer.

"Why not?" demanded Jack. "Didn't you pledge your word of honour, that when I had finished my work I should be allowed to leave this house without any further molestation?"

"I did!" said the Squire. "But you didn't really think I meant it, did you?"

"Of course I did!" said Jack, with a strange sinking at his heart.

"Then all I can say is that you're a bigger simpleton than I took you for!" said the Squire, with a mocking laugh. "Fancy thinking that I'd be such an idiot as to set you free after all you have seen and heard in this house to-night!"

"Then what are you going to do with me?" asked Jack.

"If I had my own way," said the Squire, "I would shoot you out of hand, and be done with it. But I'm not exactly my own master in the matter, and my orders are to offer you your freedom on condition that you consent to throw in your lot with us—to become one of ourselves, in fact—and to give us in the future the benefit of your valuable advice and help. In return for this, you will not only receive your freedom and a regular salary as a consulting engineer, but a certain share of the profits will be——"

"That's enough!" snapped Jack. "I consider your proposition an insult! Rather than accept your terms I'd sooner rot in this vault!"

"But it isn't a case of rotting," said the Squire dryly. "It's a case of dying!"

"Then I'll die!" said Jack through clenched teeth. "But I won't die without a struggle!" he exclaimed suddenly. And almost before the words had crossed his lips he charged straight at his two guards. They were taken completely by surprise. Jack's right fist landed on one man's mouth, and loosened most of his teeth, whilst his left fist found a resting place on the other man's eyes, and sent him reeling backwards, with howls of pain, and dropping his revolver.

Quick as thought Jack stooped to pick it up, but before his fingers could close on it the Squire snatched up a mallet and dealt him a sledge-hammer blow on the back of the head. Half dazed by the blow, he stumbled forward on his hands and knees. In that moment the three men flung themselves upon him in a body.

The Squire stooped and was in the act of picking up a revolver when the lift descended into the vault, and a man stepped out with a telegram in his hand.

The Squire snatched it with ill-concealed impatience. As soon as he had read it a savage oath burst from his lips.

"Curse it! Why didn't I shoot him ten minutes ago!" he muttered to himself.

He thrust the telegram into his pocket, and turned to the man who had brought it.

"Help those two to bind Mr. Longford hand and foot," he said. "When you've made him secure we'll carry him into the bullion-room and leave him there."

This sudden change of front amazed his two confederates as much as it astonished Jack. But the Squire was not in the mood to offer any explanation, and as soon as Jack had been bound he was thrust into a small, dark room at the end of the vault, locked in and left to his own reflections.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### The Order of the Ring!

FOR seven long, weary hours Jack Longford was kept in suspense; then two men came and removed the cords which bound his legs, leaving his arms still pinioned to his sides. Having bound a handkerchief over his eyes, they led him into the lift, escorted him through another bewildering maze of rooms and passages, and finally pushed him into a chair.

"You may leave us now," said a strange voice.

He heard the two men leave the room and close the door. Then the strange voice spoke again:

"If I liberate your arms," it said, "will you give me your promise that for the next half-hour you will neither offer resistance nor try to escape?"

"I will," said Jack. "But it must be clearly understood that my parole is limited to the time you have named. At the end

of the half-hour I shall hold myself free to act as I please."

"Agreed!" said the voice.

His bonds were thereupon loosed, and the bandage removed from his eyes. He then discovered that he was seated at a table in the room in which he had recovered consciousness the night before. The Squire was sitting by his side, and at the head of the table was a tall, distinguished-looking man whom he had never seen before.

Daylight was streaming through the long French windows of the room, and a clock on the mantelpiece pointed to half-past eight.

"I understand that you have been rather roughly handled since you entered this house," said the man at the head of the table. "Will you believe me when I say that I am very, very sorry? I feel sure that if I'd been here when you arrived I could have persuaded you to join us without resorted to violence. Unluckily, however, I was delayed: but as I knew that the Squire would probably make short work of you if you prove obstinate, I wired to him that I was coming on later, and that nothing was to be done to you until I arrived."

"Then you're the man these people call the 'Chief,' I suppose?" said Jack, remembering that the man who had brought the telegram into the vault had said that it was from the Chief.

"I am," said the stranger, inclining his head, "the Chief of the Order of the Ring!"

"The Order of the Ring!" said Jack. "What's that?"

"It is the most wonderful secret society that the world has ever seen," replied the Chief. "It was founded by myself six years ago, and is governed by a Council of Three. At the head of the council is myself, the Chief. The second in command is the Squire, and the third is the Doctor, whose acquaintance you have yet to make."

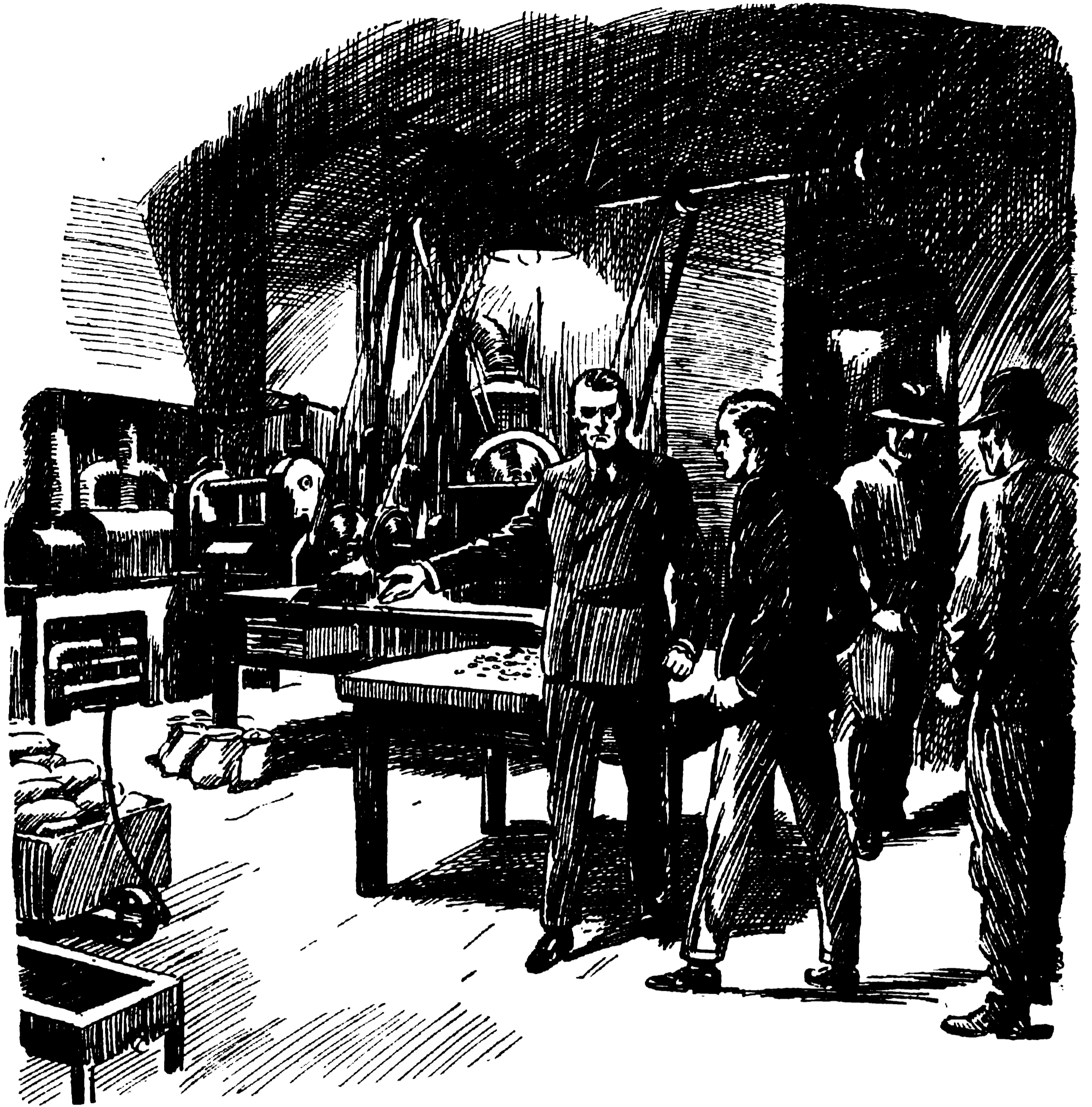
"And what are the objects of this wonderful Order?" asked Jack.

"£ s. d.," said the Chief, with a low, musical laugh.

"In other words," said Jack, "your precious Order of the Ring is nothing more nor less than a rascally gang of coiners?"

"Pardon me, it is very much more than that," said the Chief. "It is an up-to-date confederation for the execution of every kind of crime that pays. We organise and carry out extensive burglaries. We dabble in forgery, arson, and blackmail. We manufacture counterfeit in every variety and nationality of coinage, and we have an establishment in France for the turning out of spurious bonds and banknotes. If a person wishes to have another person removed, and is able and willing to pay our price, we undertake the removal for him. In short, as I said before, we perpetrate every kind of crime that pays, and we divide the plunder amongst ourselves in the form of quarterly dividends.

"The headquarters of the Order are in London, where the members meet to discuss their plans, and where most of our burglaries



Jack's bandages were whipped way from his eyes, and he found himself staring at an amazing collection of machinery. He was in the underground mint of the ruthless coiners. "Repair that machine," snarled the leader, "or you'll be shot!"

and so forth are arranged. This branch of the Order's business is entrusted to me—that is to say, I select the particular men for each particular job, and supervise their preparations. When a burglary has been committed, the plunder is brought to me, and if it consists of jewellery, or banknotes, or anything else which it would be unsafe to dispose of in this country, I take it abroad in a small steam-yacht belonging to the Order, and dispose of it on the Continent.

"My friend, the Squire has charge of the mint, which you have seen. I am only giving him his due when I say that he is one of the most skilful coiners in the world; but he has one great drawback, he knows little of electricity. So long as Sir Henry Porritt was alive this did not matter very much—"

"Sir Henry Porritt!" cried Jack—for the name was that of one of England's most

famous electrical engineers, who had died but a week ago. "Was he one of your members?"

"He was," said the Chief. "You appear to be surprised, but I could give you the names of a dozen other men quite as distinguished as the late Sir Henry Porritt, who have been members of the Order of the Ring since the date of its formation. But, to continue, so long as Sir Henry was alive, the Squire's ignorance of electricity did not matter very much. Last week, however, as you know, Sir Henry died, and two days later something went wrong with the electrical apparatus at the mint. What were we to do?"

"The Squire came to me to seek my advice. As I knew that you were one of the most brilliant electrical engineers of the day, I advised him to entice you down to the mint, to compel you to repair the machine which

had broken down, and then to offer you the choice between joining us or being shot. This he did; but I understand that he did not take the trouble to explain the matter as fully as I have done, and the consequence was that you were merely being invited to throw in your lot with an ordinary gang of coiners. Now that you know the truth, however, I have every hope that you will reconsider your decision."

"Never!" said Jack, in a firm, low voice. "What you have told me only strengthens me in my previous determination. A gang of coiners is bad enough, but a league of thieves and murderers is a thousand times worse. I know I am in your power, but nothing that you can ever say to me will ever persuade me to join in with you."

"I think you will," said the Chief, with a curious smile, "you are engaged to a certain Miss Ethel Anderson, I believe?"

"What has that to do with it?" demanded Jack.

"A great deal," said the Chief significantly. "Miss Anderson is an orphan, and an heiress. Sir Philip Anderson is her uncle. He is also her guardian, and if she should die before the age of twenty-one the whole of her fortune would go to Sir Philip. Isn't that right?"

"It is. But what has all this——"

"Pardon me," said the Chief, interrupting him. "Allow me to finish. The Order of the Ring owns a large and magnificent steam-yacht, which earns a lot of money for us by taking shiploads of invalids, or pleasure-seekers, on luxury cruises to various parts of the world. The captain and crew are members of the Order, and the Doctor, of whom I have already spoken, is the surgeon aboard.

"Every trip the Firefly makes there is one passenger at least who never returns. For instance, somebody pays the Order a certain sum of money to get rid of an enemy—and when they die at sea no one suspects foul play. So——"

**B**EFORE he had time to finish his speech Jack staggered to his feet, his face transfixed with horror.

"I see what you're driving at!" he exclaimed, in a choking voice. "Miss Anderson wrote to me last week, and told me her guardian had arranged for her to go for a three-months' cruise in the vessel you have named. D'you mean to tell me that Sir Philip Anderson has bribed you to murder her?"

"I am bound to tell you the truth," said the Chief calmly. "Sir Philip has paid us a thousand pounds, and in return for this we have pledged our word that Miss Anderson shall die and be buried at sea. The Firefly sails with Miss Anderson on board, at ten o'clock this morning. It is now two minutes to nine. Swear that you will join us, and I will write to the Doctor that Miss Anderson's life must be spared. Refuse, and she goes to her doom!"

Jack sank back into his chair and buried his face in his hands. So long as it had only been his own life which had been at stake it had been an easy matter for him to choose death in preference to dishonour. But now it was the life of the girl he loved which was trembling in the balance, and his lips refused to utter the words which he knew would seal her doom.

"Well, what is your answer" said the Chief, at last. "Will you join us, or must Miss Anderson die?"

He had scarcely finished speaking ere the clock on the mantelpiece struck nine. As its chimes fell on Jack's ears a thrill of fierce excitement shot through his frame. At half-past eight he had given his parole that for half an hour he would make no attempt to escape. The half hour was up! His promise no longer held good.

He raised his head and took stock of his surroundings. The table at which he was seated was a square one. At one end sat the young engineer, at the other sat the Chief. At the right-hand side of the table sat the Squire; at the left-hand side there was nobody. Behind the Chief was the door, and behind Jack was the fireplace. Behind the Squire were two French windows, screened with cotton blinds.

Having taken in these details, the young engineer rose slowly to his feet.

"You want to know if I will join you?" he said, speaking slowly and deliberately. "I will not—not even to save Miss Anderson's life!"

As he spoke he suddenly kicked away his chair and sprang towards the nearest window. So completely were the two men taken by surprise that for quite a second neither of them stirred. Then the Chief seized a heavy paper-weight and hurled it with all his might.

The missile struck Jack squarely on the temple, and with a moan he sank to the floor, his senses reeling.

## CHAPTER 4.

### The Sleeping Draught!

**J**ACK LONGFORD was not unconscious for long, but he remained in that stupor long enough for the Chief to summon a trusted man to stand over his prisoner who now lay on a couch, a revolver in his hand, ready for any emergency. As soon as he opened his eyes Jack realised that he had lost what chances of escape he had, and that the Chief was not running any further risks.

"It is no use asking you to reconsider your decision, I suppose?" said the Chief, addressing Jack. "You are still determined not to join us?"

"I am," said Jack firmly.

The Chief bowed and turned to the Squire.

"Have you the sleeping draught?" he asked.

"No," said the Squire. "I left it on the table in my room. Shall I fetch it?"

"Please," said the Chief. "It's nearly ten, so we haven't too much time."

The Squire accordingly left the room, and the Chief turned to Jack.

"Before I sentence you to death," he said, "I'm going to take you for a pleasant little trip across the Channel. I have already told you, I believe, that the Order of the Ring has an establishment in France for the manufacture of spurious banknotes. One of our employees there has invented an ingenious method of reproducing banknotes by means of electricity. At present, however, the process is far too costly and complicated to be of any practical use, so I'm going to take you over to France, in order that you may inspect the machine and give us the benefit of your advice."

"But I won't go!" said Jack stubbornly.

"Oh, yes you will!" said the Chief pleasantly. "You will doubtless remember that I told you that the Order owns a small steam yacht which is used for the purpose of conveying stolen property abroad. This vessel, which is named the Dolphin, is at present at Southampton. At seven o'clock to-night she will sail for Dieppe, and when she sails both you and I will be on board."

"Indeed?" said Jack sarcastically. "And how do you propose to convey me all the way from this house to Southampton?"

"By car, of course," said the Chief. "You will be given a sleeping draught in order to keep you quiet. At Southampton it will be easy to pass you off as a friend of mine joining me on a pleasure cruise, but who has been either taken ill, or been carousing—any tale will do."

"And what about passports?" asked Jack.

"There is nothing easier for the Order to provide than a forged passport, so that need not worry you," said the Chief. "We have a wonderful organisation and nothing is forgotten. I have 'phoned to my agent at Southampton who has already got into communication with captain of the Dolphin to have steam up by a quarter to seven. Money has been carefully arranged and provided for

"Except one thing!" said Jack. "Up to a certain point your arrangements are perfect; but you have overlooked the fact that even when you have succeeded in smuggling me over to France you will still be unable to compel me to do as you wish. Take me to France, by all means, if you wish, but nothing on earth will compel me to inspect your machine nor assist you in any way whatsoever!"

"Don't be too sure of that!" said the Chief significantly. "You may be sure that I haven't overlooked the possibility of you being obstinate, and I have a means of forcing your hand."

Before Jack had time to retort to this scarcely-veiled threat, the Squire re-entered the room. He had a small glass bottle in his hand, and was followed by four men.

"Here's your sleeping draught," he said, uncorking the bottle, and advancing to the

couch on which Jack lay. "Will you take it quietly, or must we treat you as an unruly child?"

Jack made no reply, but clenched his teeth, and regarded his captors with a look of unflinching defiance.

"Nip his nose!" said the Squire savagely.

The Chief obeyed, but for nearly a minute the young engineer resisted all their efforts to compel him to open his mouth. At the end of that time, however, the pangs of impending suffocation forced him to unclench his teeth, and in the twinkling of an eye the Squire thrust the neck of the bottle into his mouth and poured its contents down his throat.

## CHAPTER 5.

### Outwitted!

FOR fourteen hours Jack Longford lay in a deep and death-like stupor. Whilst he was in this condition he was taken to Southampton and conveyed on board the Dolphin which then put to sea. He was placed in a bunk in the chief mate's cabin, and that officer was told off to keep watch on him.

The Chief of the Order had not stopped at that act. For all his brutal talk his real design was not to kill his prisoner, even after he had inspected the machine in France. The Chief's one ambition was to force Jack to join the Order. The young engineer had resisted all his threats, even the threat to kill Ethel Anderson, and such obstinacy and fearlessness stirred the Chief to action. He vowed that, come what may, he would beat Jack Longford into submission and not admit his own defeat by killing him.

He thought he saw a way of doing this. He got into communication with the doctor aboard the Firefly, ordering him to meet the Dolphin at a certain spot in mid-Channel, and Miss Anderson was to be taken aboard the latter yacht.

When that had been done the Chief thought he would be able to force Jack to his wishes by letting him see Miss Anderson in the power of the Order, and by making a show of torturing the girl should the young engineer still prove obstinate.

Of all this, of course, Jack knew nothing whatever. Shortly after midnight he began to show signs of returning consciousness, and a few minutes later he opened his eyes. No sooner had he done so than the mate, who was sitting by the side of the bunk, sprang to his feet and thrust a revolver into his face.

"Lie still!" he growled.

Jack stared at the man and took mental stock of him. Now that he had recovered the use of his limbs he was firmly resolved to make another attempt to escape from his captor's clutches, even if he had to jump overboard and risk drowning.

"All right, I understand," he said. "I'm not to sit up, and I'm not to raise my hands. May I talk?"

"Oh, yes; you can jaw as much as you like!" said the mate, still covering him with the revolver.

"Then would you mind telling me where I am?" asked Jack.

"You're aboard the Dolphin, of course," said the mate.

"Are the Squire and the Chief aboard?"

"The Squire isn't, but the Chief is."

"Then would you mind asking him if I could have a drink? That beastly stuff the Squire gave me has made me as dry as a lime-kiln."

"Oh, you don't get me out of this cabin that way!" laughed the mate. "And there's no need to worry the Chief. I'll give you a drink with all the pleasure in the world. But, remember, you're not to sit up and you're not to raise your hands. I've got a flask here, and I'll hold it to your lips. We're taking no risks with you!"

Without waiting for Jack's reply, he dived into one of his pockets, and pulled out a flask. Still keeping his revolver on a level with Jack's head, he unscrewed the stopper with his teeth, and applied the flask to the prisoner's lips.

After swallowing a couple of mouthfuls, the young engineer pretended to be seized with a violent fit of coughing. For nearly half a minute he lay on his back, coughing, spluttering, and gasping for breath. Then he suddenly thrust one hand from under the clothes and frantically pointed to his collar.

Suspecting nothing, the mate bent down to unfasten it, and in the twinkling of an eye Jack snatched the revolver out of his hand and hurled it across the cabin. The next instant, before the mate had time to draw back, he flung up his arms and fastened his hands in a vice-like grip on the scoundrel's throat.

**T**HE mate made a wild but fruitless attempt to wrench himself free; then he doubled his fists and dashed them in Jack's face with all the strength he possessed. Again and again he repeated this performance, but the young engineer neither flinched nor relaxed his grip. And at last, finding that he could not shake his assailant off, the mate put forth a superhuman effort and dragged him out of the bunk.

A terrific struggle ensued on the cabin floor. At the end of two minutes the mate began to show signs of impending strangulation. For a little while longer he continued to struggle; but his blows grew gradually feebler and feebler, and at last, after a final and abortive effort to tear Jack's hands from his throat, a convulsive shudder passed through his frame, his limbs grew suddenly stiff and still, and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

Quivering with excitement, Jack leaped to his feet, and secured the mate's revolver. Having taken off his boots, he glided across

to the cabin door and stealthily opened it. He then discovered that the cabin in which he stood was situated at the end of a dimly-lighted alley-way, which led to the Dolphin's quarter deck. Both the alley-way and the quarter deck were deserted; but on each side of the alley-way were three or four cabin doors, and one of these was suddenly opened and the Chief appeared on the threshold.

For one brief instant Jack hesitated how to act; then he raised his revolver and fired. At least, he tried to fire; but the moment he pressed the trigger he found that the mate had been bluffing him, for the revolver had never been loaded, and the only result of his action was a sharp, metallic click.

Seeing this, the Chief gave vent to a mocking laugh, and whipped out his own revolver. Before he could fire, however, Jack flung the useless weapon into his face, and then, like an arrow from a bow, he darted down the alleyway, seized his opponent round the waist, and with one prodigious effort hurled him back into his cabin.

By this time the uproar in the alleyway had attracted the attention of the watch on deck, and when Jack dashed out on to the quarter deck he found his progress barred by the second mate and four of the Dolphin's crew. Nothing daunted, he charged into the midst of them, scattering them, and rushed to the rail.

In the meantime, the Chief had scrambled to his feet again, and had picked up his fallen revolver. He rushed out on to the quarter deck in time to see Jack making a rush for the vessel's side, and quick as thought he levelled his weapon and fired. The shot rang out as the young engineer was clambering over the taffrail, and the next instant, with a wailing cry, he flung up his arms and pitched headforemost into the sea.

Revolver in hand, the Chief rushed aft, and peered into the inky void astern. For a second or two a dark and shapeless object was discernible bobbing up and down in the tumbling foam of the Dolphin's wake. Then the hungry waves closed over it, and it vanished from his view.

## CHAPTER 6.

### All in Vain!

**D**AY was breaking, and the grey light of a wintry dawn was creeping across the heaving bosom of the Channel. Most of the Firefly's passengers were still asleep in their bunks, but one of them, an elderly, white-haired man, with stooping shoulders and wrinkled face, was already on deck, and was leaning over the taffrail, lost in thought.

He gazed at the rippling wavelets racing past the vessel's side, as though he were trying to find in them an answer to the problems that filled his busy mind. Then he suddenly became aware that he was not

alone, and on turning round he found himself confronted by the Doctor.

"Good-morning!" said the Doctor, with a pleasant smile.

"Good-morning!" said the old gentleman. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Dr. Sholto?"

"You have," replied the Doctor. "And whom have I the honour of addressing?"

"My name is Grundy," said the old man. "Mr. Theophilus Grundy."

"Ah, then you are the gentleman who wrote to the purser and insisted upon having the cabin next to mine?" said the Doctor.

"I am," said Mr. Grundy. "You see, I'm rather nervous about myself, for I'm subject to sudden and violent attacks of heart disease,

and I thought I had better be as near the Doctor as possible in case I happened to be taken bad in the middle of the night."

"Quite right," said the doctor approvingly. "I hope, however, that you won't—"

Before he had time to finish his sentence Mr. Grundy suddenly clutched his arm with a grip that was remarkably strong for one so old and stricken with disease.

"Look! Did you see that?" he cried excitedly, pointing out to sea. "It's gone now—no!—there it is again! A man's head, about two ships' lengths away!"

"By Jove—yes. I see it!" said the Doctor.

"It's some poor fellow, no doubt, who's been washed overboard and drowned, and whose body has risen!"

"No, he's alive!" cried both men simultaneously, for at that moment a hand was raised above the head, and a sea-soaked pocket handkerchief was feebly fluttering to and fro.

"Man overboard!" yelled Mr. Grundy, in a wonderfully lusty voice.

And the words had scarcely crossed his lips before the man on the look-out saw the fluttering handkerchief, and sang out the news to the officer on the bridge.

In a moment all was bustle and excitement. The Firefly's engines were promptly reversed, and as soon as the vessel had been brought to a standstill a boat was lowered. A moment or two later, alarmed by the sudden stoppage of the engines, a crowd of passengers rushed on deck, some of them only partly dressed. The latter went back to their cabins again when they found there was no danger, but the rest remained to witness the work of rescue.

Amongst those who remained on deck was Ethel Anderson. With straining eyes she watched the boat draw near to the all but exhausted swimmer. She saw him stretch out his hands and grasp the gunwale of the boat. She saw two of the seamen lay down their oars and raise him in their arms. She saw them haul him into the boat; then, all of a sudden, her beautiful face turned deathly pale, and a startled cry burst from her lips.

Mr. Grundy, who seemed to have ears and eyes for everything, hurried towards her, and offered her his arm.

"You're ill," he said, in sympathetic tones. "The excitement has been too much for you. Permit me to escort you to your cabin."

"No, thank you; I would rather remain on deck," said Ethel, whose eyes were fixed in an agonised stare on the rapidly approaching boat. "I feel sure that the man whom they have just rescued is a friend of mine."

The Doctor, who was standing close at hand, heard the words, and moved swiftly to her side.

"What's that?" he demanded, in a hoarse, excited voice. "Did I hear you say that man in the boat was a friend of yours?"

"Yes," said Ethel. "I just caught a glimpse of his face as they were lifting him into the boat, and I'm almost sure that it's Mr. John Longford, the well-known electrical engineer."

The Doctor almost staggered back as though he had been struck. Then he rushed up on to the bridge, where the captain was examining the boat through his glasses.

"What's to be done?" he gasped. "That man they've picked up is Jack Longford! He's evidently given the Chief the slip and made his escape from the Dolphin by leaping overboard. He knows all about the Order of the Ring, and all about the Firefly; and as soon as they bring him aboard he'll blurt out all he knows, and we'll all be ruined!"

"Rot!" said the captain calmly. "He'll never know that this is the Firefly unless you tell him. Take him to a cabin and keep him there, and—"

"But he will know," said the Doctor despairingly. "As soon as he sees Miss Anderson—"

"Then you mustn't let him see her." "How can I prevent it? She has already recognised him, and the moment they haul him on board she'll be in his arms!"



*Nelson Lee, Alone And Unaided,  
Sets Out On*

**"THE PERIL TRAIL!"**

The famous detective has broken the infamous Order of the Ring, but its leaders are still at large, and whilst this state of affairs prevails the menace of the Plunderers is constantly over-shadowing society.

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**"THE PERIL TRAIL!"**

**DON'T MISS IT!**



The captain stroked his beard and pondered for a moment or two.

"Then I'll tell you what you must do," he said. "You must be ready to receive him the instant he steps on board, and you must give him something which will stupefy him before he has time to open his mouth."

A gleam of hope sprang into the Doctor's eyes.

"That's not half a bad idea," he said. "It will be somewhat risky, with all these people looking on, but, so far as I can see, it's the only thing I can do."

He hastened down from the bridge and retired to his cabin, where he quickly prepared a powerful sleeping draught. By the time he turned on deck the boat had reached the Firefly's side, and a few minutes later, more dead than alive, Jack Longford was skilfully hoisted aboard and laid on a rug at the Doctor's feet.

"Quick! Swallow this!" said the Doctor, stooping down and thrusting a tumbler into his hand.

Jack raised the tumbler to his lips, but at the same instant his eyes fell on Ethel Anderson, who was hurrying towards him, and in the twinkling of an eye he dropped the glass and staggered wildly to his feet.

"Ethel! You here!" he gasped in tones of mingled horror and despair. "Then am I—am I on board the Firefly—the murder ship that belongs—that belongs——"

The sentence ended in an inarticulate moan. Exhausted by his long immersion in the sea, weakened by loss of blood, crushed by the discovery that he had fallen once more into the clutches of his foes, he sank back into the Doctor's arms and fainted.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Nelson Lee Detective!

"**H**E'S dead!" cried Ethel Anderson in an anguished voice.

"Not at all," said the Doctor brusquely. "He's only fainted. The shock of seeing you was evidently too much for him in his present feeble condition. We must get him to bed at once and give him something to revive him."

He beckoned to two of the Firefly's crew. "Carry Mr. Longford to my cabin," he said. "I'll follow you down in a moment or two."

As soon as he uttered these words Mr. Grundy, who had been an interested spectator of the whole scene, quietly slipped away and hurried to his cabin. From one of his suitcases he took out a gimlet, and quietly bored a hole in the wooden partition which divided his own cabin from that of the Doctor. Then he glued his eyes to the hole, and waited to see what would happen.

In the meantime the Doctor was explaining to the passengers that Jack's wild and incoherent speech—his reference to the Firefly as a murder ship—was due to the fact that his sufferings had affected his brain and

rendered him delirious. Most of his listeners were perfectly satisfied with this explanation; but one or two began to smell a rat, and although they were far from suspecting the whole of the truth, they were none the less convinced that there was more truth in Jack Longford's words than the Doctor was willing to admit.

As soon as the Doctor entered the cabin he saw that Jack was on the point of recovering from his swoon.

"He seems to be coming round again, sir," said one of the men who had carried him down.

"So I see," said the Doctor curtly. "I'll attend to him. You can leave us, now."

The two men retired and closed the cabin door. The Doctor then walked over to a locker and took out a small glass syringe, such as doctors use for injecting drugs beneath the skin. Having charged this syringe with a liberal dose of morphia, he glided up to the bunk in which Jack lay; but just as he was about to plunge the needle of the syringe into his victim's arm, the door was suddenly flung open, and Mr. Theophilus Grundy burst in.

"Doctor, Doctor, I'm dying!" he gasped, pressing his hands to the region of his heart and writhing in apparent agony. "I've just been seized with one of my old attacks, the worst I've ever had. For Heaven's sake give me something to relieve this awful pain, or else——"

His voice died away in a choking sob, he swayed to and fro like a drunken man, then he stumbled forward, as though he were going to fall.

The Doctor darted forward and caught him in his arms, but no sooner had he done so than the old man suddenly seized him by the throat, tripped him up and seated himself on his chest. He drew his revolver.

"Not a sound, as you value your life!" he hissed.

Shivering with fright, the Doctor meekly obeyed, and in the twinkling of an eye the old man whipped out his handkerchief, rolled it into a ball and crammed it into his mouth.

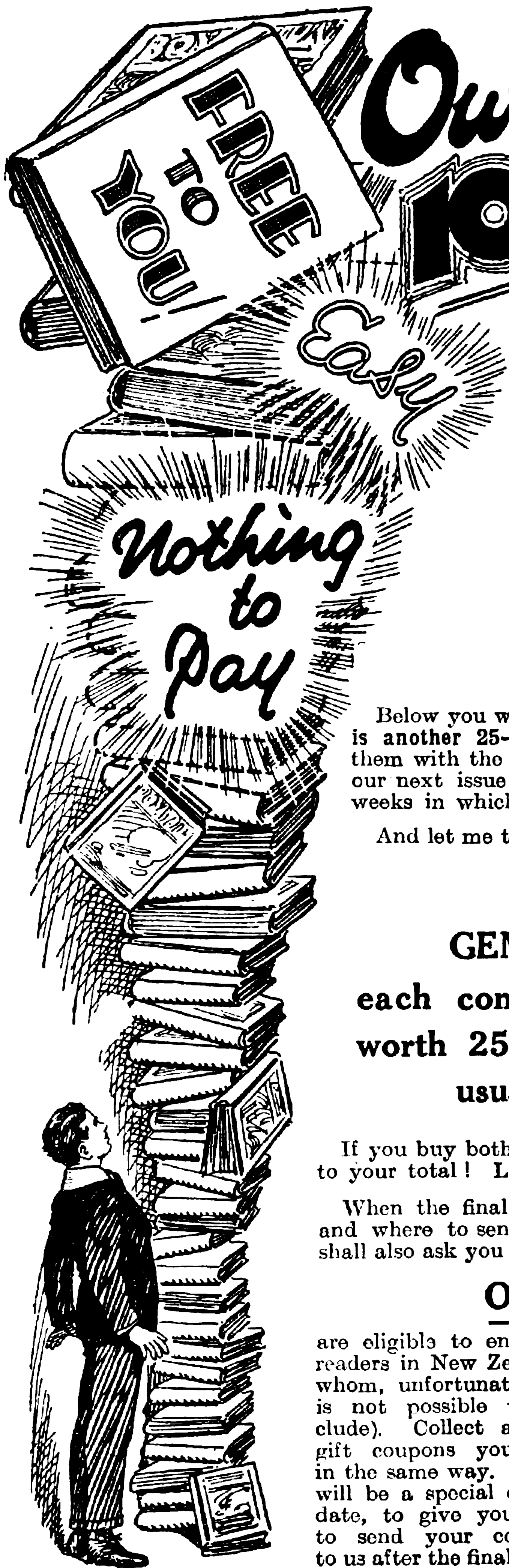
"And now, if you please, I'll trouble you to roll over on your face," he said, springing lightly to his feet and producing a pair of handcuffs.

When the Doctor had complied with this request he handcuffed his hands behind his back and bound his legs together with his necktie. Then he closed and locked the cabin door and turned to Jack, who was sitting up in the bunk, staring at the scene before him in mingled surprise and bewilderment.

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Longford," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm merely going to ask you a question or two, and then, if your answers confirm my suspicions, I'm going on deck to denounce this scoundrel to our fellow-passengers."

"Who—who are you?" stammered Jack. By way of reply the old man suddenly straightened himself, pulled off his wig and

(Continued on page 14.)



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to divine his intention, the detective ched out his hand, caught hold of the ain's ankles, and jerked him off his feet. the captain went down his revolver from his grasp, and his head struck the with so much force that he lay for a ment dazed. The detective accordingly ed him by the collar of his coat, with object of dragging him into the cabin;

beard and rubbed his wrinkled face with the sleeve of his coat.

"Why, it's Nelson Lee!" cried Jack, who had once been of service to the famous detective, and had given him expert advice on a technical point in a certain case.

"At your service," said the great detective, with a bow and a grim smile.

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Detective's Plan!

FOR a moment or two amazement held Jack spellbound, then he rubbed his eyes and pinched himself to make sure that he was awake.

"Well, I'm blest!" he managed to ejaculate at last. "Fancy meeting you on board the Firefly! I don't understand it! How did you get here, and why did you come?"

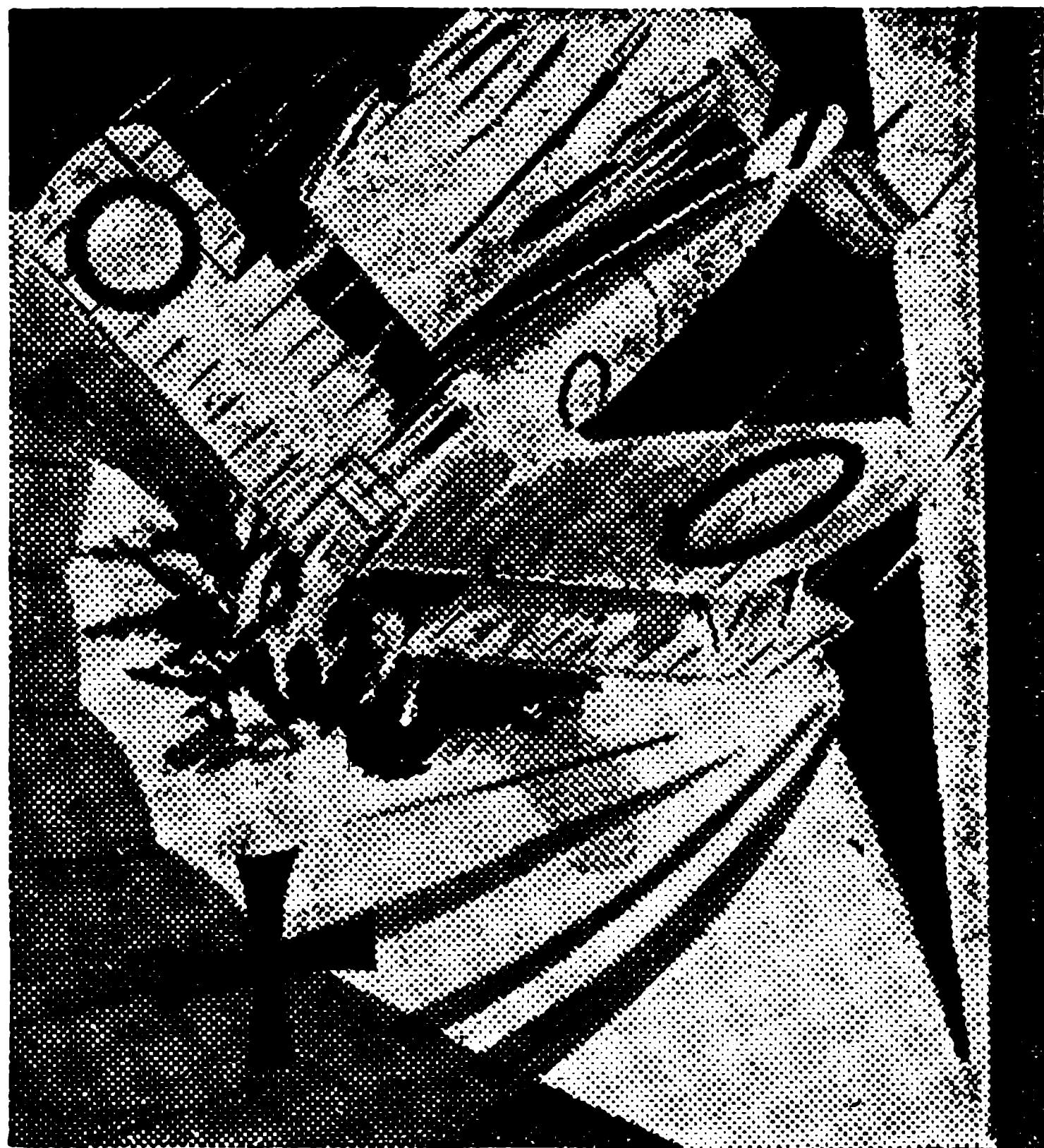
"Before I can answer your question," said Nelson Lee. "I must first try to explain that

for some time past the suspicion has been deepening in my mind that most of the undetected crimes of recent years have been the work of a skilfully organised secret society. It would take too long to tell you all the facts which have led me to this conclusion, but I am absolutely certain that a secret society is at work in our midst, and that the Doctor, here—this scoundrel on the floor—is one of its members.

"Six months ago I decided to devote myself to the task of unmasking this infamous society and bringing its members to justice. Nipper, whom you have met before, was of great service to me in my search for some clue which would enable me to tear aside the veil of mystery in which this villainous organisation it enshrouded. Even then, at the end of six months, it was precious little I really knew.

"As a last resort I determined to take a trip on board the Firefly in order that I might be able to keep the Doctor under constant observation for a week or two. Needless

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divided his own cabin from that of the Doctor. Then he glued his eyes to the hole and waited to see what would happen.

In the meantime the Doctor was explaining to the passengers that Jack's wild and incoherent speech—his reference to the Firefly as a murder ship—was due to the fact that his sufferings had affected his brain and

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to say, I had no desire to put the scoundrel on his guard, so I disguised myself as an old man, and booked my passage in the name of Theophilus Grundy. Nipper was very keen on coming with me, but I refused, as the risks are too great even for him. Besides, he has been away from St. Frank's often enough, and had to go back to his books, much to his disgust.

"It was I who first caught sight of you this morning, but it was Miss Anderson who recognised you and told us who you were. As soon as the Doctor heard your name he was seized with uncontrollable agitation, and immediately rushed away to consult the captain. Since then he has made two attempts to dose you with morphia; in fact, his whole behaviour since you came aboard points to the fact that he is desperately anxious to prevent you telling your story to the passengers.

"Why is this? What is the Doctor afraid of? Why does he wish to muzzle you? Is it possible that you are in possession of some information which he does not wish you to reveal—some information which would prove that he is a member of the society to which I have alluded?"

"That's it," cried Jack. "I know—and the Doctor knows that I know—all about the secret society to which you have referred."

"By James! You're the very man I've been looking for. Tell me, quickly, all you know."

In response to this request Jack briefly recounted his adventures from the moment when he was kidnapped by the Squire to the moment when he escaped from the Dolphin.

"The Chief fired at me just as I was in the act of leaping overboard," he said. "His bullet merely drilled a hole through the fleshy part of my arm; but, in order to make him think that I was mortally wounded, I uttered a yell and made no attempt to swim until I was out of sight. My ruse succeeded perfectly, for he evidently thought that he had done for me, and didn't even lower a boat to make sure that I was dead."

"The rest you can guess for yourself," Jack went on. "Partly by swimming and partly by floating on my back, I contrived to keep myself afloat until daybreak, when the Firefly picked me up. And this is my reward! Instead of escaping I have merely blundered back into their power again, and all my labour has been in vain."

"Cheer up," said Nelson Lee encouragingly. "You're in a tighter fix than I'd bargained for; but, with decent luck, we ought to be able to cheat these villains even yet."

Jack shook his head.

"What can we do?" he asked despairingly. "You spoke just now of going on deck and denouncing the Doctor to the passengers. Suppose you do. Suppose you tell them everything that I have told you—what can they do?"

"Nothing," admitted Nelson Lee. "When I spoke of denouncing the Doctor to the passengers, I was not aware that all the crew were members of the Order of the Ring. I suspected that the Doctor was, and possibly the captain, but I never dreamed that all the crew were members, too. Seeing that the crew, which is large for a boat of this tonnage, would outnumber the passengers, it would clearly be madness to think of trying to overpower them and compelling them to sail the vessel to the nearest port."

"Then what can we do?" asked Jack again.

Rat-a-tat!

A loud and peremptory knock at the cabin door drove all the colour from Nelson Lee's cheeks. For an instant he hesitated to act; then he pulled himself together and signed to Jack to lie perfectly still.

"Who's there?" he asked, mimicking the Doctor's voice.

"Me!" said the voice of the captain.

"Open the door; I've some news for you."

The detective turned to Jack, who was looking pale with anxiety.

"There's hope yet," he whispered hastily. "He doesn't know there's anybody here except yourself and the Doctor, so that if I suddenly open the door and pounce upon him unawares I may be able to drag him into the cabin before he can give the alarm. Here, you take my revolver. Guns make too much noise. I'm going to use my hands for this job."

He took off his coat and stole on tiptoe to the cabin door.

In the meantime, however, the Doctor <sup>had</sup> contrived, by the skilful use of his tongue and teeth, to remove the pocket handkerchief Nelson Lee had crammed into his mouth; and just as the detective was about to turn the key the Doctor yelled at the top of his voice:

"Look out! It's Nelson Lee!"

After that, of course, there was not much chance of taking the captain unawares.

Nevertheless, the detective determined to make the attempt, and with lightning rapidity he turned the key and flung the door wide open. Even as he did so, however, the captain made a backward spring, and whipped out his revolver.

"Back! Back into the cabin, or I fire!" he cried, levelling his weapon at Nelson Lee's head.

Undaunted by this threat, the detective darted forward. True to his word, the captain promptly fired, but at the same instant the detective dropped on his hands and knees, and the bullet flew harmlessly over his head.

The next moment, before the captain had time to divine his intention, the detective stretched out his hand, caught hold of the captain's ankles, and jerked him off his feet.

As the captain went down his revolver flew from his grasp, and his head struck the floor with so much force that he lay for a moment dazed. The detective accordingly seized him by the collar of his coat, with the object of dragging him into the cabin;

but in the meantime the sound of firing had alarmed the crew, and almost before the echoes of the shot had died away the second mate came tearing down the alleyway at breakneck speed.

Quick as thought the detective loosed his hold on the captain's coat and darted towards the spot where the fallen revolver lay. By that time, however, the captain had partly recovered from the shock of his fall, and the moment Nelson Lee relaxed his grip the wily scoundrel thrust out his leg and and tripped up the detective.

Before Nelson Lee could regain his feet the mate dashed up and flung himself on top of him, and in a moment the detective was lying on his stomach on the floor, and the mate was sitting astride his back, with both hands firmly clenched around his throat.

"Who is he, and what's he done?" panted the mate excitedly.

"It's Nelson Lee, the detective!" said the captain, scrambling to his feet in feverish haste. "He's overpowered the Doctor and bound him hand and foot!"

"Then what are you going to do with him?" asked the mate.

"Put a bullet through his head, of course!" replied the captain savagely.

He picked up his revolver. In the meantime, Jack Longford had contrived to scramble out of his bunk and to crawl across the cabin on his hands and knees. He had Nelson Lee's revolver in his hand, and the moment he reached the door he levelled the weapon and fired.

The bullet lodged in the calf of the captain's leg, and caused him to pitch forward on his face with a shriek. The mate turned round to see who had fired, and in the twinkling of an eye the detective skilfully unseated him, sprang to his feet, and jumped back into the cabin.

Just then a crowd of seamen burst into view at the end of the alleyway. One glance sufficed to show them what was happening, and with a chorus of infuriated yells, they came charging on. As they came to the door of the cabin Lee slammed the door in their faces, and rapidly turned the key in the lock.

An instant later the crowd outside came thundering up, and hurled themselves in a human avalanche against the door. For a second or two the cabin echoed with the din of their kicks and blows; then Nelson Lee stooped down and placed his mouth to the keyhole.

"Listen to me!" he yelled, at the top of his voice. "The Doctor is here and is absolutely at our mercy. Mr. Longford is standing over him with a revolver in his hand, and the moment this door bursts open the Doctor gets a bullet through his brain!"

The uproar ceased as if by magic. The threat had succeeded. By straining his ears the detective caught the murmuring hum of a whispered consultation, which was presently succeeded by the muffled tramp of departing footsteps. Fainter and fainter grew those

footsteps in the distance, till at last they died away.

## CHAPTER 9.

### Nelson Lee a Prisoner!

"HAVE they gone?" asked Jack, in a subdued whisper.

"Most of them," said Nelson Lee, after listening intently at the keyhole. "They would like us to think that they've all gone, no doubt, but I can distinctly hear the breathing of at least three men on the other side of this door. But now that we have gained a moment's breathing space I must thank you for saving my life. If you hadn't interfered when you did I shouldn't be alive now. It was magnificent!"

"It was nothing more than anyone would have done," said Jack, modestly. "I wish I could have been of more use!"

At that moment the silence was rent by a deafening volley of revolver shots, which appeared to proceed from the maindeck of the steamer. The next instant a perfect pandemonium of shrieks and groans was heard, mingled with which they heard the captain's voice roaring out some indistinguishable order to the crew. Then, high above the shrieks and groans, a woman's piercing scream rang out, followed by a rush of feet, and another volley of revolver shots.

"It is what I feared!" exclaimed Nelson Lee grimly, pacing to and fro, worried by his utter helplessness. "Here I am, cooped up here, and can do nothing, while those fiends are either murdering all the passengers or driving them below like so many sheep. Let's hope the captain is too much of a coward to butcher them!"

In this hope the detective had summed up the captain fairly accurately. Shortly after Jack was taken below—in fact, at the very moment that Nelson Lee and the Doctor were struggling on the cabin floor—the man on the look-out reported to the captain that the Dolphin was in sight, and that the Chief was signalling to the Firefly that he wanted to come aboard. The captain thereupon gave orders for the Firefly's course to be altered, and then he hurried below in order to inform the Doctor that the Dolphin had been sighted.

After that had come the fight in the alleyway, leaving Nelson Lee, Jack and the Doctor locked in the cabin, and three men placed on guard outside, while the mate prepared a charge of dynamite, by means of which the door should be suddenly blown open, and the detective overpowered before he had time to carry out his threat of killing the Doctor. The captain's wound, which was not a serious one, was then bound up, and he limped on deck.

By that time the passengers had become thoroughly alarmed, and as soon as the captain arrived on deck he was surrounded by an excited crowd of men and women, who insisted upon knowing what had happened.

He tried to put them off with evasive answers, but the more he shuffled the more they grew convinced that there had been foul play. Some of them—Ethel Anderson amongst them—demanded that they should be allowed to see Jack Longford, in order to satisfy themselves that he was safe. When the captain refused, the passengers broke out into open revolt, accused him to his face of being a murderer, and demanded to be taken ashore without any further delay.

"It isn't your fault. It's the fault of that cursed Nelson Lee!"

The captain scowled and bared his teeth in a venomous snarl.

"I'll flay him alive when I get hold of him!" he hissed. "Is the dynamite ready?"

"Yes," said the mate.

"Then the sooner we set to work the better," said the captain, glancing towards the Dolphin, which was now but a mile and a half away. "The Chief will be here in



**With a desperate rush, Jack Longford reached the side of the crook's ship. Too late! Even as he clambered over the rail, a shot rang out, and the young inventor gave one piercing cry and fell headlong into the sea!**

This, of course, brought matters to a crisis. The captain summoned the crew, and ordered them to draw their revolvers. One of the hatches leading into the steamer's hold was then removed, and the passengers ordered to descend. By way of hastening their movements, the captain ordered the crew to fire a volley over their heads, and when this had been done he commanded Ethel Anderson to be seized and carried to his cabin, there to await the arrival of the Chief.

Then the captain turned to the mate.

"This is a bad business—a very bad business," he said, shaking his head. "There'll be the deuce of a row when the Chief arrives, but I don't see that I could have acted differently."

"Of course you couldn't!" said the mate.

twenty minutes or so, and before he arrives we must manage by hook or by crook, to liberate the Doctor and secure Nelson Lee."

"Come along, then," said the mate. "Everything's ready!"

In the meantime, Nelson Lee was pacing to and fro in the Doctor's cabin. The thought of his helplessness stifled him, and by-and-by he staggered across to the porthole, for the purpose of opening it and admitting a breath of fresh air. As he did so, his eyes fell on the Dolphin, which was the only vessel in sight. He did not know, of course, that it was the Dolphin, and he turned to Jack with a gesture of impotent despair.

"Look there!" he said. "There's a vessel close at hand—not more than a mile and a half away. If I could only discover some

way of escape from this cabin, it would be the easiest thing in the world to leap overboard and swim to this vessel in search of help!"

"You couldn't enlarge the porthole, I suppose?" suggested Jack.

The detective shook his head.

"Impossible," he said. "The only possible chance would be if there happened to exist a secret door or a sliding panel."

As he uttered these words the Doctor gave a slight and imperceptible start. Slight as it was, the detective noted it, and instantly checked himself.

"Give me that revolver!" he said.

He snatched the revolver from Jack's hand, and thrust it into the Doctor's face.

"There is a secret door!" he said, in tones of profound conviction. "Your eyes betray you! Where is it? Quick—answer me!"

"There's a trap-door under the rug on which you're kneeling!" whimpered the Doctor, shivering with terror.

"Where does it lead to?"

"To the lower hold."

"If I let myself down into the hold, can I find any way of getting on deck and leaping overboard?"

"I don't know," replied the Doctor. "I swear I don't know—but there may be a way, all the same."

Quick as thought the detective handed the revolver back to Jack, and whisked away the rug on which he had been kneeling. A small trapdoor was then revealed, which Nelson Lee, with trembling fingers, promptly raised.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed, turned to Jack, and speaking in a low, excited whisper. "There's a rope ladder fastened to the under surface of the door, which apparently leads right down into the hold. I'm going to descend and explore. Keep that revolver to the Doctor's head, and if anybody attempts to tamper with the cabin door you know what to do."

Without waiting for Jack's reply he placed his feet on the uppermost rungs of the ladder, and commenced to descend. Just as he reached the bottom he was startled by a deafening report, accompanied by a blinding blaze of light, and in the twinkling of an eye he grasped the fact that the cabin door had been burst open by the aid of dynamite.

Quivering with excitement, he started to swarm up the ladder again; but long before he reached the top, the crew rushed into the cabin, and secured Jack, who had been hurled to the ground by the force of the explosion. An instant later the captain thrust his revolver through the open trapdoor and fired at random into the darkness. The detective saw the gleam of the revolver, and sprang off the ladder in the nick of time. By doing so he undoubtedly saved his life, but the consequence of his action was an ugly fall to the bottom of the hold, which momentarily stunned him.

And before he had time to collect his scattered wits the ladder was hauled up into the cabin and the trapdoor closed with an ominous bang! He was trapped!

## CHAPTER 10.

### Doomed!

A QUARTER of an hour later the Dolphin hove to, a boat dropped from davits to the water, and the Chief was rowed across to the Firefly. He knew nothing, of course, of the rescue of Jack Longford, or of Nelson Lee's attempt to overpower the captain and the Doctor. From the Dolphin's deck, however, he had witnessed through his glasses, the short, sharp fight which had taken place between the passengers and the crew, and his face, as he stepped on board the Firefly was a curious study of mingled excitement and anxiety.

"What's happened?" he demanded, ignoring the captain's salute, and confronting the Doctor.

"You may well ask that!" said the Doctor bitterly. "This is the blackest day in all our history. For the first time since the Order of the Ring was founded, we have met with a serious check. The secret of the Firefly is a secret no longer. Every passenger on board is aware of the purpose for which she is used, and if you'd been here a little while ago you would have heard them clamouring to be put ashore in order that they might denounce us to the police."

The Chief turned pale, then a spasm of rage convulsed his face, and he whipped out his revolver.

"And who is responsible for this?" he cried, glaring round at the assembled crew with an air of tigerish ferocity. "Show me the traitor who has given us away, and——"

"Nobody has given us away," said the Doctor, interrupting him. "It isn't a case of treachery, but of downright carelessness."

"On whose part?" demanded the Chief.

"On yours, I suppose," said the Doctor quietly. "All this trouble has arisen through your carelessness in allowing Jack Longford to escape."

The Chief staggered back as though he had been struck.

"In allowing Jack Longford to escape!" he gasped. "What d'you mean? Jack Longford didn't escape. He tried to, but I shot him—shot him dead, just as he was in the act of leaping overboard."

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Come with me," he said.

He led the Chief to his cabin.

"If you shot Jack Longford, who is that?" he asked, pointing to the young engineer, who was lying in the bunk bound and helpless, with two of the crew mounting guard beside him.

The Chief gave vent to a startled oath, and favoured Jack with a scowl of malignant vindictiveness.

"Curse him! He's more lives than a cat!" he hissed. "How and when did he come aboard the Firefly?"

In answer to this question the Doctor rapidly narrated all that had happened from the moment Nelson Lee first sighted Jack was the moment when the crew burst into the cabin, secured Jack and imprisoned the detective in the lower hold.

"You may leave us now," the Chief said, signing to the men. "The Doctor and I will take care of Mr. Longford."

The men saluted and silently withdrew. The Chief then turned to the Doctor.

"This a bad business, Doctor, a very bad business," he said.

"It is," admitted the Doctor. "Still, it's not so bad but it might have been worse. We may not have been able to prevent the passengers learning our secret, but we haven't let any of them escape to tell the news to the outside world."

"True," said the Chief. "That is certainly something to be thankful for. But what are you going to do with these self-same passengers? You daren't set them free and allow them to return to their homes, for the first thing they would do would be to denounce us to the police. On the other hand, you can hardly keep them in captivity for the rest of their lives. It seems to me that the Firefly must be sent to the bottom of the sea with every soul aboard her—passengers, officers, doctor and crew!"

The Doctor laughed uneasily.

"If it's all the same to you," he said, "I'd rather not go to the bottom just yet."

"What I mean is, the public must be made to believe that you've gone down with the ship."

"Ah!" The Doctor heaved a sigh of relief. "If it's only to be make-believe," he said, "I've no objection. What is your plan?"

"First of all," said the Chief, "I should like to be sure that I've understood you rightly. Nelson Lee is in the lower hold?"

"Yes."

"There's no possibility of him escaping, I suppose?"

"None whatever."

"Miss Anderson is in the captain's cabin?"

"Yes."

"And the rest of the passengers are in the upper hold?"

"Yes."

"Is there any fear of them breaking out if they're left to themselves for an hour or so?"

"Not the slightest."

"Very well then," said the Chief, rising to his feet. "I will now return to the Dolphin. I will take Jack Longford and Miss Anderson with me."

"What's the good?" interrupted the Doctor. "You'll never make him join us,

so why not leave him here to perish along with the rest?"

"That is my affair," said the Chief coldly. "I've sworn to make him join our ranks, and no man living ever knew me to draw back from an object upon which I had set my mind."

"All right," said the Doctor, shrugging his shoulders. "Have it your own way. You'll take Jack Longford and Miss Anderson with you? What next?"

"I have a bomb fitted with a time-fuse aboard the Dolphin," continued the Chief. "It can be set as you wish to explode at any time required, and is quite capable of blowing the Firefly to smithereens. If you'll let one of your men come with me I'll give him this timed bomb, and also half a dozen nitro-glycerine bombs. I'll then steam away in a westerly direction and the Firefly must follow suit and keep the Dolphin in sight until it is dark.

"As soon as I think it is dark enough for our purpose I'll hoist a green light at the Dolphin's mast-head. When you see this light you must damp down your fires and blow off steam. Having brought the Firefly to a standstill, you must muster the crew and order them to lower the boats. While they are doing this you must place the timed bomb on the engine-room floor and arrange the other bombs in a circle round it. You must then return on deck and order the crew to get into the boats. When everybody but yourself is in the boats you must run down into the engine-room again and set the time-fuse on the largest bomb working. After that you will have to take your place in one of the boats and row to the Dolphin as hard as you can.

"I'll set the time-fuse on that bomb for forty-five minutes. That will give you time to reach the Dolphin to come aboard us and for us to steam off out of harm's way. At the end of those forty-five minutes the time-fuse will burn out and the bomb will explode. The concussion will explode the nitro-glycerine bombs, and the result will be that the Firefly with Nelson Lee and all her passengers will be blown into thousands of pieces.

"By that time you and the rest of the crew will be safe on board the Dolphin. We'll cruise round at a safe distance, of course, until we see the Firefly blown up, and then we'll steam away and land the crew in twos and threes at various foreign ports. Both you and they, of course, will have to change your names and alter your personal appearances, and as soon as the public have ceased talking about the awful disaster to the Firefly—which will be reported as having foundered with all hands—we'll purchase another vessel with the insurance money and start the whole business all over again."

For half an hour longer these two arch-villains continued to discuss this fiendish scheme; then the Chief returned to the Dolphin, taking Jack and Ethel with him.

The Firefly's mate accompanied them; but presently returned with the timed bomb and the nitro-glycerine bombs, which he handed over to the Doctor. The two vessels then steamed off towards the west, the Dolphin leading the way, the Firefly following in her wake.

As the morning wore on the Dolphin gradually increased her lead, and by noon she was fully a couple of miles ahead. She kept this distance until sunset, when both she and the Firefly hoisted the regulation lights. For two hours longer these were the only lights the Dolphin showed; but when it was perfectly dark a green light flashed into view below the white one at the masthead and the Doctor set to work to carry out the Chief's instructions.

First of all the Firefly's furnaces were extinguished and all the steam in her boilers allowed to escape. As a natural consequence of this her engines ceased to work and the vessel came to a standstill. The Doctor then ordered the boats to be lowered, and while the crew were engaged in this operation he went down into the engine-room, placed the timed bomb on the floor and arranged the other bombs around it.

He then returned on deck and ordered the crew to take their places in the boats. When the last of them had obeyed he hurried down to the engine-room again and set the time-fuse of the largest bomb working. That done, he rushed up on deck once more and sprang down into one of the waiting boats.

Two minutes later the crowded boats, six in number, were speeding through the darkness towards the green light which was burning at the Dolphin's masthead.

Half an hour later still the Doctor and the Chief, surrounded by their respective crews, were standing on the Dolphin's deck, gazing at the Firefly's twinkling lights which were all that was visible of the vessel in the darkness and waiting with feverish impatience for the flash and the roar which would signalise her doom.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Nelson Lee to the Rescue!

AS soon as he had recovered from the stunning effects of his fall Nelson Lee struck a match and proceeded to take stock of his surroundings. He then discovered that the place in which he was imprisoned was that portion of the lower hold which was nearest the Firefly's stern. It was separated from the main hold and the upper hold in which the passengers were imprisoned by watertight bulkheads, and the only means of entering it—with the exception of the trapdoor in the floor of the Doctor's cabin—was a hatchway in the lower deck, which was covered with a wooden hatch and secured by iron bars.

Rising out of the middle of the floor was

the dome-shaped roof of the "shaft-tunnel," a massive iron tube, six feet high and four feet broad, covered on the outside with wood and containing the long steel shaft which turned the screw propeller. This tube, of course, ran all the way along the bottom of the vessel from the engine-room to the stern, but only the last few yards of it were in the hold in which Nelson Lee was confined.

In a cargo ship this portion of the hold—the after-hold, as it is called—would doubtless have been crammed with cargo. In the Firefly, however, it was merely used as a sort of general dumping ground for superfluous stores and lumber. By the time the detective had examined most of the litter his small supply of matches was almost exhausted. By rummaging amongst the cardboard boxes, however, he was lucky enough to discover a box of candles, and as soon as he lit one of these, and had stuck it in an empty bottle, he seated himself on a crockery crate and set to work to devise some scheme for making his escape.

A few minutes later the Firefly came to a sudden stop, and, after remaining at a standstill for upwards of half an hour, her propeller once more began to revolve, and the vessel resumed her voyage.

After carefully considering the situation from every point of view, and after thoroughly exploring every nook and cranny of the hold, Nelson Lee came to the conclusion that the only possible way in which he could hope to escape was to break into the shaft tunnel and crawl along it to the engine-room. If fortune favoured him, there was just the chance that he might be able to gain the deck before he was discovered, and if once he succeeded in leaping overboard he had every confidence in his ability to keep himself afloat until some passing vessel picked him up.

Fired by these hopes, he took up the candle and started to hunt amongst the lumber for suitable implements to aid him in his task. From amongst the litter he unearthed an axe, a couple of chisels, a hand-drill and a hammer-head. They were damaged tools, but he soon made them serviceable enough for his purpose.

With the aid of the axe he chopped away about two square yards of the wooden casing, this revealing the outer surface of the massive tube, which was composed of iron plates riveted together. In order to reach the interior of the tunnel it was necessary for Nelson Lee to make an opening in one of the plates sufficiently large for him to crawl through, and this he proposed to do by means of the hand-drill in the first place, and the hammer and chisels later on.

By way of a beginning he marked out a circle on one of the plates with the point of a rusty nail. He then took up the drill, with the object of boring a number of holes all round this circle; but just as he was about to commence operations he was startled by a muffled hum of voices inside the tunnel.

to the ordeal of questioning. The next made a brave attempt to tell her rescuers what had happened, but fainted before she could finish her story. The little that she told, however, was sufficient to give rise to intense excitement and sensation, and each succeeding passenger, as the men hauled them ashore, was eagerly questioned for additional details.

In this way the whole of the terrible story was gradually unfolded.

Sir Philip was aghast with horror as he listened to this startling tale, which was not told all at once, but little by little, as each succeeding passenger was brought ashore and sent up the cliff to Forelands Hall. Those who saw his terror-stricken face and observed his inward agitation, thought that he was distressed by the news that Ethel had been made a prisoner and taken aboard the *Dolphin*. But again they were mistaken. It was not of Ethel that he was thinking now, but of himself.

"We don't know everything, even yet."

It was the voice of one of the rescued passengers whom the viscount was assisting up the winding path.

"Mr. Lee says that Mr. Longford was perfectly right when he described the *Firefly* as a murder ship. He says he knows for a fact that the Doctor had been paid to get rid of one of the passengers. He knows the lady's name—"

The voice died away and the rest of the sentence was inaudible. But Sir Philip had heard more than enough. At one fell swoop his new-born hopes had been dashed to the ground. His secret was known—known to Nelson Lee!

Another scrap of conversation floated down from the winding path and interrupted the train of Sir Philip's thought.

"Yes; that's Nelson Lee, standing on the upper deck. We wanted him to be the first to come ashore, but he insisted on being the last."

"If he's going to be the last to leave the ship, I've ample time to get ready to receive him!" muttered Sir Philip, between his clenched teeth.

He turned on his heel and began to ascend the cliff. He made his way to the summit, and then entered the house and went in search of a gun. In his lordship's den he found a sporting rifle, and it was not long before he had found the ammunition and had loaded the weapon. Then he crept stealthily out of the house and made his way by unfrequented paths to a clump of stunted bushes half-way down the face of the cliff.

In the meantime, the last of the passengers had been hauled ashore, and the cradle had been sent back for Nelson Lee.

Crouching behind the bushes, with the rifle to his shoulder, Sir Philip saw the detective lower himself into the cradle. He saw him give the signal to those on shore to "haul away." He saw the cradle, with its human freight, glide into the hawser towards the cliff. He waited until it had half completed its journey—till Nelson Lee hung

poised in mid-air above the hungry waves—then he fired!

A tongue of flame leaped through the stunted bushes, and a short sharp crack blended with the thunder of the breakers on the rocky beach below.

But the bullet which had been meant to pierce the detective's heart cut through the strands of the straining rope on which the cradle hung. As if by magic the hawser snapped in twain, and the next instant, to the horrified amazement of the crowd below, the cradle and its solitary occupant were swallowed up and lost to view in the madly-tossing breakers!

## CHAPTER 13.

### The Wreck of the *Dolphin*!

THE moment his deed was accomplished Sir Philip turned and fled. With swift but stealthy steps he made his way back to the top of the cliff and re-entered the house. Unseen by the servants he stole upstairs to the viscount's den, where he rapidly removed the empty cartridge case and replaced the rifle in its accustomed corner.

He then went down to the dining-room, where a large number of the passengers were assembled, and began to question them concerning Ethel's fate. A few minutes later the door was suddenly flung open, and one of the rescued passengers—the young lieutenant, as a matter of fact—burst into the room in a state of seething excitement.

One glance at his pale, scared face was sufficient to tell the occupants of the room that something out of the common had occurred, and with one accord they sprang to their feet and greeted him with hoarse queries:

"What's the matter?"

"Matter enough!" he replied in a hoarse, excited voice. "An attempt—happily unsuccessful—has been made on the life of Nelson Lee!"

At the words "happily unsuccessful" Sir Philip's heart almost ceased to beat and an icy shiver shook his frame.

"While we were hauling him ashore," continued the lieutenant, "some scoundrel, at present unknown, fired at him from behind a clump of bushes half-way up the cliff. The bullet cut the already frayed hawser clean in two, and the cradle dropped into the sea. By a lucky chance, Mr. Lee succeeded in extricating himself from the tangle of ropes and canvas and struck out for the shore. Before he had taken a dozen strokes he was overtaken by an enormous breaker, which rolled him over and over like a cork, and finally cast him ashore at the foot of the cliff. We all thought that he was dead; but after the doctor had examined him he said that he was only stunned, and that with rest and care he thought that he would pull round. The coast watchers are now bringing him up to the house, and the fishermen have organised themselves into a search-party to hunt for the

scoundrel who fired the shot. I'm going to join them, but I thought I'd better come here first and tell you what had happened, so that if any of you cared to help in the search you could do so."

Most of the male passengers immediately volunteered to join the search-party, and left the room in company with the lieutenant. Sir Philip followed after them—not for the purpose of aiding them in their search, of course, but for fear his agitation should betray him to those who remained behind.

Scarcely knowing where he was going or what he intended to do, he staggered out of the house and wandered down the winding path that led to the foot of the cliff. Half-way down he met the little procession which was toiling upwards towards the hall. At the head were the viscount and the doctor from Blacksand. Behind them were four of the coast watchers, bearing the unconscious form of Nelson Lee on a roughly constructed litter.

The moment Sir Philip caught sight of the sad procession he was seized with unreasoning panic. For one brief instant he was tempted to turn and flee; then he pulled himself together and returned to the hall with the men. Upon reaching the hall the detective was conveyed to the viscount's bedroom, where the doctor, assisted by Sir Philip and the viscount, undressed him and laid him in the bed.

After that Sir Philip excused himself, and left the others to attend to the unconscious detective, while he went and mingled with the rescued passengers. He could not trust himself in the same room with Nelson Lee, for he feared denunciation at any moment, and all the time he was trying to concoct some plan of killing the detective before that denunciation could be spoken, yet, rack his brains as he might, he could think of no way that offered success with a minimum of risk.

Yet when, later on, the viscount asked him to take a turn at keeping watch beside Nelson Lee's bed, he could not refuse. He took up his post and sat there watching the white face of the detective, a murderous hate in his heart.

But he was not left there long. Suddenly the viscount burst into the room, with the young lieutenant and five or six of the Firefly's passengers at his heels.

"Prepare for a surprise!" cried the viscount excitedly. "There is another ship drifting towards the rocks. She is the Dolphin."

"The Dolphin!" almost screamed Sir Philip, his eyes starting from his head in horrified dismay. "The vessel on which my niece and Jack Longford, and the Chief——"

His voice died away in a groan of despair. He staggered back as though he were going to fall, but the viscount darted forward and caught him in his arms.

"Hold up, old man!" he said sympathetically. "No sense giving way yet. If the Dolphin comes ashore at a convenient spot,

there's no reason why Miss Anderson should not be rescued, after all."

Sir Philip shivered from head to foot, for this was exactly what he feared. If the Dolphin came ashore, and those on board were rescued in the same manner as those on board the Firefly had been, what would be the result? The Chief and the Doctor, with all their rascally accomplices, would be taken into custody the moment they stepped ashore. Ethel and Jack would be free to tell their startling tale, and all would be known—all would be lost!

"Do you think——" began Sir Philip, in a husky voice; but before he had time to complete his question the doctor reappeared, and eyed him in a strange and suspicious manner.

"You're very pale," he said meaningly, feeling his pulse.

"And no wonder!" retorted the viscount. "Have you heard the news? That ship which is driving ashore is the Dolphin, the vessel on which Sir Philip's niece is a prisoner."

"The worry and excitement is proving rather too much for you," said the doctor, laying a kindly hand on Sir Philip's shoulder. "You had better take things quietly, and hope for the best. If those on board the Firefly could be rescued, why not those aboard the Dolphin? There is no need to despair."

He had scarcely finished speaking when the viscount's college chum rushed into the room.

"It's awful!" he cried. "The Dolphin struck the very end of the Teeth, and her bows crumpled like so much paper, then she slipped off into deep water, and has gone down like a stone! Every soul aboard her has gone to the bottom!"

A painful, deathlike silence fell on the little group. Every eye was instinctively turned towards Sir Philip.

"Catch him!" cried the young lieutenant suddenly.

But the warning came too late. Sir Philip fell to the ground in a dead faint.

## CHAPTER 14.

### The Struggle on the Cliff!

WHEN Sir Philip awoke he found himself on the couch in the viscount's "den." The sun was streaming through a mullioned window at the end of the room, and a clock on the mantelpiece pointed to half-past twelve. For several minutes he lay in a dreamy reverie, forgetful of all that had happened the previous night, oblivious of the sword which was hanging over his head. Then, all at once, with a whirlwind rush, his memory came back, his terrors returned.

Had Nelson Lee recovered consciousness yet? Had he told what he knew of the baronet's guilty connection with the Order of the Ring? Such were the questions which

flashed across his wakening brain, and racked him with torturing suspense. In the midst of these torturing thoughts the door suddenly swung open and the viscount peered into the room.

"Ah, you're awake, I see!" he said, as he closed the door and entered the room. "I just peeped in to see if you were all right. How are you feeling after your long sleep? Better, I hope."

Sir Philip instantly arose, making out that he had fully recovered and apologising for the inconvenience he might have caused. The viscount wanted him to remain at the hall for a time, but the baronet explained that he desired to be alone in his grief for his lost niece, and nothing would satisfy him but that he returned to Blacksand Grange at once, and Lord Forelands, however surprised he might feel could do nothing but acquiesce in the suggestion, and ordered the car to take Sir Philip home.

Blacksand Grange stood on the cliff on the other side of the bay facing Forelands Hall. The grange was even more ancient than the hall, and was almost as big. Roughly speaking, it consisted of a central block, facing the sea, and two projecting wings. One of these wings had long since crumbled into ruin, and was little more than a roofless, windowless shell. The other was only a trifle better, but the roof was still intact, and the windows were boarded up on the inside. It was shut off from the rest of the house, and was locally reputed to be haunted. The central portion was still in a fair state of repair, and was the only portion of the grange which was inhabited.

It was half-past one when Sir Philip reached the grange, where he shut himself up in the library and gloomily reviewed the events of the past few days. Before leaving the hall he had ascertained that Nelson Lee had not yet recovered consciousness, so that he was still safe, and there was still time to do something.

"If Nelson Lee should die without recovering consciousness!"

He repeated this phrase to himself a hundred times. The sentence seemed to dance before his eyes in letters of fire. He flung himself into an easy-chair and buried his face in his hands. He pictured to himself the room in which the detective lay. It was situated on the first floor of Forelands Hall. The bed was immediately under the window. Outside the window was an iron balcony. Below the balcony the wall was ivy clad.

He had learnt from the viscount that the doctor had said in the morning that Nelson Lee would probably remain unconscious for another twelve hours. That meant that he

would still be unconscious when midnight came. He would be lying in the viscount's bed, with his head just under the window. In all probability there would be nobody else in the room but the nurse from Blacksand. A quick revolver shot—

"I'll do it!" muttered Sir Philip grimly. "I'll start out from here now."

It was half-past ten. Sir Philip announced his intention of going to bed. He put out the lights in the library, and retired to his bed-room. Having locked the door he slipped the mask into one of his pockets, and the revolver into another. Then he opened the window and slid to the ground down a stack-pipe.

The night was so dark that he could scarcely see his hand before his face. The turnpike road which led to Forelands Hall ran round the bay and through the village of Blacksand. If he followed this road there was more than a chance that somebody would see him. This, of course, he wished to avoid. He determined, therefore, to descend the cliff in front of the grange and to make his way to the hall along the beach.

Turning up the collar of his coat, for the night was as chilly as it was dark, he started to grope his way down the boulder-strewn face of the cliff. He was half-way down when the sound of approaching footsteps fell on his startled ears. Before he had time to conceal himself the darkness was illumined by the flash of an electric torch, and a moment later the burly form of the Blacksand constable came into view.

He was scrambling up the cliff with a curious mixture of haste and stealth, and every feature of his jolly-looking face was quivering with excitement. Upon seeing Sir Philip, whom he did not recognise at first, his hand flew towards his truncheon, and he flashed his torch into the baronet's face. Then he saw who it was, and a low, excited cry burst from his lips.

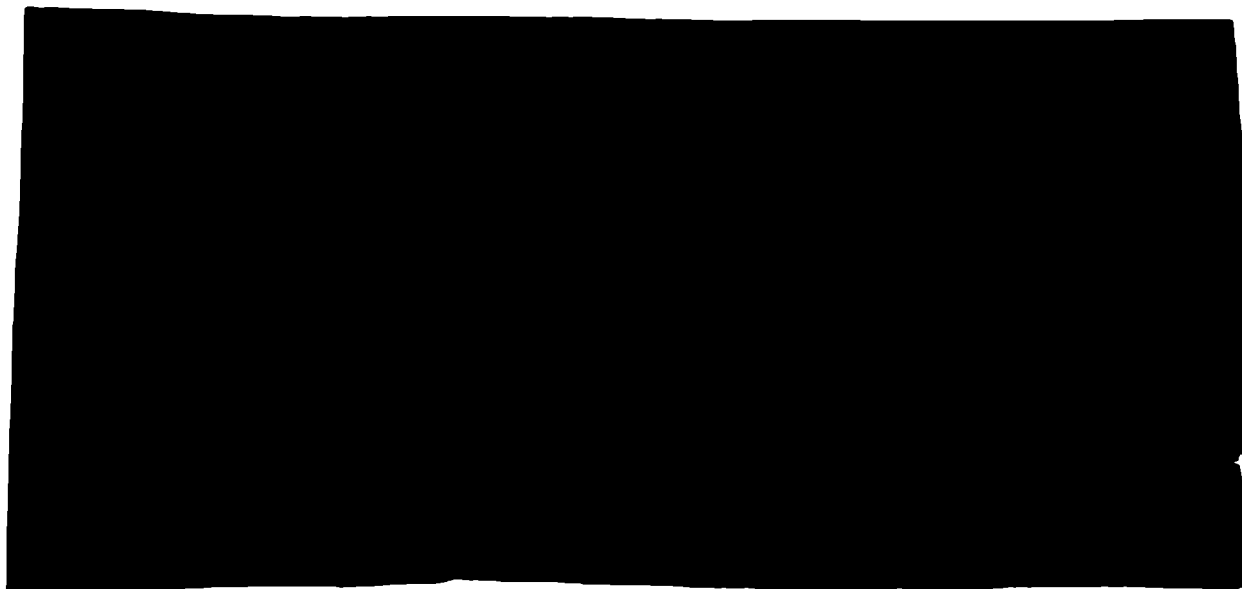
"Sir Philip!" he gasped. "The very man I was coming to see!"

"Indeed?" said Sir Philip coldly. "And why were you coming to see me?"

"To bring you good news," said the constable, lowering his voice to a whisper. "I was coming along the beach just now, when all of a sudden I heard the sound of voices in one of the caves at the foot of this cliff. Thinks I to myself, it's mighty queer that there should be anybody in these caves at this time o' night. So I crawls on my hands and knees to the mouth of the cave and quietly peered inside. And what d'you think I saw?"

"How should I know?" said Sir Philip testily. "Smugglers, I suppose!"

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"That's just what I thought myself at first," said the constable. "There were seven or eight men, sitting round a driftwood fire, and it was plain to me that some of them were sailors. But when I listened to their talk a bit I soon found out that they were a darned sight worse than any smugglers, for one of them was the Chief of the Order of the Ring, another was the Doctor, and the rest were members of the Dolphin's crew!"

Sir Philip reeled as though he had been struck.

"Is this the truth you're telling me?" he demanded hoarsely

"Gospel truth, sir!" said the constable impressively. "But I haven't told you all. Lying in one corner of the cavern bound and gagged, was a tall young fellow, with fair hair, whom I took to be Mr. Longford. By his side, also bound and gagged, was your niece, Miss Ethel Anderson!"

If a bomb had suddenly exploded at Sir Philip's feet it could scarcely have dismayed him more than the constable's disclosure. For a second or two he was paralysed with terror and despair. He pulled himself together and tried to speak

"This is good news, indeed," he said in a husky voice. "Have you told your discovery to anyone else?"

"Not yet," said the constable

A steely light flashed into the baronet's eyes, and his hand stole swiftly towards the pocket in which his revolver lay.

"You were going up to the Grange when I met you, I believe?" he asked, as he edged a little nearer his intended victim.

"I was," said the unsuspecting constable. "I was going to tell you what I'd discovered, and then I was going on to the village to get help to arrest those scoundrels in the cave."

"A very good idea!" said Sir Philip. "What time is it, by the by?"

The constable thrust his hand beneath his tunic to pull out his watch. At the same instant Sir Philip whipped out his revolver and thrust it into the constable's face. Even as he did so, he pressed the trigger; but a sharp click was the only response. His revolver had missed fire, and before he could fire a second time, the constable struck up his arm and sent the weapon flying from his grasp.

With a roar of baffled rage Sir Philip sprang at the man's throat. The latter recoiled with his fist, and the constable fell full length on the ground. He was scrambling to his feet the moment he saw the truncheon. Nothing more rushed at him a second time. He aimed a blow at his antagonist, which ducked in the nick of time. In the moment the two men grappled, the constable seized the other's arms.

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After a short wrestling bout, the constable flung his assailant off and hurled him to the ground again. Before Sir Philip could regain his feet the policeman threw himself on him and fastened his hands on his throat. Despite this, Sir Philip still continued to defend himself with savage desperation; but little by little the constable gained the upper hand, till at last, with a swift and dexterous movement, he rolled Sir Philip over on his back and seated himself astride his chest.

"It's all up now, Sir Philip!" he panted, as he fumbled for his handcuffs. "You may as well come quietly, or——"

The sentence ended in a gurgling moan, for even as he spoke, a dark form leaped athwart the gloom. A knife-blade flashed through the murky air; the constable's limbs gave a quick, spasmodic twitch, and he fell back dead!

## CHAPTER 15.

### Face to Face with Nelson Lee!

SIR PHILIP scrambled to his feet, his brain in a whirl of bewilderment and dread. Somebody had stabbed the policeman in the back—so much he knew. But whose was the hand that had struck the blow?

He peered through the pitch darkness, anxiously, fearfully, doubtfully. Then a cry of amazement rose to his pallid lips.

"The Chief!" he gasped.

"Yes," said the Chief. "Lucky I was in time, wasn't it?"

"It was—as lucky for you as for me," said Sir Philip fervently. "You were following him, I suppose?"

"Not knowingly," said the Chief, replacing his knife in his pocket. "I'd no idea that he or anyone else had discovered the secret of our hiding-place. I was simply coming up to the Grange to give you the welcome news that we were alive. I was half-way up the cliff when I heard the sound of voices. I paused and listened. I heard this fellow accost you, and tell you what he'd discovered. I whipped out my knife and crept towards you. The rest you know."

"Then it's true?" said Sir Philip, more to himself than to the Chief.

"What's true?" demanded his companion.

"What the constable told me."

"True as gospel," said the Chief. "As soon as I saw that the Dolphin was doomed I ordered the boats to be lowered. Some of them were smashed to atoms before they reached the water, and others were swamped as soon as they were launched. In fact, to the best of my belief, the only boat which got clear of the wreck was the boat which contained the Doctor and myself, your niece and Mr. Longford, and five of the crew.

"More by luck than skill, we managed to land at the foot of this cliff, where we promptly turned the boat adrift and concealed ourselves in one of the caves. We had known all along that this was Blacksand Bay, and

that your house was on the top of the cliff. If I had had strength I should have come to you right away, as soon as we landed, but I didn't feel equal to climbing this cliff till I'd had a rest, and by the time I'd had my rest it was daylight. For the whole of to-day, therefore, we've been hiding in the cave, and as I told you before, I was on my way to see you when I met you. And now, tell me, how did the Firefly get on? Were the passengers rescued?"

"Every one of them," said Sir Philip.

"Then everything is known?" asked the Chief.

"Not everything," answered Sir Philip. And he forthwith plunged into a rambling account of all that had happened.

"But why are you so anxious to dispose of Nelson Lee?" asked the Chief, when Sir Philip made an end of his tale. "You've nothing to fear from him. He may know that you bribed us to murder Miss Anderson, but he can't prove it. You've only to put a bold face on the matter, and deny everything, and what can he do? Absolutely nothing."

"All the same," said Sir Philip. "I should feel far easier in my mind if I knew that he was dead."

"We'll attend to that," said the Chief grimly. "The Order of the Ring is quite competent to deal with Mr. Nelson Lee. There's no need for you to interfere. And, besides, at the present moment you have other and more useful work to do than trying to assassinate Nelson Lee."

"What do you mean?" asked Sir Philip nervously. "What do you wish me to do?"

"Surely, you can guess!" replied the Chief.

"In a cave at the foot of this cliff are the Doctor, Miss Anderson, Mr. Longford, and five of the Dolphin's crew. Like myself they are in urgent need of food and shelter and a hiding-place. Your house is close at hand. One of the wings, I understand, is boarded off from the rest of the house. By this time, no doubt, your servants are in bed. Need I say more?"

"In other words, you wish me to conceal you in my house?"

"Exactly."

"For how long?"

"Two or three days. I have an intimate friend in London, who is the owner of a small steam yacht. His name is Stephen Meredith, and he lives in Chesham Place. To-night you will smuggle us into your house. To-morrow, I will give you a letter to take to Stephen Meredith. In this letter I will ask him to bring his yacht round to Blacksand Bay, and the first dark night after the yacht's arrival we'll all go aboard and bid you good-bye. In the meantime, you will perhaps allow me to remark that we are wasting valuable time; so, with your permission I will signal to my friends, and then we'll adjourn to the Grange."

Without giving Sir Philip time to reply, he hurried a little way down the cliff and emitted a long, low whistle. A few minutes later the Doctor appeared. Behind him,



**The taxi-driver came slowly along the road past the gates of the sinister-looking house, the light from his torch piercing the blackness. Suddenly it stopped and rested full on a still form that lay in the middle of the road. It was the figure of Nelson Lee !**

closely guarded by two of the sailors, came Jack Longford, whose hands were bound behind his back, and whose mouth was gagged with a handkerchief. Behind Jack Longford, also between two sailors, came Ethel Anderson, similarly bound and gagged. Last of all, bringing up the rear, came the Dolphin's second mate.

In obedience to the Chief's commands, Sir Philip silently led the way to the summit of the cliff. As they filed through the big iron gates that gave admittance to the grounds of the Grange, the sound of a car was heard coming down the road from the direction of Blacksand. In feverish haste Sir Philip dragged the last of his companions

through and hurriedly closed the gates. Before he had time to shoot the bolts, however, a car dashed up and a couple of men sprang out. One of them saw Sir Philip indistinctly through the darkness, and mistook him for a servant.

"Hi, you there! Don't lock those gates! We're coming through!" he cried.

As he uttered these words he strode towards the gate. As he passed the rays of the car headlamps, the glaring light illuminated his face, and Sir Philip staggered back with an inarticulate cry of dismay.

For the face was the face of Nelson Lee! He spun round on his heel, with the intention of warning his confederates. To his



intense relief, however, they were nowhere to be seen. As a matter of fact, the Chief had recognised the detective's voice as soon as the latter had spoken, and in the twinkling of an eye he had glided behind a clump of bushes on the edge of the drive. The rest of the party had quickly followed his example, and had dragged their prisoners after them. To all appearances, the drive was deserted.

By the time Sir Philip had grasped these facts, the two men who had alighted from the car had reached the gates, and were peering through the iron bars. One of them was Nelson Lee, and the other was the viscount.

"Is your master at home, my man?" asked Nelson Lee.

Before Sir Philip could reply the viscount had caught sight of his face.

"Hallo, it's Sir Philip himself!" he exclaimed. "Don't you know us, old man?"

"I didn't know you until you spoke," replied Sir Philip, as he opened the gates. "Glad to see you again. I was just coming over to your house to ask after Mr. Lee. But who is your companion?"

As he asked the question he peered into the detective's face. Then he started back with a cry of feigned surprise.

"Why, it is Mr. Lee!" he exclaimed.

"Of course, it is!" said the viscount, with a quiet chuckle. "Isn't he a marvel? He recovered consciousness quite suddenly, and unexpectedly, at half-past ten. I told him all that had happened, and as soon as he heard that you were living in this neighbourhood he expressed a desire to see you and have five minutes' chat with you. I offered to send for you, but he said he would

rather see you at your own house. As he insists upon returning to London by the first train in the morning, there was nothing for it but to bring him round to-night, late as it is. I hope you don't mind."

"Not in the least," said Sir Philip readily. "On the contrary, I'm delighted to see you. But come up into the house."

"No, thanks, I mustn't come in," said the viscount, after consulting his watch. "I must leave you now, as my sister is returning from town by the midnight train, and I've promised to meet her. I'll drive round here on my way back from the station, and by that time, perhaps, you'll have finished your chat, and Mr. Lee will be ready to go back with me."

The detective signified his consent, and the viscount accordingly re-entered his car and drove away. Sir Philip then led the detective along the short, neglected drive, and admitted him into the house by means of his latchkey. He escorted him into the library, and switched on the lights. Then he waved the detective into one chair, and seated himself in another.

"And now," he said, "what is it you wish to say to me?"

"I will answer your question with another," said Nelson Lee, fixing his eyes on the baronet's face. "What do you know about the Order of the Ring?"

He had hoped to take Sir Philip by surprise, to entrap him into a guilty start or a tell-tale flush. But Sir Philip was on his guard. He met the detective's gaze with a calm, unflinching stare. He arched his eyebrows and shook his head.

"I know nothing, of course," he said. "At least, I only know what the rescued passengers told me yesterday."

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"I think you know more than that," he said. "Seeing that you paid the Order of the Ring a thousand pounds, in return for which they contracted to murder Miss Anderson—"

Sir Philip leapt to his feet with a gesture of well-acted indignation.

"I did what?" he cried. "I paid the Order of the Ring a thousand pounds to murder my niece? Are you mad, or is this your idea of a joke?"

"I am neither mad nor joking," said Nelson Lee. "The Chief of the Order told Mr. Longford, and Mr. Longford told me, that you had paid them a thousand pounds—"

"It's a lie!" roared Sir Philip furiously. "I never even heard of the existence of the Order of the Ring until last night."

"Then why did you fire at me from behind those bushes on the cliff?" asked the detective quietly.

It was a random shot, but it struck right home. Sir Philip turned deathly pale, and a look of haunting terror leaped into his eyes. But he quickly recovered himself. He knew that he had betrayed himself, but he banked on the fact that Nelson Lee could

prove nothing against him, however much he suspected.

"Now, look here, Mr. Lee," he said, suddenly changing his manner. "Let us clearly understand each other. What is your object in coming here to-night?"

"To make you an offer," said Nelson Lee. "If you will turn King's evidence, if you will tell me all you know about the Order of the Ring, if you will help me to unmask the identity of its members, I will say nothing about your attempt to murder me, and I will do my best to get you off with as light a sentence as possible for conspiring to murder your niece. That is my offer. What is your answer?"

Sir Philip burst into a mocking laugh. He planted himself in front of Nelson Lee, and folded his arms across his chest.

"Now, listen to me, Mr. Nelson Lee," he said. "You assert that I tried to shoot you last night; I did. You declare that I am in league with the Order of the Ring; I am. You say that I bribed them to murder my niece; I did. But you cannot prove it. Not one single jot or tittle of evidence can you bring in support of the charges which you make, and to which I cheerfully plead guilty. You admit that you got your information from Jack Longford—but Jack Longford is dead. Even if he were alive his unsupported testimony would be worthless to convict me. In a word, I am in the happy position of being able to defy you. I have nothing to fear from you—absolutely nothing—either now or at any future time. You have made me an offer, and you have asked for my answer. This is my answer—there is the door! Unless you leave this house at once, I shall ring for the servants in order for them to throw you out. And remember, if I hear of you spreading any slanderous reports about me behind my back, I shall place the matter in the hands of my solicitor, and prosecute you for libel. Now go!"

"Very well," said Nelson Lee, as he moved towards the door. "I have given you your chance, and you have refused it. From now on it is war between us—war to the death! In spite of your refusal to help me, I shall yet succeed in unmasking this infamous league of murderers and thieves, and when the day of reckoning comes—"

He left the sentence unfinished, but the menacing look that crossed his face struck a chill of terror to Sir Philip's heart. An instant later he had passed through the doorway, and the baronet was alone.

## CHAPTER 16.

### Tracked!

SIR PHILIP ANDERSON had made his secret guests as comfortable as was possible in the ruined wing of the Grange, and the following morning the Chief gave him a letter to take to Stephen Meredith in London.

Nelson Lee had announced his intention of returning to London by the first train in the morning, after his interview with Sir Philip. Just as he was about to leave Forelands Hall, however, the news was brought that the murdered constable's body had been found at the foot of the cliff on which Sir Philip's house stood. Instinctively, the detective connected this latest crime with the owner of the Grange, and he decided, therefore, to postpone his departure until he had examined the body and made a few inquiries.

Nothing came of his investigations, however, and the upshot was that he left for London by the same train as Sir Philip. There was something almost comical in the dismayed expression which crossed Sir Philip's face when he saw the detective standing on the platform of Blacksand station. It is quite possible that the detective might never have thought of shadowing Sir Philip, if the latter had not hoisted such unmistakable signals of distress and agitation. As it was, the baronet's look of guilty alarm at once excited the detective's suspicions, and he then and there decided to shadow him to his destination.

When the train arrived at Paddington, Sir Philip sprang out and hastened to the cab rank, where he jumped into a taxi, and ordered the driver, in a loud tone, to drive him to the Elsinore Hotel in Oxford Street. The moment the taxi drew up outside the door of the hotel he sprang out on to the pavement, paid the driver, and vanished into the spacious entrance hall. From the entrance hall, he strolled into the billiard-room. From the billiard-room he made his escape, by means of a small side door, into Glossop Road, where he chartered a second taxi he found cruising there, and drove to Chesham Place.

"That's thrown him off the scent, I'll bet!" he muttered to himself, as he rang the bell at Dashwood House.

"Is Mr. Meredith in?" he asked the footman, who opened the door.

"No, sir; he's away from home at present."

"Is his secretary in?" asked Sir Philip, in accordance with the close instructions the Chief had given him.

"Yes, sir; but he's engaged at present."

"Well, I think he will see me if you give him my name. I am Sir Philip Anderson, of Blacksand Grange. I am the bearer of an important message for your master."

The footman accordingly ushered him into the drawing-room, and left him to his own reflections for a moment or two. At the end of that time he returned and conducted him to a smaller room on the first floor.

"Sir Philip Anderson!" announced the footman as he opened the door.

Sir Philip walked in, and then drew back with an exclamation of surprise. There were two men in the room, one of whom was a pale young man, who was evidently the secretary. The other was the Squire.

"How d'you do, Sir Philip?" said the Squire, advancing and shaking hands with him. "You seem to be surprised to see me here, but I can assure you that you cannot possibly be more surprised to see me than I am to see you. How on earth have you found your way here?"

"The Chief has sent me," said Sir Philip.

"The Chief!" cried the Squire. "Is it—can it be possible that the Chief is still alive?"

"Well, he was alive at noon to-day," replied Sir Philip. "He, and the Doctor, with five of the Dolphin's crew, and Miss Anderson and Jack Longford, are at present in hiding at my house."

For a second or two the two men stared at him in incredulous amazement. All England was ringing with the news of the sensational events which had taken place on board the Firefly, and everyone believed that the Dolphin had gone down with every soul aboard.

Nelson Lee would have preferred to have kept the whole affair dark until he could get his hands on some, at any rate, of the gang. But the rescued passengers, out of sheer gratitude, had talked to the newspapermen in praise of his pluck and skill, and so the story became public property, as far as the passengers had been able to tell, although there were one or two points of which they were ignorant.

"Stephen Meredith," of course, was the name by which the Chief was known in private life, and the Squire had actually come to Dashwood House to take charge of the supposed dead Chief's papers and effects. And now, he learned that Stephen Meredith, alias the Chief of the Order of the Ring, was still alive, and hiding in Blacksand Grange.

As soon as he had recovered from the shock of this pleasant surprise, he plied Sir Philip with eager questions, in reply to which the baronet told him all that had occurred.

"This is the letter which the Chief gave me for Mr. Meredith," he said, producing the letter from his pocket. "He said, that if Mr. Meredith was not at home I was to give it to his secretary. He also said that I was to be sure to take him an answer back."

The secretary took the letter and broke the seal. Whilst he was reading it, Sir Philip turned to the Squire.

"By the way, who is this Mr. Meredith?" he asked. "Is he a member of the Order of the Ring?"

"Never you mind about that," said the Squire, with a significant glance. "He is a friend of the Chief's, and that is quite enough for you. If the Chief had intended you to know more about Mr. Meredith, he would doubtless have told you more. What's in that letter?"

This last question was addressed to the secretary, who promptly handed him the letter to read for himself.

"Thanks," said the Squire, after reading the letter. "You'd better write a line or two for Sir Philip to take back with him. Tell the Chief that I am here, and that I'll see that his instructions about the yacht are faithfully carried out."

The secretary retired to a writing-table, and returned in a few minutes with a note. The Squire took the letter from the secretary's hand, and gave it to Sir Philip.

"Go straight back to Paddington, and take the first train back to Blacksand," he said. "I fancy you'll find one waiting there. But you'll have to be quick to catch it."

Sir Philip accordingly left the house, and started out for Paddington, with Nelson Lee, who had easily seen through the baronet's simple attempt to evade him by slipping out of the side entrance of the hotel, and who had followed him to Mr. Meredith's house, close at his heels. The detective saw him take his seat in the Devonshire coast express, and then he abandoned his quest, and drove to his rooms in Gray's Inn Road.

## CHAPTER 17.

### Nipper Helps!

SEVERAL weeks passed, and still Nelson Lee was as far as ever from accomplishing the task he had set himself to perform. Still unrent was the veil of mystery in which the Order of the Ring was enshrouded.

Needless to say, the detective was by no means idle during these long and dreary weeks. On the contrary, he spared himself neither night nor day, for both Ethel Anderson and Jack Longford were still missing, and no one could say whether they were alive or dead.

Nelson Lee told his story to the authorities of Scotland Yard, and received the Chief Commissioner's promise of co-operation in his task. Then he paid a visit to the deserted offices of "The Firefly Cruising Company, Ltd.," in the hope of picking up some useful information, but nothing came of his visit. The police had already raided the offices, and had arrested the manager and half a dozen clerks. All these, as a matter of fact, were members of the Order of the Ring, but all protested their innocence in the most indignant terms, and all were subsequently released for want of evidence against them.

For the whole of the next week the detective kept watch on Dashwood House. He had no idea, of course, that this was the residence of the Chief, whom he firmly believed had been drowned in the wreck of the *Dolphin*. He merely kept watch on the house because Sir Philip had visited it, and any house at which Sir Philip was a visitor was invested, in the eyes of Nelson Lee, with a certain amount of suspicion, but the only result of his week's investigation was the

information that Mr. Stephen Meredith had gone abroad.

He went up to the Midlands to hunt for the big country house which concealed the coiner's plant at which the Squire officiated, but there were so many country houses, all of them seemingly unconnected with the Order, that the task was hopeless from the start. Jack Longford had no idea where he had been taken on that fateful night.

It must not be supposed for a moment that Nelson Lee's enemies left him in peace during the time that he was making these investigations. On the contrary, the Squire's unsuccessful attempts to kill him were many and varied.

But, undaunted by these attempts upon his life, unmoved by the warnings which were showered upon him through the post, the detective calmly and doggedly pursued his investigations. But the clue for which he was seeking, the clue he had sought for so long, eluded his grasp like a will-o'-the-wisp.

"I've had enough of this!" he muttered to himself one day. "I'll do what I ought to have done before. I'll disappear this very night! This is where Nipper can help me!"

He sent a telegram to Nipper at St. Frank's, in a code which they used between them and which was only known to them both. Then, close upon twelve o'clock that night the detective was standing in a private sitting-room at Roxby's Hotel in the Strand. He had engaged it for the night, along with a bed-room, and had given his proper name and address.

He had asked Nipper to bring certain disguises to him there, and Nipper came direct from St. Frank's with a suit-case to Roxby's Hotel, not going anywhere near Gray's Inn Road.

Nipper was perturbed.

"You ought to let me come into this case with you, guv'nor," he said earnestly. "It's too risky, single-handed."

But Nelson Lee only shook his head.

"I'm safer alone, Nipper," he said. "Were you followed here?"

"No," replied Nipper. "They've got watchers outside, though. Those fellows in the coffee-stall opposite seem to be more interested in who comes and goes out of this hotel than in selling coffee."

"Yes, I know they're there," said the detective. "You walk out by the main door, Nipper, and go straight back to St. Frank's. Try to fool the watchers and you will only excite their curiosity. Act naturally, and make no attempt to deceive them, and they will take no notice of you. Now, hand over that disguise, and I'll change at once, so that you can take my ordinary clothes back with you. In that way, I shall leave no trace here."

The disguise consisted of a pair of corduroy trousers, a threadbare coat and waistcoat, a flannel shirt of startling hue, hobnailed boots, a greasy cap, and a tool-bag, together with grease paints and wig for facial alterations.

When Nelson Lee had effected his disguise his ordinary clothes were packed into the suitcase with which Nipper boldly marched out of the hotel and boarded a late bus as if he had not a care in the world. His manner was so free and easy that the watchers took not the slightest notice of him, and did not for one moment connect him with Nelson Lee.

At half-past six the next morning Nelson Lee added the final touches to his disguise, making certain alterations to his face by means of grease-paints in the make-up box, which had a place in the tool-bag when he finally left the hotel by a back door into the yard.

Passing through the wooden gates at the end of the yard, he emerged into Middlemarch Lane. On the opposite side of the road stood a coffee-stall. Both the men in charge and his assistant were members of the Order of the Ring, and they had adopted this ingenious device for the purpose of mounting watch on the back door of the hotel. Two other men were mounting guard at the front door.

With his tool-bag slung over his shoulder, and with a short clay pipe in his mouth, the detective shambled past the coffee-stall, past the watchers in the Strand, and over Waterloo Bridge. At St. George's Circus he turned to his right along Lambeth Road. In Lambeth Walk he knocked at the door of a house, which displayed the legend, "Lodgings for Single Men."

He gave his name as Robert Lawson, and stated that he was a mason out of work. He had left his lodgings in the Walworth Road because of a dispute with one of the other lodgers. Could he have a bed-sitting room for which he was prepared to pay rent in advance? If he could, and the rent was reasonable, he would return to his former lodgings for his box of clothes and tools.

Yes, he could have both a bed-room and a sitting-room. The rent was discussed and settled. He went for his box—which he purchased, together with its contents, from a second-hand dealer in Houndsditch—and by ten o'clock he was comfortably settled in his new quarters.

Next morning the papers were full of the "Mysterious Disappearance of Nelson Lee." Interviews were published with his landlady and with the manager of Roxby's Hotel. He had left his rooms in the Gray's Inn Road at a quarter to eleven. He had been traced to Roxby's Hotel, and was known to have spent the night there. When the boots had called him at eight o'clock the next morning his bed-room had been found empty. Nobody had seen him leave. As the manager of the hotel happened to be an old friend of the detective's, and had been asked to help, nothing had been said to a soul of Nipper's visit to the hotel with a suit-case, and his departure shortly afterwards.

By the public the news was received with profound regret, for nine men out of ten immediately jumped to the conclusion that

the popular detective had at last met his death by the Order of the Ring.

But the Order of the Ring knew better! By them the news was received with consternation and alarm. While the detective was being closely watched he could not surprise them, but now that no one knew where he was everyone was in immediate danger.

Things had quietened down at Blacksand. The Chief and his party had long since made their escape in the yacht of Stephen Meredith, which had appeared off the bay one dark night, and taken them aboard, while the coast watchers were busy some fifteen miles away investigating a fake alarm of smuggling operations. With the departure of the Chief and the Doctor, to say nothing of the others, Sir Philip Anderson breathed freely once more. He, for one, was glad to see the backs of them.

The yacht had sailed to a lonely part of the Cornish coast, far from any town or village, and there the Squire was waiting with several helpers and two powerful cars.

The Chief went ashore to make sure that his instructions were understood.

"Miss Anderson goes to the coiners' den in the Midlands," he said to the Squire. "And I hold you responsible for her safety. And Stephen Meredith's secretary takes Jack Longford to the club."

"All right," said the Squire, "I'll see to it."

So Ethel Anderson went north to the country house where the Order conducted its counterfeiting operations, while Jack Longford was secretly conveyed to the club, a building in London of which only a very few members of the Order knew.

After that the yacht departed on a cruise in mid-Atlantic to give the Chief, the Doctor, and all who had escaped from the Dolphin time to grow their beards and generally become thoroughly disguised, thus to avoid recognition by any of the Firefly's former passengers when they returned to England.

## CHAPTER 18.

### Cornered!

IT was on the Friday that the Chief's yacht steamed into Portsmouth Harbour and anchored over on the Gosport side beyond Fort Blockhouse. The Chief and the Doctor were taken across in the motor-launch to the pontoon, and from there they made their way to the Harbour Station, where the Squire met them, and they travelled up to London together.

The Chief, of course, was travelling as Mr. Stephen Meredith, of Dashwood House, Chesham Place, London, S.W., while the Doctor, who had quite a foreign appearance, with his coal-black beard and mahogany cheeks, was travelling as Mr. Meredith's Italian friend, Count Nicolo Zacconi.

The Squire met them at the Harbour Station and journeyed to town with them.

From time to time he had written or cabled to the Chief—always in cipher, of course—informing him of the various attempts which had been made on the life of Nelson Lee. Such information had necessarily been of the briefest description; but now he told the Chief everything that had happened while he had been abroad.

"Then you never found out what became of Nelson Lee?" asked the Chief, when the Squire had finished.

"Never," said the Squire. "It's five weeks to-night since he entered his bed-room at Roxby's Hotel, and closed the door, and from that moment to this all trace of him is lost. When you consider the enormous number of spies we possess, and when you know that none of these has ever been able to trace him, I think you'll agree with me that the probability is that he's dead."

The Chief shook his head vigorously and decisively.

"I wish I could think so," he said. "But it's no use deluding ourselves with false hopes. We haven't finished with Nelson Lee yet. Depend upon it, he's merely lying low, and some day, when we least expect it, he'll reappear and give us a shock. In the meantime how's Miss Anderson?"

"As well as can be expected."

"She's at your house, of course?"

"Yes. I've had two rooms fitted up for her immediately over the underground mint."

"And Jack Longford?"

"He was all right when I saw him a couple of days ago. He's imprisoned in one of the attics of the club."

"Good! And now tell me, what do you think of our appearance—my own, and the Doctor's? Are we sufficiently changed? Should we pass muster if we happened to meet any of the Firefly's passengers?"

"Rather!" said the Squire. "I wouldn't have believed that a beard would have made such a difference. Both of you are absolutely and completely changed. Even Nelson Lee wouldn't know you!"

They continued their chat in this way until the train arrived at Waterloo, where they took their seats in a waiting private car, and arrived at Dashwood House a few minutes after seven o'clock.

Three footmen were waiting to receive them, and the moment they stepped into the brilliantly-lighted entrance hall the Chief observed—or fancied he observed—that one of the footmen gave a slight but perceptible start of surprise.

He handed this footman his hat and gloves, and at the same time examined him with a glance that was apparently careless, but which was really keen and searching. Then he drew in his breath with a short, sharp nervous gasp, and his sun-tanned face went slightly pale. By a mighty effort he recovered his self-control before the footman observed his agitation, and as soon as he had divested himself of his coat he escorted the Squire and the Doctor to their rooms,

and left them to dress for dinner. He then went in search of his secretary.

"You've engaged a new footman in my absence, I see," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the secretary. "Toyno broke his leg, and had to go into hospital, so I was obliged to advertise for somebody to take his place."

"What is the new man's name?"

"Robert Lawson, sir. He had excellent testimonials, and was last in the service of Lord Ellerby."

"Oh, was he?" said the Chief ironically. "How long has he been here?"

"About a week, sir. I hope I haven't done anything wrong, or contrary to your wishes? I assure you that Lawson has given us every satisfaction up to the present."

"I don't doubt it," said the Chief. "No; you haven't done anything wrong. On the contrary, I rather think you've done excellently well. By the way, will you please arrange with the butler for Lawson to bring in the coffee to-night?"

"I will, sir."

The Chief went up to his room, where his valet arrayed him in evening attire. He then dismissed the valet, slipped three revolvers into his pocket and went down into the drawing-room. The Squire and the Doctor had not yet made their appearance, and the only occupant of the room was a lady member of the Order of the Ring, known as Lady Ursula.

The moment he entered the room she sprang to her feet and ran towards him with a cry of delight.

"So you're glad to see me back, are you, little woman?" he asked.

"Need you ask?" she replied. "It has been—oh, horrible—to be separated from you for so long."

A moment later she left the room, and the Squire and the Doctor appeared, both in evening dress. A whispered consultation took place. The Chief gave them each a revolver. Then the dinner-bell rang, and they went into the dining-room.

Excellent as the dinner was, the three men ate but sparingly, and the wine was practically untasted. At the conclusion of the meal the footmen withdrew, and the Chief produced his cigar case. The Doctor drew up his chair beside the Chief. The Squire rose from his seat at the other end of the table, and seated himself on the other side of the Chief. They lit their cigars. Then the door swung quietly open, and Lawson glided in with a silver tray on which were three tiny cups of coffee, a silver bowl of sugar, and a jug of cream.

The Chief laid down his cigar and turned his chair. The Squire and the Doctor followed his example.

"Coffee, sir?" said Lawson, halting in front of the Chief, with the tray in his downstretched hands.

With a swift and sudden movement the Chief leaped to his feet and whipped out his revolver. His two companions followed

suit, and in the twinkling of an eye three gleaming revolvers were levelled at the footman.

"Good-evening, Mr. Nelson Lee!" said the Chief, with a mocking laugh. "Permit me to congratulate you on the excellence of your disguise!"

The detective—for such it was—raised his eyes and looked the speaker full in the face. No one knew better than he that his life was hanging by the merest thread, that the slightest suspicious movement on his part would be followed by instant death. Yet, in spite of the peril which menaced him, his face was as calm and impassive as when he had entered the room.

"I wondered if you would recognise me," he said, addressing the Chief in a clear, unfaltering voice. "You see, like everyone else, I felt sure that you and the Doctor were at the bottom of Blacksand Bay. If I had known you were coming here, and that you were Mr. Stephen Meredith, I would have altered my features more drastically. The Squire had never met me before, so he hardly mattered.

"Yes, I spotted you in the hall when we arrived," said the Chief, with a complacent smile, "and I arranged for you to bring the coffee in, so that we might settle our differences in a quiet and gentlemanly manner. Sit down."

"Thanks; I prefer to stand," said the detective coolly. "With your permission, however, I will set this tray down, and then——"

"I think not!" said the Chief, interrupting him. "You don't come over us with a simple trick like that. So long as your hands are encumbered with that tray, they can't very well get into any mischief, so you'll kindly stand where you are, and hold it in your hands until I've finished."

"Pardon me," said Nelson Lee, with a winning smile. "From the tone of your remarks, I can only think that you and your friends are labouring under a slight delusion. Surely you do not think I have been so foolish as to venture into this house without taking every precaution to guard against being captured? Is it possible that, because you have covered me with your revolvers, you are flattering yourselves that I am in your power?"

"Well, yes; I must confess that we were under that impression," said the Chief, with a derisive laugh. "If you can show us that ~~we~~ we are mistaken, we shall be very much obliged!"

"Very well," said Nelson Lee, who was indulging in one of the tallest games of "bluff" he had ever played. "Since you have asked for proof, you shall have it. Listen!"

The words had scarcely crossed his lips before a deep-toned voice rang out at the far end of the room:

"Hands up, all three of you, or I fire!"

With gasps of alarm, the three men spun round on their heels and stared in the direction from which the voice proceeded.

This, of course, was exactly what Nelson Lee had expected them to do. An expert ventriloquist, he had "thrown" his voice, as the saying is, to the other end of the room, and the moment his captors turned round he dropped the tray and sprang towards the door.

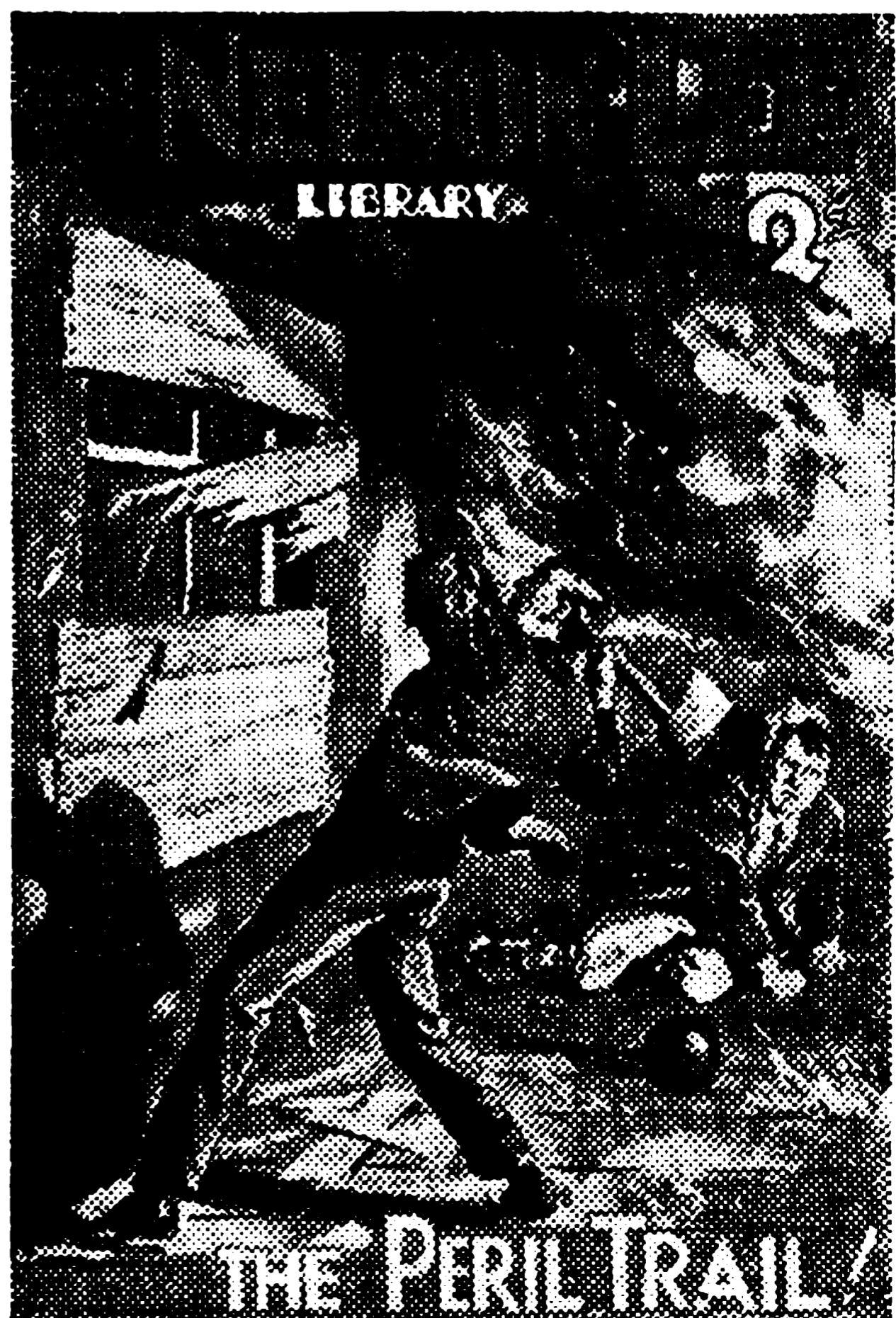
Quick as thought the three men turned and covered him with their revolvers. Before they could fire, however, he had reached the door, and switched off the electric light, and the room was plunged into inky darkness, which concealed the daring detective from view.

Despite the darkness, the three men fired, aiming at the spot where Nelson Lee had last been seen. In the meantime, however, after switching off the lights, the detective had dropped on his hands and knees, and the bullets buried themselves in the wall. An instant later he had opened the door, had crossed the spacious entrance hall, and was flying down the steps which led to the street.

Unmindful of the curious glances which greeted him on every hand, he raced to the corner of Belgrave Square, where his keen eyes had already detected the burly, blue-clad figure of a policeman.

"Blow your whistle!" panted Nelson Lee, rushing up to him. "I am Nelson Lee. The Chief of the Order of the Ring is in Dashwood House."

**LOOK OUT FOR THIS COVER  
NEXT WEEK!**



The constable waited to hear no more. He may not have understood much about the Order of the Ring, but he recognised Nelson Lee, and that was enough. In less than a couple of minutes they were joined by seven or eight constables, and a sergeant, and as soon as Nelson Lee had explained the position a move was made on Dashwood House.

The entrance hall was thronged with terrified servants, who hailed the arrival of the police with a chorus of cries of relief. They had heard the firing in the dining-room, and some of them had seen the detective bolt out of the house. But none of them had the remotest idea of what had happened, or what was afoot.

In a few brief, hurried sentences the detective explained the true state of affairs, then he asked for news of Mr. Meredith and his two companions. Where were they? Still in the dining-room?

"No, they're upstairs in Lady Ursula's boudoir," said the butler. "I saw them rush out of the dining-room and hurry upstairs immediately after you left."

With the police at his heels, Nelson Lee rushed upstairs. On reaching the door of Lady Ursula's boudoir, which was locked, he knocked and demanded admission in the name of the law. Receiving no reply, he applied his shoulder to the door and burst it open. Then he started back, with a cry of bewildered surprise.

There was nobody in the room!

Yet the door—the only door—had been locked on the inside, and the key was still in the keyhole, while the window was too small for anyone to crawl through, in addition to which it was barred.

"The servants have deceived us!" cried one of the constables angrily. "The men we're after never came into this room at all!"

"Oh, yes, they did!" said Nelson Lee. "The door was locked on the inside. They must have come in here."

"Then, where are they now, sir?"

"I'll tell you that when I've found the secret door," said Nelson Lee, making a swift guess at the truth. "In the meantime, you search the rest of the house."

The police accordingly withdrew to ransack the house, leaving the detective alone in the boudoir. But it was all in vain. There was not a trace of the wanted men, nor of Lady Ursula, anywhere in the house, but when they returned to the boudoir they were just in time to see Nelson Lee disappearing through a slit-like opening in one of the walls. He had found a tiny door, cunningly hidden in one of the recesses of the room, and screened by heavy tapestry curtains.

The constables wriggled through the narrow slit, one at a time, and followed the detective down some steps. At the bottom, several feet below the level of the cellar floors, was a low arched opening which proved to be the entrance to an underground tunnel. With an electric torch in his hand, the detective led the way along this tunnel for over a hundred yards, then the tunnel came to an end, and

they found their further progress blocked by a massive, iron-sheeted door.

"What's on the other side of this?" asked one of the policeman.

"It's plain enough to me," said Nelson Lee. "This passage, as you see, follows the line of the street, and is, roughly speaking, a hundred and twenty yards long. If you were to go outside and measure that distance in an easterly direction from Dashwood House it would land you in the middle of the south side of Belgrave Square. Mr. Meredith has evidently owned, or rented, two houses. One in Chesham Place and one in Belgrave Square, and has had this tunnel constructed to connect the two houses. Thus he has a back way of escape, which has stood him in good stead to-day. You go on trying to batter this door down, while I rush round to Belgrave Square to see if I can steal a march on them!"

He handed his electric torch to one of the policemen, then dashed out of the house, and round to Belgrave Square. He had to be quick. It was all guess work, in a way, but there was wisdom and shrewd judgment behind it all, characteristic of Nelson Lee.

His suspicions were soon confirmed by the fact that a big car stood outside one of the houses in Belgrave Square, just where he thought the tunnel would come out. And a moment later he saw a lady, closely veiled and cloaked, glide out of the house and step into the car.

Nelson Lee quickened his pace; but before he could reach the spot, four men came out, three of whom sprang into the car, while the fourth took a seat beside the chauffeur. Owing to the darkness and the distance, the detective was unable to see their faces; yet he had no doubt whatever but that they were the Chief, the Squire, and the Doctor. The lady was undoubtedly Lady Ursula, while the fourth man was the secretary.

He broke into a run, but the car suddenly shot forward and sped away in the direction of Grosvenor Place. But as the detective pulled up, raging with mortification, a prowling taxi came into view. Quick as thought the detective hailed him, and leapt in.

"I am a detective," he said, pointing to the now distant car. "Keep that car in sight till she reaches its destination and it'll mean ten pounds for you!"

"Then that tenner's mine, sir," exclaimed the driver, as the taxi leapt forward like a live thing, and the long chase began.

There were a thousand and one things Nelson Lee could have done. He could have waited and called up the Flying Squad. He could have whistled up every policeman in London, but unless he knew where that car went to, everything would be in vain.

The Chief and his lieutenants of the Order of the Ring were getting away, and Nelson Lee saw that his duty was to stick to the trail, despite the fact that he was working single-handed.

The rogues headed for the Marble Arch, then swung round into the Edgware Road

and sped rapidly along that wide thoroughfare for the north-west. The traffic at that time of night was beginning to thin out somewhat, but even so Nelson Lee could not help admiring the skill of the Order's chauffeur as he handled his powerful car. It seemed as if there was only one man his equal, and that was the detective's taxi-driver, who certainly accomplished wonders with his creaking and complaining engine.

It was hopeless to try and catch the Chief's car, but they kept it in sight all the time, out past Cricklewood and on to Hendon and Edgware, and yet further on out past Elstree, until in a maze of dark country lanes the rear light of the car they pursued was concealed by a high hedge, and then, from the back of the taxi came a coughing explosion, and the vehicle came to a standstill.

"Sorry, sir," said the taxi-driver miserably. "I did me best, sir."

Nelson Lee paid him the ten pounds at once.

"You've earned it," he said. "I'll go on afoot. I daren't lose the trail now."

He had a small electric torch in his pocket, and now he pulled it out, and by its rays he saw the tyre marks of the Chief's car. He followed them at a loping trot for about a quarter of a mile until ahead he saw lights that showed there was another main road, and it looked as though the Chief had come out via Elstree simply to foil Nelson Lee as to what direction he took out of London.

But that was wrong, for the detective came to where the tyre marks swerved from the lane and in at the gates of a dark, deserted-looking private house, standing in its own grounds. He switched off his torch and made to enter the gates, when suddenly two men cannoned into him. They had been walking through the darkness from the house to the road, and had not seen him.

But as they recoiled from the impact, and stared at him, there was speechless stupefaction in their eyes; then three sharp, startled cries rang out. For the two men were the Chief and the Squire, returning to the road, having heard the noise made when the taxi engine "conked" out, and coming to make sure what it was, and to assure themselves that they had not been followed to their hide-out.

The detective was the first to recover his presence of mind, and, with lightning-like rapidity, he lashed out with his fist and caught the Chief a blow on the point of the jaw that bowled him over like a ninepin. At the same instant, however, the Squire swung round his left and dealt the detective a sledge-hammer blow on the back of his head. Half-stunned by the blow, the detective stumbled forward, and before he could recover his balance the Squire darted after him. An automatic fitted with a silencer popped suddenly as the crook fired point-blank at Nelson Lee.

With a choking cry, the detective stumbled forward on his face. Even as he fell the sound of a horn of a car was heard, and

the wheezing of an old engine, as some motor vehicle came down the winding lane.

"Run—the house—you've done for him!" gasped the Chief, in a hoarse, excited whisper. "Quick—there's a car coming!"

They rushed back into the house, and called to their accomplices.

"Quick! We'll have to clear out of this. Nelson Lee was at the gate, but we've done for him. Still, he'll be found. That'll bring the police down here. We daren't stay. They can't prove we killed him, but his body will be identified, and we shall be suspected."

"Let's be calm about it," said the Chief. "We'll all have to disguise ourselves. If the driver of that car comes here we must send him to fetch the police, and take care we're gone before he can come back. Listen!" They heard the car stop for a time, then go speeding off towards the distant high road. "Good, he's gone for help right away, thinking this house is empty, as it has been for some time. That gives us a chance. In a quarter of an hour we must be out of here."

They hurriedly donned their disguises, the car left with the chauffeur and the secretary, then one by one the chief members of the Order left the house, and were lost to view in the black shadows, the Chief being the last to leave, because he remained behind long enough to set fire to the house, in order to make sure of leaving no clues behind for the police to find.

When he came out in the lane he looked for the body of Nelson Lee, but it was not there.

The car that had startled the murderers had been the taxi in which Nelson Lee had followed the Chief from Belgrave Square. The driver had managed to get the engine going again, and had followed on in the hope of picking up the detective again, only to find him lying in the middle of the lane, apparently dead.

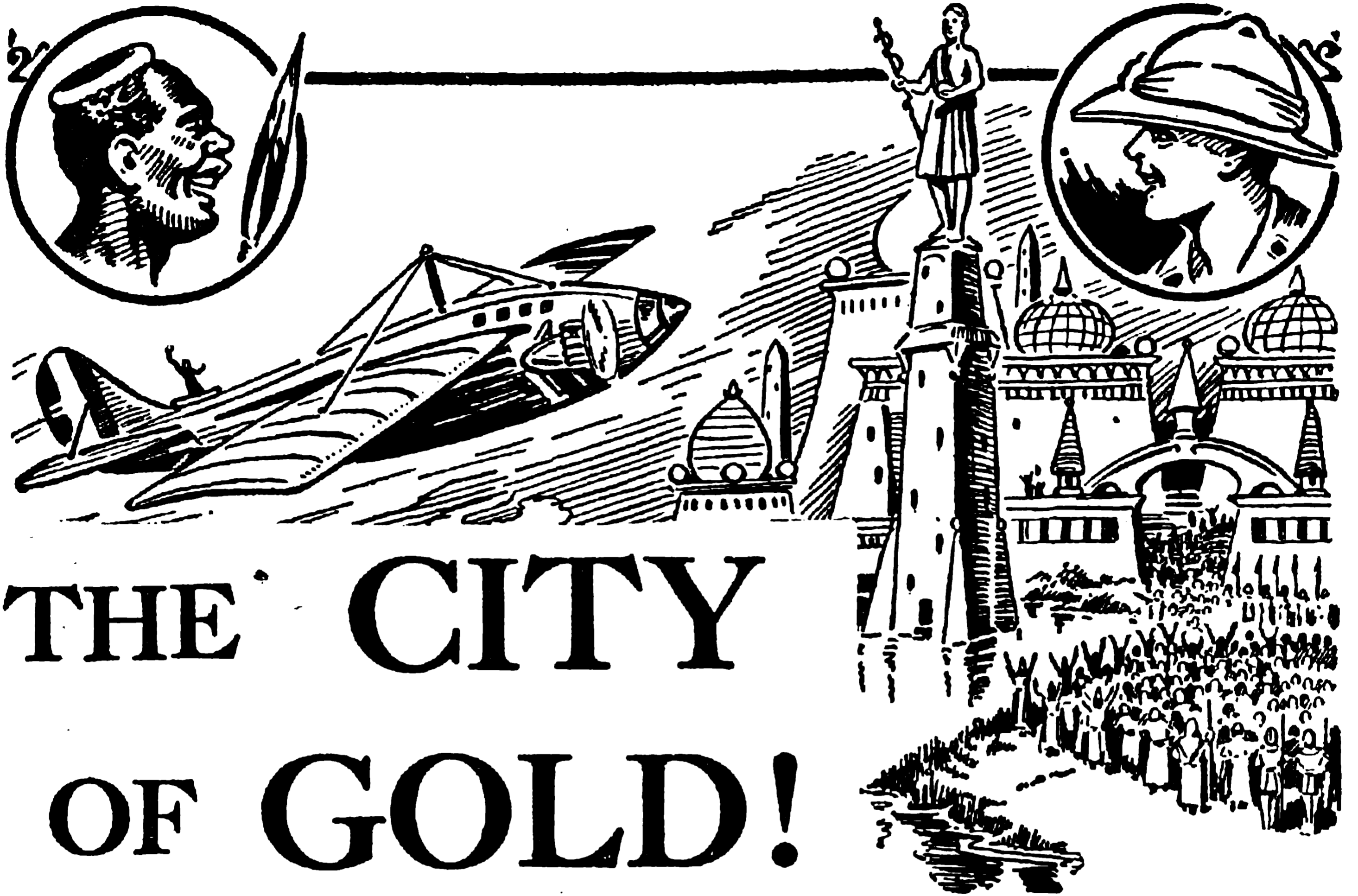
The taxi-driver's first impulse was to rush into the dark house nearby and ask for help, but he thought better of it. By the marks in the lane he saw that the car they had been pursuing had gone in there, and that the occupants must have been enemies of Nelson Lee, and possibly, now, his murderers. It would be foolish to seek help in that quarter.

Accordingly, he lifted the detective's body into his old car, and drove like mad to the nearest main road, and so to the nearest police station, where he told his story. The detective was taken at once to a hospital, while a posse of police, soon followed by the Flying Squad from Scotland Yard, swooped down on the lonely house only to find it abandoned and on fire, the flames bursting through the roof.

Never before had the newspaper readers of Great Britain been provided with such sensational news as met their eyes in the columns of their papers on the next day. Singlehanded, Nelson Lee had broken up the

(Continued on page 44.)

## White Boy Rules Mysterious African City!



# THE CITY OF GOLD!

**Tom Cook, the white boy-king of an ancient city in the heart of Africa, is determined to stamp out the terrible rites of the priests. He captures Gobo, the high priest, and brings him to trial on the Isle of Death.**

**According to ancient custom, Gobo selects an ape-man to champion him. Lulu, a Zulu servant of Tom Cook's, takes up the challenge. A stirring fight begins on an isle in the middle of a lake in which a terrible prehistoric creature dwells.**

### Well Played Lulu!

**T**HE ape-man limped back a few paces, growling under his breath and gnashing his fangs in helpless fury. He had made so sure of getting his grip on this slender, shining-skinned figure, and had counted on getting his mighty arms around him and crushing him as he had done so many back there in his primeval forest. Never before had he been so hurt and bested by anything that walked upright on two legs, and this two-legged animal did not even use his teeth, or give him a chance to.

But Lulu, too, had been using his brains, and made up his mind that he had to end this business quickly, or a foul chance might give the monster the grip he desired, when Lulu was under no misapprehension of what would be the result. Keep out of those clutches he must, or run the risk of being slowly crushed to death. He would make one bold bid for supremacy and trust to his science against the other's brute force.

Then the black warrior made the mistake that was like to cost him his life!

Lulu did not wait again for the ape-man to attack. He thought that rushing tactics would pay best, combined with strategy.

Lithe and active as a panther, he dived in as if to clutch the gigantic brute again; then, like a flash, he ducked below the mighty arms that came so gladly to meet him, and with all the force he had behind the blow, he drove his right straight for the solar plexus.

"Woof!"

The great body lurched forward with the pain of the pile-driving blow which knocked all the wind out of his body, and involuntarily the great paws clasped across the place where the pains were—in the tummy!

Quick as light Lulu ducked, and, catching the wild man by the ankles, he gave a mighty heave, and, with the assistance of his shoulders, sent him hurtling over his back to crash on to the granite slope.

But there Lulu had judged without remembering one thing. It would have been a magnificent throw and good tactics against

any other type of foe; but the ape-man had been accustomed since childhood to falling from the topmost branches of trees to the ground without hurting himself. Instinctively, on being thrown into the air, he had doubled himself up into a ball and landed on the polished, hard surface of the rock on case-hardened muscles.

He bounded to his feet as he reached the ground and came back at the Zulu with breath-taking rapidity. This time Zulu could not avoid the unexpected rush, and he felt the great arms close around him, whilst the talon-like nails tore the skin from his back and the two-inch-long fangs sank into his shoulder, whilst the fetid breath of the brute nigh choked him.

It looked any odds against the Zulu ever getting out of that mighty grip, but he suddenly sagged loosely and let all his weight hang limply in the mighty arms.

As has been said, his body was shining with oil, and as by now he was also sweating profusely, his naked skin was about as easy to hold as a greasy pole. He knew that even the strongest man cannot hold a greased naked body for long, and even before he had seen his mighty opponent he had guessed that he was going to fight something unusual in the way of strength and size, and had arranged accordingly.

He simply slipped through the ape-man's fingers like an eel, and as he dropped to the ground he rolled, and with one hand jerked the great brute's feet from under him.

As the wild man crashed Lulu sprang to his feet, still clutching that ankle, and with an effort grabbed the other and brought the two together. Then, with the heavy, struggling body as a fulcrum, he ran round and round in a circle.

With the impetus gained by the downward slope, he managed to get the huge body on the move, and, grinding his heels in, got a tremendous swing on and actually had the body revolving round him as if he was about to throw the hammer!

Yells of excitement came from below at the sight, but Lulu paid no heed to anything as the beads of sweat rolled down his face and chest and the veins stood out as if they must burst, as faster and faster he twirled, and then, as his own feet began to slip on the sloping surface, worn slippery by hundreds of struggling feet in distant pasts, he gave one last mighty heave and let go of the struggling form, sending it hurtling towards the edge.

As the wild man crashed a despairing yell came from his lips as he slid slowly down over the edge, to disappear from his adversary's sight over the sheer side into the lake!

Lulu fell back, overcome by the tremendous effort, and did not hear the yell from the crowd that greeted his feat.

The wild man crashed down on to the surface of the water from that tremendous height, and he had hardly struck the water when there was a swirl from below and up

came the hideous head of the guardian of the Isle of Death.

At sight of the struggling man so close to that small lizard reared up at the end of that hideously long neck, with the blind, peering eyes inset, and the bird-like beak with its yellow fangs questing hither and thither in search of its latest living tit-bit, Tom covered his eyes and shuddered, whilst Al swore lustily under his breath in choicest Bowery.

The wild man, seemingly unaffected by the height he had fallen, struck out madly, doing his best to escape to the shore. But there was little chance of that, for the hideous head was twisting to and fro with quick flirts of the head, uncannily like a duck after a bit of bread, and it was evident that the second the hideous beast caught his scent it would be all up with the unfortunate man.

"Jumpin' James, I cain't stand this!" muttered Al. "It might have been ol' Lulu!"

Deftly he slipped a shell into the rifle he was carrying, a shell of special design, of peculiar shape and composition. He sighted for that ugly, questing head, and taking a quick snapshot as the "duck" spotted the swimming ape-man, he pressed the trigger.

Zupp-pip-pip!

The sound was hardly audible three yards off, but the effect was marvellous as the tiny explosive bullet hit that scaly head. The great beast seemed to flop out of the water, to crash back again with a noise like thunder. Then the head was sunk under the surface as if to cool it, whilst tremendous waves were thrown to the shore as the huge beast struck out wildly to right and left, springing up into the air, to flop back again with raucous, choked cries of agony coming from that elongated throat.

One of the waves carried the wild man with a crash up against the rocks, and he floated motionless, stunned, on the surface within perilously close proximity to those threshing claws, which were beating the pool into waves.

Then Lulu did what was probably the bravest deed of his life.

Judging by the sounds that something weird and terrible was happening, he dragged himself to the edge of the rock and looked over. He was just in time to see the wild man dashed against the rock and see how near he was to the flailing claws of that monster beast.

Seeing that he was unconscious and helpless, the generous Zulu did not pause a second. He rose to his feet, took a deep breath, and dived for the Pool of Death in a graceful swallow dive. The water was whirling madly under the wildly threshing claws, wings and tail of the monster, but as Lulu came to the surface the beast seemed to make a sudden resolve, and turned tail, to swim rapidly for the other end of the lake, where it evidently had a lair that it seldom left unless there was food about.

As Lulu gripped the insensible figure of the wild man, and, swimming strongly, dragged it to the shore, Tom, regardless of his dignity as a king, rushed down to meet him, with Al cheering wildly, anxious to give his due to a very brave man.

To his surprise, the rest of the people remained in their seats, seemingly in sullen silence, perhaps awed by the scene.

But he paid little attention to them, rushing to his pal and servant and "pump-handling" him for all he was worth, stuttering out his congratulations not only on the result of the fight, but also on Lulu's heroic action in diving to the rescue of his foe.

"Though, I'm afraid, you ran that risk for nothing, Lulu; his head must have been smashed in by the force with which he fell, and I reckon he's a goner—"

There came a sudden shouting and a commotion down by the side of the lake, and they all turned in that direction. Then they saw that the royal guard who had been set to watch old Gobo were fighting with some gold-armoured soldiers, who were being gradually driven back, whilst the priest prisoner was hustled away amongst a crowd.

"Gee, that old devil's goin' to escape!" cried Al. "Who's that bunch that are attacking the guard? My stars, they're whackin' 'em, too, and givin' 'em socks! Shall I put a bullet amongst 'em just to bring 'em to their senses? We can't have the palace guard knocked about like this; it isn't discipline, and we should never be safe in our beds!"

"No, leave 'em alone, old chap. I don't care if Gobo does escape; and anyway—we can't fight women!"

"Women?" howled Al. "What are you gettin' at? They were bigger chaps than our guard, and were givin' 'em what for."

"Soupsa and her guard of Pachakas," said Tom with a grin. "Nice husky little birds, eh? I'll say we're well rid of her and her gran'dad. Now, let's see to this wild man."

But when they turned back to the spot they had left him in, the wild man had gone!

### Trouble in the Air!

"GEE-WHIZZ, but that was quick work!" exclaimed Al, as they saw that the "wild man" had made his escape. "I guess old missin' link was playin' 'possum! Artful bird, tho' he don't look it!"

"I expect he thought if he stayed he might get another pasting from Lulu, or perhaps we might give him toko for losing his fight. I expect the old priest told him some fairy stories about us to induce him to fight at all. As a rule, these wild forest tribes aren't too keen about getting into settlements of any sort," Tom observed. "Oh, well, it doesn't matter ;

we didn't want him, and he's one responsibility the less. If only old Gobo has the sense to clear out—"

"Say, Tommy, d'you notice the uncanny sort o' silence, and these folks don't seem to be lookin' at us quite so pleasant as they did, what?"

"Disappointed we didn't let that poor beggar be eaten up by the giant duck, p'raps," said Tom indifferently. "Let's get away from here as quick as we can. I've half a mind to find the Fish and fly back. I get rather fed with that oxen procession!"

"Take my white horse, baas," said Lulu. "I walk if you like? Baas, I think quicker we go back the better!"

"How so, Lulu. Nothing wrong is, is there?"

Lulu turned his wide-nostrilled nose skywards, and sniffed.

"Me smell somethin'. Know not what it be, but—death lurks in the air!" he murmured slowly.

"Aw, bosh, it's the reek of this prehistoric fowl," said Tom impatiently. "Go, get your horse, and ride back, Lulu. I wouldn't dream of depriving the commander-in-chief of the army, and the hero of the afternoon, of his charger. Beat it back to the palace and order a feast to celebrate the event, Lulu!"

But the Zulu glanced almost nervously around at the sullen faces as they approached the circle of counsellors. They had been grouped together deep in some discussion, but on the approach of Tom and his cousin had separated again as if unwilling to be overheard.

Tom saw that old Metla's face was very grave and that the counsellors, who had been his supporters, looked somewhat glumly at him whilst the bearded man and his bald pal openly sneered at the young king.

"There is something up!" muttered Tom. "Now, I wonder what it is?"

The crowds of common people streamed past, and their voices murmuring sounded like a sullen sea breaking amongst rocks. Evidently something had happened that had excited the citizens and upset them, for there was no cheering, no "Baihete!" in greeting to the Tomkuk—in fact, Tom had the feeling that not only was he not as popular as before, but the people did not stand in such awe of him as previously they had done.

With a feeling of danger in the air, Tom put on as bold a front as possible and strode grimly up to the sullen crowd.

"Well, Metla, what is it that troubles your spirit?" he asked.

*(Something has happened that spells danger for Tom Cook & Co. What is it? See next week's Thrilled-packed chapters of this splendid African story. Coming soon:—Great Story of the Chums of St. Frank's. Don't miss it!)*

## "Nelson Lee" Readers Win Prizes For Jokes!

MY DEAR CHUMS  
—I mentioned the other day that there would be a big surprise treat in store for you in our 10,000 Gift Plan. It takes the form of a Special Bonus Coupon value 250 points. This coupon will be found in next week's pages, together with the



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usual two coupons of 25 points each. In all, then, next Wednesday you will be able to add 300 points to your collection—all from the Nelson Lee. Of course our companion papers will be giving away their usual coupons, and if you get them too, you will greatly enlarge your total. There's bound to be a rush for next week's NELSON LEE when everybody hears that we are giving away the Special Bonus Coupon. So be in the running for your copy. Don't leave it to chance—order to-day.

Talking about treats in store brings me to

### OUR GRAND ST. FRANK'S STORY.

We are another week nearer to the start of this splendid yarn. For those of you who may have missed my announcement last week, let me mention again about Mr. Brooks' latest masterpiece of school fiction. Owing to the demand for a St. Frank's story AND a long Detective-Thriller, I have decided to include both a detective-thriller and a story of St. Frank's in the NELSON LEE EVERY WEEK.

That's the great scheme, and one which I know will meet with great rejoicing. This is another instance where I have taken regard of the views of my many readers. Personal co-operation between the editor and his chums is making the NELSON LEE the Best Boy's Book on the market.

Tell all your pals about this coming treat; tell them that they must order their copies in advance; they'll need only to be told once after they've seen a copy of the Old Paper.

Now for some jokes which have won

### Grand Prizes For Readers.

The owner of a cheap watch brought it into the jeweller's shop to see what could be done for it.

"The mistake I made, of course," he said, "was in dropping it."

"Well, I don't suppose you could help that," replied the jeweller. "The mistake you made in picking it up."

(E. Allan, 33, East 8th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C., Canada—a grand prize.)

Teacher: "James, what is a comet?"

James: "A star with a tail, sir."

Teacher: "Give me the name of one."

James: "Rin-Tin-Tin!"

(L. Bentley, Gill Moss, West Derby, Liverpool—a pocket wallet.)

The bore was relating his experiences in the club-room.

"There I stood," he was saying, "there I stood, with the abyss yawning in front of me."

"Excuse me," interjected one of his listeners, "but was the abyss yawning before you got there?"

(D. H. Sheppard, Newlands, Sanderstead Hill, Sanderstead, Surrey—a penknife.)

Office Manager (on tour of inspection): "This place is getting rather dusty and dirty again."

Office Boy: "Right, sir. Shall I ask the vacuum people to give us another free demonstration?"

(H. A. T. Double, 81, Bury Street, Stowmarket, Suffolk—a pocket wallet.)

Employer: "Although you have been with us for sixty years, you'll have to leave."

Man: "If I'd known this wasn't to be a steady job, I'd never have come."

(G. Marshall, 39, Northumberland Tottenham, N.17—a penknife.)

Teacher: "'I have went.' Is that sentence wrong?"

Johnny: "Yes, ma'am."

Teacher: "Why is it wrong?"

Johnny: "Because you ain't went yet."

(N. Challis, 63, Stephen Avenue, Shepherd's Bush, W.12—a pocket wallet.)

A tramp, going up to the house, threw himself down on the lawn and commenced eating the grass.

Lady: "My good man, what are you doing there?"

Tramp: "Nothing to eat for days, mum; I'm starving."

Lady: "My dear man, if you go round to the back of the house you will find the grass much longer."

(A. V. Jenkins, 38, Ivy Street, Southsea—a pocket wallet.)

"Rastus, ah doesn't like to accuse you, but ah suspects dat you has stolen one ob mah chickens."

"Dat's a serious statement, Sambo. Has you any evidence?"

"De evidence, boy, is scratchin' fo' worms in yoh back garden."

(E. Arran, 76, Cavendish Road, West Didsbury, Manchester. A penknife.)

Tramp (to shopkeeper): "Do you buy rags and bones here?"

Shopkeeper: "Yes. Why?"

Tramp: "Well, how much for me?"

(L. James, 124, Lutter Moor Lane, Oldham, Lancs. A pocket wallet.)

## "PLUNDER LTD.!"

(Continued from page 39).

infamous Order of the Ring, and if he had failed to capture the leaders, he had, at least, driven them into hiding. The pity of it was that Ethel Anderson and Jack Longford were still the prisoners of the Chief.

**W**EEKS passed before Nelson Lee was able to leave the hospital, and then he went down to Forelands Hall, on the invitation of the viscount to recuperate. Both the viscount and the doctor exerted all their persuasive powers in a vain attempt to induce him to go abroad for a month or so, in order to recruit his shattered strength to the utmost, but he would not hear of it. Despite the perils he had already encountered, he was firmly resolved—as soon as he was able to move about—to resume his task of hunting down the villainous birds of prey who masqueraded under the name of the Order of the Ring.

"I have sworn to devote every moment of my time to exterminating this rascally society," he said. "I have vowed to rest neither night nor day until I have brought its leaders to justice, and have cleared up the mystery which at present enshrouds the fate of Jack Longford and Ethel Anderson."

"Then what are you going to do?" asked the viscount. "Are you going back to your rooms in Gray's Inn Road?"

"Not likely," said Nelson Lee, with a laugh. "I've no desire to be murdered just yet. After what had happened, my enemies will be more vindictive than ever. My only chance of safety lies in keeping my whereabouts an absolute secret."

"Then you intend to disappear again?"

"Exactly. I'm going to disguise myself as a low-down, out-at-elbows tramp, and I'm going to take up my quarters at a certain so-called 'model' lodging-house, which is well known to the police as the rendezvous of the lowest dregs of the criminal world."

"I see the idea," said his lordship. "You are going to take up your residence amongst the scum of the criminal world, in the hope that by listening to their conversation you may be able to pick up some information which will put you on the track of the Order of the Ring."

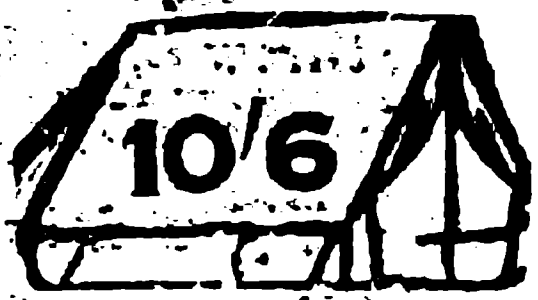
"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee, for the second time. "One phase of the work has come to a close, and now I must start at once on the second part, which, I hope, with the additional knowledge I now have, will end in triumph for law and justice!"

THE END.

(Next week's Gripping Detective-Thriller is entitled: "The Peril Trail!" and deals with Nelson Lee's heroic fight against the leaders of the infamous Order of the Ring. Don't miss it!)

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