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**THE PERIL TRAIL!**

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# THE PERIL TRAIL!

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**Somewhere in England lies the secret retreat of a sinister criminal confederation. But where? The task of finding it is fraught with a thousand perils, yet with typical grit and daring, Nelson Lee, the famous detective, sets out to brave these dangers and smash for ever the infamous Order of the Ring!**

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## CHAPTER 1.

### On the Track!

**N**ELSON LEE, the famous detective, sat in front of the kitchen fire in the house of a seafaring man named Knight. The house was situated close to the river, somewhere in that maze of dingy streets behind the Commercial Road in the East End of London.

The detective had not come there by sheer blind chance. He was busily engaged in trying to pick up the trail of the Order of the Ring, a criminal organisation he had sworn to smash up. This order was controlled, mainly, by three men, known to their

confederates and underlings as the Chief, the Doctor and the Squire. They dealt in all known forms of crime, and stayed their hands at nothing provided there was money to be made.

They had representatives all over the world, although their main headquarters were in England. They dealt in kidnapping, blackmail, burglary, murder, arson and counterfeiting. They ran a coiner's mint in a large country house in Yorkshire. They had an establishment in France for the printing of bogus banknotes and bonds. At one time they had several yachts at their disposal, but much of their power had been smashed up by the activities of Nelson Lee, who had made things so hot for them that



the leaders of the organisation had been compelled to remain in hiding. And now the detective was anxious to pick up the trail again.

It had so happened that some of the electrical machinery at the counterfeiting plant had gone wrong, and had defied the skill of all the men at the disposal of the Order of the Ring. The Squire had therefore lured to the "mint" a young electrical engineer, named Jack Longford, and had compelled him to repair the damage. After that he had given Jack Longford the option of joining the gang or dying.

But the Chief interfered, thinking he saw

a way of forcing the young engineer to join the Order of the Ring. The gang had been paid a large sum of money by Sir Philip Anderson in return for which they undertook to bring about the death of his niece, Ethel Anderson, because this young lady, being an heiress, stood in the way of the baronet coming into a fortune.

Young Jack Longford, however, happened to be engaged to Miss Ethel Anderson, and the Chief's subtle brain realised that if he threatened to torture the girl before the young engineer, then Jack would consent to take the oath of allegiance to the order rather than witness her sufferings.

But Jack had defied him, and Nelson Lee had interfered in the plot. The vessel in which the Chief, the Doctor, Ethel Anderson and Jack Longford had been sailing on a cruise, had been wrecked off the coast of Devonshire, in Blacksand Bay, close to the residence of Sir Philip Anderson. It had become known that the Chief and the Doctor, together with some of the crew, had made their way ashore and had escaped, but the fate of the two prisoners was not at all clear.

Nelson Lee had robbed the order of much of its power, and three of their meeting places had been destroyed through his agency. But while the Chief, the Doctor and the Squire, together with Lady Ursula, the only woman member of the organisation, were still at large, and while the fate of Ethel Anderson, and Jack Longford remained a mystery, the famous detective refused to give up his single-handed attempts at finding out the truth.

HE had lived for some time in the East End of London, mixing with all sorts of criminals, until he had met Knight, whom he had recognised as one of the seamen aboard the Chief's yacht, the Dolphin, which had been wrecked in Blacksand Bay. After becoming friendly with the man and persuading him to give him lodging for a while, he actually made himself known as Nelson Lee, the detective, but not telling him that he realised Knight's connection with the Order of the Ring.

"It's risky," he detective told himself. "But it may work. Knight will not rest until he has let the Chief know that I am still alive and on the trail, and if I watch Knight he may lead me to the Chief's hiding place."

And on this particular evening Nelson Lee saw that Knight was restless and uneasy. The housekeeper had gone to bed, and the detective and his host were smoking and talking in front of the kitchen fire. In the midst of their conversation the clock struck eleven.

"That reminds me!" cried Knight, jumping up and knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "I shall have to leave you now. I've an appointment down at the docks at a quarter-past eleven. Don't trouble to sit up for me, if you feel tired. I may only be gone ten minutes, and I may be an hour. I can't tell exactly."

"Oh, I expect I shall go to bed, about twelve," said Nelson Lee.

Knight put on his hat and hurriedly left the house. The detective waited until he heard him close the front door, and then he, too, put on his hat and followed Knight's example.

"It's working out to plan," he muttered to himself, as he shadowed Knight down the dark, deserted street. "He's afraid to tackle me single-handed, so he's gone to tell his confederates where I am, and bring some of them back with him to help him overpower me. An appointment at the docks! I won-

der if he thought that yarn fooled me? Who makes appointments at this time of night?"

It soon became clear that Knight had no intention of proceeding to the docks, for as soon as he reached the end of the street he deliberately turned his back on the river, and walked away at a rapid pace in the opposite direction. In the Commercial Road, he hailed a cruising taxi and drove off towards the City. And as a matter of course, the detective, being lucky enough to find a second taxi, immediately ordered the driver to keep the first in sight.

The City was reached, traversed and left behind. At the corner of New Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road, Knight's taxi pulled up. The detective followed suit about thirty yards in the rear. Knight stepped out of his taxi, paid the driver, and continued his journey on foot. The detective did the same, and shadowed his quarry to the door of the Raglan Club, where Knight turned in and disappeared.

Although Nelson Lee did not know it, Ethel Anderson and Jack Longford were still alive, having escaped from the wreck of the Dolphin with the Chief and the Doctor. But whereas the girl had been taken to the Squire's place in Yorkshire, where the "mint" was situated, Jack Longford had been taken to the club, of which only very few members of the order were aware.

But realising that Knight had not come to the Raglan Club for nothing, Nelson Lee ensconced himself in an archway on the opposite side of the street, and resigned himself to the prospect of a long and weary vigil. As a matter of fact, however, his vigil was exceedingly short, for just on the stroke of midnight, an empty car drove into the street and pulled up at the door of the club. And a few minutes later the Chief and the Doctor emerged from the club, sprang into the car, and gave the order—distinctly audible to Nelson Lee:

"St. Pancras, as fast as you can drive, for we've only twenty minutes to catch the train!"

After that Knight was of little account. Obviously, Nelson Lee's move was to follow the two master criminals. He walked to the end of the street, and hailed a passing taxi. By dint of furious driving he reached St. Pancras a minute or two in advance of the men he was shadowing. When they arrived he followed them into the booking-office, and heard them ask for tickets to Sheffield. Then he hurried across to the station-master's office, where he made himself known, explained his mission, and dictated the following telegram:

"To the Chief Constable, Sheffield.

"Stephen Meredith, alias the Chief of the Order of the Ring, and one of his confederates, known as the Doctor, are coming to Sheffield by train from St. Pancras, arriving at 5.15 a.m. Procure warrants and

be at station to meet them. Am travelling by same train myself in order to identify.—  
NELSON LEE."

He handed this wire to the stationmaster, who promised to see that it was sent off without a moment's delay. Then he hastened back to the departure platform and sprang into the Sheffield train just as it was moving out of the station. It seemed as if his mission would soon end, that he would not only capture the two chief rogues, but learn more of the order and its resources. But the fates willed it otherwise!

## CHAPTER 2.

### So Near and Yet So Far!

**O**N to the north sped the flying train. In a first-class compartment near the centre of the train, little dreaming what was in store for them, the Chief and the Doctor were chatting. For the past few weeks—ever since Nelson Lee had tracked them to the red-brick villa beyond Elstrae—they had been lying low at the Squire's house up north, to which they were now returning after a hurried visit to London.

They had been to see Jack Longford, and whilst they had been in the club Knight had arrived with the startling news that Nelson Lee was at his house!

The Chief immediately instructed Knight to return home, with three more members of the Order of the Ring, and dispose of Nelson Lee. He and the Doctor, then left the club, and had driven to St. Pancras, where they had caught the Sheffield train, with the object of returning to the Squire's place. They could have travelled by car as they had arrived, but they were afraid that Nelson Lee was closer on their track than they knew, and that a description of the car, together with the number, might be flashed throughout the country, and they would be arrested before they could dive back into their hiding place again. The express train was dangerous enough, but certainly more speedy.

"How long to you think it'll be before we're able to remove Longford to the Squire's?" asked the Chief.

"Three or four days. But why do you wish to take him to the Squire's?"

The Chief laughed a harsh, unpleasant laugh, with more than a suspicion of defiance in it. A dangerous light flickered in his deep-set eyes, and his face grew ominously hard and cold.

"I have sworn to make Jack Longford join our ranks, and, by heaven, I'll do it, if it takes me twenty years! What is the time?"

"A quarter-past one."

"Then, at this very moment, in all probability, Knight and his three companions are

tracking Nelson Lee! I have a flask here—we'll drink to his memory!"

They laughed at their joke, but their merriment was out of place, for when the would-be assassins reached Knight's house they found that their victim had flown, and although they waited until dawn, he did not return.

And as the train sped northwards, Ethel Anderson was sleeping in a room above the underground mint at the Squire's house. In the drawing-room the Squire and Lady Ursula were playing cards.

"Four o'clock!" exclaimed the Squire, as the clock on the mantelpiece chimed the hour. "How the night drags on!"

"That's not very complimentary to me," said Lady Ursula, with a silvery laugh. "I'm sorry you find me such a bore!"

"Oh, it isn't that," said the Squire hastily. "But somehow or other I'm in the dumps to-night. If I believed in such things I should say that I had a presentiment of evil. I can't shake off the feeling that something's going to happen."

"To whom?"

"To the Chief and the Doctor. I'm sure it wasn't wise of them to venture up to London, now that Nelson Lee is out and about again, and we don't know where that hound is, so we can't keep an eye on him. It's too dangerous to all of us. I hope they're all right."

"Of course, they're all right," said Lady Ursula, helping herself to another of the Squire's cigarettes. "You've got Nelson Lee on the brain! Shuffle those cards, and we'll have another hand. It won't be long before they'll be knocking at the door."

She had scarcely finished speaking ere the house re-echoed with the a violent pealing of the front-door bell.

"There they are!" she cried, springing to her feet.

"Impossible!" he said. "Their train isn't due in Sheffield until a quarter-past five, and it's only just gone four."

"Perhaps they caught an earlier train."

"Impossible. If they had caught the earlier train they would have got here long ago."

"Then who can it be?"

Before he could reply a second peal reverberated through the house.

"Whoever it is, he's in a desperate hurry," said the Squire. "As the servants are all in bed, I suppose I shall have to answer the door myself."

He left the room and crossed the spacious entrance hall. Before he opened the door he peered through the narrow, slit-like window, which overlooked the porch outside. The first thing that caught his eye was a gentleman's bicycle, which had been reared against one of the pillars of the porch, just beneath the old-fashioned hanging lamp. The front tyre was apparently quite flat, and the machine itself was caked with mud.

Standing at the door was a tall, young fellow. One hand clutched the handle of his

machine, the other gripped the handle of the door. His face, though as white as a sheet, was streaming with perspiration. He was swaying to and fro like a drunken man, and he was breathing hard from his strenuous exertions.

The Squire recognised him at once. He was a telegraph clerk at the Sheffield General Post Office. He was also a member of the Order of the Ring!

WITH trembling hands the Squire unlocked and unbolted the door. The moment he opened it his visitor staggered blindly into the hall and literally fell into one of the chairs.

"The game's up!" he gasped, thumping himself on the chest, and panting for breath. "Chief and Doctor arrested—L.M.S. station—as soon as they arrive!"

For one brief instant the Squire regarded him in horrified stupefaction. Then he darted into an adjoining room, and presently returned with a tumbler and a decanter.

"Here, drink this!" he said, handing the man a glass. "Now, pull yourself together and tell me what's happened."

The clerk gulped down the drink and unloosed his collar. For a moment or two he fanned himself with his cap, then he cleared his throat and told his startling tale.

"I was on duty at the office this morning from midnight until half-past three," he said. "Shortly after one o'clock I received a message from London. It was addressed to the Chief Constable, and, to the best of my recollection, ran as follows:

"Stephen Meredith, alias the Chief of the Order of the Ring, and one of his confederates, known as the Doctor, will arrive Sheffield from St. Pancras at 5.15. Procure warrants and be at station to meet them. Am travelling by same train myself in order to identify.—Nelson Lee."

The Squire staggered back with a low, hoarse cry of despair.

"I knew it—I knew it!" he groaned. "Something told me that we were on the eve of a catastrophe! What did you do?"

"What could I do?" replied the clerk. "I thought at first of keeping the message back until it was too late for the police to meet the train, but unfortunately one of my fellow-clerks was looking over my shoulder when the message arrived, so that concealment was impossible."

"Then the message was delivered?"

"It was."

"Why didn't you come and tell me at once?"

"I couldn't. I was on special duty to-night, and they wouldn't let me off. The moment I came off duty I jumped on my bicycle and rode out here as fast as I could. Is it too late, do you think, to warn the Chief and the Doctor of the danger which awaits them?"

"I'm afraid so," said the Squire, pacing the hall with rapid, agitated strides. "It is now a quarter-past four. By this time

their train will have left Derby, and will only stop once more—at Chesterfield—before it reaches Sheffield. We haven't time to get a wire through to Chesterfield before they leave; and even if we did it would be no good, for Nelson Lee is in the train, and if he saw them get out he would simply do the same and shadow them here."

"Wouldn't it be possible to stop the train between Chesterfield and Sheffield?" suggested the clerk. "The line runs past the end of your grounds, you know."

"I know," said the Squire. "But how could we stop the train without exciting Nelson Lee's suspicions?"

Before the clerk had time to reply, Lady Ursula appeared.

"What is it?" she asked, glancing from the Squire to the clerk, and from the clerk to the Squire. "Has anything happened?"

In a few hurried sentences the Squire told her the startling news. Somewhat to his surprise she betrayed neither fear nor despair. She heard him calmly to the end, then she shrugged her shoulders and regarded him with a glance of pitying scorn.

"What fools you men are!" she said contemptuously. "Do you really mean to say that you cannot see any way by which the Chief and the Doctor can be saved? Listen to me. In three-quarters of an hour from now the train in which they are travelling will be passing through the cutting at the south-west corner of your grounds."

"That is so."

"Then answer me this. If you were to rouse two or three of the servants and were to take them down to the cutting, would it be possible for them to tear up one of the rails before the train arrived?"

"Certainly. But what good would that do? It would stop the train, I admit, but it would also give rise to a frightful accident in which the Chief and the Doctor would certainly be injured, if not killed outright."

"Not at all," she replied. "As soon as you've removed the rail, one of the servants must hurry up the line to meet the train. He must take a lantern or torch of some sort with him, and the moment he sees the train he must wave the light frantically and yell to the driver to stop. When the driver has brought the train to a standstill the servant must go to him and say something to this effect: 'I was crossing the line just now on my way to my work when I accidentally discovered that one of the rails had been torn up. As I knew that the London mail was just about due I flew up the line to give you warning. Thank Heaven I am in time!'"

"What will happen next, do you suppose?" she went on. "The passengers will crowd out of the train in a state of great excitement. When they hear your servant's story they will shake him by the hand and hail him as a hero. Some of them will walk down the line to look at the place where



**Nelson Lee knew he was cornered, but he could hold off the attack of the crooks until help came. Suddenly the head and shoulders of a man appeared above the trap, and Lee, clubbing his revolver, brought it down with a crash!**

the lines have been tampered with, but by that time, of course, you will have sent the rest of the servants back to the house, so that nobody will be visible, and nobody will be able to discover by whom the rail was removed."

"And what shall I be doing in the meantime?" asked the Squire.

"You will be hiding behind the hedge at the side of the cutting," she replied. "As soon as you see a favourable opportunity you will mingle with the crowd, keeping out of the way of Nelson Lee, of course, and whisper to the Doctor and the Chief. Then all three of you, taking advantage of the darkness and confusion, will quietly slip away and make your way to this house."

"That's all very fine," said the Squire doubtfully; "but it seems to me that you're leaving Nelson Lee entirely out of your reckoning. Suppose he smells a rat? Suppose he decides to keep an eye on the Chief and the Doctor? Suppose he follows

us when we quietly slip away, as you suggest?"

"Leave that part of the business to me," said Lady Ursula significantly. "I'll look after Nelson Lee."

**I**N a third-class compartment of the Northern Express Nelson Lee was patting himself on the back and congratulating himself on the near approach of the end of his arduous quest.

He consulted his watch. It was five o'clock. In another fifteen minutes, he told himself, the train would run into the station at Sheffield. The chief constable, or one of the officers, would be standing on the platform with a posse of police. The former would have a couple of warrants in his pocket, one for the Chief and another for the Doctor. He—Nelson Lee—would spring from the train the moment it pulled up. He would beckon to the police and lead them to the door of the first-class compartment

in which the Chief and the Doctor were travelling. He would point them out to the police—

Grr-r-r!

A sudden, violent jar ran through the train and brought his ruminations to an abrupt termination. The engine-driver had suddenly clapped on the brakes. The train began to slow down.

"Signal's against us, I suppose," muttered Nelson Lee.

He lowered the window and thrust his head out. It was a pitch-dark night, or rather morning, with a thin drizzle of rain. Far away down the line, perhaps half a mile ahead, someone was waving a lantern. And above the grinding of the brakes, above the roar of the skidding wheels, the detective heard the distant warning cry:

"Pull up! Stop her! Danger!"

Shorter and shorter grew the distance between the train and the dim figure with the lantern. Slower and slower moved the express, till at last it came to an absolute stop in a deep, dark, steep-sided cutting. The moment it came to a standstill carriage doors flew open as if by magic, and in less time almost than it takes to tell a crowd of anxious passengers sprang out on to the line and hurried to the engine, where the driver and the fireman were engaged in conversation with a nervous-looking little man with a lantern in his hand.

"I only just managed it," the man was saying, when the passengers came up. "Another twenty yards and nothing could have saved you."

A shiver of horror ran through the crowd as they heard this startling statement. They plied the man with a babel of eager questions.

"Somebody's tried to wreck your train, that's all!" said the man as soon as he could make himself heard. "I was walking down the line on my way to work when I noticed that one of the rails on the down line had been taken up and laid across the metals. Whilst I was looking at it I heard the rumble of your train, so I ran up the line, waving my lantern and shouting to the driver to stop. I was afraid at first that I should be too late to stop you; but thank Heaven I was just in the nick of time. Come, and I'll show you what you've missed."

Lantern in hand, he led the way down the line. Most of the passengers accompanied him, but one or two remained behind and engaged each other in conversation. Amongst them were the Chief and the Doctor.

"What d'you make of this affair?" muttered the Doctor, under his breath. "You recognised the man with the lantern, of course?"

"Of course I did," said the Chief in the same low tones. "He's one of the Squire's men. I was on the point of speaking to him, but he gave me a look which said as plain

as words that he didn't wish me to recognise him."

"I saw it," said the Doctor. "There's something in the wind, you can bet your boots. Can it be that something has happened which makes him anxious to communicate with us before we get to Sheffield?"

Before the Chief could reply a muffled figure stole up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

"Quick! Follow me!" said the Squire, for it was he. "It was I who caused the train to be stopped. Nelson Lee is here. He has wired to Sheffield, and the police are waiting for you at the station."

"Nelson Lee here!" gasped the Chief, in an incredulous whisper. "You're dreaming! He's at Knight's house in London, and by this time is probably dead. Knight came to the club—"

"For heaven's sake don't stop to argue!" said the Squire impatiently. "I'll tell you about it afterwards. For the present it's enough for you to know that I've seen Nelson Lee not half a dozen yards from where we're standing, within the last half-minute. He's just gone down the line to look at our handiwork."

This was partly true and partly false, though the Squire did not know it. It was true that he had seen Nelson Lee, but it was not true that the detective had gone down the line to inspect the Squire's handiwork. On the contrary, he was standing at that moment in the shadow of one of the carriages just behind them, and was watching their every movement with an eager, lynx-eyed gaze.

The fact of the matter was that the detective saw the Squire at the same moment as the Squire saw him, and in the twinkling of an eye the suspicion flashed into his mind that it was the Squire who had stopped the train, and that he had done so in order to warn his two accomplices of the fate which was awaiting them at Sheffield. In order to put his theory to the test, he passed the Squire without the slightest sign of recognition and pretended to walk down the line with the other passengers. As soon as he was out of the Squire's line of vision, however, he doubled back and concealed himself in the shadow of one of the carriages.

From this coign of vantage he saw the Squire approach the Chief and the Doctor. He saw the whispered consultation, though he could not hear what passed. Then he saw the three men glide away and begin to climb up the steep and grassy embankment. The detective's first impulse was to shout for help and to rush forward to arrest the criminals. But he checked himself. It dawned in upon him that in all probability the Squire's house that contained the mint and for which he had searched long and often must be somewhere in the vicinity, and that he might learn much by quietly following his quarry.

With stealthy, catlike steps he threaded his way across the line and crept up the steep embankment. By the time he was half-way up the Chief and his two confederates had vanished over the crest. Fearful of losing them in the darkness the detective quickened his pace. He reached the top and was in the act of climbing over the fence when suddenly, out of the ground, as it seemed, there rose the figure of Lady Ursula.

Crack!

There was a sharp report, accompanied by a silvery, mocking laugh and a vicious spit of flame. The next instant the detective toppled backwards off the fence and went rolling down the embankment.

### CHAPTER 3.

#### A Cross-country Chase!

IN the meantime the Chief and his two companions were hurrying across a large grass-field which lay between the railway line and the road which bordered the Squire's grounds. Half-way across the Squire came to a halt and glanced behind him.

"You two go on and I'll wait here," he said. "In the top left-hand corner of this field you'll find a gate. Turn to the right, and about thirty or forty yards farther along the road, on the left-hand side, you'll find the stile which leads into the park."

"But why aren't you coming with us?" asked the Doctor.

"I'm going to wait here for Ursula," said the Squire.

"For Ursula?" exclaimed the Chief in tones of profound surprise. "Surely you don't mean that Ursula is out here?"

"She is," replied the Squire. "She insisted upon coming with me in order to keep an eye on Nelson Lee. She's posted herself at the top of the embankment, and if he attempts to follow us she's going to—"

Before he had time to complete his sentence they saw the flash and heard the report of Lady Ursula's shot. For a second there was silence; then the hum of angry voices was heard, mingled with the excited barking of a dog. Above the uproar they heard the soft, swift patter of approaching footsteps, and a moment later Lady Ursula came running up.

"Quick! Run!" she gasped. "I've failed!"

"Failed! How?" demanded the Squire.

"He saw you steal away, and he started to follow you!" she panted. "I waited until he reached the top of the embankment, then I fired at him just as he was climbing over the fence. But he was too quick for me. The moment I raised my revolver he flung himself backwards off the fence, with the result that my bullet missed him."

"Curse the man, he's as many lives as a cat!" growled the Chief as they scurried across the field. "But if he threw himself

off the fence, surely he must have rolled down the embankment."

"He did, but he wasn't hurt, worse luck," she replied. "I saw him pick himself up, and I heard him speak to the passengers. He called upon them, in the name of the law, to assist him to chase us; but only three of them responded to his call. One of the three has a dog, however, and as it's growing lighter every minute you'll see that we haven't a moment to lose if we wish to give them the slip."

She had scarcely finished speaking before the detective and his three companions, accompanied by the dog, scrambled over the wooden fence which divided the field from the railway cutting. For an instant—but only for an instant—the darkness baffled them; then the dog gave vent to a low, fierce growl, and dashed away in the direction of the gate at the end of the field.

"There they are! I can see them now!" shouted Nelson Lee grimly. "Three men and a woman, making for that gate!"

"It's all up now," groaned the Squire. "We can't possibly shake them off before we reach the stile; so that, even though they may not be able to overtake us, we shall simply lead them straight to my house."

"Never!" said the Chief, between his clenched teeth. "We must preserve the secret of your house, whatever happens!"

"But how?" demanded the Squire.

"We must not go near the house until we've shaken them off," said the Chief. "As soon as we reach the road we must divide our forces and disperse in different directions. You and Ursula must turn to the right; the Doctor and I will turn to the left."

"I understand," said the Squire. "If we can't shake them off, I am to shoot them."

"Exactly," said the Chief.

"But what about you and the Doctor?" asked the Squire. "Neither of you has a revolver, while Nelson Lee is sure to be armed."

"Don't you worry about us," said the Chief. "Your business is to take care of Lady Ursula. The Doctor and I are quite capable of taking care of ourselves."

By this time they had reached the gate, and a moment later they were racing down the deserted road, the Squire and Lady Ursula to the right; the Chief and the Doctor to the left.

"What shall we do now?" panted one of Nelson Lee's companions. "Which couple do we follow?"

"Both!" said the detective, as he vaulted over the gate. "You two follow the Squire and Lady Ursula, and we two will follow the Chief and the Doctor."

Without a word the two men he addressed—one of whom was the owner of the dog, which, naturally, followed him—wheeled round to the right and set out in pursuit of the Squire and his companion. For nearly half a mile they chased them through the ever-brightening gloom, gaining ground

at every stride; then the Squire suddenly turned at bay and opened fire with Lady Ursula's revolver.

The dog rolled over, a bullet through his heart; one man dropped dead, the second shot piercing his brain; the other lost the tip of an ear, and immediately turned and fled.

A quarter of an hour later the Squire and Lady Ursula had crossed the park and were safe inside the house.

**I**N the meantime the Chief and the Doctor were sprinting down the road in the opposite direction, with Nelson Lee and his new-found ally in close pursuit. The latter was a young Oxford undergraduate named Rhodes, who had distinguished himself the year before in the inter-university sports. In the ordinary way, both he and Nelson Lee could have given their opponents a hundred yards in half a mile and beaten them every time; but on the present occasion fear had lent wings to the fugitives' feet, and although their pursuers strained every nerve, the distance between the hunters and the hunted at the end of the first mile was much the same as when the chase started.

This state of affairs was anything but pleasing to Nelson Lee, who had been looking forward to an easy and a speedy capture. At the same time, it was still less pleasing to the Chief and the Doctor. It was true that their pursuers were not gaining on them, but it was equally true that they themselves were not increasing their lead. And there was not much consolation in the thought that they were only just holding their own when the rosy light of the dawn was steadily creeping across the sky; when already the smoke was beginning to issue from the chimneys of the neighbouring farmhouses; when before very long the fields and roads would be dotted with farm-labourers, who would only need an appealing shout from Nelson Lee to throw down their implements and join in the chase.

"We must separate," gasped the Chief. "It's our only chance of shaking them off. At the bottom of this hill the road divides. You take the turn on the right, and make for that wood. I'll take the turn on the left and try to find cover in the neighbourhood of the old mill."

The Doctor nodded his agreement—he had no breath left for words—and as soon as they reached the foot of the hill he swerved to the right and continued his flight alone.

"Hallo, they've parted company!" cried Nelson Lee, as soon as he perceived this fresh manœuvre. "Are you game to tackle the Doctor single-handed?"

"Rather!" said Rhodes.

"Then you take the Doctor and I'll take the Chief," said Nelson Lee. "If you manage to overtake him, don't stand on ceremony."

More than this the detective had not time

to say, for by the time he had finished speaking they had reached the bottom of the hill.

In accordance with Nelson Lee's instructions, Rhodes took the turn on the right and chased the Doctor to a densely wooded copse which adjoined the Squire's park. By the time the Doctor gained the shelter of the wood his pursuer was less than fifteen yards behind. But that, unfortunately, was the full extent of the young Oxonian's success. As he vaulted over the low stone wall which divided the wood from the fields, he caught his foot in a trailing bramble and measured his length on the ground.

When he tried to rise, he found to his dismay that he had twisted his ankle. Despite the pain, he struggled gamely on; but at every stride the gap between himself and the Doctor increased in length until at last he lost sight of him altogether.

Twenty minutes later the Doctor was shaking hands with the Squire and Lady Ursula in the drawing-room of the Squire's house. Three of the four had made good their escape. But what of the fourth—the Chief?

"When I left him," said the Doctor, "he was making for the ruined mill in the hope of finding cover. It's only a quarter to six. There won't be many people abroad at this hour of the morning. What d'you say if we go out to meet him? Nelson Lee is a pretty big handful for one lone man—even for a man like the Chief—to tackle by himself, and it's quite on the cards that we might fall in with them in time to lend him a helping hand."

"All right; I'm game!" said the Squire, opening a drawer and producing a pair of revolvers. "It's a bit risky to venture out so soon after what has happened; but he'd do as much for us."

Meanwhile, the Chief was badly needing help, for Nelson Lee was gaining on him. After parting with the Doctor, he kept to the road for a matter of three or four hundred yards; then he suddenly swerved to the left, vaulted over a five-barred gate, and took to his heels down the steeply-sloping side of a thickly-wooded ravine.

At the bottom of this ravine was a deep and rapid stream, spanned by a rickety foot-bridge. The Chief's idea was to cross the stream and demolish the bridge before the detective overtook him. If only he could accomplish this—so he argued to himself—the detective's further progress would be barred. He would not be able to leap across the stream; it was too wide. He would not be able to ford it; it was too deep. He would not even be able to swim across, for the stream ran like a mountain torrent between two high and perpendicular banks, which not even a cat could have scaled.

It was true that there was another bridge lower down the stream; but by the time the detective had made his way to this second bridge, which was nearly half a mile away, the Chief would have taken to his heels in the opposite direction, and further pursuit would be out of the question.

Fired by these hopes, the Chief put on an extra spurt, and gained the bridge full fifty yards ahead of the detective. The instant he reached the other side he set to work with feverish haste to tear up the rotten planks of which the bridge was composed. Half a dozen blows with an axe would have done the work in as many seconds; but as he only had his hands with which to work, his task was but half-completed when Nelson Lee came running up.

"Got you—at last!" cried Nelson Lee, as he bounded on to the bridge.

But he had spoken too soon. As soon as the rickety structure received his weight it began to sway from side to side; and an instant later—just as the detective reached the middle—it toppled over like a house of cards and fell with a splash into the stream.

Fortunately, the swaying of the bridge had warned the detective of what was coming, and the moment he felt it giving way beneath his weight he pressed his elbows to his sides and took a flying leap forward.

Meanwhile, the Chief had risen to his feet and had turned to bolt for it. Upon hearing the splash of the falling bridge he spun round on his heel just in time to see the detective land on his feet on the very edge of the bank.

With a snarl of baffled rage, the Chief rushed at the detective and gave him a violent push. Instinctively, Nelson Lee threw out his hands and clutched at the Chief by the lapel of his coat. For one brief instant they swayed and reeled on the brink of the chasm; then the ground gave way beneath the detective's feet, and both he and his assailant fell backwards into the stream, locked in each other's embrace!

— —  
**CHAPTER 4.**

**At Bay in the Ruined Mill!**

**T**HE footbridge had been thrown across the stream at its narrowest and deepest point, and so fierce was the current at this particular spot that the instant the two men struck the water they were seized, as it were, in a vice-like grip that dragged them out of each other's arms and sucked them under, flung them to the surface again, and whirled them away at a pace which they were powerless to control or to resist.

By-and-by, however, the stream grew wider and the current slower until at last it

broadened out into a large square sheet of water, which had formerly done duty as a mill dam. At one end of the dam was a weir and the remains of a mammoth water-wheel; and close beside the water-wheel, fringing the edge of the dam, was a long, low row of roofless buildings, from the centre of which rose the ruined tower of the dis-used mill.

Until they reached the dam, both Nelson Lee and the Chief had no alternative but to let the current carry them along at its own sweet will. The moment they entered the dam, however, the Chief turned over on his side and struck out for the nearest bank. The detective lost no time in following suit, and before the Chief had covered twenty yards the detective was close behind him.

Suddenly, to Nelson Lee's amazement, his opponent dived and vanished below the surface. When he re-appeared he had a knife in his hand, and, almost before the detective had time to realise what had happened, the Chief made a lightning dive towards him and aimed a blow at his face.

Quick as thought the detective dived and came up on the other side. With a couple of rapid over-arm strokes he approached the Chief from behind and dealt him a blow which sent his weapon flying from his hand. With a savage oath, the Chief spun round and flung

his arms around the detective's neck. The next instant they were writhing and struggling in the mud and slime at the bottom of the dam.

Nelson Lee went through mental agonies in the next few minutes. It was obvious that the Chief had at last abandoned all hope of escape. He had resigned himself to his fate. He had come to the conclusion that he was doomed to die—either by drowning or at the hands of the hangman—and he had made up his mind that he would die by drowning, and that Nelson Lee should perish with him.

With this end in view, he made no attempt to strike at Nelson Lee, but contented himself with clinging to the detective's neck for the purpose of preventing him rising to the surface. In vain the detective wriggled and strained and pulled and pushed. In vain he seized his assailant's arms and strove to tear them asunder. Despair had endowed the Chief with almost superhuman strength, and never for an instant did his murderous and remorseless grip relax.

In the agony of his despair—for he felt that the horrors of suffocation were rapidly



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soon wash over the  
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creeping over him—the detective clenched his fists and drove them into his enemy's face with all the strength of which he was capable. Again and again he repeated this manoeuvre, till at last, with a gurgling moan, the Chief rolled over and lapsed into unconsciousness.

Like an arrow from a bow the detective shot upwards to the surface. Half a dozen deep-drawn draughts of the cool, fresh, morning air revived his flagging energies and cleared his clouded brain. Then once again he dived down to the muddy bottom of the dam, where he gripped the Chief by the collar of his coat, dragged him to the surface, swam to the bank, and hauled his prisoner ashore.

For a moment he feared that the Chief had succumbed; but a closer inspection revealed the fact that his heart was still beating, though feebly and at irregular intervals. Unmindful of his own discomfort, the detective promptly set to work at artificial respiration. In the midst of his task, and just as the Chief was showing signs of returning consciousness, a cheerful whistle was heard; and a moment later a shock-headed youth, with a pickle-jar and a primitive fishing-rod, climbed over the wall which divided the road from the stone-flagged enclosure in front of the mill.

Upon seeing Nelson Lee kneeling beside the unconscious Chief, the boy immediately dropped his tackle and took to his heels.

"Hi, come back! I shan't hurt you!" shouted Nelson Lee. "I'll pay you well to run a message for me."

Somewhat reluctantly the boy pulled up and retraced his steps towards the dam.

"What is the nearest village, and how far away is it?" asked the detective.

"Abbeyvale, sir—about two miles away."

"Right," said Nelson Lee. "You buzz off there as hard as you can go, find the policeman, and tell him that you've come from Mr. Nelson Lee, the London detective. Tell him that I'm up at this old mill, and that I've captured the Chief of the Order of the Ring. The Chief of the Order of the Ring. Can you remember that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Tell him, too, that my prisoner is very ill, and cannot walk, so that he'd better bring a doctor with him and a car of some sort. Do you understand what—"

In the midst of his sentence he suddenly paused, for at that moment a faint and far-off cry fell on his ears.

"Coo-ee! Coo-ee!"

**W**HY it was the detective could never afterwards explain; but the moment he heard that cry a sudden suspicion flashed into his mind that it foreboded danger. In order to put his suspicion to the test, he sprang to his feet and ran towards the ruined mill, bidding the astonished boy to wait where he was until he came back.

He darted through the doorless doorway at the foot of the tower and found himself in a gloomy, mildewed room which had

formerly served as the machine-room. On the far side of this room, opposite the doorway, was a long and partly demolished ladder, which led through a trapdoor in the wooden roof to the room above. Quivering with excitement, he sprang up this ladder, picked his way across the mouldering floor, and peered through a slit-like window in the tower wall.

From this elevated position he had an uninterrupted view of the whole countryside to the east of the mill. An artist would have revelled in the view, yet Nelson Lee saw none of it. All that he saw was a couple of men, accompanied by a bloodhound, sauntering down the road towards the mill. They were fully three-quarters of a mile away, yet even at that distance he recognised them at a glance.

For the figures were those of the Doctor and the Squire, and they were evidently looking for the Chief.

Swiftly, yet without any undue haste, the detective descended the ladder and returned to the spot where he had left the Chief and his new-found young friend.

"Which is the way to Abbeyvale?" he asked.

"That way," said the boy, pointing in the opposite direction to that in which the Doctor and the Squire were approaching.

The detective heaved a sigh of relief. He had feared that the boy might have had to pass the two men on his way.

"Here's a ten-shilling note for you," he said, thrusting it into his hand. "I have another message for the Abbeyvale policeman. You must tell him all I told you before, but you must also tell him that he'd better collect about half a dozen helpers from the village and bring them along with him. There are two men coming down the road who are friends of the Chief's, and if they find him here they'll stick at nothing to prevent his arrest."

"All right, sir; I'll tell him," said the boy. "A car, a doctor, and half a dozen men. That's all, isn't it?"

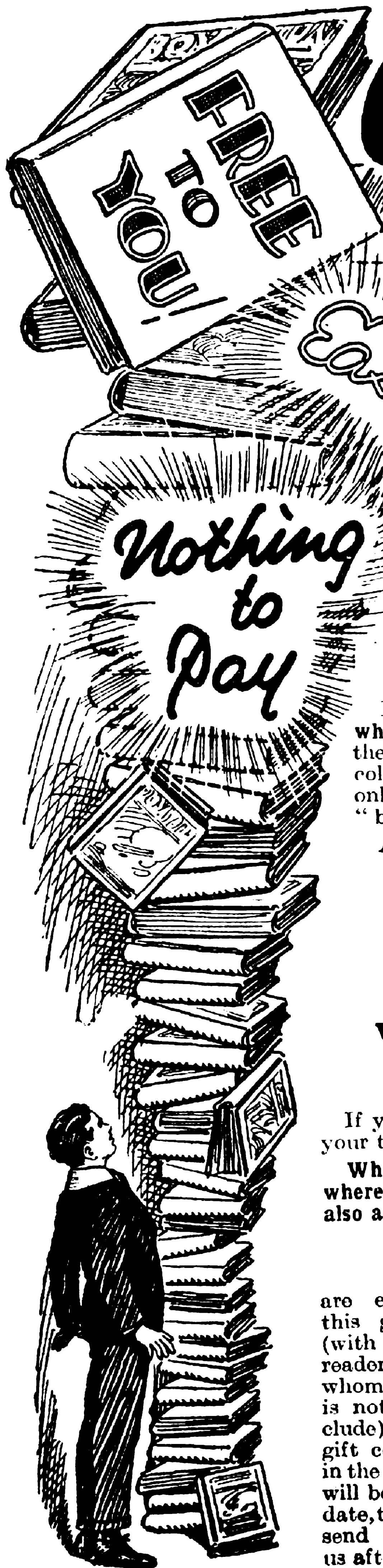
"That's all," said Nelson Lee. "Except that he's got to look sharp! Now, go. Run all the way, and don't stop a minute for anything or anybody!"

The boy climbed over the crumbling wall and vanished down the road. The detective then stooped down, raised the still unconscious Chief in his arms, and partly carried him, partly dragged him, into the ruined mill. By dint of heroic exertions he carried him up the ladder into the inner room, where he laid him on the floor and bound him hand and foot by means of his braces, a leather belt, a necktie, and a pocket handkerchief.

"Coo-ee! Coo-ee!"

Again the cry came floating down the wind. The detective walked over to the window, and once more took a hasty survey of the scene outside. The Squire and the

(Continued on page 14.)



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**THE PERIL TRAIL!***(Continued from page 12.)*

Doctor were then about a quarter of a mile away.

He examined the ladder and tried to wrench it from its fastenings. Finding that it was too firmly fixed, he gave up the attempt and took out his revolver. He emptied out the cartridges and dried them as well as he could. He replaced them in the revolver and once more stole to the window.

"Coo-ec! Coo-ee!"

The two men were looking over the wall which divided the millyard from the road. They glanced at the mill and said something which he could not catch. Then the Doctor raised the bloodhound in his arms and dropped him over the wall.

By some strange instinct the animal bounded straight to the spot on the edge of the dam where the Chief had recently lain. He sniffed at the still damp patch on the ground; then he threw up his handsome head and gave vent to a deep-throated, musical bay.

"I wish I had Nipper and Wolf here," muttered Nelson Lee. "But what's the use of hoping? They're at St. Frank's and I'm here, in a tight corner!"

In the twinkling of an eye the Squire and the Doctor were over the wall and standing beside the great dog.

"Seek him, boy—seek him!" cried the Squire in a hoarse, excited voice.

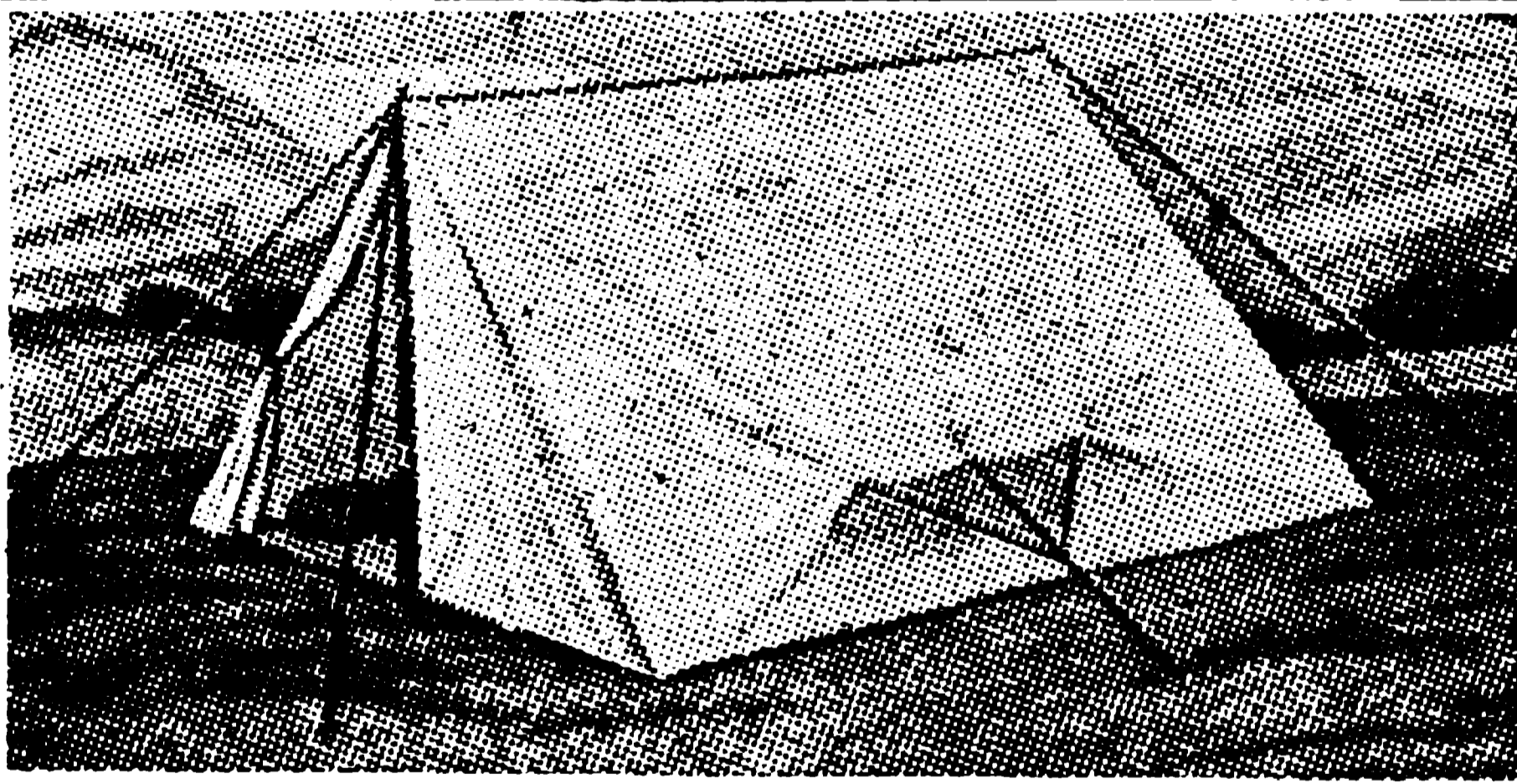
And almost before the words were out of his mouth the bloodhound darted towards the ruined mill, with the Squire and the Doctor at his heels.

**CHAPTER 5.****Trapped!**

NELSON LEE stepped back from the window and pulled out his revolver. "I'm afraid it won't be of very much use," he muttered to himself as he ruefully examined it. "However, there's always the butt end to fall back on."

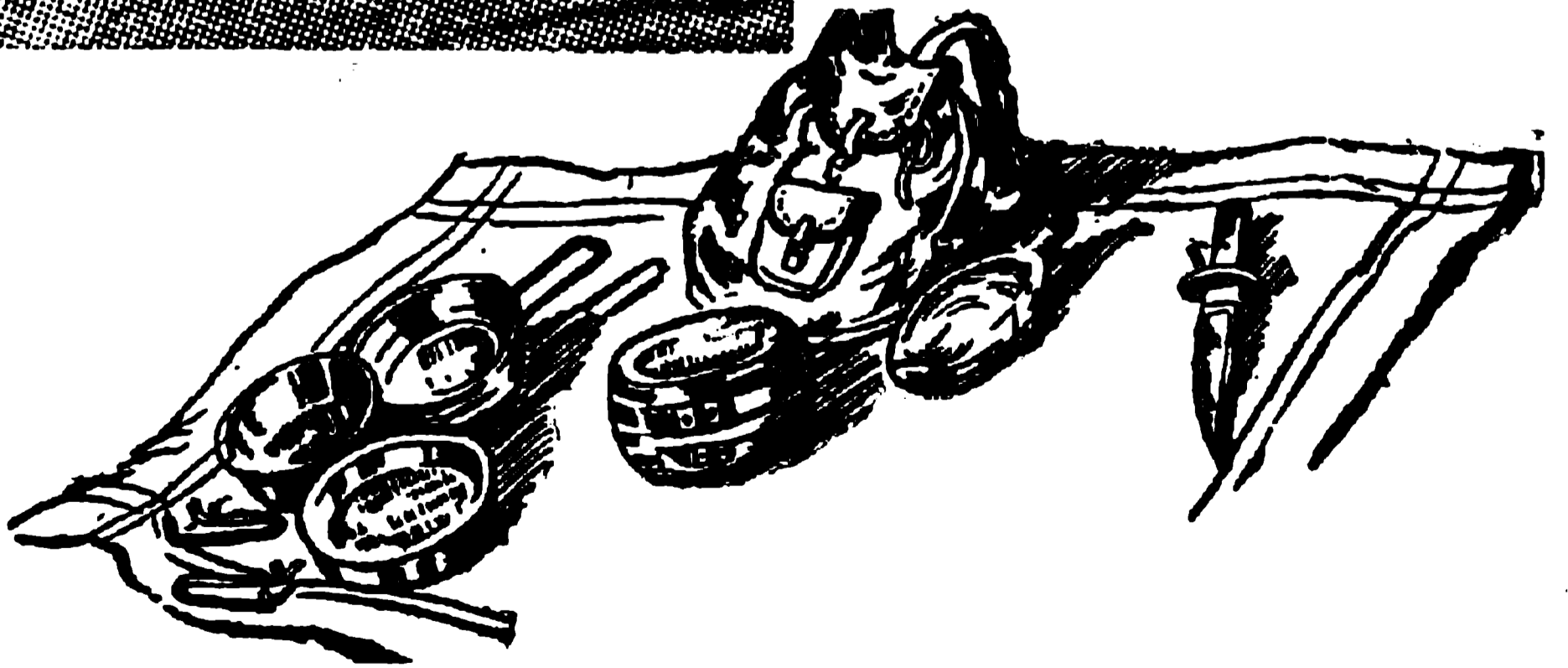
He glanced at the Chief, who was lying in a huddled, half-unconscious heap in one corner of the room. Then he glided across to the open trapdoor—which was merely a hole in the floor—and threw himself flat on his face beside it.

Scarcely had he done so ere the Doctor and the Squire, preceded by the bloodhound, rushed into the room below. They knew nothing of what had happened since the Chief and the Doctor parted company, and consequently they were still in the dark as to whether the Chief had succeeded in shaking off the detective, or whether he had been captured. They knew, from the behaviour of the bloodhound, that the Chief



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had been at the ruined mill; but whether he was still there, or whether he had left, was a question upon which they still had to be enlightened.

Upon this latter point however, the bloodhound seemed to have no doubt whatever. For the moment he entered the ruined mill he bounded straight to the foot of the ladder, where he executed a series of frantic leaps, whilst at the same time he made the place re-echo with his plaintive howls and excited yelps.

The Squire thrust the dog aside and began to mount the rickety ladder. The detective clenched his teeth and waited until the Squire's head came into view through the hole in the floor. Then he clubbed the weapon and brought it down with all his strength on the Squire's head. Partly from the force of the blow, partly from astonishment, the Squire staggered back, and all but overbalanced himself. By a superhuman effort he saved himself from falling, but the blow had evidently dazed him, and for quite a couple of seconds he clung to the ladder and blinked at Nelson Lee with an air of almost comical stupidity.

Once more the detective raised his revolver, but the action seemed to galvanise the Squire into life again, and before Nelson Lee could deal him a second blow, he gripped the ladder with his arms and legs and slid to the bottom like a flash of lightning.

"Who was there? Who struck you?" gasped the Doctor in sheer amazement, not unmixed with fright.

"Nelson Lee," replied the Squire, tenderly rubbing the lump on his head. "And the Chief's up there, too. He's unconscious, I think, for he's lying perfectly still in one corner of the room."

"Is he bound?"

"I couldn't see."

"And Nelson Lee—is he armed?"

"He has a revolver, but it's no use. Cartridges damp, I think. He himself is soaking wet, so that probably his gun is in the same condition. At any rate, he had to club me with it."

The Doctor pondered over this information for a moment or two in silence.

"There's no chance of rushing him, I suppose?" he asked at last.

"Not through that trapdoor," said the Squire.

"Then what do you propose to do?" asked the Doctor.

"I propose, in the first place, that we go outside and have a look round," said the Squire.

Suiting the action to the word, he led the way into the mill yard outside. The windmill tower as already stated, was situated in the middle of a long row of roofless buildings which had formerly served as workshops and granaries. It was still bedecked with the remnants of its sails, which had evidently been used when the waters of the stream did not run strongly enough to turn the great wheel. The tower itself was

divided into three compartments, one above the other. The lowest of the three was the room in which the detective and his prisoner were. And above that, under the dome-shaped cap of the tower, was another room, lighted by a couple of narrow, oblong windows.

"I wonder if it would be possible to get into that room at the top of the tower?" said the Squire thoughtfully. "It certainly wouldn't be possible if Nelson Lee could shoot, but, seeing that his revolver is out of order, I don't see why it shouldn't be done. At any rate, I'll have a try. Wait here until I come back."

WITH both hands the Squire hauled himself up one of the sails of the windmill, inch by inch, until he reached the dome-shaped cap of the tower, where he wriggled through one of the windows, and vanished from the Doctor's sight.

Nelson Lee, of course, was an interested spectator of the greater part of the Squire's ascent, for the latter, as he swarmed up the sail, passed close to the window of the room in which the detective was mounting guard over the Chief. As the Squire had truly said, if the detective's revolver had not been rendered useless by the water of the dam, it would have been an easy matter for the detective to have shot the daring climber as he passed the window.

As it was the Squire reached the top of the tower safely and vanished through one of the windows of the upper room. For nearly a minute he remained invisible, then the Doctor saw him emerge and begin to climb down again.

"It's all right! We've got him now!" he said, as soon as he reached the Doctor's side. "The floor of that room at the top of the mill is the roof of the room below, of course. In the middle of it there's an opening, which has evidently been constructed to serve as a manhole or ventilator. Being in the middle of the floor, it commands an uninterrupted view of the whole room beneath, so that I could not only see the Chief and Nelson Lee, but also the top of the ladder which leads up from the room below."

"But, if you could see Nelson Lee, why didn't you shoot him?" growled the Doctor.

"I hadn't time. He was took quick for me," said the Squire. "As soon as he saw my face at the ventilator he darted into the corner and hid himself behind the Chief. If I had fired at him I should have shot the Chief. However, it doesn't matter. We've got him, now, all right. All we've got to do is this: I'll climb back into that upper room, and you must into the lower room and station yourself at the foot of the ladder. The moment you hear me shout you must rush up the ladder as fast as you can——"

"And get knocked on the head like you were!" said the Doctor.

"Don't be mad!" said the Squire, for the second time. "Haven't I just told you that

the ventilator in the upper room looks down on the top of the ladder? If Nelson Lee attempts to go near the ladder I shall simply shoot him dead on the spot. If he stays in the corner behind the Chief you'll enter the room and cover him with your revolver. I shall then jump down and join you, and it'll be a funny thing if we can't overpower him between us—especially as we are armed and he is not. But we're wasting time. Are you game to carry out my plan?"

"I am," said the Doctor grimly.

"Then off you go," said the Squire. "Post yourself at the bottom of the ladder and remain there until you hear me shout."

Without a word the Doctor turned on his heel and disappeared into the room at the foot of the tower, where the bloodhound was still making frantic attempts to scale the ladder. The Squire then repeated his perilous climb, and once more squeezed himself into the uppermost room of the mill. Revolver in hand, he stole to the edge of the ventilator, and cautiously peered into the room below. Then a cunning smile lit up his face. The detective was still crouching in the corner, using the half-unconscious form of the Chief as a screen.

"Good-morning, Mr. Lee," said the Squire, in jocular tones. "Would you mind moving a little farther along to the right, please, so that I can get a better view of you? At present I can only see the heels of your boots, and it's no use shooting at those, you know."

The detective made no reply to this taunting speech. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful if he heard it, for his whole attention was fixed on the opening at the top of the ladder. He had guessed what his opponents meant to do, and he had formed a plan that might, with luck, succeed in checkmating them.

"Now, Doctor, come on!" shouted the Squire, the next moment.

In answer to this summons, the Doctor promptly rushed up the ladder at breakneck speed. The instant his head and shoulders appeared through the opening the detective swiftly flung out his hand and sent his revolver whizzing through the air.

True to its aim, the missile struck the Doctor between the eyes, and deluged his face with blood. Despite this, however, he planted one knee on the edge of the opening, and began to scramble through, whilst at the same moment the detective leapt to his feet, and dashed across the room.

Crack, crack, crack!

Three times the Squire fired in less than as many seconds. But the fierce excitement of the moment, coupled with the rapidity of the detective's movements, marred his aim, and each of his bullets flew wide. The next instant the detective had seized the Doctor by the throat, and with one prodigious effort, had hurled him down the ladder into the room below!

Crack!

Again the Squire fired, just as Nelson Lee was recovering his balance, and this time

he made no mistake, for his bullet grazed along the side of the detective's head, an inch or so behind the ear. The next moment he threw up his arms, and pitched forward on his face.

## CHAPTER 6.

### In the Grip of the Law!

FLUSHED with triumph, the Squire thrust his revolver into his pocket, wriggled through the ventilator, and lowered himself into the room, where he kicked the detective's prostrate form aside, and peered through the trapdoor.

"Hallo, there! Are you hurt?" he shouted.

"Badly," came the answer, in a doleful voice. "I've broken my leg, I think."

"I hope not," ejaculated the Squire, as he hurried down the ladder. "Surely it's not so bad as all that?"

"I'm afraid it is," groaned the Doctor, who was lying on his back at the foot of the ladder, with his left foot under him. "But I'll tell you in a minute. Roll me over on my side and straighten out my leg. Gently—yes, I thought so," he said, after running his hand down his injured limb.

"It's broken just above the ankle."

The Squire smothered an oath, and gazed at his companion with an air of mingled exasperation and dismay.

"I'll have to fetch the car, now," he said. "I'll throw Lee's body into the mill-pond, and then I'll——"

His plans ended in a gasp of alarm, for at that moment the bloodhound in the room below gave vent to a warning growl.

"Somebody must be coming this way," muttered the squire, uneasily. "Wonder what they want?"

He walked to one of the windows and looked out. There was nobody to be seen on that side of the mill. He darted across to the window in the other side. Then he staggered back with a low, hoarse cry of despair.

Coming down the road at a reckless speed was a large, open touring car that seemed to be packed with men, while conspicuous amongst the passengers was the helmet of a policeman.

For one brief instant the Squire gazed at the approaching car in spellbound stupefaction. Then he sprang to the top of the ladder and literally leapt down into the room below.

"It never rains but it pours!" he gasped, addressing the Doctor in hurried, breathless accents. "Somebody must have been here before we arrived, and Nelson Lee must have sent them to the village for help. The constable with a car-load of men are coming down the road, and they're less than half a mile away! It's impossible for me to get you away before they arrive——"

"They'll arrest me and the Chief—if you leave us!" moaned the Doctor, clinging to

the Squire's sleeve with the desperation of a drowning man.

"I know they will," said the Squire. "And they'll arrest me if I stay. That's why I'm going. If I thought I could save you, I would stay to the bitter end; but I can't. Both you and the Chief are bound to be arrested now, whether I go or whether I stay. If I stay, they'll arrest me, too, and it will be out of my power to render you any further assistance. On the other hand, if I clear out now, before it's too late, there's a sporting chance that I may be able to concoct some scheme for rescuing you at an early date. But listen! You can hear the car, now. It's time I was off! One word before I go. Tell the Chief to employ Randall Vyse as the solicitor to defend you both in the police court. And now, good-bye! If all goes well, you'll hear from me before very long!"

He shook off the Doctor's despairing grasp and darted out of the mill. With the bloodhound at his heels, he glided round to the end of the dam and picked his way across the weir. Upon reaching the other side he vaulted over a low stone wall and concealed himself behind a heap of fallen masonry.

From here he saw the car pull up and discharge its excited occupants. He saw them clamber over the wall and swarm into the mill. He heard their shouts of amazement when they found the crippled Doctor, and he heard their still more clamorous cries when they discovered the Chief and Nelson Lee.

He saw them carry the three men out and place them in the car. He saw them drive away in the direction of the village; then he rose up from his hiding-place and struck a bee-line for his house.

It was some weeks after that the two prisoners and Nelson Lee were able to appear, and even then all that could be done was to commit the two rogues for trial at the Leeds Assizes. At that court both the Chief and the Doctor appeared quite calm and confident, although Nelson Lee, after all he had endured, was pale and shaken.

The doctors at the hospital tried to persuade him to go abroad and rest, but he refused point blank, saying that his work was still far from finished, and even the pleadings of Nipper, who came from St. Frank's to see him for a while, could not shake his resolve.

"The end of the Order of the Ring has not yet come," he said.

## CHAPTER 7.

### Rescued!

THE Sheffield station is a dismal-looking building at the best of times, and on the morning when the Chief and the Doctor were due to be taken to Leeds, it was looking even more dismal than usual.

At the early hour of six a.m. the station and its approaches were comparatively

deserted. On some of the platforms there was not a soul to be seen; on others there were one or two intending passengers, and here and there a porter or an official. In the covered portico outside were a couple of sleepy-eyed porters and a few ill-clad loafers. On the cab-rank was a solitary taxi, the driver of which was seated at the wheel munching at a sandwich.

Presently another taxi came up, and Nelson Lee stepped out. For once in a way the detective had done a foolish thing. In defiance of the doctor's orders, and in face of their advice, he had insisted upon taking his discharge from the hospital, and had driven down to the station with the avowed intention of proceeding to Leeds by the same train as the Chief and the Doctor. No one knew better than he that he was not yet strong enough to resume his work—that he ought to have remained in the hospital for at least another week—but his anxiety lest the Chief and the Doctor should escape had induced him to take a step which, in calmer moments, he would have been the first to condemn.

He paid the driver and limped into the first-class booking-office. By the time he had taken his ticket he began to realise how weak he was, for his legs were trembling under him, and his brow was bedewed with clammy perspiration. He staggered into the refreshment buffet, and fortified himself with a dose of brandy. Then he made his way to the first-class waiting-room and rested himself.

A moment or two later a mild sensation was created in the portico outside by the arrival of a smart car. The chauffeur was fair-haired, young, and handsome—little more than a boy to all outward appearances—while the solitary passenger was an elderly, well-dressed man with snow-white hair and flowing beard.

The moment the car pulled up one of the porters hurried forward and touched his cap.

"Any luggage, sir?" he asked.

"No, thanks," said the old man as he alighted. "Is the Leeds train in yet?"

"No, sir; but it's due in ten minutes," said the porter.

The old man turned and said something in a low voice to the young chauffeur. The latter promptly set the engine running again, but instead of driving away as the porter had expected him to do, he simply turned the vehicle and had it standing ready to drive out of the station yard with the shortest possible delay.

The old man nodded his approval, glanced round at the little group of loafers in the portico, and marched into the first-class booking-office.

"Single to Leeds, first-class," he said.

The booking clerk handed him out a ticket, which the old man paid for with a pound-note. Having received his change, he was turning away from the window when a figure glided up to him and touched him on the arm. The figure was that of Randall Vyse, the solicitor who had been engaged to defend the Chief and the Doctor.

"One moment. I've some news for you," said the lawyer in a low, agitated whisper.

The old man turned on him with a sudden blaze of anger.

"You fool! D'you want to ruin everything?" he hissed. "Didn't I tell you that you weren't to speak to me or to recognise me in any way what ever?"

"I know—I know," said the lawyer hurriedly. "But I thought you would like to know that Nelson Lee is here!"

The Squire, for it was he, staggered back with a startled gasp of incredulity.

"Nelson Lee! Impossible!" he exclaimed. "You're dreaming! I called at the hospital last night on my way home from your office, and they told me he was going on all right, but wouldn't be able to leave for another week at least!"

"Maybe," said the lawyer curtly. "But he's here now, all the same. He came into the buffet when I was there and ordered a glass of brandy. He looks awfully seedy, and I don't think you have much to fear from him; but I thought I'd better tell you he was here."

"Where is he now?"

"In the first-class waiting-room."

As the lawyer spoke the distant rumble of a heavy car was heard.

"That's the police van," said the Squire hurriedly. "Plant yourself outside the door of the waiting-room, and if Nelson Lee rushes out when he hears the row, trip him up, or get in his way. By hook or crook contrive to delay him until you hear our car start up, and after that you can leave the rest to Ursula and me."

"Ursula?" gasped the lawyer. "Is Lady Ursula here?"

"Certainly," said the Squire. "The young chauffeur—that's Ursula!"

As he uttered these words he turned on his heel and darted out into the portico.

"Hallo, what have we got here?" he exclaimed, addressing one of the porters, and pointing to the van. "That's a Black Maria, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," said the porter with a grin.

"Is it coming here?"

"Yes, sir. They're taking a batch of prisoners to Leeds for the assizes. Out of the way, you chaps!"

The last remark was addressed to the half-dozen loafers. At the sight of the police car they had collected in a cluster on the edge of the pavement at the spot where they calculated the car would pull up.

"All right. Don't worry, mate," said one of them. "We only want to take one last long farewell of those unlucky chaps in the Black Maria."

"Here, come on, out of it, or you'll take a ride in her!" retorted the porter as he elbowed them aside.

Somewhat reluctantly the little crowd drew back a yard or two, and every man, by a strange coincidence, thrust his right hand into his pocket. A moment later the car drew up alongside the kerb, quite close to the private car which had brought the old gentle-

man. The inspector alighted and went round to the back.

"Stand back, there!" he said, addressing the crowd in his most brusque and official tones.

THE six men sullenly drew back another yard or so. The inspector opened the door at the back and majestically waved his hand.

"Come on!" he ordered.

Two by two the prisoners filed out. The first pair were two bullet-headed hooligans, the right wrist of one man being handcuffed to the left wrist of the other. They stepped out of the van with a jaunty, devil-may-care demeanour and favoured the bystanders with a grin of defiant bravado.

Close on their heels came a rat-faced man and a beetle-browed Italian, also linked together. A third pair, similarly fettered, followed suit. Then a whispering murmur ran through the crowd as the Chief and the Doctor, likewise handcuffed wrist to wrist, appeared at the door and prepared to alight.

All this time the Squire had been edging nearer to the inspector. When the Chief and the Doctor appeared at the door of the Black Maria he quietly thrust his hand into the inside pocket of his overcoat; and the moment the two men stepped on to the pavement he whipped out a short, thick cane, loaded at the end with a ball of lead, and dealt the inspector a violent blow on the back of his head.

With a stifled groan the inspector stumbled forward and fell on his face. At the same instant the six men who had been loafing in the portico suddenly revealed themselves as the Squire's confederates. Each of them was armed with a loaded cane, similar in size and shape to that which the Squire had wielded with such deadly effect. They had merely been waiting for their leader to give the signal, and the instant he whipped out his weapon the whole six promptly followed suit.

Two of them flung themselves upon the constable, who was yelling for help at the top of his voice and trying to get out his whistle, and felled him to the ground. Two more dragged the chauffeur of the Black Maria from his seat at the wheel and stretched him senseless in the gutter. The fifth knocked down one of the porters, and the sixth half-stunned another.

All this happened in a split second. In a quarter of a minute at the very outside the Squire and his confederates were masters of the situation. The Chief and the Doctor, having been warned by Randall Vyse what was to happen, knew just what to do. They scrambled into the waiting private car, the Squire leapt to the vehicle and took his seat beside Lady Ursula, while the six men who had aided him were making themselves scarce, rushing off in different directions.

In the meantime the constable's yells had reached the ears of Nelson Lee. Forgetful of his weakness, the detective sprang to his

feet and rushed to the door of the waiting-room, a prey to excitement and uncertainty. On the platform outside he collided with Randall Vyse who seized him by the arm and attempted to detain him. But the lawyer had mistaken his man. With a single back-handed blow the detective sent him spinning across the platform, over the edge and on to the metals below. Then he

Doctor scrambled to their feet; but before they could turn themselves round—they were still handcuffed wrist to wrist—the detective had hauled himself into the car, seized them by the throat, one with each hand, and exerted all his strength to push them out into the road.

It was a gallant, well-meant attempt, worthy of the man who made it; but it was



**With a roar the car fairly leaped away from the station carrying the two crooks to freedom. Suddenly Nelson Lee darted forward through the crowd, and with a mighty jump landed clean on the back of the car!**

dashed out into the portico just in time to see the great car glide away.

In the twinkling of an eye the detective grasped the situation. The car the Squire had brought had the hood down. Maybe that had been done so as to arouse no suspicion whatever before the right time. Maybe the rogues meant to raise the hood as soon as they had won clear from the station. But Nelson Lee saw that there was only one desperate chance, and he did his best to seize it. He cleared the pavement at a single bound, took a flying leap and hooked himself on to the back of the car with his hands.

With a furious oath the Chief and the

doomed to failure from the first by reason of the detective's enfeebled condition. For a second or two, in spite of the odds against him, he contrived to hold his own; but that was the full extent of his success. When his strength began to give out, his adversaries forced him back, inch by inch, to the edge of the swiftly moving car. One of them opened the door, and freeing themselves from his weakening grasp, hurled him headlong into the road.

And by the time he had picked himself up the car had reached the top of the road and had vanished round the corner. Nelson Lee commandeered a taxi in order to follow, but

the Squire had picked on a car that could travel at a speed that was utterly impossible for a taxi to maintain, and as the roads at that hour were deserted, he had no difficulty in getting clean away.

Two hours later the detective stood in the office of the chief inspector of the Sheffield police.

"Any news of them?" he asked.

"The car has been found abandoned in a lonely lane half a mile to the south of Totley Village, and that doesn't help, because they were met there by another car. The marks in the road have told us that. I'm going off to Totley right away to make inquiries, but I don't hope for much. We'll have to start all over again now."

## CHAPTER 8.

### The Ruined Abbey!

WHILE the police were doing their utmost to find out which way the escaped prisoners had gone from Totley, Nelson Lee was carrying on his investigations in his own way. The police argued that the Chief and the Doctor were either hundreds of miles from that part of the country, or had reached the coast and had left the country altogether.

Nelson Lee did not subscribe to either of these theories. He knew that the Order of the Ring had a house in that part of the country, where the Squire controlled and ran the counterfeiting plant, and where Jack Longford had been taken when the order had kidnapped him in the first place.

It seemed more than likely that the two men had been taken to this house, and all the facts in the possession of Nelson Lee pointed to the place being somewhere in the vicinity of Sheffield. Therefore he killed two birds with one stone. The doctor had ordered him plenty of fresh air and gentle exercise, and he wanted to carry on his investigations. So he spent the time with a survey map, quietly walking the country lanes and taking a look at every large country house he encountered.

This went on for a week and a day, and although the detective's daily tramps had bronzed his cheeks and hardened his muscles, and infused new life into his veins, they had yielded no result with respect to the Squire's house. On the ninth day, however, his perseverance met with its reward.

It happened in this way. He left the farm, which he had made his headquarters, about half-past eight, and struck out in a northerly direction. At the end of half an hour's walk he came to the cutting on the railway line where the Squire had stopped the express from London. He crossed the line and the field beyond, and emerged into the road. He turned to the right, and presently came to a rustic stile which gave admittance to a large and well-wooded park.

For upwards of twenty minutes he wan-

dered through its leafy glades and dim avenues of trees, seeking in vain for any sign of a house. At last the trees began to grow fewer and wider apart, and eventually he came to a low stone wall. He approached it and peered over it, then his heart gave a mighty bound, and a quiver of triumph thrilled through his frame.

For there, before Lee's eyes, bathed in golden sunlight, stood the house for which he had sought so long!

Trembling with excitement, the detective scrambled over the wall, and concealed himself behind the trunk of a lofty, big-limbed oak. He called to mind the brief and hurried description of the house which Jack Longford had given him in his cabin of the *Firefly*. He compared it with the stately house in front of him. Without a doubt he had found the object of his quest.

"This is the place!" he murmured to himself. "I'm sure of it! This is the home of the Squire and the site of the underground mint!"

A faint rustling of the branches over his head brought his musings to a sudden end. He raised his eyes to discover its cause, and even as he did so a wriggling, snake-like length of rope, with a running noose at the end, came spinning downwards through the air and settled round his shoulders.

As it happened, the Squire had been strolling through the park, and had picked up a coil of rope which one of the woodmen had left behind after felling a tree. On his way back to the house he had suddenly caught sight of Nelson Lee, and, fearing to cross the lawn lest the detective should see him, he had swarmed up the very tree under which Nelson Lee had afterwards taken his stand. If he had had a revolver with him, he could have shot the detective with the greatest ease. Having no revolver, he had fashioned a noose on the end of the rope, and had dropped it over the detective's head with the object of strangling him.

Quick as thought the detective flung up his hands and made a grab at the noose. At the same instant, however, the Squire gave the rope a sudden upward jerk, and before Nelson Lee could grasp the noose it tightened itself round his shoulders. The next instant he was jerked off his feet and swung into the air.

The Squire, however, was not strong enough to keep the detective dangling in the air for any length of time. He let the rope go and the detective dropped to the ground. At the same time the crook swarmed down the tree and ran at the struggling figure of Lee.

With wonderful presence of mind however, the detective, who was lying on his back, kicked up his leg and planted his foot on the Squire's stomach. With something between a grunt and a groan the Squire staggered back, and in the twinkling of an eye the detective leaped to his feet and whipped out his revolver.

"Put 'em up!" he snapped.

But almost before the words had crossed his lips the Squire flung the pocket-knife straight into his face. The point of the blade struck the detective in the middle of the forehead and the blood streamed down into his eyes, although the wound was not, in itself, very serious. Fearing a second attack, he sprang aside and dashed the blood from his eyes. Then he gazed around him in stupefied bewilderment. The Squire had disappeared!

But Nelson Lee's bewilderment was not of long duration. A crackling of the undergrowth on the other side of the low stone wall told him what had happened. After hurling his knife into the detective's face, the Squire had vaulted over the wall and had taken to his heels across the park:

In a second, the detective was on his track. But fear lent wings to the Squire's feet, and although he could not shake off his pursuer, neither could the latter overtake him. In and out amongst the trees they raced, up the gorse-clad sides of the little hills, and down the rocky slopes of miniature ravines, neither of them gaining ground to the extent of a single yard. Once the detective tried the effect of a running shot, but missed his man by the merest fraction of an inch.

At last, however, the Squire began to show signs of flagging, and the detective began to overhaul him hand over hand. Seeing this, the Squire changed his tactics. Hitherto, he had contented himself with dodging in and out amongst the trees in a vain attempt to throw his pursuer off the scent. Now, however, he struck a bee-line for the north-west corner of the park, where stood the ruins of an ancient abbey—Riversdale Abbey—which gave its name to the neighbouring village of Abbeyvale.

All that now remained of this once famous abbey, which had served the double purpose of an abbey and a monastery, was a crumbling, ivy-clad tower, and a long, irregular wall, pierced by half a dozen Gothic windows. The tower was little more than a roofless shell. In the centre of the floor was a large round hole, something like the mouth of a well, which led into a dismal, underground pit of unknown depth, which tradition said—falsely, no doubt—had formerly been used as a place of imprisonment and also of torture for heretics. Originally this opening had been covered by a circular iron plate, but this had been removed, or had rusted into decay.

It was towards this ruined tower that the Squire now directed his flight. He reached it, breathless and exhausted, full thirty yards ahead of Nelson Lee, and as soon as he had gained the shelter of its crumbling walls he flung himself down flat on his face behind a massive block of fallen masonry.

A moment later the detective dashed up. Fearing a trap, he halted outside the ruined doorway of the tower, and cautiously peering into the interior. Seeing no trace of the Squire, he ventured to step inside.

"Where the dickens has he got to?" he muttered to himself. "Surely he hadn't gone down that hole?"

He stole to the mouth of the pit and peered down into its gloomy depths, then he thrust his hand into his pocket, and pulled out a box of matches. He struck a light, and was shading it with his hands when a sudden sound behind him caused him to spin round with a gasp of alarm.

But the action came too late. Like a panther the Squire sprang forward, and gave him a violent push. The next instant the detective staggered backwards and vanished into the pit!

## CHAPTER 9.

### A Double Surprise!

FOR over two hundred years the rain and snow had been free to enter the roofless tower of Riversdale's ruined abbey. In consequence of this the underground pit had become converted into a kind of subterranean reservoir, and, though much of the water had naturally drained away through the chinks between the stones of the wall and floor, there still remained some six or eight feet of stagnant, evil-smelling liquid, crusted on the surface with a thick, green film of slimy vegetation.

Under these circumstances, the effects of the Squire's action when he hurled Nelson Lee into the pit were far less serious than they would have been if there had been nothing for the detective to fall upon but the hard stone floor. As a matter of fact, beyond a thorough soaking, the detective was little the worse for his unexpected plunge.

After the Squire had gone, the detective commenced to swim round the walls of the pit in the hope of finding some means of escape. For a time his hopes seemed doomed to disappointment, for the walls of the pit rose sheer and perpendicular, like the sides of a house, and were coated with tenacious and jelly-like slime, that made them as slippery as glass. He had almost resigned himself to the prospect of a lingering death, when all at once the hand with which he was exploring—it was too dark to see anything—slipped round a corner and plunged into empty space.

His first impression was that he had thrust his hand into the mouth of a drain, but a very slight examination showed him that it was really a low, arched doorway, the bottom of which was exactly on a level with the surface of the water.

With hope renewed, he placed his elbows on the lower edge of this opening, and hauled himself through. Having scraped away some of the slime which clung to his hands and face, he pulled out his electric torch, which, owing to his usual foresight, had been all the while in a waterproof cover, and thus escaped damage during his immersion in the water, and the beam of light

revealed what he had discovered. The opening through which he had crawled was the entrance to an underground passage, which had been tunnelled through the earth long centuries ago, and lined with rough-hewn blocks of stone. Where it led to he could not even guess, but as soon as he had wrung the water out of his clothes, he started out on a tour of exploration.

The passage was so low that, in places he had to stoop in order to avoid striking the roof with his head. The air was foul, and at times well-nigh poisonous. The walls were adorned with strange, fantastic-looking fungi, sometimes of gigantic size.

For nearly half a mile he stumbled along this eerie burrow, the journey occupying several hours. Eventually, he came to a flight of steps which apparently marked the end of the passage. These steps—there were over a hundred all told—ran up between two solid-looking walls, and at the top was a narrow wooden door, which had neither handle, latch nor keyhole.

As the detective gazed at this door, and then at the walls on each side of the steps, a dim suspicion of the truth stole into his mind. The walls were evidently the inner walls of some large house—a hollow wall, in fact, with the steps running up inside it. The door at the top was, apparently a wooden panel, which doubtless formed part of the panelling of one of the upper rooms of the house. But whose was the house? And what, or who, was in the room on the other side of the panel?

He ascended the steps and applied his shoulder to the panel, and gave it a gentle push. It appeared to yield. He planted one foot against the opposite wall and exerted all his strength.

For a moment nothing happened. Then a sharp, metallic click was heard, and the next instant the panel suddenly flew open, a woman's startled cry rang through the air, and Nelson Lee fell floundering into a brilliantly-lighted room.

**H**E was on his feet in an instant. The only occupant of the room was a young and beautiful girl. His eyes, so long accustomed to the darkness, were dazzled by the light, and he could not at first distinguish her face. He sprang towards her and gripped her by the wrist.

"Not a sound—it's a matter of life and death!" he hissed. "I'm not going to hurt you, unless—"

Then he saw her clearly, and he checked himself with a low, hoarse cry of bewildered stupefaction.

The girl before him was Ethel Anderson!

The detective was the first to break the silence.

"I can't be mistaken, surely!" he gasped. "It's Miss Anderson, isn't it?"

"Yes," she faltered in a trembling voice. "But who—who are you?"

"I am Nelson Lee," he replied.

She started forward with a rapturous cry, and seized his grimy hands. Naturally, her first thought was not for herself, but for the man she loved.

"Tell me quickly—is Jack safe?" she asked, regarding him with a pleading, anxious glance.

"That's the very question I was going to ask you," he said. "I thought—everybody



**Nelson Lee raced desperately across the narrow but rotten woodwork even as he leaped forward. T**

thought—that both you and Mr. Longford had been drowned in the wreck of the *Dolphin*. How did you escape?"

"We escaped in one of the boats," she said. "The Chief, the Doctor, myself and Jack, and five of the crew. We landed on the beach in Blacksand Bay, just under my uncle's house. For the rest of that night, and for the whole of the following day, we hid in one of the caves at the foot of the cliff. At night my uncle came and conducted us to the haunted wing of Blacksand Grange, where we remained for the next two days. At the end of that time we all

went aboard a private yacht, which took us to a lonely part of the coast, but just where I cannot say. Before we landed Jack and I were drugged, and when I recovered my senses I was here, and I've been here ever since. But how did you get here?"

The detective told her, briefly and rapidly, of his pursuit of the Squire and of his adventures in the underground passage.



ago. He saw the crook tearing madly at the rope so late! With a crash the bridge collapsed!

"Then you didn't know I was here?" she said, when he had finished.

"Of course I didn't," he said. "I thought that you were dead."

A look of disappointment crossed her face.

"I was hoping that you had come to take me away," she said.

"So I will," he replied.

"Through that underground passage?" she asked with a shiver of fear.

The detective shook his head.

"There's no way of escape in that direction," he said.

"Then I am afraid there's no way of escape at all," she said. "The door of this room is locked and bolted on the outside, and the window, as you will see if you draw those curtains, is guarded by strong iron bars. Besides, even if you managed to open the door you couldn't escape, for every servant in the house, both male and female, is a member of the Order of the Ring."

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll find some way of escape, don't you worry," he said in cheery, confident tones. "In the meantime, I shall be glad if you will enlighten me on one or two points. In the first place, am I right in supposing that this is the Squire's house?"

"Yes. This is the house to which the Squire lured Jack seven months ago."

"Do you know its name?"

"Abbeyvale Hall."

"And the Squire's name?"

"Josiah Bristowe—at least, that's what he told me was his name; but he was more or less intoxicated when he gave me the information, so I don't know whether he was speaking the truth."

"He drinks then?"

"Oh, yes. Almost every night, when he comes to pay me his usual visit, he's generally had more than is good for him."

"His usual visit? Does he come to see you every night?"

"Every night when he's at home."

"What time does he usually come?"

"Always at the same time—ten o'clock."

The detective pulled out his watch. It was three minutes to ten. He glided across the room and closed the panel through which he had entered. He rearranged the curtains in front of the window and moved away a chair. He examined his revolver, shook the water out of the barrel and ruefully replaced it in his pocket.

"It might serve to frighten him, at any rate," he muttered to himself.

He pushed a chair into the middle of the room and motioned Ethel to be seated.

"We've two minutes yet," he said in a low voice. "Do you know whether Lady Ursula is here?"

"Yes, she is. She was in my room this afternoon."

"Are the Chief and the Doctor here?"

"No. The Squire told me, nine or ten days ago, that he had rescued them from the police and had sent them to a place of safety in the south."

"Is Jack Longford here?"

"No."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"Have you any idea why they're keeping you a prisoner here?"

"Yes. As soon as Jack is well enough to be moved——"

"Is he ill?"

"He has been. As soon as he is able to be moved they're going to bring him here, and then they're going to torture me in his

presence, in the hope of compelling him to join their ranks."

She had scarcely finished speaking when the heavy staggering footsteps of the Squire were heard in the corridor outside.

"The Squire!" gasped Ethel, turning pale. "Quick! You must hide!"

The rattle of a key in the keyhole warned Nelson Lee that it was time to be moving. With stealthy, catlike footsteps he glided across the room and concealed himself behind the curtains.

The next instant the door swung slowly open and the Squire staggered in. He removed the key from the outside of the door, thrust it into the keyhole on the inside, and closed and locked the door. He then lurched into the middle of the room, dragging a heavy chair after him and seated himself in front of Ethel.

## CHAPTER 10.

### The Tightening of the Net!

"AND how is my pretty little prisoner to-night?" asked the Squire, regarding Ethel Anderson with a smirk.

"You're looking pale, but I'll soon bring a blush to those cheeks. Do you know who's coming here next week?"

"How should I know?"

"It's a shame to tease you," he chuckled. "I'll tell you. The Chief is coming and he's bringing the Doctor with him, and someone else—Jack Longford. And you know what's going to happen when Jack Longford gets here?"

"I ought to," she replied calmly. "You've told me often enough."

"I know I have," he admitted. "I wanted to impress it on your mind. But I haven't come to talk of that again like I have in the past. I've a different object in view, my dear. So long as Nelson Lee was alive I dare say you were deluding yourself with the hope that some day he would rescue you. But that hope's gone now. Nelson Lee is dead. The police have practically thrown up the sponge. Jack Longford is our prisoner. Your uncle is only too eager to hear of your death. In the whole wide world there isn't a single soul who is able or willing to help you. You are completely at our mercy. Isn't that so?"

"It would appear so," said Ethel coldly. He drew his chair a little closer.

"Well, look here, my dear," he said in husky tones. "I'll help you. I'll be your friend. I'll say to the Chief, 'I refuse to let you torture this girl. I insist that she shall be set at liberty.' The Doctor will back me up, I know, so that we shall be two to one, and according to the rules of the Order of the Ring the Chief will have to give in to us."

Ethel stared at him in bewildered amazement.

"Is this a joke?" she exclaimed.

"No," he replied. "I will do all this, and more for you, but only on one condition."

"And what is that?"

"That you promise to marry me," said the Squire. "Ever since you came to my house I have been growing to love you more and more——"

"Stop!" cried Ethel, starting to her feet and recoiling from him with a gesture of loathing. "You're insulting me now. After all I have endured from you and your Order of the Ring—to marry you. I'd rather die than marry you."

"You'll die if you don't!" he hissed angrily.

"I'd prefer it," she retorted coldly.

The Squire's face grew black with rage. He dragged himself unsteadily to his feet.

"We shall see!" he snarled, and caught her by the arm.

"Get back!"

The words rang suddenly through the room. The curtains parted as if by magic, and Nelson Lee strode forward into the light, his revolver levelled.

Thoroughly sobered, the Squire pulled up and dropped his arm. For one brief instant he stared at Nelson Lee in speechless consternation; then he opened his mouth to yell for help; but before the cry could cross his lips the detective had him by the throat.

Slipping one foot behind the Squire's ankle he tripped him up and flung him on his back. Then he planted one knee on the crook's chest and dealt him a blow between the eyes that momentarily stunned him.

"Quick! Tear off a strip of that tablecloth and roll it into a ball!" gasped Nelson Lee, turning to Ethel.

With trembling fingers the terrified girl obeyed. The detective crammed the ball into the Squire's mouth and secured the gag by means of a pocket handkerchief. Then he sprang to his feet, darted across the room, and took down one of the pictures. Whipping out his pocket-knife he cut off the cord and lashed the Squire's wrists behind his back. With a second length of cord he pinioned his captive's arms to his sides; with a third he secured his ankles.

He dragged the Squire across the room and opened the panel which gave admittance to the underground passage. He propped him up in a huddled heap at the top of the steps; then he closed the panel and turned to Ethel.

"I am now going to put your courage to a pretty severe test," he said. "I am going to ask you to allow me to leave you here while I go for the police."

"How long do you think you'll be before you come back?" asked Ethel.

"About a couple of hours, if all goes well," said Nelson Lee.

"Very well," said Ethel. "Since you wish it, I will stay."

"You're a brick!" said the detective gratefully. "If I thought that you were exposing yourself to any greater danger by remaining here than by coming with me I would not ask you to stay. But I have no hesitation in

saying that you will be far safer here than you would be if——"

In the midst of his sentence he paused, for at that moment his quick ear caught the sound of a light footstep in the passage outside.

"Somebody's coming!" he whispered.

He had scarcely finished speaking before the footsteps ceased and the door vibrated with a sharp, peremptory knock.

"MAY I come in, please?" said the voice of Lady Ursula.

Quick as thought the detective turned to Ethel and held up his hand.

"Leave her to me!" he whispered.

He shuffled his feet on the floor to make believe that he was rising from a chair. He lurched towards the door exactly as the Squire would have done, and while he was fumbling with the key he quietly placed one foot against the lower edge of the door in such a way as to prevent it being opened.

Then he turned the key and made a great pretence of tugging at the handle.

"C o n f o u n d the thing, it's stuck!" he growled, mimicing the Squire's drunken tones. "Push!"

Lady Ursula pushed, but the door still "stuck."

"Harder, can't you?" growled the detective, still wrestling with the handle. "Get your shoulder to it."

Lady Ursula began to lose her temper. She placed her shoulder against the door and pushed again suddenly, viciously, and with all her might.

At the same instant the detective removed his foot and hastily stepped back a yard or two, with the natural result that the door flew open to its widest extent, and Lady Ursula stumbled forward into the room and literally fell into his arms.

In the twinkling of an eye, one of his hands was over her mouth and one of his arms was round her waist. He hated the thought of using violence towards a woman, but he could not afford to be over-scrupulous.

Despite her frantic struggles, he lifted her off her feet as easily as if she were a child.

"The door!" he exclaimed in a low, intense whisper. "Close it, and lock it on the inside!"

Ethel flew to obey, and at the same time the detective carried his struggling captive across the room—his hand still over her mouth—and dropped her into an easy-chair. Then he bound and gagged her in the same way that he had bound and gagged the Squire.

Finally he raised her gently in his arms, opened the secret panel, and set her inside.

"Two out of four—not a bad night's work," he said, as he closed the panel. "The net is tightening fast. The Dolphin and the Firefly are lying at the bottom of the sea; the villa at Elstree is a blackened ruin; Dashwood House and the house in Belgrave Square are both in the hands of the police, and the Squire and Lady Ursula, together with all their servants, will be safely lodged in gaol in a few more hours, if all goes well. All that will then remain to be done to complete my task will be to arrest Sir Philip Anderson, to capture the Chief and the Doctor——"

"And to release Jack Longford," said Ethel earnestly.

"You may rest assured I shall not forget that part," replied the detective as he left her.

He contrived to make his escape from the house without attracting attention.

At Abbeyvale, he was able to 'phone through to Sheffield, with the result that in less than an hour several car-loads of police descended on the Squire's house. By that time the servants had all gone to bed; but one by one they were rudely awakened and taken into custody.

Ethel was then released and handed over to Nelson Lee, after which the Squire and

Lady Ursula were removed from behind the panel and sent to Sheffield, along with the servants, in charge of an escort.

From beginning to end the detective's plans were carried out without the slightest hitch, and when at last the sun rose over the trees of Abbeyvale Park, he looked down on a silent and deserted-looking house, whose only inmates were a couple of plain-clothes men who had been left behind to mount guard over the underground mint.

## CHAPTER 11.

### An Unexpected Meeting!

THE net was tightening, slowly but surely the rest of the Order of the Ring were finding their way into the meshes. Ethel Anderson was left at Sheffield in a suite of private apartments at the Wharnccliffe Hotel, and Nelson Lee made his way down to Blacksand, determined, now that he had sufficient evidence, to arrest Sir Philip Anderson.

It was half-past ten, and the moon was playing hide and seek with the slowly-drifting masses of cloud which a faint south-easterly breeze was lazily drifting across the sea over Blacksand Bay.

Now the scene on both land and sea was plunged in inky blackness. Now the moon burst through the clouds and flooded it with

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silvery light, bringing into bold relief the straggling line of cottages which fringed the curving beach and the two grim, towering cliffs that stood like sentinels on each side of the entrance to the bay.

Two men were standing at the door of Blacksand Grange, which was perched on the summit of one of these cliffs. One of the men was Nelson Lee, and the other was an inspector of the local police, who had been told off to accompany the detective to the Grange in order to assist in the arrest of Sir Philip Anderson.

"They must have gone to bed," said the inspector. "Ring again!"

The detective raised his hand, then he lowered it again, and nodded to his companion.

"It's all right," he said. "I hear someone coming. You do the talking."

He had scarcely finished speaking before the door opened and the butler appeared. The moon had retired behind the clouds, and the two men were all but invisible.

"Who is it?" said the butler, peering out into the darkness.

"Inspector Pollock," said the inspector. "Is Sir Philip at home?"

"He isn't," replied the butler, "but we're expecting him back at any moment."

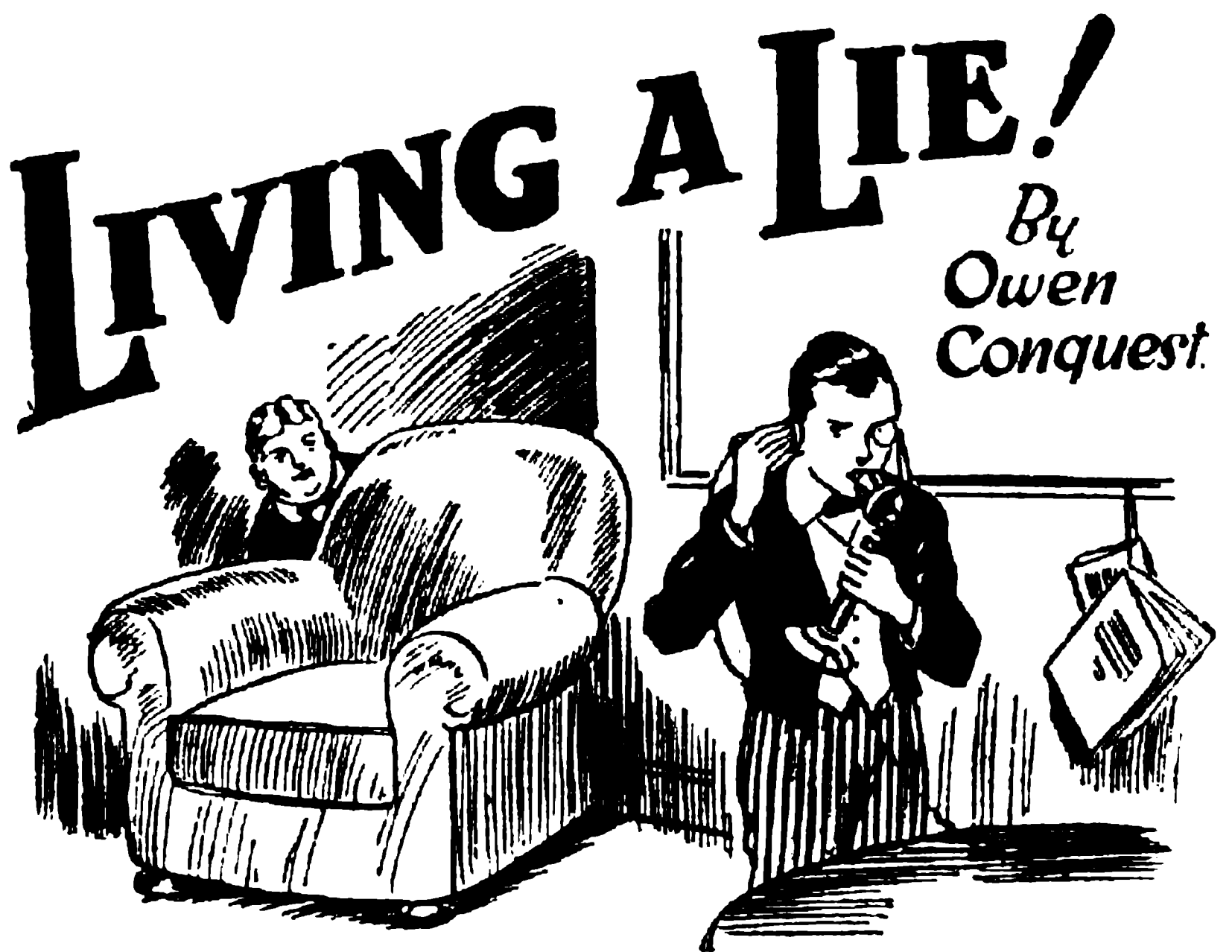
"Do you know where he's gone?" asked the inspector.

"Yes. He and a couple of gentlemen who are staying here went out about eight o'clock for an evening's fishing in the bay. They said they would be back about half-past ten, so that in all probability they won't be very long now. Will you step inside and wait?"

The inspector held a whispered consultation with Nelson Lee.

"We will go down and meet him," said the detective. "If we go inside it is just possible that the butler might send one of the servants to inform Sir Philip that Nelson Lee and a policeman are here, and are waiting for him up at the house; and you can guess what would happen then?"

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"Quite so," said the inspector. "Sir Philip would never come near the house at all. He would simply cut and run."

The detective stepped forward into the light and addressed the butler.

"Is there anybody with Sir Philip except his two friends?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Not even a fisherman?"

"No, sir."

"They have gone out in a boat, I presume, and not fishing from the shore?"

"They've gone in a little four-oared boat belonging to Sir Philip."

"Where will they land?"

"Have you ever been down this cliff?"

"Yes."

"Then you probably know that there's a narrow zig-zag path, starting just outside the gates of the Grange and running down the face of the cliff?"

"Yes, I know it well."

This was perfectly true. The detective had explored the cliff on the morning after the Chief had murdered the constable who had discovered the shipwrecked party in the cave.

That had occurred after the wreck of the *Dolphin*, and there was not the slightest doubt, but except for the constable's untimely death at the hands of the Chief, Nelson Lee would have smashed the Order of the Ring that same night. As it was, the rogues escaped with the help of Sir Philip Anderson.

"When the tide is out," continued the butler, "the path runs right down on to the beach. When the tide is full, as it is to-night, the sea comes up to the foot of the cliff, and the last few yards of the path are under water. Just about high-water mark there's a little cave."

"I remember it," said Nelson Lee.

"Well, they'll run their boat into that cave," said the butler. "There's an iron ring in the side of the cave to which they'll fasten the boat, and then they'll scramble out and walk up the cliff. When the tide goes out the boat will be high and dry in the cave, and will have to remain there until it's high water again."

"Thank you," said Nelson Lee. "Our business with Sir Philip will not take more than a moment or two to transact, so I don't think we will come inside; we'll go and meet him."

With these words he turned on his heel, and led the way along the short neglected drive, through the massive iron gates, and down the zig-zag path on the face of the cliff.

Half-way down the detective halted, and held up his hand.

"Confound this darkness!" he growled. "I wish the moon would come out. I thought I heard them then."

They continued their descent for another twenty or thirty yards, then the detective once more halted, and signed to his companion to do the same.

"Do you hear them?" he whispered.

The inspector nodded his head. Above the low murmur of the placid sea he distinctly heard the clang of an iron ring, and the hum of human voices.

"They're making the boat fast," said Nelson Lee. "We'll wait for them here, where the path is fairly broad."

A moment or two later the voices grew suddenly more distinct, and were accompanied by the sound of scrambling footsteps.

"They're coming up the path," whispered Nelson Lee. "Get out your handcuffs, and be ready with your truncheon in case he shows fight."

The inspector drew his truncheon, and whipped out the iron bracelets which were destined for Sir Philip's wrists. The detective pulled out his revolver.

Nearer and nearer came the footsteps. Louder and more distinct became the three men's voice. Then, all at once, to the inspector's surprise, the detective gave a violent start, and clutched him by the arm.

"Listen!" he gasped, in a low, excited whisper. "Surely, I can't be mistaken! They are the voices of——"

He had no need to complete his sentence, for at that moment the moon burst suddenly through the clouds, and bathed the rugged cliff in a flood of light.

And, there, not half a dozen yards away, stood Sir Philip Anderson, the owner of *Blacksand Grange*, with the Chief on his left hand, and the Doctor on his right!

The next instant the clouds closed over the moon again, and enveloped the cliff in a mantle of impenetrable darkness.

## CHAPTER 12.

### The Drama on the Cliff!

IT would be hard to say which of the five was the most surprised by this unexpected meeting, Nelson Lee and the inspector, or Sir Philip and his two companions. It would be equally hard to say whether Nelson Lee or the Chief was the first to regain his presence of mind. For the brief half second that the moon remained in view they both stood rooted to the spot in stupefied bewilderment. The moment the moon disappeared behind the clouds, they both awoke from their stupor. The detective might have been first, but if he was the Chief was a very good second.

Revolver in hand, the detective started towards the spot where he had last seen the three men standing. At the same instant the Chief snatched up the boathook, which had fallen from Sir Philip's trembling hand, and lashed out into the darkness. It was a random blow, but, as luck would have it, the boathook struck Nelson Lee on the shoulder, and felled him to the ground.

Before he could scramble to his feet, the Chief sprang towards him, and lunged at his heart with the sharp end of his weapon.

Quick as thought, the detective grasped the boathook with both hands, and the next moment the two were struggling fiercely.

In the meantime, the inspector was not idle. Following Nelson Lee's example, the moment the moon was obscured by the clouds he rushed to where he had seen the three men standing. More by chance than design, he collided with Sir Philip, and knocked him backwards into the Doctor's arms. The latter promptly pushed Sir Philip aside, and sprang at the inspector, but, with lightning-like rapidity, the inspector clenched his fist and stopped his assailant's rush with a rasping blow in the mouth.

As the Doctor staggered back, the inspector darted after him, and dealt him a blow with his truncheon that stretched him senseless at his feet. At the same instant Sir Philip recovered his presence of mind and flung himself upon the inspector from behind. With a backward kick, the inspector forced him to release his hold, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, he spun round on his heel, swung his truncheon as he turned, and caught Sir Philip a sledgehammer blow on the side of the head that sent him reeling towards the edge of the narrow path.

By a superhuman effort, Sir Philip recovered his balance in the nick of time, but before he could collect his scattered wits, for the blow had partially dazed him, the inspector seized him by the throat, and forced him to his knees.

"Now—coming quietly?" he panted, with a threatening flourish of his truncheon.

"Yes—yes. The game's up!" moaned Sir Philip, who was shivering with fear.

"Hold up your hands, then!"

Like a beaten cur Sir Philip obeyed.

Click! His left wrist was encircled by a bracelet of steel. Click! And his right wrist was treated in the same manner. Sir Philip was a prisoner!

Flushed with triumph, the inspector then turned round to render assistance to Nelson Lee.

Locked in each other's arms, the two were rolling and writhing on the narrow path, first one and then the other uppermost. Inch by inch they approached the edge, too madly excited to be conscious of their peril. Then, all at once, the ground seemed to sink under them, and the next instant, just as the inspector turned round, they both rolled over the edge of the path, and vanished into space.

Luckily for both of them, the rocky ledge from which they fell was not much more than fifteen feet above high-water mark. Luckily, too, the tide was at the full, and the sea was perfectly calm, so that, instead of falling on to the rocks at the foot of the cliff, as would otherwise have been the case, they merely plunged into three or four fathoms of almost unruffled water. But even so the shock which they received when they struck the surface of the water was quite sufficient to daze them for a time, and to

cause them to relax their grip on each other's throat.

On this occasion the Chief was the first to regain his scattered wits, and without a moment's loss of time he struck out for the shelving beach which stretched in a semi-circular curve between two grim cliffs on each side of the cove. Before he had taken twenty strokes, the detective was in hot pursuit. He could not see the Chief, of course, for the moon was still hidden behind the clouds, but his quick ears caught the almost inaudible splash of the fugitive's overarm strokes, and by these alone he steered his course.

As soon as the Chief discovered this he turned himself over on his back and contented himself with floating for a while. A stiffish current ran across the little bay, and when this had carried him some distance towards the opposite cliff, he turned once more, and struck out for the beach.

**B**Y that time, the detective had abandoned the chase in despair; his adversary's cunning ruse having deprived him of all clue to the scoundrel's whereabouts, and, after spending several minutes in a vain attempt to pick up the scent, he followed the Chief's example, and struck out for the beach.

Fringing the shores of the cove was the village of Blacksand, which consisted of a straggling line of houses, facing the sea. In front of the houses was an ill-paved road, and in front of the road, divided from it by a low wall, was the steeply-sloping beach. The upper part of this beach was never covered by the sea, even at the highest tides, and in front of the wall was a long line of fishing boats, with here and there a pleasure boat, some fitted with motors, drawn up beyond the reach of the waves.

When Nelson Lee had scrambled up the beach and was climbing over the low stone wall, a gruff voice hailed him through the darkness, and a moment later a coast-watcher flashed a torch in his face.

"Hallo! Who are you?" demanded the coast-watcher.

Then he started back with an exclamation of amazement.

"Why, it's Mr. Lee, the detective, isn't it?" he gasped. "You're the gentleman we rescued on the night when the Firefly was wrecked!"

"I am," said Nelson Lee, wringing the water from his dripping coat. "I came down here to-night to arrest Sir Philip Anderson. The inspector and I went up to the Grange together, and while we were hunting for our man we suddenly came face to face with him, and the Chief and the Doctor of the Order of the Ring! The encounter took place on the path which runs down the cliff below Sir Philip's house. The inspector went for Sir Philip and the Doctor, and I went for the Chief. After a desperate struggle we both rolled into the sea, where the Chief succeeded in giving me the



**The figure in the tree stirred and suddenly a noose dropped clean over the shoulders of the detective. Next moment Lee was snatched off his feet and whirled into the air.**

slip. The probability is that he'll try to land on the beach here—if he hasn't done so already—and I want you to be on the watch for him. I can't stay myself, for I don't know how the inspector has got on, and I must hurry back and see if he needs my help."

"All right, sir. I'll be on the look-out for the beggar!" said the coast-watcher. "What shall I do if I collar him?"

Before the detective had time to reply the moon burst suddenly through the clouds and flooded the cove with light. The detective turned and scanned the sea with an eager, circling glance. Then a startled cry burst from his lips.

"What is it?" gasped the coast-watcher, wheeling round.

"Look!" cried Nelson Lee, pointing towards the opposite end of the beach.

The coast-watcher looked. Then he, too, uttered a startled cry.

For the Chief had already effected a landing. He was in the act of dragging a heavy-looking boat to the edge of the water. They

saw him launch her and attempt to scramble in over the stern sheets.

Quick as thought the detective vaulted over the wall which divided the road from the beach. The coast-watcher promptly followed his example; and an instant later they were tearing across the sands as fast as their legs would carry them. Long before they could interfere, however, the Chief was aboard his boat and bending over something amidships. Then there came to their ears the splutter and roar of a motor, the propeller churned the shallow water to foam, and the stolen motor-boat shot out into deep water and headed for the horizon. By the time Nelson Lee and his companion reached the water's edge he was fully a quarter of a mile from the beach and speeding away into the night, leaving a white wake spreading fanwise astern.

"We'll have to follow!" shouted Nelson Lee, darting to the boats.

But as luck would have it, there was not one motor-boat that had petrol aboard, or else the Chief had helped himself to all he could lay his hands on. To have gone

up to the village for petrol and then set off in pursuit would have been hopeless. Already the Chief's boat was but a tiny speck in the moonlit waters.

"It's no use, sir," said the coast-watcher, shaking his head. "He's got too good a start."

The detective stared at the speeding motor-boat, and then, with a suddenness that was positively startling, the moon retired behind the clouds and darkness swallowed it up.

## CHAPTER 13.

### In the Lions' Den!

INSPECTOR POLLOCK had not been idle. When he realised what had happened to Nelson Lee his first thought was to go to his aid, but he could not do that until he had taken his two prisoners to where they would be safe. The Doctor recovered consciousness only to find himself securely handcuffed.

The inspector hustled his bruised and dazed prisoners down to the village and handed them over to the care of the village constable, after which he set out for the beach, intending to arouse some fishermen and institute a search for Nelson Lee.

But on the way he encountered Nelson Lee and the coast-watcher, who were on their way to the Grange.

"Thank Heaven you're safe!" cried the inspector, wringing the detective's hand. "I've given you up for lost. But what's become of the Chief?"

"He's escaped," said the detective bitterly. "How have you got on?"

"Got 'em both," said the inspector laconically. "They're now in the lock-up, with the constable sitting outside the door. I'm taking no chances. But how did the Chief escape?"

The detective told him, and when he had finished his tale the inspector said:

"Then, by Jove, there isn't a moment to be lost! He can't travel a great distance in that cockleshell. He's bound to land somewhere in this neighbourhood. We must immediately wire a description of him all along the coast."

"You're too late," said Nelson Lee with a smile. "As soon as we knew that pursuit was hopeless, we knocked up the postmaster, and he is now engaged in telegraphing to all the towns and villages between here and Penzance in the west and Dover in the east. That ought to help."

"Good!" said the inspector. "You don't believe in letting the grass grow under your feet, I see. But what are you going to do now? I must get back to Plymouth with my prisoners, of course; but it would be madness for you to come with me in your present condition. That wound on your head wants seeing to, and you need a change of clothes."

"True," said Nelson Lee. "I was coming up to the Grange to see how you were getting on, and then I was going to call on the Blacksand doctor. He attended me once before, you know—on the night when the Firefly came ashore. However, there's no need for me to go to the Grange now, of course, so I shall go straight to the doctor's and have my wound dressed."

"And after that?"

"I shall beg a night's lodging at Forelands Hall."

"Is that the big house on the opposite cliff?"

"Yes. Lord Forelands, who lives there, was very good to me when I was here before, and pressed me to make his house my home whenever I was in this neighbourhood. So I shall take him at his word."

"Shall I see you again before you leave?"

"I doubt it. Unless I get news of the Chief—which I don't in the least expect—I shall return to London by the first train in the morning."

With these words he shook the inspector by the hand and turned back towards the village. He went first to the doctor, and half an hour later he was inside Forelands Hall, the welcomed guest of Lord Forelands.

He spent the night at Forelands Hall, and left for London the next morning, much rested and feeling fit. He had thought things out, and his next course was obvious. The Squire, Lady Ursula, and the Doctor were now all in the hands of the police, and only the Chief was still at large, and it was doubtful if he dared land on English soil again.

But Jack Longford was still a prisoner in the hands of the Order of the Ring. Where could he be? Every one of the known headquarters of the Order had by now been raided, but there must be one other haunt still to be visited?

Then, in a flash, Nelson Lee recalled how Knight had gone to the Raglan Club, and that the Chief and the Doctor had been there. That fact might mean anything or nothing, but it was plainly his duty to visit the Raglan Club, and, if possible, get inside the building to prove or disprove that it was another of the order's dens.

In accordance with this plan the detective left Blacksand by the morning train and arrived in London in the course of the afternoon. After a lengthy interview with the officials at Scotland Yard he returned to his rooms in Grays Inn Road and disguised himself as a hawker of penny toys. A filthy red-cotton handkerchief tightly tied round his head effectually concealed his bandages and added not a little to his slovenly and woe-begone appearance.

From nine o'clock until midnight he plied his trade in the slummy back street in which the Raglan was situated. Every man who went into the club, every man who came out, was subjected to a keen and penetrating scrutiny, with the result that the detective recognised one as the former steward of the

Firefly, and a second as Mr. Stephen Meredith's private secretary—in other words, the secretary of the Chief.

At midnight the club began to empty, and in another quarter of an hour the last of the lights had been put out and the place was enshrouded in darkness. A few minutes later the door opened and Black Bruno, the caretaker, appeared—evidently with the intention of taking a stroll. He removed the key from the inside of the door and thrust it into the keyhole on the outside. He stepped out into the street, closed the door, and locked it. Then he thrust the key into his pocket and walked away in the direction of Tottenham Court Road.

"Now's my chance!" muttered Nelson Lee who was ensconced in an archway on the opposite side of the street. "This burly Italian giant is evidently the caretaker, and now that he has gone out the place will be deserted. I'll slip in through one of the back windows and—"

Suddenly he paused for at that moment a foreign-looking individual—evidently a sailor by his dress—walked up to the door of the club and rang the bell. Bruno was then about twenty yards away, but for some reason or other he happened to look round just then, and seeing the man at the door, he turned on his heel and came back.

"Hallo! Who are you, and what d'you want?" the detective heard him ask.

The sailor said something in a low voice which the detective could not hear. Black Bruno started, and held out his hand. The sailor fumbled in his pocket and produced a letter which Bruno snatched from his hand with ill-concealed eagerness. For a moment or two longer the two men conversed in whispers; then the sailor took his departure, whilst Bruno unlocked the door and entered the club again.

What was the meaning of this curious scene?

The detective stood in the archway opposite the club, and presently he saw a light spring up in the basement. A few minutes later a second light appeared in one of the windows at the top of the house. The light in the basement remained where it was, but the second light kept dodging about, first in one room and then in another, for all the world as though someone were moving about the house with an electric torch in his hand.

**W**HEN nearly an hour had elapsed the detective's curiosity could stand the suspense no longer. By hook or crook he must see what Bruno was doing; he must find out the meaning of that wandering will-o'-wisp light.

The Raglan stood at the corner of two streets, or rather at the corner of a street and a narrow, dirty lane. The detective crossed the street and glided down the lane. About fifteen yards from the corner he came to a wooden door which apparently led into

the yard at the back of the club. Upon trying the handle he found that the door was locked, but by the aid of a bunch of keys which he always carried with him he speedily let himself in.

He then found himself in a stone-flagged yard surrounded on three sides by high brick walls, the fourth side being formed by the back of the house. All the windows of the latter were in darkness, and after waiting for nearly ten minutes without discovering any sign of life he crept up to one of the lower windows, forced back the catch, threw up the sash and cautiously squeezed himself through.

"**A**RE you the man they call Black Bruno? If you are, I have a letter for you from the president of your club."

Such were the words the sailor had addressed to Bruno—the words the detective had not caught.

Bruno started, for "the president of the club" could only mean the Chief.

"Where is it?" he asked, holding out his hand.

The sailor produced the letter and handed it over.

"Where did you meet the Chief—I mean, the president?" asked Bruno.

"At Cherbourg," said the sailor. "He was brought into that port by a French fishing-boat, which had picked him up in an open motor-boat, having run out of petrol, I believe, somewhere in the Channel. Our steamer was just on the point of sailing for London when he landed, and he gave me that letter and a ten-pound note to bring it to you."

"Have you to take an answer back?"

"Oh, no. I don't suppose I shall ever see the gentleman again."

"Then I'll wish you good-night," said Bruno. "I'm anxious to see what this letter's about."

The sailor took his departure, and Bruno unlocked the door and re-entered the club. Having carefully locked the door he went down to his sitting-room in the basement and switched on the light. Then he broke the seal of the envelope and spread out the letter upon the table.

It was written in the secret cipher of the Order of the Ring, but Bruno was perfectly familiar with the key, and had no difficulty in translating it. It ran as follows:

"All is lost, for the present, at any rate. Lady Ursula, the Squire, and the Doctor are all in custody, and I have only just managed to escape arrest by the skin of my teeth. England is too hot for me just now, so I'm going to take up my quarters with our comrades in Paris for a while. In the meantime, the Raglan is a standing danger to us, for if once that cursed Nelson Lee

gets into the place and discovers those books and papers in the safe the Order of the Ring will be completely ruined. I have decided, therefore, that it will be best to make a clean sweep of the place and all it contains, including Jack Longford. In other words, I want you to set fire to the club and burn it to the ground.

"As the safe is a fireproof one, you had better open it and scatter the books and papers about the floor, so as to make sure that they will all be destroyed. The lock, as you know, is a combination lock, so there is no key. The word which opens the safe was changed at our last meeting. It is now 'Absolu.'

"Fire the place to-night if you possibly can, and then come over and join me at our French establishment in the Avenue de la Reunion.

"THE CHIEF."

Like all other members of the Order of the Ring, Black Bruno had the most unswerving faith in the wisdom of the Chief. No thought of questioning the Chief's decision ever entered his mind. It was enough for him that the Chief had commanded him to burn the Raglan to the ground, and without a moment's hesitation he promptly set to work to carry out his orders.

Having collected an armful of shavings and paper he lit a candle and went upstairs. With the help of the shavings and the paper, together with a miscellaneous assortment of lumber, he constructed an enormous bonfire just outside the door of the attic in which Jack Longford was imprisoned. He did not light it just then, but went down to the landing below and prepared another bonfire there. A third was built in the meeting-room, a large room on the first floor, at one end of which stood a massive iron safe. A fourth was erected in the billiard-room on the ground floor.

When his four bonfires were completed the Italian proceeded to drench them all with paraffin. He then went up to the attic again where the young engineer—all unconscious of his coming peril—was fast asleep on a heap of straw. An iron ring had been riveted to one of his ankles, and to this a short steel chain had been affixed, the other end of the chain being fastened to an iron staple in the wall.

"Wake up, my friend. Wake up and hear the joyful news," said Bruno, shaking him roughly by the arm.

"What is it?" yawned Jack, sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"I've been ordered to set you free," said Bruno.

"To set me free?" cried Jack, suddenly becoming wide awake. "It can't be true! You're mocking me!"

The Italian laughed and rubbed his hands.

"What I tell you is perfectly true," he said. "This very night your long imprisonment comes to an end. I am going to give you your liberty. Can you guess how I am going to do it?"

Jack shook his head.

"Well, listen, and you shall hear!" said Bruno, with a fiendish grin.

He stepped to the door and struck a match. He flung it on the bonfire, which immediately burst into flames.

"That's how I'm going to set you free!" he said, putting his head in at the door again. "Good-bye!"

He strode past the blazing heap and hurried downstairs. He applied a lighted match to the second bonfire and rushed down to the meeting-room. He was just about to fire the third of his oil-soaked piles of lumber when his eyes fell on the safe.

"Per bacco! I've forgotten to open the safe!" he muttered to himself.

He sprang to the safe, candle in hand, and began to adjust the letters of the combination lock. He had got as far as "Abs" when a sharp metallic click fell on his startled ears, and on turning round he found himself face to face with Nelson Lee, who was covering him with a revolver.

"Hands up!" said the detective sternly.

But the words had scarcely crossed his lips ere Bruno suddenly dashed the candle to the ground and hurled himself upon Lee.

Nothing daunted, he grappled with his burly foe in a desperate hand-to-hand encounter. Over and over they rolled on the floor, the din of their furious combat mingling with the hiss and the roar of the blazing heaps upstairs.

Suddenly above the crackling of the flames a wild, despairing cry came:

"Help! Help!"

Up to that moment Nelson Lee had no proof that Jack Longford was imprisoned in the Raglan, and the sound of Jack's voice, the knowledge that the young engineer was in deadly peril, acted upon Nelson Lee like a sudden electric shock. It galvanised his flagging energies into life again and filled him for the moment with a wild burst of strength that was absolutely irresistible.

With one terrific sledge-hammer blow he loosened half the Italian's teeth. Then hurling his burly foe aside, leaped to his feet and snatched up his revolver. Clubbing the weapon, he dealt Black Bruno a blow behind the ear that stretched him senseless at his feet. Then he rushed to the window and drew up the sash.

Crack, crack, crack!

Three times in rapid succession he fired into the air and awoke the startled echoes of the silent street.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Three times he yelled at the top of his voice. Then he sprang over Bruno's prostrate form, snatched up an axe which he saw lying on the floor, and darted from the room.

## CHAPTER 14.

## Fighting the Flames!

**B**RUNO had built a bonfire in the billiard-room on the ground floor, a second in the meeting-room on the first floor, a third on the landing on the second floor, and a fourth outside the door of the attic in which Jack Longford was imprisoned. He had intended, of course, to fire them all before he left the club, but after he had set fire to the one outside the attic door and the one on the second floor landing, and before he had time to light the one in the meeting-room the detective had tackled him and had put a stop to his incendiary proceedings.

These bonfires were constructed of shavings and lumber saturated with paraffin-oil, and when once alight not only burnt with extraordinary fierceness, but were practically inextinguishable.

As a matter of fact, by the time the detective reached the landing on the second floor the bonfire was a roaring mass of white-hot flames, while the wooden floor, the banister of the staircase, and even the stairs themselves were already ablaze in a dozen different places.

Swiftly, yet cautiously, the detective picked his way across the burning landing and rushed to the foot of the attic stairs. The fire which Bruno had kindled outside the attic door was blazing with even greater fury than the one on the landing, and the narrow space at the top of the stairs was a veritable inferno of smoke and flame.

In other words, between himself and the attic door was a six-foot wall of madly-whirling flames. And before he could reach Jack Longford—whose cries for help had now given place to feeble, stifled moans—he saw he must fight his way through this roaring belt of fire.

With the utmost coolness he whipped off his coat and wrapped it round his head. Then he stumbled up the blazing stairs, charged through the thick of the hissing flames, and pitched head first into the attic, his clothing scorched and smouldering, but otherwise unscathed.

Luckily for Jack, the flames had not yet spread into the attic, but the room was full of blinding, suffocating smoke; and as soon as Nelson Lee had scrambled to his feet he groped his way to the window with the object of opening it. To his dire dismay he found that the window had been boarded up on the inside; but, nothing daunted, he set to work with savage desperation to smash in the boards. By the time he had wrenched the last away, and had opened the window to its widest extent, the flames were curling through the doorway and were creeping across the worm-eaten floor like darting, wriggling snakes of fire.

At the sight of Nelson Lee, the young engineer, who had been lying on a heap of straw in the farthest corner of the room, roused himself from his lethargy and rose to his feet.

"A file—a file! Have you a file?" he gasped, when Nelson Lee sprang towards him after opening the window.

"I haven't," said the detective. "Why?"

Jack uttered a groan of despair and pointed to his ankle, on which was a tightly-fitting iron band. Then he lifted up the strong steel chain, about three yards long. One end of the chain was fastened to the band round his ankle, and the other was firmly secured to an iron staple in the wall. On the other leg he had a similar chain at the end of which was a ball.

"It's no good if you haven't a file," said the young engineer despairingly. "You can't save me."

"I can try, at any rate," said the detective doggedly.

He grasped the chain with both hands about three feet from the staple and planted one foot against the wall. He pulled and tugged till the veins stood out on his forehead like knotted cords. But it was all in vain. In spite of all his efforts, the staple stubbornly refused to yield. And, in the meantime, the flames were making such rapid headway that by the time he abandoned his attack they were half-way across the attic floor.

"It's no good!" groaned Jack again. "You've done your best, but you can't accomplish the impossible. You're only risking your life by remaining here. Save yourself before it's too late."

"Never!" said the detective between his clenched teeth. "We'll perish together or we'll get out together."

He whipped out his revolver and examined it. It had been loaded in every chamber when he had entered the club, but three of the chambers had been emptied through the meeting-room window in order to arouse the neighbourhood. There were three full cartridges left.

He placed the muzzle of the weapon quite close to the wall and fired at the wooden plug into which the staple had been driven. His first shot reduced it to a mass of splinters. Another vigorous pull and the chain was free.

Then, placing the revolver at a part of the other chain, which looked extremely worn, he fired twice and severed it.

Jack Longford was free!

**F**REE! The word seemed almost a mockery. The whole of one end of the attic was already in possession of the flames. The door was on fire in half a dozen places—the ceiling in half a dozen more. The doorway, the landing outside, the staircase, and the landing below were wrapped in one continuous sheet of lurid flame. To reach the stairs—even to reach the attic door—was an absolute impossibility. To remain where they were meant certain, speedy death.

"The window!" gasped Nelson Lee. "We must try the window! It's our only chance!"

He staggered across to the open window and thrust out his head. Jack picked up the loose end of his chain—the other end was

still fastened to the band round his ankle, of course—and followed the detective's example. In the street below was a surging crowd of men and women, who greeted their appearance with frantic shouts of excitement.

"Why the dickens don't they fetch a ladder?" growled Jack.

"Some of them have gone for one, I fancy," said Nelson Lee. "And I fancy, too, that the fire brigade isn't far away. I can hear the bells. But we daren't remain here until they arrive. We'll be roasted to death unless we clear out of this at once."

This was only too obviously true, for even while he was speaking a long, thin tongue of flame was hungrily licking at his heels.

"It's easy to say we must clear out," said Jack despondently, "but how are we to do it? There's nothing below us but fifty feet of smooth, bare wall."

"Look up," said Nelson Lee. "The edge of the roof is only just above our heads. We must climb out on the slates and wait until the fire-escape arrives."

"All right, I'm game!" said Jack. "Lead the way."

"No, no!" said the detective firmly. "You must go first. Give me the end of that chain, and I'll hand it up to you when you're on the slates."

There was no time to argue the point, so the young engineer gave Nelson Lee the end of the chain and climbed out on to the narrow sill outside. When he stood erect the edge of the sloping roof was exactly on a level with his waist. He bent himself forward in such a way that the upper part of his body lay flat on the slates. Then he gripped the slates as best he could with his elbows and his hands, and cautiously drew up his legs.

For a moment all went well. He got one knee over the edge of the roof, and was drawing up the other, when, all at once, to his horrified dismay, he lost his grip on the slippery slates and began to slide down. He made a frantic attempt to regain his foothold on the window-sill, but the effort ended in failure, and the next instant, amid a chorus of startled shouts from the crowd, he slid back over the edge of the roof and shot downwards through the air.

Then occurred one of the most marvellous and sensational feats that Nelson Lee had ever performed. Jack had handed him the end of the chain which was fastened to the iron band round his ankle. The instant the young engineer began to slid down the roof the detective saw what was going to happen, and, with matchless presence of mind, he clutched the chain in a vice-like grip with both his hands, and braced his knees against the inside of the wall below the window.

Scarcely had he done so before a violent shock jerked him forward and almost tore his arms out of their sockets. By a herculean effort he managed to prevent himself being dragged through the window, and an instant later the crowd below was electrified by the sight of Nelson Lee hanging half-way out of the window, with the young engineer dangling head downwards in the air a couple of yards below him.

What a mighty roar of applause went up when the crowd understood what had happened! And even while they were cheering the jangle of bells was heard, and the fire-engine dashed up.

After that the rest was comparatively easy. One glance sufficed to show the firemen what had happened, and it was not long before the fire-escape was run up to the side of the house. Two minutes later Jack Longford's limp and senseless form was being carried into a neighbouring house, and Nelson Lee was struggling to extricate himself from an enthusiastic and wildly-cheering crowd.

## CHAPTER 15.

### On the Track of the Chief!

"**H**AVE you got the caretaker?" That was Nelson Lee's first question as soon as he could make himself heard.

"Yes!" cried a dozen excited voices. "We broke into the club as soon as we heard the alarm of fire, and we found him lying unconscious in a big room on the first floor."

"Where is he now?"

"In mine house," said a benevolent-looking man of Jewish appearance, elbowing his way to the front. "Come mit me, and I vill him to you show."

"In a minute," said Nelson Lee. "I must first go and see Mr. Longford."

"Is dot der yong shentleman you haf just now rescued?" asked the Jew.

"Yes."

"Den you can two mit von stone kill," said the Jew. "Both der caretaker and Mishter Longford haf into mine house been carried."

"Right. I'll come with you in half a minute," said Nelson Lee.

He turned and beckoned to a policeman who was assisting to keep back the crowd.

"Do you know the name of the caretaker of the Raglan?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the constable. "Leastways, I don't know his surname, but he's known to everybody hereabouts as Black Bruno."

"Are you aware that he's a member of the Order of the Ring?"

The policeman started as though he had been shot.

"Bruno, a member of the Order of the Ring?" he gasped.

"That's what I said," said Nelson Lee. "It was I who gave him that knock on the head which put him to sleep. I want you to take charge of him now—to sit with him until he comes round, you know—and then I want you to place him under arrest for arson and attempted murder. It is quite possible that I may have other charges to prefer against him later, but those will suffice for the present. Now, sir, will you kindly lead the way to your house?"

This last request was addressed to the Jew, who accordingly conducted them into his house.

Bruno had been laid on the couch in a cosy little sitting-room, and was already showing signs of returning consciousness. Jack was lying on a mattress on the floor, and was being examined by a doctor.

"Is he seriously hurt?" asked the detective in anxious tones.

"It depends upon what you call serious," replied the doctor. "All the joints of one leg—the leg by which you held him—have been terribly strained and twisted, but, as far as I can ascertain, there is no fracture and no dislocation. His loss of consciousness is due to the fact that when he had dropped the full length of the chain and came to a sudden stop, he banged his head against the side of the house with so much force that it stunned him."

"Concussion of the brain, in other words?"

"Exactly."

"There is no fracture of the skull?"

"None that I can find."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said the detective fervently. "If your diagnosis is correct, he'll probably be all right in the course of a day or two—barring the injuries to his leg, of course."

"That is my opinion," said the doctor. "Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes; but his house has been shut up ever since he disappeared."

"Then I should strongly recommend that he be sent to the Middlesex Hospital."

"Very good," said Nelson Lee. "I will send for the ambulance at once."

He turned to the constable, who was mounting guard on Bruno, and despatched him to phone to the hospital for the ambulance. Then he seated himself by the side of the half-unconscious Italian, and calmly proceeded to rifle his pockets.

"I'm not robbing the wounded," he said, seeing the doctor and the Jew were regarding him with wondering eyes. "I was watching the Raglan to-night, and saw this man receive a letter under somewhat mysterious circumstances. Shortly afterwards I caught him in the act of setting fire to the premises, and I shrewdly suspect that the letter he received was an order from a confederate—from the Chief of the Order of the Ring, in fact—commanding him to burn the place to the ground. He may have destroyed the letter, of course, but I'm hoping that he has it in one of his pockets, and if he has I mean to have a look at it. Ah, this is it, I expect!"

He drew the Chief's letter from Bruno's pocket and eagerly unfolded it.

"Confound it! It's in cipher!" he said in a somewhat disappointed voice. "However, I never came across a cipher yet that I couldn't solve, so I will take the trouble

of annexing this letter in order to study it at my leisure."

He placed the letter in his pocket-book, and a few minutes later the ambulance arrived.

LEAVING the constable in charge of Bruno, the detective accompanied Jack to the Middlesex Hospital and handed him over to the house surgeon. He then dispatched a wire to Ethel Anderson, informing her of her lover's safety, and afterwards drove to Scotland Yard and reported his discoveries. Following this, he returned to his room in Grays Inn Road, and as soon as he had had a bath and changed his clothes, he lit a pipe and seated himself at his writing-desk, drew out the cipher letter, and set to work to de-code it.

This proved a stiffer task than he had bargained for, and long before it was accomplished the sun was streaming through the sitting-room window. At last, however, on the stroke of half-past eight, his perseverance was rewarded. He discovered the key to the cipher in which the letter was written, and, tearing a page from his

notebook, he copied it out, word for word, in plain, straightforward English."

The Chief's letter contained the following passages, amongst many others

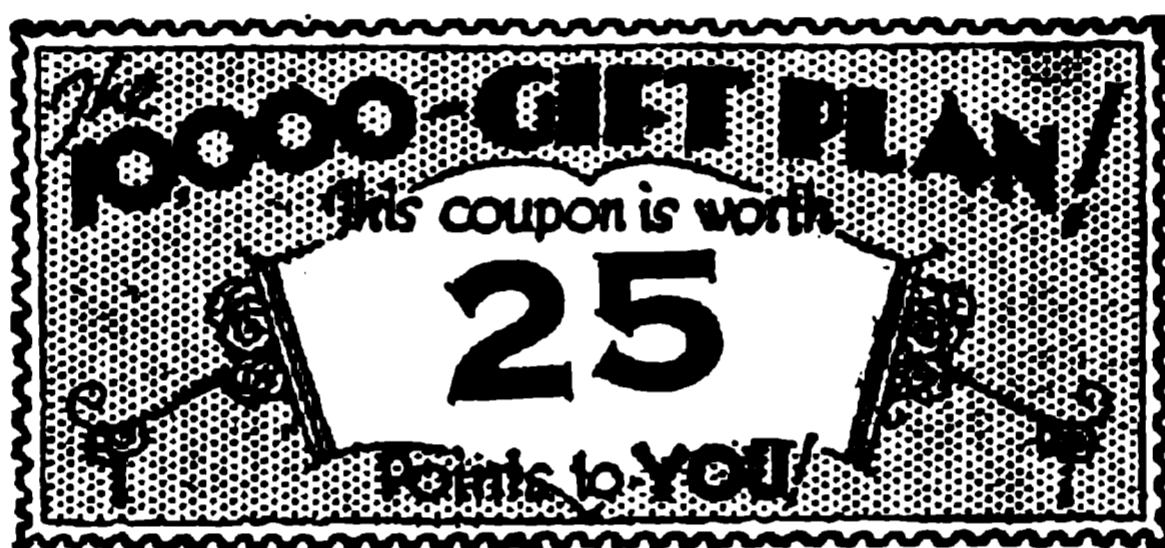
"England is too hot for me just now, so I am going to take up my quarters with our comrades in Paris for a while. In the meantime, the Raglan is a standing danger to us, for if once that cursed Nelson Lee gets into the place and discovers those books and papers in the safe, the Order of the Ring will be utterly and eternally ruined. The word which opens the safe was changed at our last meeting. It is now 'Absolu.' Fire the place to-night—and then come over and join me at our French establishment in the Avenue de la Reunion."

As soon as Nelson Lee had read the Chief's extraordinary communication he was torn between two conflicting desires. His first desire was to rush back to the Raglan to superintend the removal of the safe and to find out the nature of those "books and paper" on which the Chief apparently set such store. His second desire was to fly to Paris and to hunt for that establishment in the Avenue de la Reunion where the Chief had evidently taken up his quarters.

He consulted his watch.

"I can just catch the air mail, with luck," he told himself. He pondered for a moment, then made up his mind. "I'll go," he exclaimed, as he thrust his watch back into his pocket. "Scotland Yard can look after the safe, and I'll look after the Chief!"

**STOP!** Cut this coupon out before you forget it!



It did not take long to get into telephonic communication with Scotland Yard, and he was soon talking to the Chief Commissioner.

"Amongst the ruins of the Raglan Club you will find a fireproof safe. The lock is a combination lock, and if it hasn't been destroyed by the fire, the word that opens it is 'Absolu.' If the lock is destroyed, burst open the safe as best you can. Inside it you will find important documents relating to the Order of the Ring. I am off to Paris to hunt for the Chief."

The Commissioner's wishes for good luck were still ringing in his ears as he rang off, and five minutes later the detective was speeding away to Croydon in order to catch the air mail for Paris.

His final quest had begun.

## CHAPTER 16.

### At the Mercy of His Foes!

THE Avenue de la Reunion is one of the longest thoroughfares in Paris. It starts just opposite the theatre of the same name, in the heart of the city, and, after crossing the line of fortifications, it runs in an almost straight line for over two miles beyond the city boundaries.

Inside the city it consists for the most part of cafés hotels and semi-public buildings, but as soon as it has crossed the city boundaries it becomes more and more rural

in its aspect, until at last it is little more than a quiet suburban road, bordered on each side by private dwelling-houses of considerable size, each in its own grounds.

As soon as the detective arrived in Paris he drove at once to the Prefecture of Police and asked the Prefect if he could give him any information which would enable him to form an idea as to which was the house in which the Chief was hiding.

"There is only one house which appears to fulfil your requirements," said the Prefect, after consulting his secret registers. "It is a big house, standing in its own grounds, about a mile and a half beyond the city boundary. It was purchased some four or five years ago by an Englishman by the name of Samuel Smith.

"According to my notes, Mr. Smith is an eccentric middle-aged bachelor, who is such a confirmed woman-hater that he will not have a female servant about the house. He has a fair number of servants, I understand, but all of them are men, and all of them are English. Moreover, there is a note in the register to the effect that no Frenchman have ever been known to be allowed to enter the house."

"That's the house, without a doubt," said Nelson Lec. "Mr. Samuel Smith is doubtless another alias for the Chief of the Order of the Ring. He told Mr. Longford that they had an establishment in France for the production of spurious banknotes and bonds.



**Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know a good rib-tickler, send it along. Pocket wallets, Books, and penknives are offered as prizes for jokes published. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.**

A man rushed excitedly into the office of the managing director of a huge motor works.

"Look here, sir," he exclaimed, "is it true that your firm has built a car in 7 minutes 35 seconds?"

The manager drew himself up to his full height.

"It is true, young man," he said pompously, "and let me tell you we are proud of it."

"Oh, are you?" retorted the young man bitterly. "Well, I'm not. I've got that car."

*L. M. Cartmel, 224, Scarisbrick New Rd., Southport—a pocket wallet.*

The widow of a farmer had some difficulty with her fowls and appealed for advice to the Department of Agriculture.

"Something is wrong with my chickens," she wrote. "Every morning when I come out

I find two or three of them lying on the ground cold and stiff, with their feet in the air. Can you tell me what is the matter?"

In due course she received the following reply.

"Dear Madam, your chickens are dead!"

*(Miss J. Neylon, 1,010, Liverpool Rd., Bankstown, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia—a grand prize.)*

Smith: "Is that new watch-dog of yours any good?"

Brown: "Rather. If you hear a suspicious noise at night you've only got to wake him and he barks!"

*(P. Sadler, 66, Woodhouse Rd., Tennal Estate, Queens Park, Harborne, Birmingham—a penknife.)*

Pat: "Jim is the laziest man I know."

Mike: "Why?"

Pat: "He always smokes a clay pipe because he won't have to pick it up if he drops it."

*(C. Evans, 82, Holly Bush Terrace, Glanllyn, nr. Wrexham, N. Wales—a penknife.)*

A pompous-looking man entered a restaurant and beckoned the waiter to his table.

"Do you serve crabs here?" he asked.

"We serve anyone, sir," replied the waiter.

and this house in the Avenue de la Reunion must be the place to which he referred."

The Prefect agreed that all this sounded very plausible, and as soon as the detective had obtained a full description of the exact situation of the house, he took his leave and set out on a tour of exploration. It was half-past seven when he reached the house, which was an old-fashioned, rambling mansion standing in extensive and well-wooded grounds, surrounded by high stone walls.

The more he examined it—from the road, of course—the more he felt convinced that this was the house he sought. And he determined that as soon as it was dark he would enter the grounds and endeavour to examine the house at closer quarters than was possible from the road.

At half-past eleven he set out again for the Avenue de la Reunion, and almost exactly on the stroke of midnight he was standing outside the big iron gates that gave admittance to the grounds of the suspected house.

The night was pitch dark, with more than a suspicion of thunder in the air. As it was impossible to tell what hidden dangers lurked inside this darkness, he hesitated for a moment before he entered; but as nothing occurred to arouse his distrust, he opened the gate and stole inside. Revolver in hand, he started to grope his way up the winding drive that led towards the house; but before he had taken a dozen strides a couple of ghostly

figures—each of them armed with a revolver—started out of the darkness and clapped their weapons to his head—one on his right and the other on his left.

"Halt!" cried one of the men in a commanding voice. "One step farther—one single cry—and you're a dead man! Who are you, and what d'you want?"

The detective glanced from one to the other in speechless dismay. It was only too plain that these were the sentinels, posted by the Chief to guard the entrance to the grounds. Probably they had been watching him from the first, and had only waited until he was well inside before pouncing upon him and challenging him.

So swift had been their action, so ghost-like their movements, that the first warning he had received of their presence was the pressure of their revolvers on his temples. His presence of mind, however, never deserted him for a moment; but, with lightning-like rapidity, he dropped on his knees between the two men, caught each of them by a leg, and flung them backwards off their feet.

This novel method of attack was so unexpected that the two men were sprawling on their backs before they had time to realise what was happening. As the detective sprang towards the gate, however, an enormous mastiff bounded through the darkness and leapt at his throat. As he had dropped his revolver in order to trip the sentinels, he was practically defenceless, but he seized the

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(*"Reader," 162, Stevens Rd., Chadwell Heath, Essex—a pocket wallet.*)

An Irishman and a Scot were dining together in a restaurant, and when the waitress took the bill she was naturally about to give it to the Irishman when, to her surprise, the Scot said: "I'll pay!"

Next day the newspapers bore the headline: "Sudden Death of Irish Ventriloquist."

(*F. Clark, 19, Openview, Earlsfield, S.W.18—a pocket wallet.*)

"D'you know, whenever I see you I think of Brown."

"That's funny, we're not a scrap like each other."

"Yes you are, you both owe me five pounds."

(*M. March, "Southfield," Bloomfield Rd., Bath, Somerset—a penknife.*)

Bill: "Did your watch stop when it fell to the ground?"

Bob: "Well, yes. You hardly expected it to go through, did you?"

(*W. Hoskin, Box 443, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada—a grand prize.*)

"This inn must be very old," said a visitor who had not yet been made acquainted with its history.

"Very old, sir," said the proprietor, with the utmost solemnity. "Would you like to hear some of the stories connected with the place?"

"I should indeed," replied the tourist. "Tell me the legend of the curious old apple tart the waiter just brought in."

(*N. King, 87, Pickford Lane, Dunkinfield, Cheshire—a penknife.*)

Inspector: "Got away, has he? Did you guard all the exits?"

Country Constable: "Yes, but we think he must have left by one of the entrances."

(*B. Wright, 84, North St., Portslade, Sussex—a pocket wallet.*)

Grandpa: "What are you doing with my watch, Richard?"

Richard: "I was only trying to find out if you had been cheated. I read the other day that a watch had 175 different parts, and I just wanted to make sure they're all there."

(*H. J. Jeans, 72, Cochrane St., St. Johns, Newfoundland—a grand prize.*)

"What's the idea of the Greens having French lessons?"

"They've adopted a French baby and want to understand what it says when it begins to talk!"

(*Miss J. M. Hogg, 11, Charlotte St., Rry, Scotland—a grand Prize.*)

hound by the throat and exerted all his strength to strangle it.

In the meantime, however, the two men had scrambled to their feet, and a moment later they flung themselves upon him and bore him to the ground. Despite the odds against him, the detective defended himself with pluck and determination; but before the struggle had been in progress many seconds a crowd of excited men, attracted by the barking of the mastiff, poured out of the house and rushed to their confederates' assistance. Kicking, struggling, fighting to the last, the detective was finally overpowered and carried in triumph towards the house.

"Have you got him?" asked a well-remembered voice, as they dragged him up the steps towards the front door. "Bring him into the light, and let me see if I know him."

They hauled the helpless detective into the lighted hall. Then the Chief started back with a cry of exultant surprise.

"Nelson Lee!" he cried. "The very man I wanted to get hold of! I owe you a thing or two, Mr. Nelson Lee, and now I've got you so that you can't get away, and I'm going to make you sorry for meddling in my affairs!"

Nothing daunted, the detective raised his head and faced the Chief with a calm, unwavering gaze.

"Yes, you've got me!" he said proudly and defiantly. "But your success comes rather late. The Squire and all his servants, the Doctor and Lady Ursula, Black Bruno and Sir Philip Anderson are all in custody. Miss Anderson and Jack Longford are free. The Firefly and the Dolphin are lying at the bottom of the sea. Dashwood House and the house in Belgrave Square, Abbeyvale Hall, and the underground mint—all these are in possession of the police. The Raglan is a heap of smoking ruins, and the contents of the safe——"

He paused to let his own words sink in.

"Yes?" said the Chief impatiently. "The books and papers in the safe—what about those?"

"They are now in the hands of the police," said the detective quietly.

The Chief's teeth came together and a low hiss issued from his thin lips. The books and papers in the safe included, amongst other things, a complete register of the names and addresses of all the members of the Order of the Ring, together with sufficient documentary evidence to send all of them to prison, and many of them to the gallows. In addition to this, there were also many letters and reports relating to the house in the Avenue de la Reunion, and the purpose for which it was used. If those books and papers had fallen into the hands of the police, the Order of the Ring would be wiped out of existence.

"It's a lie!" said the Chief, striding up to Nelson Lee and shaking his fist in his face. "You think to frighten me. Black Bruno opened the safe and scattered the contents all over the place before he set the Raglan on fire."

"He would have done so if I had not prevented him," said Nelson Lee.

"You prevented him?"

"Yes. I'm glad to say I was just in time to do that," retorted Nelson Lee.

For a moment the Chief was too furious to speak, and his face was dark and flushed with rage. Then he turned to his confederates.

"Let the two sentries return at once to their posts," he said. "The rest of you bring Lee into the dining-room. If what he says is true, the sooner we settle accounts with him and make ourselves scarce, the better for all concerned."

## CHAPTER 17.

### The Final Blow!

THE dining-room was large but low-roofed apartment, lighted in the daytime by a couple of French windows, and at night by electricity that had been carried to the handsome chandelier which hung from the centre of the ceiling. Immediately underneath the chandelier, which was lighted now, of course, was a long, narrow table with six chairs on each side of it and one at each end.

By order of the Chief, the detective was forced into a chair at the foot of the table, and two of his captors took up their stand beside him—one on either side—each with a loaded revolver in his hand. The Chief then took his seat the head of the table, and the rest of the men, to the number of ten, seated themselves in the chairs at each side.

"You have heard Mr. Lee's statements, gentlemen," began the Chief, after laying his revolver on the table in front of him. "If the papers of the Raglan Club are in the hands of the police, then the Order of the Ring is doomed, and we have Nelson Lee to thank for it all. I suggest that we kill him and get away from here without delay."

A growl of assent ran round the table.

"According to our rules," continued the Chief, "the sentence of death can only be pronounced by a majority of the Ruling Council, which consists, as you know, of the Squire, the Doctor, and myself. But the Squire and the Doctor—thanks to Mr. Nelson Lee—are at present in the hands of the police. Strictly speaking, therefore, I have the right to pronounce a sentence of death on Mr. Lee without consulting anybody. But I desire to waive the right. I wish to do nothing that has not your unanimous approval. I wish you to look upon Mr. Lee as the prisoner at the bar, upon myself as the judge, and upon yourselves as the jury. The charge against him is conspiring to overthrow the Order of the Ring. What is your verdict? Is he guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" yelled every man present.

"And your sentence?"

"Death!"

The Chief bowed and took up his revolver.

"Prisoner at the bar," he said, addressing Nelson Lee, "you have been found guilty

and sentenced to death. Have you anything to say—anything to urge why I should not now proceed to carry out the sentence of the court?"

The detective rose from his chair, his face as calm and impassive as though it were carved in marble. He glanced round the room with an air of quiet self-possession; and then, with incredible swiftness, he dashed his fists into the faces of the two men on each side of him and sprang towards the nearest window.

A dozen revolvers were instantly levelled at his head, and a dozen bullets flew about his ears. But his life seemed to be charmed, and he had actually reached the window, and was in the act of tearing down the blind, when one of his foes, more nimble than the rest, leapt upon him from behind and dragged him to the ground. Like a pack of wolves the rest of the scoundrels rushed towards him, but he shook off his assailant and scrambled to his feet.

With his fists as his only weapon he charged into the thick of his foes and scattered them like chaff before the whirlwind. Inch by inch he fought his way towards the door, and for several seconds it seemed as though the intrepid detective, by sheer pluck and audacity, was about to effect his escape. Suddenly, above the uproar, the voice of the Chief was heard.

"Stand back, you idiots!" he yelled. "Out of the way, and let me get a shot at him!"

The crowd fell back, and the Chief raised his revolver; but at the same instant the detective snatched up a chair and hurled it at the chandelier. The crack of the Chief's revolver mingled with the deafening crash of broken glass, and the next moment the room was plunged into total darkness. Wounded though he was, for the Chief's bullet had passed through the fleshy part of his arm, the detective instantly dropped on his hands and knees and crawled beneath the table. Under cover of this novel shelter, while his confused foes were rushing about in the darkness and seizing each other by mistake, he started to creep towards the door.

When he reached the end of the table, which was three or four yards from the door, he threw himself flat on his face and began to wriggle across the floor between his enemies' feet. Scarcely had he emerged, however, when somebody's stumbled over him, and an instant later he felt a man's hands on the back of his neck.

"Here he is! I've got him!" yelled the man.

But almost before the words were out of his mouth the door was suddenly burst open, and one of the sentries rushed into the room.

"Quick! Bolt for it!" he gasped. "The police have arrived, and are coming up the drive!"

IT was true. On receipt of Nelson Lee's note, the Chief Commissioner at Scotland Yard had immediately despatched a number of men to disinter the safe from the ruins of the Raglan. The task had been rendered difficult owing to the debris that

had to be cleared before the safe could be got out, and it was not until late in the afternoon that the safe was removed to the Yard and had been rifled of its contents.

Amongst the contents were a number of documents relating to the banknote factory in the Avenue de la Reunion. As soon as the authorities at Scotland Yard had read these papers they had 'phoned to the Prefect of the Paris police, and had asked him to set a watch on the house, and, if necessary, arrest its inmates. This report greatly interested the Prefect, and remembering what Nelson Lee had told him earlier in the day, he had sent a troop of gendarmes to the Avenue de la Reunion with instructions to raid the house and secure all its occupants.

This was exactly what the Chief had feared, and the moment he found that his fears were realised he rushed to the nearest window, tore down the blind, flung open the sash, and vanished into the darkness outside. This cowardly desertion plunged his confederates into panic-stricken confusion, and before they had recovered their presence of mind the detective sprang through the open window and dashed away in pursuit of the Chief.

By that time the Chief had crossed the lawn in front of the house, and was making for the boundary wall which divided the grounds from the neighbouring fields. Owing to the darkness the detective could not see

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him, but he could hear the thud of his flying feet, and, with this as his only guide, he chased his quarry across the grounds, over the wall, through a couple of fields, and into a narrow, deserted country road that bordered the railway line.

For upwards of a mile the detective chased his fleet-footed foe along this road, gaining ground at every stride. At last, finding that he could not shake his pursuer off, the Chief wheeled and opened fire with his revolver. Four bullets in quick succession whistled through the air, but flew harmlessly over the pursuer's head.

Again he pressed the trigger, forgetful of the fact that he had fired twice already in the dining-room.

Click—no flash and no report! With a savage curse he hurled the empty weapon into Nelson Lee's face and sprang on to the low, wooden fence which divided the road from the railway line. Quick as thought the detective sprang after him, and the next instant they were rolling down the sloping embankment, locked in each other's arms.

Then commenced a desperate scuffle on the railway line. For a time the Chief appeared to be gaining the supremacy, but little by little the detective bore him down, and at last succeeded in rolling him over on his back.

"Do you give in?" he panted.

For a moment the Chief made no reply. He ceased to struggle and lay perfectly still. Then a blaze of triumph illumined his eyes. He threw his arms round Nelson Lee's waist and locked his fingers behind the detective's back.

"Listen!" he hissed.

The detective's face turned suddenly pale. Clearly and distinctly, growing louder every second, he heard the sullen rumble of an approaching train.

"D'you hear it?" hissed the Chief, tightening his grip on the detective's waist and twining his legs round those of Nelson Lee. "It's the express from Paris—on this line. In another two minutes it'll be on us! How d'you like the prospect, Mr. Nelson Lee?"

A thrill of horror shot through the detective's frame as he realised the Chief's meaning. The scoundrel knew that he himself was doomed, whatever happened, and he had apparently made up his mind to take Lee with him.

As soon as Lee had grasped this appalling fact he loosed his hands from the prisoner's throat and seized him by the arms.

He made a furious attempt to force the rogue's hands apart, but the Chief only clung to him all the tighter.

Over and over they rolled in the four-foot way, first one and then the other uppermost; but never for an instant did the Chief relax his grim and remorseless embrace.

In the midst of their reckless struggle, the headlights of the oncoming express burst into view round a curve in the line about five hundred yards away. With a final, despairing effort the detective clenched his fist and dealt the Chief a terrific blow between the eyes.

Half-dazed by the blow, the Chief, for one brief fraction of a second, allowed his grip to relax, and in the twinkling of an eye the detective wriggled out of his grasp and rolled into the safety of the cinder track beside the metals.

Foaming with rage—oblivious of his danger—the Chief leapt wildly to his feet, but even as he did so the train came thundering up and hurled him to the ground.

Across the night a single piercing shriek of agony rang out. Then the train swept on remorselessly, and when the long line of carriages had passed on, the once dread Chief of the Order of the Ring lay in a strange, huddled heap between the glittering metals.

THE END.

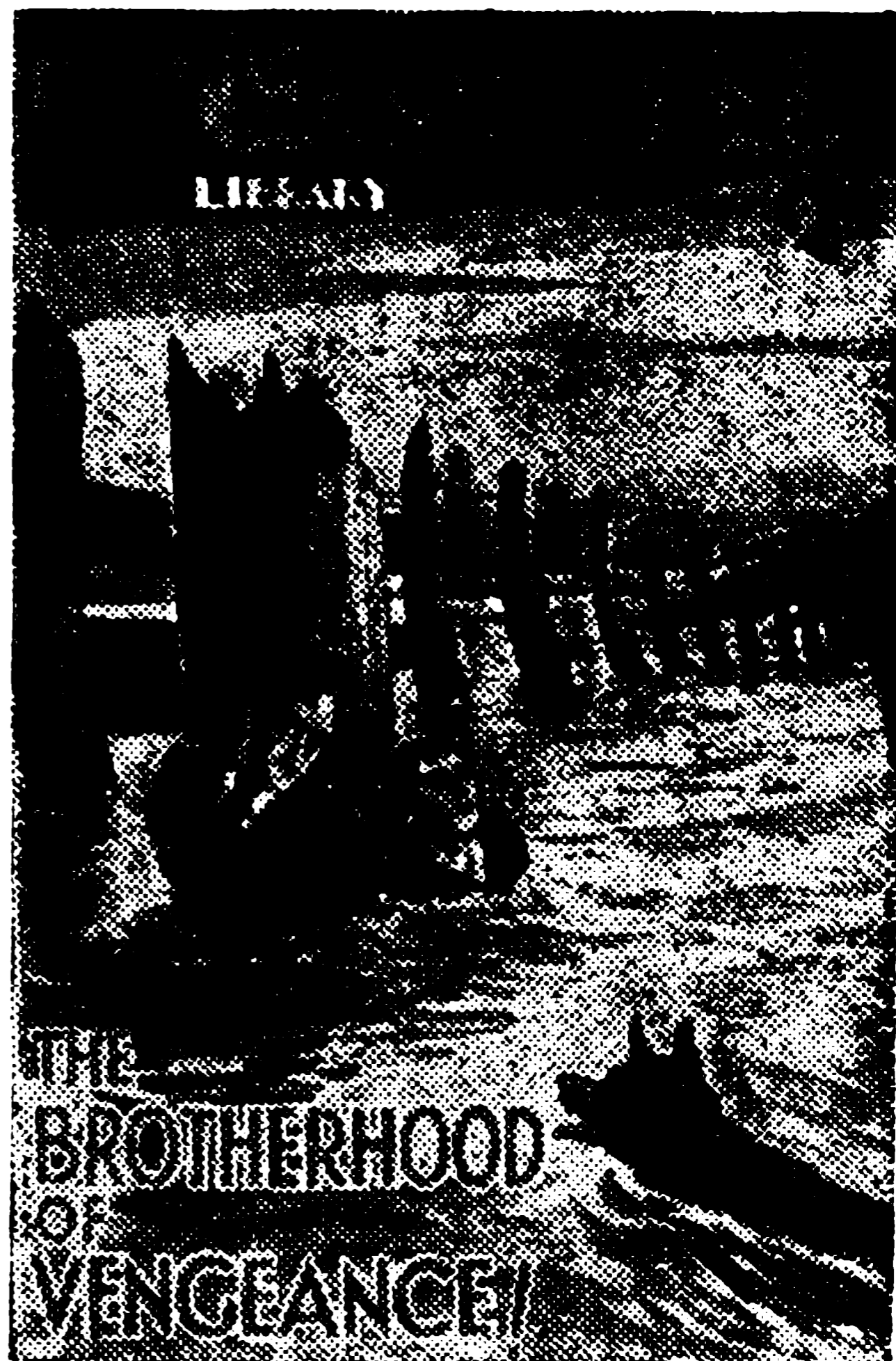
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**LOOK OUT FOR THIS COVER  
NEXT WEEK!**

## How-Do, Chaps! Here We Are Again For Another Chinwag!

MY DEAR CHUMS, — To-day, in our 10,000 Gift Plan, we are giving away a Special Bonus Coupon value 250 points, together with the usual two coupons totalling 50 points. So in one week you will add to your collection coupons to the value of 300



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points. But I expect you have made it your first job to cut out these coupons. If you haven't be wise and do so at once.

There is only one more week in which to complete your collection. Next week sees the finish of the Free Gift Plan, so now is the time to make a big push towards making your total of points a real winner. Just think of the fine prizes that are waiting to be awarded—10,000 handsome books. Gee, it's worth a little effort to possess one of them.

By buying one or all of our companion papers, the "Ranger," "Magnet," "Modern Boy" and "Gem," which are also incorporated in this Free Gift Plan, you will be able to add greatly to your collection of coupons. Good idea that, eh? Not only will you get the coupons, but some really first-class reading matter, too.

And talking of first-class reading matter brings me to

**Our New Book-length St. Frank's Story** which will be definitely starting in the NELSON LEE in two weeks' time.

I mentioned this special treat in store last week—I can't let this week go by without adding to that mention and telling you all how splendid this latest yarn of E. S. Brooks' is. If I know your requirements—and I pride myself that I do—then you are all booked for an enjoyable time when you start reading this story.

I shall have a lot more to say to you about "Waking Up St. Frank's"—this, incidentally, is the title of the story—next week. But for the moment I shall take it as a favour if you will all mention to your pals about this treat in store, just in case they have missed my announcements.

### Next Week's Story,

which is entitled "The Brotherhood of Vengeance," is the finest detective-thriller yet. Certainly Nelson Lee and Nipper are confronted with the most baffling mystery they have ever come up against. And not only is there plenty of mystery in this story, but dramatic adventure and breathless perils. The story is staged on the South Coast of England, where Nelson Lee meets sinister forces from the Orient.

"The Brotherhood of Vengeance" is a story which has all that the reader of sensational fiction asks for—it's a winner!

There have been a good many readers asking for Pen Pals recently, so this week I have managed to squeeze in some

more names and addresses.

## CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

Dick Chalmers, 73, Sumner Road, West Croydon, Surrey, wants Scout correspondents overseas.

H. Rexstraw, 112, Wills Street, Bendigo, Victoria, Australia, wants correspondents interested in coins and stamps.

Guy L. Hallett, Montacute, via Gretna, Tasmania, Australia, wants correspondents interested in tennis and stamp collecting.

Leon Rothfeld, 120, Christopher Avenue, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A., wants to correspond with stamp collectors in Egypt, Italy, British Guiana, Japan and West Indies.

F. Bower, 17, Mildmay Road, Islington, London, N.1, wants a correspondent in the Codrington School, Mazabuka, N. Rhodesia.

Ernest V. Sawyer, 32, Felton Grove, Bedminster Down, Bristol, wants overseas members for the Blue Eagle Correspondence Club.

Miss Doris Smith, 27, Sydney Road, Hornsey, London, N.8, wishes to correspond with girl readers overseas; ages 14-16.

Israel Herr, P.O. Box 3116, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa, would like to hear from readers in U.S.A.

Miss Jessie Mackay, 5399, Park Avenue, Montreal, Province Quebec, Canada, wants girl correspondents ages 18-20.

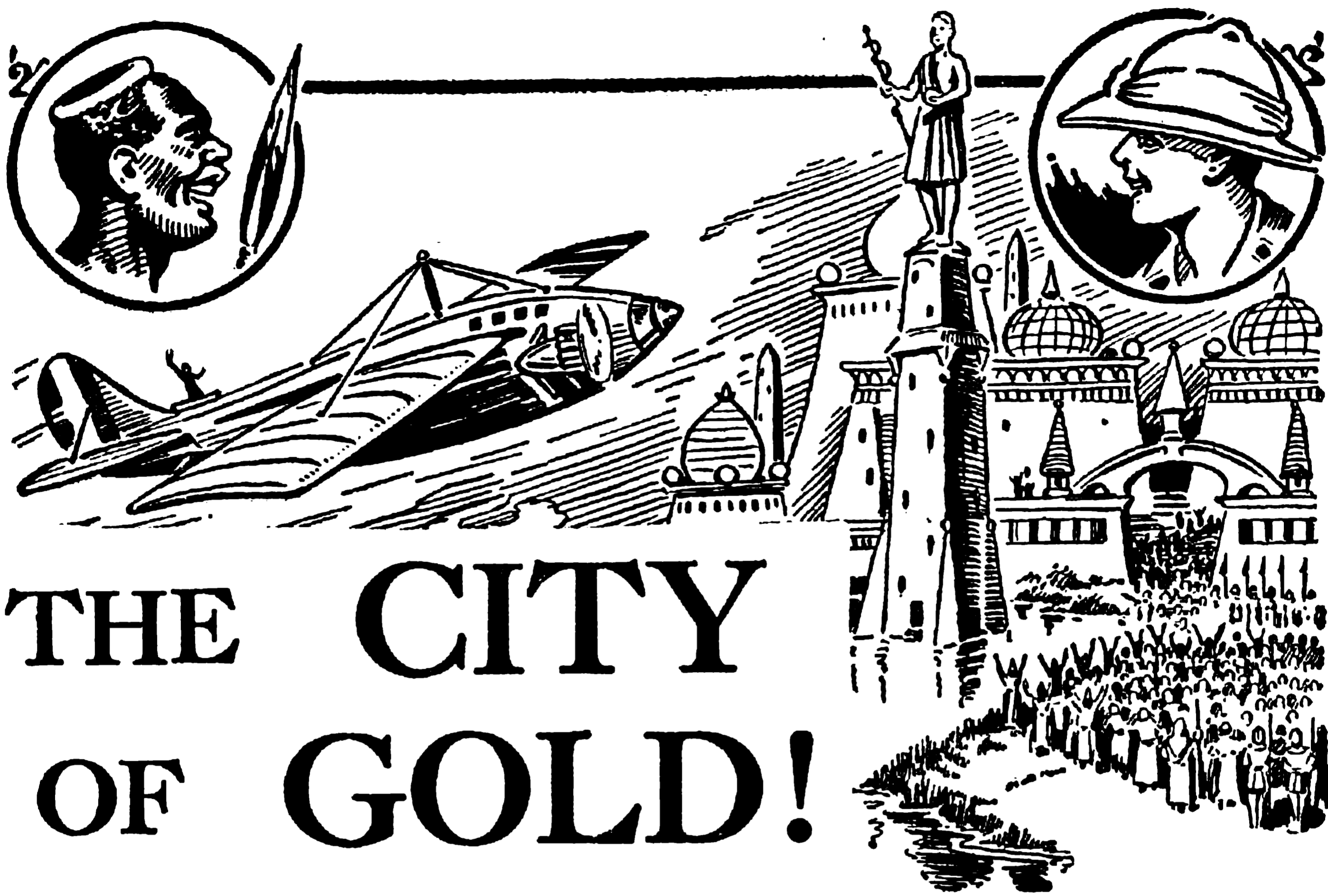
Richard P. Rowe, 79, Drummond Road, Skegness, Lincs, wants to hear from a Japanese reader.

Miss G. Butler, 82, Queen's Head Street, London, N., wants to hear from girl readers.

H. M. (Tim) Burgess, 1468, Crescent Street, Montreal, Province Quebec, Canada, wants stamp correspondents ages 9-14.

Miss Gertrude de Jager, 2, First Street, Rayilton, Buluwayo, Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, wants girl correspondents; interested in reading, music, etc.

## Amazing Adventure In The Heart Of Mysterious Africa!



# THE CITY OF GOLD!

Tom Cook, the white boy-king of a mysterious city in the heart of Africa, has vowed to free the people from the power of the priests. He captures Gobo, a high priest, and brings him to trial on the edge of a lake in which dwells a frightful prehistoric creature. Gobo, however, escapes, and for some mysterious reason the people turn sullen towards their king.

### The Earthquake!

“G OBO has escaped, it seems?” said Tom.

“Yes, lord. The priest has escaped, but his prophecies remain!” was the curious answer.

“Oh, his prophecies!” echoed Tom, with a light laugh, though he could see from the grim faces that there was something more in the wind. “They are like clouds that a strong wind will soon blow away!”

“Not when they come true, lord king!” snapped one of the others.

“What prophecies of his have come true that makes you all look so grave?” asked Tom, with a searching look around.

“But yesternight he prophesied that not only would he escape, but his champion would also go free,” said Metla, casting an uneasy glance at the white lad. “Likewise did he bring to mind the prophecy of old anent the Wak-Lok, Lord of the Pool of Death!”

“Um, what’s that prophecy?” asked Tom carelessly, and immediately he had spoken

knew that his words were tactless. A gasp went round the group of counsellors and the two friends of Gobo’s nudged each other and grinned openly.

“Surely,” the bald man said with a sneering smile, “our lord the king jests with his servants? The great Tomkuk, who knows all—even to men’s secret thoughts—knows not what happens when Wak-Lok is deprived of his rightful food and a prisoner escapes? Surely——”

“Surely, Polak, the counsellor talks too much!” said Tom, fixing the man with his eye and slowly stretching out his hand and pointing towards him. “Peace, Polak! Maybe Tomkuk can read men’s thoughts; can read the secrets of their minds, and know their truth or treachery. Maybe he knows that two of his counsellors are traitors to the State in their hearts; who, whilst pretending to be Tomkuk’s men, yet hold secret converse with the false high priest Gobo and spread his prophecies for him whilst he is yet a prisoner of the State!”

It was a shot in the dark, but it told, for Polak and the bearded man went as white as their dusky complexions allowed, and shrank back before Tom's stern gaze.

"And now, Metla," said Tom very quietly and with dignity, "speak out and tell what it is this false priest has said, and also tell the prophecy of old regarding Wak-lok. What if I already know it? There are others here, my friends and some of yours, who doubtless have forgotten or, perchance, never knew this prophecy."

"It is written in the archives that all convicted prisoners and their champions shall be given to the Wak-Lok as a sacrifice. "Yet, though Gobo's champion was defeated by Lord Invoboo and thrown to his death, yet did Lord Inkobo plunge after him and save him from Wak-Lok. Is it not written that so long as Wak-Lok lives, and is fed upon the criminals sacrificed to him, that he will act as guardian to the city, and all shall be well with the land. But if we fail in our duty, or Wak-Lok be killed, then will disaster fall on us, and we be blotted out entirely!"

"Al, you put your foot in it right above the knee when you hit that prehistoric duck on the napper!" he whispered to his cousin, and gesturing to make it appear that he was consulting him. "It seems he's a sort of mascot of the country, and so long as he lives—all's hunky; but, if you've slewed him or driven him away, I'll have to bluff 'em!"

He bowed to Al as if accepting some advice he had given to him, then turned to the men with his blue eyes flashing fire.

"Metla and counsellors, listen and answer," he said in his deepest tones. "Which think ye is the stronger—the Tomkuk himself, or that monster that dwells within the pool?"

"The Tomkuk the Great should be the stronger," said Metla slowly, with another half-suspicious glance at Tom. "Yet is the prophecy an old one, and this is the first time within the memory of man that the sacrifice has been withheld from Wak-Lok. What was it caused him to writhe in pain and leap out of the water with blood streaming from his neck—to lash the water into waves in his anger, and then to withdraw himself from his worshippers who had assembled to do him honour?"

"Perchance the Wak-Lok liked not the sacrifice!" said Tom quickly, in a very sharp and decisive voice. "Think ye that he knows the difference between man and ape? Pah! Gobo, the priest, chose his champion from a half-man and, when defeated, even the Wak-Lok refused him and his answer was aroused!"

"Baas, baas, the pool looks to me to be lower, and there is something strange at the other end," whispered Lulu; "Shall we not make for the palace. The sky too, is overcast and—"

He was interrupted by an extraordinary sound from the other end of the lake. It was like the suck of an emptying bath magnified a thousand times. As they stood staring in wonderment a faint wreath of mist or steam came out of the water and then the whole body moved bubbling and frothing as if on the boil.

Then the ugly head of "Wak-lok" broke the surface, blood streaming from the wound in its neck where the explosive bullet had hit it. He let out a squawk that sounded like a herd of banshees all screeching together. As he came to the surface a great burst of steam came up after him, and with a scream he flopped over the water like a giant fledgling and scrambled up with his bat wings flapping on to the central Isle of Death.

Rocks and mud were thrown up from underneath where he had evidently had his lair and rained on to the sides of the pool and again he gave that raucous frightened scream and flapped his wings.

"Here, I say, let's beat it!" said Al, "If that wild goose is goin' any goosier an' takes to flyin' about th' country this is no place for my mother's son! Up sticks, Tommy and beat it whilst th' goin's good!"

"Look out, down on your faces, quick!" yelled Tom, and translated to the counsellors.

There was an explosion that seemed to shake the earth beneath them, and a great wave rushed across the murky pool as a column of steam fifty feet high rose from under. Then the wave rolled back, and as the waters touched the rocks at the other end there came the sucking, gurgling sound once more, and more than half the pool disappeared in a great cloud of steam and hot spray.

"Wak-lok is angered and will destroy us!" yelled one of the bearers of Tom's canopy; and the cry was taken up by the counsellors, who legged it towards the forest. The great prehistoric reptile-bird rose with a hideous squawking, his batwings flapping with a loud creaking as he made towards where Tom and the others were.

"Down on your faces and don't move—he's blind and will not see you!" yelled Tom, throwing himself down amongst the rocks and forcing Al down beside him.

"Now we know that Tomkuk is an impostor!" screamed the bald-headed Polak, as he picked up his robes of office and scuttled for the forest. "Come, brothers and leave him to be devoured by the Wak-Lok he has defied!"

"Auguh-kuk-kuk-kuk!"

The screaming bellow came from the gigantic beast as he rose with flapping, fishy wings and as he passed over the spot where they lay the lads were almost suffocated by the stench of it. They could hear the creaking of the scales which wrapped that weird body

and hear the snuffling wheezy breath of the brute which had not perhaps flown for hundreds of years, and yet that enormous mass of flesh was travelling through the air at something over fifty miles per hour!

Polak and his fellows were screaming in fright, like fools, and as they got within range of the outskirts of the forest where possibly safety lay, Polak crashed down with his black-bearded fellow on top of him. Mad with fright they fought each other on the ground, letting out yells as that mass of venom sailed nearer. Wak-Lok did not stop his slow-seeming but actually-rapid flight, but just bent his lengthy neck, snapped up the two men one after another and sailed off over the forest.

"Gosh! What a horrible brute!" Al choked, as he scrambled to his feet and stared after the rapidly disappearing prehistoric fowl. "That chap Polak may have been a traitor and a bad egg generally, but he certainly got his right there! He had no more chance than a worm with an ostrich with that horror!"

"We shall be in luck if we get out of this ourselves, old chap!" said Tom quietly. "Look at the pool!"

By now the rocks had been blown away more and more by the force of subterranean explosions and now an enormous plume of white hot vapour was hurled skywards, whilst the waters of the lake drained down to the huge fires below. There were noises like the screams of souls in torment. The Isle of Death rocked on its foundations, and then, with a noise like the blasting of a hundred mines at once, slowly sunk from sight!

In a few seconds what had once been a pool

of water was transformed again into the crater of a very active volcano!

"The Fish, let's try to make for it!" gasped Tom, dragging Al along with one arm and old Metla with the other.

"Leave me, lord," said the old man quietly. "I am old and my time is short in any case. Leave me, and save yourself, you are young and your time is all before you!"

"Likely!" retorted Tom. "You're an old brick and I'll save you if it's possible! Lulu, where's that white stallion of yours?"

"Tethered amongst the rocks yonder, baas," said the Zulu. "You and the old man mount him. Baas Al and I can run alongside."

"You and I'll do the running part, we've used to it," said Tom, with a glance at his cousin's face, which was deathly. The stench and the recent happenings had proved too much for Al and he was swaying as he walked.

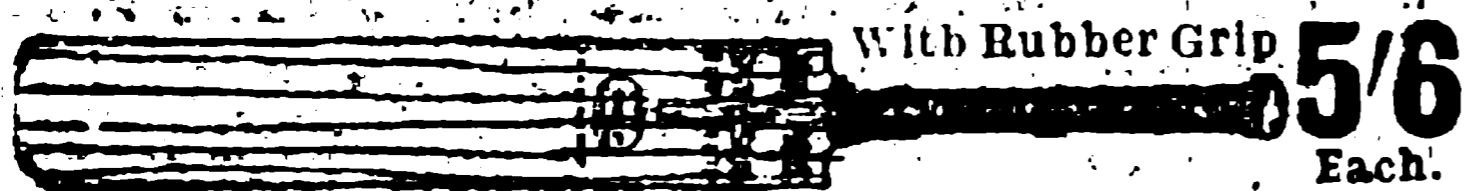
"Where's the Fish?" gasped Tom. "Perhaps Ben's got her close handy. Hallo, it won't be much use if he has—he wouldn't be able to land with her—THE FOREST'S AFIRE!"

It was too true. Far ahead of them they heard the dull roar as fresh eruptions took place on the ground of old craters which the jungle had overgrown.

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