

A Popular
Book—

THE 1933 HOLIDAY ANNUAL

On Sale Sept. 1st.
Price 6/-

THE NELSON LEE

LIBRARY

2d



The HOUSE of HORROR!

New Series No. 137.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

September 3rd, 1932.

Here Is A Hair-Raising Yarn Of Non-Stop Thrills—

THE HOUSE



CHAPTER 1.

Terror By Night!

THE powerful car owned by Nelson Lee, and easily recognised by the police on account of its long, low body and perfect streamline, moved almost silently along the deserted road at about quarter speed.

The detective was at the wheel, peering ahead through the screen, his eyes narrowed

in an attempt to determine the outline of the road on each side. Beside him sat Nipper, while behind was Inspector Harker of Scotland Yard.

A man—an Oriental of some sort, calling himself Dr. Haroun—had been writing a lot of letters to Scotland Yard declaring that he was in great danger and appealing for protection. At first the authorities had ignored these requests, but they were so persistent that eventually they sent two constables to make inquiries.

Featuring NELSON LEE, DETECTIVE, and his Assistant, NIPPER!

OF HORROR!



What is the sinister mystery that surrounds the House of Horror? What is the meaning of the terrifying noises that are heard at night in its grounds? These are only a few of the baffling questions that confront Nelson Lee and Nipper.

They found that they could obtain no answer to their knocks at the lonely house, that the local tradesman had to leave their goods on the doorsteps and found their money there, that no one had seen Dr. Haroun distinctly for some time, and that weird howls and screams had often been heard at the house.

Scotland Yard decided that the man was mad, and would have no more to do with the affair. But one more letter came, in which Dr. Haroun stated definitely that he

would die that night. Even then the Yard would not make any move, but Inspector Harker, on his own initiative, talked the matter over with his old friend, Nelson Lee, and more to satisfy their curiosity than anything else, they had made up their minds to investigate the matter and chance the consequences.

It was autumn, and an exceptionally cold, late autumn. A deep depression over Iceland had sent a very unusual snow fall over England—a rare thing at that time of the

year. In the City, the snow was merely slush, but now the bright head-lamps of the car glittered upon the white landscape in a way which did not make driving more easy.

On each side of them there stretched a broad, treeless heath—one of those stretches of common land on the outskirts of London which appear at times infinitely more dreary even than the deserts of bricks and mortar of London proper.

The ditch on the far side was almost filled with snow, revealing a very slight depression by which Nelson Lee was able, with care, to guide the car safely. When at last the heath was crossed and the road became more defined, a muttered exclamation of relief escaped him, and he opened out the throttle. The big car slipped ahead, flashing between two terraces of houses and turning into a road which dipped down between high hedges.

"The house is just round the bend by this copse, Lee," said Inspector Harker.

Nelson Lee changed gear, and the big car took the hill swiftly, swinging round presently into a narrow, rutted lane, fringed on both sides by high elms, the overhanging boughs of which formed a canopy which almost obscured the sky and split the rays of the moon into lattices of light and shade upon the roadway.

At the end of a minute Nipper pointed meaningly at a high wall which enclosed thickly wooded grounds, and Harker nodded.

"Yes, the gate will be along there, I reckon. Ah, I thought so! Here we are, Lee!"

They had come to a broad, rusted gate of bent iron, of Georgian pattern, and Nelson Lee swerved the car in close to the wall and shut off the engine. So thick was the canopy of branches above them that the snow had hardly penetrated. Nelson Lee leaped out.

"Shall I switch off the headlights, Harker?"

"Yes; perhaps you'd better. There'll be hardly any traffic along here. What a prison it looks, Lee!"

The detective nodded, and as he removed his gloves and rubbed some life into his hands, he peered through the grille of the gate.

Beyond, a snow-covered drive led up between the coppices, and though the white carpet gave to the scene a certain picturesque harmony, it was plain that the place ran wild. Not far from the gate, one part of the drive subsided to form a hollow which had become a small stagnant puddle, upon the edges of which grew coarse reeds and bunches of rank grass.

The edges of the coppices were tangled about with brambles and briars, and here and there a sinuous growth of purple green holly. The rusted gate, the overgrown drive, the ill-kept vegetation, all combined to give the place an atmosphere of desertion, of loneliness and isolation.

"I suppose we can't take the car along the drive?" Lee said presently.

"I shouldn't think so," Harker replied. "This piece of old iron looks as if it would fall off its hinges if we tried to open it. We'll walk up, I think."

He stepped across to the side gate and thrust it forcibly. It gave a certain distance.

"Hallo!" the Yard man muttered. "Chained up! Padlocked!"

Nelson Lee stepped up to him and bent down quickly.

"If he keeps this locked, how do the tradesmen get in?" Harker muttered.

"Through this gate—as a rule," Lee said quietly.

"What? They have a key?"

"No!"

"Then how do they get inside?"

"Walk through," said Lee. "This is not usually locked, Harker. You were right in certain of your surmises about our friend's letters. He has been very much afraid. Yesterday he became frenzied—too frenzied to think clearly."

Harker stared at Nelson Lee in amazement. Lee knew considerably less of the affair than he did. Yet he had begun to recount items of fact before he had set foot on the premises.

"How do you know that?" he asked quickly.

"This lock was fitted on yesterday. It is a new one."

"Yes; I noticed that. But why yesterday?"

"Well, let us say yesterday, at five o'clock in the evening," Lee said with a smile.

"Great Scott, Lee! How do you know that?"

"By the association of a few simple facts," Lee said quietly. "It was snowing all day yesterday—until about five. It did not snow during the night, but a certain amount fell to-day, although not so much. It is obvious by comparing the flat top of this padlock with the flat bar of the gate that the padlock had only one day's snow fall upon it!"

"I see that—yes," Harker said slowly, his eyes fixed on the padlock. "But—but why five o'clock exactly?"

"Because it gets dark soon after five," Lee said. "I have an idea that Dr. Haroun would not, in his present frame of mind, venture out after dark—not even in his own grounds!"

"No; I should hardly think so. But you said he had grown frenzied with fear, Lee?"

"There comes a period of terror," Lee said, "when a man loses his sense of proportion. Dr. Haroun has lost his, otherwise he would have seen the utter uselessness of putting a padlock on this gate to keep out anyone who is very desirous of getting in. After all, it's going to take us exactly one minute to scale this gate."

"It is rather insane, when you come to think of it," Nipper muttered, trying the padlock to make sure it was secured.

"You've used the right word, young 'un," Lee said; "the word which might easily explode my theory."

"Insane?"

"Yes. We may be dealing with an imbecile," Lee said. "Or, as some people might say, a fellow who is barmy, loopy, and off his rocker. Here, Wolf!"

At the word, the big Alsatian they had brought with them, who had remained obediently in the car, sprang out into the snow. Nelson Lee glanced at his companions, and, reaching up, raised himself until he stood upon the decorative points of the gate.

Then taking a secure hold of the spiked shanks at the summit, he raised himself, lowering his head, and thrust his body upwards, as a man who raised himself for a handspring on the parallel bars. He allowed his body to topple backwards gently, then he gave a sudden thrust, turned an easy somersault, and alighted lightly on his feet on the other side.

Nipper came over, a moment later, in the same way, but the Yard man, who was not less active, but rather less scientific, narrowly escaped impaling himself.

Nelson Lee smiled through at Wolf, who eyed him wistfully through the bars.

"Over, boy!" he muttered.

The great Alsatian looked up dubiously at the gate, which towered above him, apparently gauging the extent of the run required to effect a clean vault.

The lane was narrow, and, what was more, the car intervened. But there was a quality of resource in Wolf which seldom failed him. With a little growl he retreated along the lane, returning with a swift loping action, and with one huge bound he landed on the hood of the car.

He turned and stood poised for an instant. Then, his body crouched, his legs seemed to double under him, and he took a swift standing leap, clearing the path and gate like a panther.

The party turned, and Harker led the way along the drive, their footsteps falling silently. They came to a bend presently, which shut out the sight of the gate, and as the drive curved it seemed that the trees on each side had encroached upon it jealously, narrowing it into little more than a track.

At that moment they might have been trudging through some thick and historic forest remote from civilisation, so little sign there was of life or habitation. It seemed hard to believe that a dwelling lay round the bend before them—that London itself lay across the valley. The sense of loneliness and isolation became even more manifest.

The vestige of a whine from Wolf broke the silence, and Nelson Lee paused in blank amazement. The Alsatian had stopped, his forefeet stuck in the snow, his head drawn back, as if with some fear which he could not determine.

"Great Scott, what's the matter with Wolf? What's wrong, old fellow?"

Harker peered quickly ahead and all round him.

"He's scared," he said, laughing in a way

he knew to be unreal. "The dog's got the wind up!"

Nipper looked down sharply at the Alsatian and bent down, stroking him gently.

"What's wrong, Wolf?" he whispered.

The dog, to whom courage and fidelity were deep-rooted instincts, turned his head appealingly towards the youngster. He seemed puzzled as much as afraid. There was something, too, of shame, in the expression of his eyes.

"It's funny, gov'nor!" Nipper said, looking over at the detective—and he hardly knew why he lowered his voice.

The detective did not reply, but there was a puzzled look on his clear-cut face as he led the way along the drive again. He noticed that Wolf dropped slightly in the rear and followed very close at heel.

The Yard man glanced round at him and seemed about to speak, but changed his mind. They walked on in silence. Suddenly a sharp bark, which was half a whine, broke from the dog, and Lee stopped, wheeling round.

His eyes became fixed upon a narrow opening in the thick coppice beyond. Wolf was watching the same spot, his lithe body strangely rigid.

Nipper spoke in a low tone, but Nelson Lee cut him short sharply.

"Wait!" he said.

The three stood motionless, watching. A sudden weird hoot rang out, echoing through the intense silence; there was a rush of wings nearby, and two bright orbs glowed at them from the darkness for a moment as something white and spectral flashed overhead.

"Jiminy!" Nipper gasped. "What——"

"Steady, young 'un," said Nelson Lee. "That was an owl. Wait!"

For some minutes they stood, motionless—no sound except the rather laboured breathing of the dog. Nelson Lee turned slowly.

"Walk on!" he whispered. "Not too quickly!"

"What the deuce is up?" Harker murmured. "Are these darned grounds haunted?"

"We are being followed," Lee said in a low voice.

"Followed?"

"Yes. Don't pause and don't look back!"

"Have you seen someone?" Nipper asked, under his breath, for the snow seemed to echo their voices a hundredfold.

"Yes. So has the dog. I can't quite make him out. He seems to have the wind up badly—Great Scott!"

A hoarse, chattering laugh had broken the silence suddenly—a laugh devoid of mirth, senseless, demoniacal. There came the sound of running feet, and a cry burst from Harker's lips.

A figure had appeared suddenly between the tree-trunks only a few yards away—a figure in evening dress, hatless and wildly hysterical.

He leapt as they turned, and swung stupidly upon the low branch of a twisted

hornbeam and then crouched in close to the tree-trunk, so that it was merged in the black shadow of the tree.

Nelson Lee, standing motionless, felt the body of Wolf close against his legs—and it was quivering pitifully. The detective felt his own heart beating quickly, and for a moment he could not stir. His limbs refused to respond.

Then, in a sudden flush of anger, he bent to where a rough-bound bundle of faggots lay beside the path, and seizing a stout stave, he tore it free.

"After him!" he exclaimed, darting forward.

Both Harker and Nipper seemed glad of the signal. They sprang forward after Nelson Lee, and as they did so the wild, demoniacal laughter rang out once again, and the man beyond leapt from the shade of the tree and fled precipitately.

The weird, uncanny drama of that chase has remained indelibly upon the memory of Nelson Lee and Harker. To Nipper it is like the memory of a bad dream.

With a recklessness that was almost abandon, they dashed through the coppice, swinging round by the thinner trunks, lowering their heads and darting through overhanging shrubs which tore and scratched the flesh.

But if the chase was precipitate, the flight of the weird fugitive was that of a madman. He darted with the agility of an ape among the tree-trunks, he vaulted like a kangaroo. Now and then he seemed to trip and stumble to his hands, continuing his flight upon all-fours with wonderful agility.

The breath of the pursuers was now coming in quick gasps—and the fugitive seemed to be drawing away. He swerved suddenly and disappeared, and as the wood grew clearer Nelson Lee increased his pace in a final sprint, gripping the wooden stave grimly.

He stopped suddenly upon the edge of a small clearing, and the others came up, panting.

"Wh-where is he?" Harker gasped.

Nelson Lee stared ahead, puzzled and bewildered.

"Look! This way! This way!" Nipper's voice came suddenly. "Here are footprints!"

Nelson Lee sprang up to him, and a line of prints showed clearly, leading across the opening. They followed them with ease to the edge of the thin coppice beyond, and here they, too, disappeared.

"Great Scott, Lee, this is uncanny!" Harker muttered.

They stood beneath the tall trunk of a large oak, and Lee peered about him. The trees were sparser here, and they could see clearly between them; but there was no sign or trace of the fugitive.

Nipper ran back to where the snow was thicker, and went on his knees. He beckoned Nelson Lee towards him.

"Look here, gov'nor," he said. "Here are the imprints of—"

"Toes!" said Harker quickly.

"Yes, the man is bare-footed. He must be mad—as mad as a March hare!"

Nelson Lee said nothing. He knelt down beside the youngster and peered at the imprints through the glass he always carried. He moved forward slowly, examining some of the other footmarks.

Presently he rose to his feet, and, replacing the glass, took his revolver from his hip-pocket and opened the breech to reassure himself that it was loaded.

"Let's get up to the house!" he said quietly.

CHAPTER 2.

Wolf's Fight!

THE residence of the mysterious Dr. Haroun was well named the Hermitage. It was a fitting home for a recluse—for one of those strange mortals who wish to remain aloof from the world, isolated and unknown.

Belted by trees and undergrowth on three sides, the coarse meadow at the back sloping down into a grey waste of flooded fields, it would have gratified the desires of the most morbid person in the world.

There was not, as with many houses of the type, a lawn dividing the Hermitage from the wood. The trees enclosed the house on three sides, almost to within a few yards, darkening the place and shedding about it an atmosphere of indescribable gloom.

Nelson Lee and the others had approached to within a few paces before they descried the building ahead of them, square-built and strong, yet moss-grown and green, like a ruin, so that it looked forlorn and decrepit.

"What a dungeon!" Harker muttered.

It was the first word which had been spoken between them since the wild chase of the apparent maniac. It broke the tension rather, and Nipper forced a laugh.

"We've had our first instalment," he said. "This looks even more promising."

Nelson Lee nodded and paused, peering up at the barred windows, from which there came no glimmer of light. It was like a house of the dead, and Harker shook off a certain sense of apprehension and melancholy which he found settling over him.

"This is the sort of place which ought to have had a bomb dropped on it," he said. "It would have livened things up a bit. The place seems deserted, Lee."

"We know it isn't that," the detective said. "But a little noise won't do it any harm!"

As he spoke he ascended the worn steps, and, gripping the grotesque knocker on the door, he banged it viciously, sending the echo of his knocking reverberating through the house.

They waited, listening, but no sound came—no response.

"Not in!" Nipper muttered; and then, peering towards the coppice: "Perhaps our

friend, the loopy waiter, will come and announce himself!"

"We're ready for him if he does," said Harker. "I wonder if Haroun has lost his reason?"

He looked over askance at the detective, but Lee's only reply was to seize the knocker again and hammer furiously. The clamour he made seemed to emphasise the intense silence which followed. He stood listening, and bent to peer in at the letter-box. An exclamation left him as he did so.

"Hallo!" he said quickly. "This door has been forced by an 'alderman,' it seems."

"An 'alderman'?" Nipper echoed, not realising, for a moment, that Nelson Lee was using a cracksman's slang.

"Yes—a long jemmy. Look here, Harker! The lock's burst!"

Harker bent and looked at the spot which Lee indicated. The frame of the door had been squeezed and partially torn away. The door itself, strong as it was, seemed to have been wrenched upon its hinges.

"You're right," Harker said sharply. "And the bolts, too." He pointed upwards. "A good push and this door would give, Lee."

The detective nodded, and straightened himself. From his pocket he took a small silver case and took out a cigarette, offering one to Harker, who shook his head.

Nelson Lee lighted it quickly, putting his foot on the match. He inhaled a deep breath of smoke.

"I'm beginning to think, Harker," he said quietly, "that I am glad we came."

"Why, Lee?" the Yard man asked quickly.

"For several reasons. That door will give easily. But we'll behave legally until we're compelled to do otherwise."

He took the knocker again and hammered upon the door. The sounds had barely died away when there came from inside a deep growl, which elicited a short, sharp bark from Wolf.

The Alsatian seemed more normal now. The strange fear which had come over him appeared to be wearing off.

Nelson Lee bent quickly and put his eye to the letter-box. It was stiff and rusted, but there was a small chink through which he could peer, with a narrow circle of dim vision. For some minutes he remained motionless.

"There is someone inside," Nipper said quietly.

"There is something!" the detective muttered, and there was an emphasis in his use of the word which sent an intangible shiver along the spine of Inspector Harker.

"Have you your revolver, Harker?"

"Yes. Shall we need it?"

"One never knows. We're going to force this door in. Now—when I say!"

He bent and put his shoulder against the door—placing his feet to get the maximum leverage. Nipper did the same. Harker stood with his back to the panel, crouching.

"Ready?" Lee whispered. "Now—heave!"

The door creaked and shivered under their weight, wedging firmly at the bottom. Lee

rose and drove his foot against it, and it flew inwards.

Immediately the detective entered, his revolver clasped in his right hand, a shaft of light springing from the torch in his left, illuminating a square and barely furnished hall, the floor of which was tessellated with worn tiles, shabby and uneven.

"Gee, what a den!" Harker muttered, and his eyes were fixed upon a number of weird horned heads, which seemed to peer down at them from all sides. In the thin light of the torch the place seemed like a house of horrors.

Nipper's heart had lost a beat—till the illusion was explained by a second glance. Wolf was not yet satisfied, for he crouched upon the mat, with fangs bared, growling fiercely.

"A little zoological collection," said Lee. "Picturesque, but not pleasant."

He shone the torch round slowly, revealing an oak panel which had been built around the square hall. Upon this panel was fixed the heads of strange animals, some pleasingly ornamental, some startling and horrible.

Near to Lee's shoulder was thrust the nose of a rhinoceros, with its ugly, upturned tusk and filmy eyes of clouded glass. There was the head and neck of a giraffe, towering above the others; the strange head of an African gnu, the graceful outline of a springbok, most hideous of all, the grinning, flat mask of a gorilla.

The sight of them brought a rather welcome thought to the mind of the Yard man.

"I have known men go mad who live in places like this," he said. "I'm not surprised, either!"

"Nor I," Lee muttered. "You want a cheerful setting, even for a small museum of natural history. Lie down, Wolf! They're all dead, boy! Can't you see?"

But Wolf did not seem to be snarling now at the zoological specimens. He had advanced into the hall, his blunt nose near the ground, his nostrils vibrating, his eyes burning fiercely as they peered ahead along the line of the torchlight.

At the end of the hall he paused, and turned to the others with a mute appeal for them to follow him. He seemed anxious to redeem his reputation. He sniffed round in a circle, and then sprang towards the stairs.

Nelson Lee groped in his pocket and took out the leash, clipping it on to the dog's stout collar. Wolf leapt forward immediately, almost dragging his arm from its sockets.

"Wait, boy—wait!" he hissed. "We'd better let him lead us. He's on the trail of something," he added in a low voice to the others.

He gave his revolver to Nipper, and together they ascended the stairway slowly, peering steadily ahead. The stairs ascended in a slow spiral, enclosing a well which ran from the top of the house to the hall below.

They could peer down over the banisters and perceive the vague outline of a horned head protruding from the panel immediately beneath.

Upon the landing of the first floor they paused to listen, and they caught distinctly the sound of a heavy, shuffling tread and a weird, unaccountable rustling. Harker specially, peering with startled eyes, leaning over the banisters and trying to penetrate the utter darkness. Wolf strained madly on his leash, his forefeet pawing at the stairs, his breath coming in quick, short gasps, for he was half strangling himself.

"Wait, boy—wait!" Lee hissed.

The shuffling ceased, and then there came a steady plump, plump, as of someone descending the stairs quickly. Nelson Lee threw his weight back upon the leash, directing the torch steadily at the bend of the stairs. Nipper crouched beside him, the revolver levelled—waiting.

Suddenly a huge and shaggy head came into the light, and the hearts of the men stood still. There came a fierce snarl, which almost froze the blood within them—for there is no terror like the fear of the unknown.

Crack!

The automatic in Nipper's hand spat fire, and a hoarse bellow issued from the thing beyond.

Crack!

The pistol spoke again, echoing deafeningly.

A huge form rose suddenly above them, and as it did so Wolf sprang—like a tiger—his fangs bared, jerked the leash from Lee's hand with such violence that the detective toppled forward, and the torch fell to the floor and plunged the upper stair in darkness.

"Quick, guv'nor! Quick! Look out!"

There came a snarl and a roar. Nelson Lee had recovered the torch, and its light revealed Wolf at the throat of the creature above them. They were swaying perilously on the edge of the stair.

Nipper took careful aim again, his hand as steady in emergency as the hunter of big game. He aimed to miss the dog—which he did. But the aim was true.

The huge figure of Wolf's opponent rolled forward, pitching down the stairs with a thud which made them creak and crack.

Almost at the feet of the three they stopped, and the brute rose again. Nipper thrust the nose of his automatic into its shaggy side, but before he could fire, it fell again, crashing heavily into the banisters, which gave way like matchwood.

"The dog! The dog!" Lee cried hoarsely, and he leapt forward.

But he was too late. With a bellow, the writhing mass toppled over into the shaft, crashed into the stairs beyond, and came with a sickening thud on to the banisters twelve feet below. Then, rebounding, crashed on to the stone tiles of the hall below.

For a moment the three stood staring down, and an intense anxiety now caused the torch to quiver a little in Nelson Lee's hand.

He turned, the next instant, and sprang down the stairs recklessly, two by two—his hand slipping over the banisters to save himself in case he fell.

He reached the hall in a matter of seconds, but not before Nipper, who had descended the last flight in two wild leaps. They swung round, and as they did so, Wolf, with a little whine of triumph, came limping towards them, the blood streaming from an ugly gash in his back.

"Good boy! Good boy!" Nelson Lee paused an instant to pat his head, and then he ran to the great shaggy-haired figure which lay inert and still upon the tiled floor.

Even in that swift glance he gave it he noticed that the fur of the huge creature was cleaned and brushed—as carefully kept as a lady's lap-dog.

Upon the blunt nose was clamped a thick muzzle of polished leather.

It was a bear!

CHAPTER 3.

A Grim Discovery!

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR HARKER of the Yard was not given to strong language, but he expressed himself in forcible terms of wonder and astonishment as he stood in the hall of the Hermitage and peered down at the shaggy carcase of the bear.

Apprehensive, not knowing what to expect, the advent of the animal had been startling enough—and the fierce encounter, with its dramatic finish, had left them little time to think.

But now there was something reassuring about the huge, shaggy creature over which Nelson Lee was stooping. It was remarkable, even in the varied and thrilling career of a Scotland Yard man; but it was at least tangible.

The mystery was explained, in this instance at least, although there was still much left to be explained. Now, Nelson Lee was on his knees beside the body of the bear. It was a perfect specimen, and its condition showed that it had been kept by Dr. Haroun as a pet, a sort of formidable house dog.

A huge collar of silver encircled its neck, and upon this collar were the words: "Pharoah. Mahomet el Hessim."

Nelson Lee glanced up at the Yard man and smiled rather grimly.

"I don't wonder that our friend Haroun did not encourage tradesmen. He probably preferred not to pay damages for having the milkman cuddled, or the baker chewed up."

"Most probably!" Harker said, with a chuckle, for his usual calm was beginning to return now. "Pharoah would be rather a discouragement to a bailiff, for instance, or a solicitor's clerk serving a writ."

He turned to where Nipper had torn up his handkerchief and was making a rough dressing for Wolf's torn shoulder.

"Is it very bad, young 'un?" Lee asked anxiously.

"No, guv'nor. Just a flesh wound. Pretty shallow. The old fellow is lucky to have got off so lightly."

"He is," Lee muttered.

The detective rose to his feet and watched Nipper thoughtfully for a moment as he made Wolf's bandage secure. He stroked his chin and turned, presently, to Harker.

"It's not easy to realise, Harker," he said slowly, "but we might have landed ourselves in a bit of a hole."

"How so?"

"By exceeding our privileges as detective officers."

"You mean we've no business in this place without a proper search warrant?"

"I mean that, partly," said Nelson Lee. He did not himself scruple about such things when on a clear scent, and Nipper was regarding him with mild bewilderment.

"But the man has been clamouring for our assistance," said Harker.

"I know. But you, at any rate, aren't here under orders. We've no legal right to break into this place—still less to cause the death of a valuable animal. When Haroun comes along he will be quite justified, in a way, in kicking up the very deuce of row——"

"But where is he?" Harker said rather irritably. "The man is mad, Lee—raving mad! We saw enough of him in the grounds to know that. Surely that is justification enough!" He glanced with a little apprehension at the open door. "The chances are he is watching us now—spying on us. He is a dangerous customer, Lee. When a man loses his reason he does not often lose his discretion. He develops a certain diabolical cunning. If——"

"But how do you know this poor demented creature is Haroun?" Lee queried, and Nipper looked up quickly, wondering that Nelson Lee should even doubt the fact.

"But, gov'nor," he said, "if that madman we chased in the grounds is not the Egyptian, who else can he be?"

Nelson Lee met his eyes, and then looked down with a strange expression at the bear.

"I would not like to make a guess," he said grimly. "But this isn't the place for arguing. I dare say most of the facts are written here for us if we look for them. Let's take a look round."

The gloomy residence of Mahomet el Hessim—alias Dr. Haroun, the great illusionist and animal trainer—was built upon a square and old-fashioned plan, which combined a dreary and repellent exterior with a certain measure of comfort and convenience inside.

The principal reception-rooms all opened on to the hall, from which a small corridor ran along to the small side wing, in which were the kitchen and domestic offices. Leaving the body of Pharaoh where it lay in the hall, Lee rose and moved, opening the door of a capacious room, through the shuttered window of which not a vestige of light straggled.

In the gloom Nelson Lee noticed a few outstanding features which proclaimed it a dining-room. He passed on without further inspection to the next door, and, peering in,

saw what seemed to be half a drawing-room, half a museum of specimens.

There remained still the door of what, in such houses, passed muster as a library. Leo tried it, and found it locked. He bent and flashed the torch, revealing a lock, not of the ordinary pattern for inside doors, but like the latch of a main entrance.

It seemed in the first glance that Dr. Haroun held the room as specially private. The old lock had obviously been taken off, and a new one fitted for greater safety. Lee bent down, perceiving that the key was still in the lock, the end protruding the fraction of an inch on the outside.

"Key in!" said Harker quickly. "Push it through, Lee. I've a set of 'twirls' here."

He groped in his trousers pockets and produced a small bunch of skeleton keys, at the use of which Harker had for many years been an expert. He selected the first of the 'twirls,' as they are known among cracksmen, and was about to push out the key that was in the lock, when Lee stopped him.

"One moment, Harker. I've something here quicker than 'twirls.'"

Nelson Lee produced from his waistcoat pocket a small but strong implement resembling a pair of calliper grips, controlled by a screw bolt.

"A thumbscrew!" Harker said, recognising it immediately.

"Yes. Charlie Peace's old dodge," Lee said. "Some of these old masters can teach us things even yet, Harker!"

He slipped the tweezers over the protruding edge of the key and tightened the thumbscrew to the utmost, so that the file-like grips of the callipers bit tightly into the key-shank. A slow, steady turn, and the lock slipped back with a snap.

"Quicker and easier," Lee muttered, throwing open the door. "Hallo! Plenty of light in this room. There—— Great Scott!"

He stopped suddenly, arresting Nipper and the Yard man as they followed him. His eyes were fixed upon the floor. Almost at his feet, stretched in an attitude of tragic abandon, lay the body of a man.

It lay athwart a thick rug of zebra skin—the vivid markings throwing into grotesque relief the white gown of loose silk in which the man was clad.

His half-bald head lolled tragically across the edge of a bronze fender. The ashes of a dead fire were still in the grate; upon the hearth lay what seemed to be a turban, charred and burned upon one side.

The spectacle was startling, even in that house of horror. Nipper's fists were gripped spasmodically; the face of the Yard man had gone deathly pale.

Nelson Lee alone remained unmoved after the first shock. He bent and took a swift glance at the staring eyes, the upturned, dusky face of the dead man.

"I feared as much," he muttered.

He caught up the wrist, held it for a few moments, and it fell limply when he released it.

"Dead?" queried Harker, speaking rather hoarsely.

"Yes; and has been for some time. This is Haroun, the Egyptian. There can be no doubt at all about that, I suppose, Harker?"

The Yard man took a swift glance.

"No," he said. "But, Lee," he added, in a startled voice, "this is—this is— What does it mean?"

"We shall see later on," Lee replied grimly.

He bent now, calmly, upon one knee, peering down at the form of the Egyptian. Upon the face he noted deep scratches, and about the throat. There was in the eyes a strange look of terror—utter, ungovernable fear—which had become fixed in death. There was plain evidence, too, of a bad wound in the rear of the skull.

Harker came and bent beside him, directing upon the prone figure an eye almost as expert in such matters as was Lee's. The Yard man took in all the salient features in the one glance—and pronounced his verdict.

"Homicide," he said quietly. "He has been done to death, Lee. I must ring through to the police at once!"

The detective rose and nodded thoughtfully. He indicated a telephone upon the extended flap of a roll-top desk which stood, closed, in the corner of the library.

Harker stepped over quickly and picked it up, jiggling the receiver rest imperatively.

"Hallo, exchange! Are you there? Gee!" he exclaimed, standing the 'phone down again. "Cut!"

"Naturally," said Lee. "That is an elementary precaution; but it isn't the most effective. We'll see what we can do presently."

"Had I better go for them—the police, I mean, gov'nor?" Nipper asked quickly.

"No!" Lee said sharply. "Stay here. It was not my place to prevent Inspector Harker ringing up for the police, but the 'phone is out of order. It's not my place, now, to worry unduly over that. I don't want a small army of county police trampling down every clue there is. But let's look in this desk."

The desk was of the variety which, by closing the flexible top, automatically locks the side drawers. It had been closed now, but not fastened, for that was impossible. The lock had been wrenched out of its socket.

"Now we're coming to the motive," Lee muttered, throwing it up.

The desk was in a disorder which contrasted vividly with the neatness of the house in general. Mahomet el Hessim had obviously been of an orderly disposition, with a dislike for litter.

Yet the papers in the desk were thrown about in a state of chaos and confusion, as if they had been rummaged through carefully in search of some specific document. An inkpot had been overturned; pens, nibs

and stationery lay about, scattered here and there.

Nelson Lee threw open the drawers and found them in the same state. The papers had evidently been turned out, gone through, and then bundled back anyhow.

"The Egyptian seemed to have something of great interest to his visitors," Lee said.

"Money and jewellery are usually interesting," Harker said—more to pump Lee than anything else.

"Not in this case," the detective retorted. "Look here!"

He tossed Harker something he had taken from the desk. It was of black, polished ebony, and represented a form of beetle. The claws were of gold, and for the eyes there were two rubies of purity and value.

The Yard man gazed at it with a fixed stare, and there was an unreal smile upon his lips as he looked back at Lee. He seemed startled.

"It—it's the Sacred Beetle," he muttered. "Does this mean anything, Lee? An ordinary burglar would have taken that, but a superstitious man, especially one who had been in the East, would not have dared to touch it."

"Well, it points to another motive than pure burglary," said Lee. "I should say that El Hessim used it as a brooch for his turban."

Nelson Lee glanced round the room, which, though small, showed no other signs of disorder. There seemed no evidence of a struggle, yet the Egyptian had apparently died by violence.

At the farther end of the room were a pair of French windows which gave on to the garden. They were latched, but not fastened.

"We'll leave this for the present," Lee said quietly. "Let's examine the other rooms."

They passed out through the door, and by the light of his torch Lee discovered an elaborate acetylene lamp suspended from the centre of the ceiling in an elaborate sort of chandelier. He leaned up and turned the screw, and he detected immediately the fumes of acetylene gas.

"A match, young 'un!" he said quietly.

The match was struck, and immediately the room was flooded in a white light.

"Hessim had an objection to gas and electric companies," Lee muttered. "He probably wanted to be free from all intrusion—"

"Look at the safe!" Harker interrupted sharply.

Nelson Lee turned, and in the corner of the room there stood an iron safe, the side of which had been completely blown out. Beside it was a thick blanket and tablecloth, scorched and rent. They had apparently been used to cover the safe in order to deaden the noise of the explosion.

A number of valuable curios and documents were flung about the floor in the



There came a wild, unearthly chatter, and from out of the trees dropped the most terrifying figure Lee and his two companions had ever set eyes on—a figure that swayed menacingly towards them!

region of the safe, and this also had obviously been rifled feverishly. Whether or no the thieves and assailants of the Egyptian had been successful in their search it was impossible to say. But it was obvious that, whatever it was, they had been to some trouble to trace it.

Nelson Lee noted all these facts in the swift and comprehensive manner to which his mind was trained. A number of salient facts had already assumed a certain relation in his mind, and the combination pointed towards as mysterious and interesting a crime as he had investigated for a long time.

Nelson Lee made a swift examination of the

papers and documents. They were all of interest, bearing upon the past life and activities of the Egyptian. Mahomet el Hessim had been in the showmanship line all his life, as an illusionist and an animal trainer, and apparently he had toured the whole world with his show in partnership with a man named Carlotta; and they employed, also, a Spaniard named Juan Vadillo, known on the stage as "The Hawk." This man was apparently, a hypnotist of some skill.

There was a deed of assignment and an indenture of lease relating to the house, the Hermitage. There were insurance policies and lapsed contracts.

There was nothing, however, which interested Lee more than casually except a small triangular piece of glass of about a two-inch base. It was covered with a thin, gelatinous coat which had become heated by the explosion of the safe, and was apparently a piece from a shattered photographic negative.

Lee picked it up casually, glanced at it, and was about to throw it aside when he paused and regarded it more closely. A grunt escaped him, and, withdrawing, a small enamel box from his pocket, he placed the piece of glass carefully inside.

"A clue?" asked Harker, observing him.

"Maybe," said Lee, adding sceptically, "and maybe not. Have you found anything, Harker?"

The Yard man had been examining the room carefully.

"No! There is no direct clue that I can see. There should be some indirect matter, however, amongst this lot."

"Yes," said Lee, nodding. "It will want going through carefully. I don't think there is anything else here."

He rose to his feet, and as he did so he stood rigid for a moment in an attitude of intense listening. Harker rose and brushed some dust from his fingers.

"We will have another look at Mahomet now," Lee said quietly. "The motive seems obscure enough to be mystifying, Harker."

"We may find something on him!"

"Hardly likely."

"But possible."

"Yes—possible," Lee muttered.

He followed Harker out of the room and across the hall to the library, where lay the body of the murdered man. The Yard man stepped into the room with a businesslike step, and then suddenly he stopped, blocking the doorway.

A strange noise came from his throat—a half-stifled cry. He stood rigid, like a man transfixed.

"What's wrong, man?"

"Vale of Jehos!" the Yard man cried hoarsely.

"What's the matter? Let me come! Move, man!" Lee rapped out tersely.

With sudden, passionate impatience he thrust the detective forward so that he staggered, half falling, into the library. Nelson Lee sprang after him, peering down at the zebra skin rug.

"Great Scott!" he cried.

The body of Mahomet el Hessim had disappeared!

CHAPTER 4.

A Mystery Solved!

THE moon which, intensified by the reflection cast by the white mantel of snow outside, penetrated the French windows of the library at the Hermitage, illumined a strange tableau.

They had been absent from the room but a few minutes, and then barely a few yards

away. A vague magnetism, which he tried to shake off, drew the eyes of Harker towards the Sacred Beetle, which lay on the desk. To the Yard man it seemed an age that they stood there motionless, but Lee assured him rather irritably afterwards that it was only a matter of a few minutes.

Nelson Lee peered quickly round the room and down at the zebra skin. He dropped on to one knee, and his hand came into contact with a small pool of water. He directed his torch quickly upon the rug, and directed it still further along the floor. He sprang immediately to his feet.

"Snow," he rapped out. "There's no mystery here. Harker! Pull yourself together!"

He sprang towards the windows, through the stained side panes of which the moon threw quaint-coloured tessellations upon the floor. He seized the handle and pulled, and both doors opened easily and without noise. He hand went to his hip pocket.

"Follow me!" he barked, and sprang down the steps.

A meadow of rank grass, looking now like a white sheet in the moonlight, sloped down from the back of the house. A low hedge divided it from a succession of fields beyond, which merged into the grey waste of flood below.

The tops of willow peeped out of the water like strange bushes. At one spot the thatched summit and small chimney of a cottage reared their heads pitifully. Lee peered about him quickly, but he could see no one, not a sign of life or movement. He listened, and there came again the eerie hoot of the owl which had greeted them as they approached the house. That was all.

Beckoning to the other to follow he ran along to the side of the house, beyond which the coppice encroached upon the meadow—a black and gloomy outline. And as it came into view a sudden cry broke from the lips of Nelson Lee. He turned and beckoned feverishly to the others pointing as they came up.

"Look!" he gasped. "Look!"

Almost from where they stood a trail of footprints led clearly across the snow towards the edge of the coppice, but it was not at the trail that Harker and Nipper peered breathlessly. Their eyes were fixed upon the short, thick-set figure of the man—the seeming maniac—whose demented ravings had curdled their blood less than an hour before.

The moon fell clearly upon him, and they could see plainly the evening dress, the white muffler, the moving tails of a dress jacket. He moved on silently, and it seemed to them that he must be a man of immense strength. His head looked absurdly small, probably in comparison with the immense girth of shoulder. Certainly he moved at a surprising speed considering the burden he carried.

In his arms he bore, with a great tenderness, the limp body of another man. He moved swiftly, purposefully, towards the edge of the copse, as if eager to conceal the grim burden.

Nelson Lee did not speak. He merely glanced at the others, and then bounded forward, his feet falling almost without noise on the snow. Suddenly he saw the figure turn round and pause, and in that instant the detective raised his automatic.

Crack! Crack!

The echo of the shots had hardly died away when the air seemed to reverberate suddenly with a repetition of the wild, maniacal laughter which they had heard before. There was something mirthless and horrible in the noise, something senseless and chattered—in-human.

Crack!

It was Harker's revolver which spoke now—heavier and more ponderous, without the vicious snap there was in the bark of Lee's automatic.

"He's dropped it! After him! Leave the other alone!"

The thick-set figure in evening dress had dropped his lifeless burden suddenly in the snow, and now he bounded forward with the same cat-like agility he had displayed before. The chance of capture seemed almost remote, but Lee bounded swiftly after him. Now, running down hill, proceeding by swinging lopes over the springy surface of the snow, he dashed towards the coppice at a speed which left both Nipper and Harker a foot behind in every yard he covered.

The fugitive, vaulting forward swiftly, seemed to have a preconceived line of retreat. He did not make for the nearest point of the coppice, but swung a little to the left towards the far extremity, and Lee's hopes beat high.

Once in the open, and pursuit would be greatly simplified. At the point for which the fugitive was making the coppice jutted out in a narrow isthmus of trees, and it was for this point Lee headed also. He realised that he was not gaining ground, for this man, whoever he was, moved at an amazing speed. It was a question of heading him off into the open.

The thick-set, vaulting figure reached the point of the wood when Nelson Lee was still twenty yards in his rear, but the detective covered that space in but very little more than two seconds. He sprang through the slender trunks of the firs, clutching one as he ran, and swinging round without losing way.

And then, with a hoarse cry of astonishment, he stopped. The figure of the fugitive had gone! Once again the man had mysteriously eluded them. He gazed blankly ahead as Harker and Nipper rushed up breathlessly.

"Lost him?" Nipper gasped.

"No! Wait!"

Nelson Lee spoke sharply, a note of irritation—anger—in his voice. He peered ahead to where the coppice jutted out into another point, so that the meadow formed, as it were, a small bay, upon one cape of which they were standing. He glanced about him, and then strode on, perceiving the tracks of the fugitive plainly.

"This way," he muttered. "Be on the alert! This fellow is an ugly customer, I'm thinking."

The trail led them as easily as if they had been following the actual strange figure of the man. The placing of the feet, the depth of the imprint, the extreme distance they were apart, revealing to Nelson Lee's logical mind at once the extreme speed at which he had covered this last few yards of open ground. Twenty feet from the coppice, Lee stopped with a sudden exclamation.

The trail had suddenly ceased. The footprints, plain as possible, had stopped as if by magic, unaccountably. It seemed actually as though they would never plumb the weird mysteries of this house of terror. It seemed that this maniacal fugitive—this man who was half animal—had been caught up—spirited away—dissolved into thin air.

"This beats all!" Harker muttered, peering about him. "If they had finished at the wood I could have understood it. But to finish here——"

He drew in a deep, sighing breath and expelled it slowly.

Nelson Lee stood where he had paused. The coppice was still some twenty feet distant. The nearest tree, standing a little isolated from the others, was fully twelve feet; a tall and graceful pine, the dark and drooping foliage of which swept up like a frosted cone, tapering gracefully, forty feet above. It was, as it were, a graceful sentinel, a watchful outpost of the coppice.

Nelson Lee smiled strangely, then stepped back, retreating a few paces, taking out his automatic as he did so.

"Don't come with me. Stay where you are! And be prepared for squalls!" he said.

The Yard man and Nipper stood under the deep shade of the pine and watched Lee wonderingly. They wondered still more when he suddenly raised his automatic and fired into the tree above him, and the bullet sped into the thick foliage of the fir.

Crack! Crack!

There was a pause.

Crack!

The automatic spat for the last time, and a wild, unnatural cry burst suddenly from the tree above the heads of Harker and Nipper. There came a sudden crashing, as of a figure falling. Harker sprang back, peering up.

"Look out!"

A form seemed suddenly to rebound upon one of the lower boughs and drop from the outer foliage, a wild, dishevelled figure, with a dress-shirt and collar torn to ribbons.

It fell with its back to them, and recklessly Nipper sprang upon it. A snarl broke from their captive, a pair of hands came back like claws, and Nipper felt himself torn up and whirled in the air before he was sent hurtling into the snow with his biceps lacerated and his coat torn to ribbons as if by claws and not fingers.

He rolled over and sprang again to his feet, and in that instant he caught a fleeting

glimpse of a face at once fearful and horrible. It was not the face of a man, it was the face of a monster—of something, some creature—what, he could not think.

A sharp cry from Nelson Lee called him to his senses. The vision of that face, grotesque and infuriated, had temporarily stunned him. He became aware that this creature had still defied them. It seemed that one of Lee's bullets had found its billet. The snow where the fugitive had stood was stained pink with blood. But even now he had turned and darted away again, this time down the sloping meadow towards the grey face of the flooded river.

Nelson Lee and Harker were in full pursuit. Nipper pulled himself together with a jerk and began to run. He saw Lee draw level with Harker a dozen yards ahead, and shout something to him. And then he perceived the Yard man pause to take aim with his revolver, and the weapon spoke fiercely.

The first shot missed. The second brought a cry from Lee, for the retreating figure stumbled and fell. But even now, as they ran faster, this creature ran on all fours for a dozen yards and then sprang up again, half-vaulting, half-falling over the low hedge which divided the grounds of the Hermitage from the fields beyond.

Nelson Lee and Harker were breathless from the chase. The Yard man, not so fit, was wincing under a sharp "stitch"; but they kept on, encouraged by the fact that the fugitive now was plainly weakening. Twice he had been hit, and twice he had kept on. The strength and vitality of the "man" was almost incredible.

He was staggering forward blindly now, heading straight for the steeply-dipping meadow, whose grassy slope was the back of the flooded river. And, as Nelson Lee sprang forward, some instinct seemed to warn the figure ahead of him. It gathered itself in a sudden access of strength. Once again that wild, chattering laughter rang out, and then, half-falling, half-wading, the fugitive plunged into the waters of the floods, disappearing in a swirl of eddies.

Nelson Lee stopped short on the lapping edge of the water, peering down. There were reasons for which he did not feel disposed to endure complete immersion in the icy stream. But he reckoned without Nipper. As the youngster dashed up, there bobbed on to the surface of the floor, a few yards out, a small head, and a black, cuffed sleeve groped wildly for a moment.

Before Nelson Lee could lay a restraining hand upon the lad he had sprung forward into the water, moving swiftly across it, reaching the spot just as the head sunk from sight. Quick as thought, the lad's head doubled under him in a surface dive, but he came up a few seconds later—alone.

"Come out, young 'un! Come out!" Lee called to him. "You're wasting your time!"

It struck Harker as a strange thing for Lee to say. But Nipper did not hear him. He dived again, groping on the grassy

bottom until his hand clutched suddenly the loose tail of a coat. He gripped it fiercely and came to the surface, the breath bursting from his lungs.

"I've got him, guv'nor!" he cried triumphantly. "Help—help me to haul him out."

He struggled towards the shore, and Harker waded in and caught his hand. Between them they lifted the now inert form of the fugitive out of the water and lay him in the snow.

Nelson Lee bent over him and rent the muffler and collar from his neck, while Nipper squeezed the water from his clothes and Harker chafed his hands.

"He is still alive!" Lee said quickly.

"Really?" The yard man swung round quickly. "Can we do anything for him, Lee?"

"Yes. Lend me your revolver!"

"My revolver—why?" the Yard man asked.

"I've used all the cartridges in mine. I want yours a moment," Lee said simply.

Harker handed him the revolver without question, though he watched him curiously. Lee rose to his feet, and, with his finger on the trigger he pointed the muzzles straight at the heart of the unconscious figure in the snow.

"Guv'nor!" Nipper almost screamed.

"What—what the deuce are you going to do, Lee?" Harker asked hoarsely.

"Put him out of his misery!"

"But are you mad?"

"No!"

Nelson Lee's finger tightened on the trigger, the revolver spoke, and two bullets found a billet in the heart of the figure at his feet. A cry of horror and amazement broke from the dry lips of Nipper. Harker seemed about to spring on Nelson Lee and wrench the revolver from him.

"Why—why——" he stammered, almost inarticulate.

"That is why!" the detective said, pointing calmly downwards. "How excited you become over trifles, both of you. Look! Look at his feet and his face, and his hands. Look!"

Nipper and the Yard man sprang forward, and as they bent over the now dead form of the fugitive, they saw, not human hands, but long, hairy and prehensile claws.

The bare feet which protruded from the sodden trousers were like the hands, with fingers in place of toes! The head was bare now, and Lee had torn away the collar and the muffler. It was the face of a huge ape which looked at them—flat, hideous and repulsive!

CHAPTER 5.

Tangled Clues!

THE body of the unfortunate Egyptian had been borne back into the house, in the dining-room of which Lee and Harker had lighted a fire.

Nipper, chilled to the marrow by his icy

"No, Lee," he said. "I can't concede that. In the first place, you know that these turbans, as a rule, are a pretty tight fit. They aren't even like a hat, or even a cap. They aren't the sort of apparatus to topple off a man's head when he falls backwards. Besides, have you thoroughly examined the wound on the skull?"

"I have!"

"It is a very ugly one—bad enough to be fatal."

"Yes!"

"Then I contend that a man of Hessim's weight, falling back in an ordinary manner, could not injure himself to that extent—unless his skull were a perfect eggshell."

"I agree with you," Lee said quietly.

"Then how can you——"

"My point is that the Egyptian did not fall back in an ordinary manner."

"No—exactly!" Harker agreed, missing Lee's point. "He might have been practic-

ally senseless and just collapsed like a heap. But even his dead weight in a fall——"

"He did not fall," Lee said.

"Did not fall?"

"No," said Lee insistently. "He was hurled—it is the only word—hurled back by someone of immense strength!"

"You think that?"

"I am confident! El Hessim was most probably raised from his feet, being light, as you say, and hurled down with such force that the bronze edge of the fender stove in his skull. But, in my opinion, when that happened, he was already dead."

It was a theory which half fitted in with Harker's own, and he nodded, admitting its possibility.

"It is your opinion that he was strangled, Lee?" Harker queried.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"We cannot be sure, not without a proper post-mortem. The condition of the lungs would indicate death by asphyxia. There are

A Book-length Adventure Yarn for 4d.



The Night Hawk

By John Brearley

Silent as a phantom: swifter, more deadly than a pouncing eagle, the Night Hawk streaks down from the skies, fearless and implacable—an enemy of crime! Action, excitement, danger unlimited—these are what the winged avenger and his young assistant live for, so get ready for thrills when they set out on their most desperate adventure yet—a fight against terrific odds to win back a boy rajah's throne! A powerful story by the master writer of thrilling yarns.

Ask for No. 352

BOYS' FRIEND Library

On Sale Thursday, September 1st - - - - - 4d.

other and more superficial evidences which force me to that view. But there are one or two facts, in addition, which puzzled me at first. There is an extremely long span, Harker, between the depression of the thumbs and the pressure of the finger tips. I have rather a startling theory to put forward."

"What is that?"

"El Hessim was not murdered—in the strict sense!"

"Not?"

"No. Murder is a legal definition," Lee said. "One cannot apply that definition in a case where it cannot legally apply."

"I don't follow," Harker said—and Nipper looked puzzled.

"If you were attacked and killed by a bull," Lee said slowly, "the coroner's jury would not bring it in as a case of homicide against the animal."

"Of course not. But——"

"The correct verdict, I suppose, would be 'death by misadventure.'"

"But how does that instance fit in with this affair?" the Yard man asked.

"That cases are parallel to an extent. El Hessim died by misadventure!"

"By misadventure?" Harker and Nipper cried together.

"That is my opinion—yes. We have just had the privilege of delivering summary justice on his assailant," Lee said.

Nipper and the Yard man stared at him.

"You mean, it was the ape?" the youngster cried, amazed.

"I believe so," the detective said thoughtfully. "The Egyptian died at the hands of his own pet!"

CHAPTER 6.

The Three Glasses!

NELSON LEE'S conclusion fell on both Harker and Nipper like a bombshell. They stared at him, at no pains to conceal their amazement. Harker was openly sceptical. He peered down at the carpet with contracted brows, and paced up and down for some time in silence. At the end of a few minutes:

"I am sorry, Lee," he said presently, and rather sharply. "I don't agree with you—I can't."

"No need to apologise, because of that," Lee said, the ghost of a smile crossing his face. "You are entitled to your opinion; I have given you mine. I say that the ape killed the doctor!"

Nipper was bewildered, but he had learned on such occasions to adopt the cautious attitude of discreet silence. But Harker was more than mystified—he was exasperated, especially when Nelson Lee passed into the library, and spent some time in careful examination of the papers in the desk. In his notebook he made several careful notes.

On one occasion, after studying an apparently meaningless diagram upon the blotting pad, the detective sprang up and came back to the settee on which lay the

body of the unfortunate Egyptian. He bent over the inert form and pushed back gently the loose sleeve of the kimono-like dressing-gown he wore. On the forearm of the man, in ink of a vivid crimson, were tattooed very small, and with exquisite care, several lines of hieroglyphics. Nelson Lee beckoned Harker over.

"Did you notice these?" he muttered.

"Yes. No significance, have they?"

"Probably not," Lee said.

"I have known natives in Cairo with bodies like the sides of the Pyramids," the Yard man said. "Tattooing in Egypt would naturally take that form, eh?"

"I suppose so—yes."

The crimson tattoo upon the forearm of El Hessim, however, was executed with such care, and the characters written so small and perfectly, that Lee's eyes betrayed an interest far beyond the casual nature of his responses to Harker.

He took his glass from his pocket, and through the lens noted the perfect symmetry with which the hieroglyphics were depicted. Obviously the arm had been pricked and the work done with the aid of a lens. The work was too fine to be done by the human eye.

"This tattooing was done by the Egyptian himself," Lee said quietly.

"By El Hessim—on his own arm?" Nipper cried.

"Yes."

"How do you know that?" Harker queried. For Lee's quiet announcement of facts hidden from anyone else sometimes savoured of the uncanny. Yet his elucidations were usually absurdly simple. He was a natural genius in applied logic.

"If this work had been done by a professional tattooist," Lee said, "I doubt whether he would have put this workmanship and care into it. I am certain he wouldn't. Also, these people are usually governed—or their art is—by the ordinary accepted minor rules of the craft. An artist using a square canvas doesn't paint his picture from corner to corner—diamond fashion; he conforms to the natural line of his canvas. So a tattooist ornamenting an arm does not plant his drawing askew. If the picture is on the forearm he will invariably make the base of it either fairly parallel with the outlines of the arm, or at right angles to it."

"Naturally," said Nipper. "He wouldn't draw it cock-eyed for the purpose."

"No," Lee said. "And he would observe those rules, I take it, if he were tattooing on a man's arm a series of diagrams like these hieroglyphics."

"And those are askew," Nipper muttered, bending down.

"That is why I say he did them himself. In choosing the easiest position for the purpose his lines run slantwise across the arm."

Harker bent down and muttered assent.

"Queer idea—tattooing oneself!" he said.

"Yes," Lee said, taking out his notebook and opening it.

Peering closely through the lens, he made a careful copy of the hieroglyphics, reproducing them in every detail. Then he

returned to his examination of the papers in the library.

It was half an hour before he emerged again. And Nipper looked at him eagerly.

"We've made rather an important discovery during your absence, gov'nor," he said.

"What's that?"

"This tray upon the sideboard! It seems to have an important bearing."

The youngster indicated a small tray standing on the sideboard. Upon the tray stood a small decanter of cut glass, containing a yellowish fluid. Beside the decanter were three small spirit glasses.

"Whisky, Lee," Harker said. "Looks as if he had company last night!"

"Three glasses!" Lee muttered quickly.

"Yes. And one a Pussyfoot apparently," the Yard man said.

The meaning of this remark was explained a moment later when Lee stepped over. Two of the glasses were empty, the third contained still a stiff tot of spirit.

"Have you touched the glasses?" Lee asked, turning.

"No."

"The decanter?"

"Touched nothing," Harker said.

Nelson Lee nodded with satisfaction, and lifted the decanter with great care for some reason, gripping it between finger and thumb across the lip.

The stopper was of cut glass, with innumerable facets, and after a moment's pause Nelson Lee took hold of this and lifted it.

"That would tell no stories," he muttered rather mysteriously, as he put it down.

He raised the decanter and applied his nose to the neck, inhaling the fumes thoughtfully.

"Whisky—Irish!" he said; and Harker smiled.

Nelson Lee smiled also, for it was the sort of detective work which usually delighted the readers of cheap thrillers. Yet Harker knew as well as Lee the importance and the possible significance of a correct surmise.

Lee replaced the stopper and lay the decanter carefully back upon the tray. He then took from his pocket the small thumbscrew which he had used to turn the key of the library. With this between the points of the callipers he gripped the spirit glass and smelt the contents.

Both Harker and Nipper were aware why he refrained from touching—or rather from gripping—the glass.

"Same stuff?" Harker queried, and Lee nodded.

But he took a second sniff at the whisky and then held the glass up carefully to the light.

"Have you a phial, young 'un?" he asked, turning to Nipper.

The lad nodded, and produced a small phial of strong glass with a strong, air-tight stopper. This, along with a small box for storing fragile clues, they invariably brought with them upon an investigation.

Lee emptied the contents of the small glass into the phial, but not before he had

taken out his penknife and swirled round the stagnant whisky in it.

"It looks as if the Egyptian entertained his friends last evening," Lee said. "That rather points against your theory of someone entering by the library windows, Harker."

"Yes. I might have to revise that assumption," the Yard man admitted. "It looks as if he had tried to propitiate his visitors by offering them whisky."

"Maybe," Lee said; "and yet——"

He fell into a sudden silence and began to pace thoughtfully up and down.

"And yet what, gov'nor?" Nipper queried.

"Here again we may be led astray by the obvious," Lee said slowly.

"In what way?"

"In assuming that there were more than one visitor."

"You think there might only have been one?" Nipper cried.

"It is possible," Lee said.

"Then why on earth three glasses?" asked Harker quickly.

"That may be more easily understood later on," said Lee. "Have we the camera in the car, young 'un?"

"Yes, gov'nor."

"And the magnesium wire?"

"Yes."

"Good! We'll use up a negative or two before we leave. I think, for the next thing, we'll take a look outside."

The full moon had risen high in the sky by this time, shedding a mellow radiance upon the white landscape. So clear was the silver disc that Nipper vowed humorously that he could see "the man in the moon."

The brilliance of the moon was good fortune for the detectives, enabling them to pursue their investigations without waiting for daylight.

They passed out through the front door, the forcing of which with a jemmy was a point in the mystery which Nelson Lee had not forgotten, though Harker had apparently overlooked it in the rapid formation of his theory.

Up till now Nelson Lee had neither the time nor the inclination to make a close scrutiny of external evidences except those connected with the pursuit of the ape. But realising the vital value which the snow might prove, in case of need, Lee had taken the precaution of approaching the house in single file, Harker and Nipper stepping in his own footprints so that no other track might be obliterated.

Standing in the porch outside, they surveyed for a few moments their own tracks which led up the broad stone steps. The footprints, well defined and embedded, provided a vivid record of their movements. They saw them distinctly stretching away through the trees which verged on the house, along the drive which led to the main gate of the grounds.

"We appear to be the only ones who've been here lately," Nipper muttered, casting his eyes about him.

"We mustn't look for too plain an imprint," Lee replied. "The footprints we want date back to last evening. Since then there has been a fall of snow."

"And they are obliterated," Harker put in. "The devil looks after his own!"

"They may not be, altogether," Lee said. "The last fall was very slight. Not sufficient to——"

As he spoke he was bending down over the steps, and now suddenly he paused, peering down with renewed interest.

"What is it?" Harker said quickly.

"Look here. What do you make of this?"

The Yard man bent down closely, and he saw in the snow of the steps the distinct and clear outline of a foot. It had been filled with new snow, which half concealed it. But it became, under close scrutiny, clear and apparent.

The impress of the heel was there, and the outline of the toe. A man's boot, and yet——

Harker looked wonderingly at Nelson Lee.

"This is a huge foot, Lee. Tremendous!"

"It is," the detective muttered.

Nipper leaned forward and gazed down with interest upon the vague imprint. The boot—if boot it was—that had left that print was not to be bought in any shop. It was the boot of a giant, or a monstrosity.

"I knew a Grimsby fisherman with a foot this size," Lee said. "He took fifteens!"

He moved forward carefully, and on the bottom step he came across the imprint of the same boot. To be strictly accurate, it was not the same boot. This bootmark was the right boot; the other was of the left. It was the partner, proving that there were a pair of monstrous feet which these boots enclosed.

"This is interesting," Lee murmured.

He bent down and examined the imprint carefully, as he had done the first. He scrutinised the steps which intervened, and here again he paused with an exclamation. His careful examination had revealed another clue, and that was the imprint of a boot as absurdly small as the other was huge. It was small and shapely, corresponding, perhaps, to a size three in women's footwear. Yet it was broader and more square at the toes than a woman's would have been.

"This is a child's footprint," Harker said quickly.

"That is what I was thinking," Lee agreed dubiously. "Perhaps we can follow the track."

It was not an easy matter, but by dint of pain and close scrutiny they traced the two sets of imprints to the edge of the coppice. Here, owing to the sparse nature of the snow, they became indiscernible. But both Nelson Lee and Harker had seen sufficient to support some sort of theory.

As they retraced their steps again to the house, Lee pointed out some of the major points which struck him. The monster footprints were heavy and obvious compared with the smaller ones. There were, roughly, four times as many of the smaller prints as

there were of the larger. It seemed that a child had been walking beside a huge man, taking four short steps to each stride of his companion.

Between the footprints of the child, assuming it to be a child, there was less than a foot of space. Between the strides of the other there was at least four feet—the stride of a giant.

The footprints which Nelson Lee traced from the portico to the coppice were turned towards the house. The strange callers, whoever they had been, had approached the front entrance of the Hermitage, ascended the steps, and perhaps knocked for admittance.

Harker, in the light of this new discovery, was busy in a moment, exploiting the faculty which only a little earlier Lee had told him was a weakness. He tried at once to see how the new facts would bear upon his theory. In a few moments he reached some sort of a conclusion. He arrived at an interesting possibility which immediately caught his imagination.

"I've known several cracksmen who take kids about with 'em," he said. "They are useful for getting in through small places. They also disarm suspicion. This big fellow was probably responsible for having forced that door with a jemmy. It would have required a powerful arm to have done it. If this man's 'plates of beef' are any guide, he's pretty hefty!"

Nelson Lee pursed his lips non-committally.

"This accounts, too," Harker went on, "for the third glass of whisky being untouched. The Egyptian, in his anxiety to keep on good terms with his visitors, might have poured out one for the kid, who, of course, wouldn't touch it."

Harker displayed a good deal of ingenuity in dovetailing facts, but there were times when his imagination ran riot.

"I don't seem able to agree with any of your excellent theories to-night, Harker," Lee said, with a dry smile.

"What? Am I wrong again?" Harker said ironically.

"Yes. I don't fancy these people, whoever they were, entered by that door."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because their footprints descend the steps again and move round there towards the back of the house," Lee said quietly.

"Do they, by Jove!"

This fact had been quickly intimated to Nelson Lee by Nipper, while Harker was formulating his theory. A very short scrutiny had revealed to the youngster the huge footprints and the smaller ones moving round the house as if the visitors, receiving no satisfaction from the front door, had gone in search of some other entrance. The footprints were only just discernible, those of the seeming child being almost invisible.

"Looks as if we shall lose them altogether in a moment," Harker growled.

"On the other hand, they will be much clearer," Lee said with confidence, and both the Yard man and Nipper gasped when they

turned the west wing of the house to see the imprints clearer and better defined than at any other place. Nelson Lee's prophecy savoured of black magic.

"How did you know they would be clearer, gov'nor?" Nipper asked.

"Use your own memory and brains, young 'un," Lee retorted. "You know as well as I that the last fall of snow we had was thin and carried by a pretty stiff wind coming across from the east. This wall faces west. It stands to reason that these footprints, provided they kept well in the lee of the wall, would not be filled up so much as the others. But hallo, what's that?"

By the side of a small lean-to building of brick, standing about nine feet from the ground, the footprints had stopped. Nelson Lee paused and peered up as he perceived that one of the panes of the window which overlooked the roof of the lean-to had been shattered. He turned to Harker.

"Here, give me a heave up a moment," he said quickly.

The Yard man bent and gripped Lee firmly by the ankles. The next instant, with a sudden lift, he hoisted him vertically, holding him there, Lee gripping the gutter with his hands.

The first quick survey of the roof revealed what he had half expected to find. The tracks of tiny feet led up the roof to a spot immediately beneath the sill of the window. There were two sets of tracks—one leading up, the other down. Without disturbing the footprints, Nelson Lee made his way carefully across the roof and examined the sill of the window. In the snow, about two feet apart, he discerned the clear imprint of a small hand—fingers embedded, as if the owner had drawn himself up bodily on to the sill.

In the middle of the sill itself were two parallel depressions, which mystified Lee for a few minutes, until he suddenly realised that they had been caused by someone kneeling on the sill. He peered up at the shattered window, and he saw pieces of glass glinting on the sill. On the wooden ledge below the shattered pane there was a pink stain. At the spot where Lee now stood pieces of glass lay about in the snow.

All these facts Lee noted quickly, committing them to memory.

Harker had retreated some paces from the lean-to, and from where he stood he could see quite plainly the tracks of small feet across the roof. He had noted also the broken pane.

"It's as good as a confession," he muttered to himself.

Nelson Lee came down lightly from the roof and alighted on his feet below.

"That's the mode of entry—eh?" Harker said.

"Obviously," Lee said—a remark which Harker did not realise was a rather sarcastic rejection of the suggestion.

"The big fellow hoisted the kid up—eh?"

"Apparently!"

"And the kid smashed the window and got in that way?" Harker went on.

"He might possibly have got in that way," Lee said. "But I don't think so."

"No?"

"No. And he didn't smash the window. That's my opinion!"

"Jiminy! What makes you think that, gov'nor?" Nipper asked.

"Because the window was smashed from the inside!" Lee said quietly.

"I understand!" Harker stared at him in wonderment. "You found the glass outside?"

"Yes."

Harker nodded dubiously and gazed at the broken window.

"That point will want some explaining away," he observed. "But the kid got in all right. He didn't come back!"

"I think he did," Lee said.

"Why?"

"For the simple reason that his tracks are shown there plainly, returning from the window."

But Harker shook his head with conviction, and Nipper plainly favoured his point of view.

"You'll have to give in to our way of thinking when you know what we know," Harker retorted with a smile.

"What do you mean?"

"The big man made off and left the kid behind him!"

"What?"

"It's all true. It's all written down here like a book. See here!"

He pointed to the snow, and Nelson Lee perceived quite plainly the huge footprints of the big man leading alone away from the house. Of the footprints of the child there was no sign whatever.

There was no indication of anything else at all, excepting an oblong-shaped depression in the snow, with four small holes, as if made by the ferrule of a stick.

It seemed here that this mysterious giant was moving more quickly than before. The footprints were heavier, and the heels indicated a trifle more plainly than the toes. Also, the length of the stride was, if anything, longer, a fact which filled even Nelson Lee with a astonishment.

The track led from the wing of the house across an open space into the coppice, where it was lost, as it had been before. Nelson Lee followed it, bent almost double, scrutinising each imprint with the care and patience of an archæologist perusing an ancient papyrus.

"There is no sign of the child," Harker observed.

"Not the vestige of a sign," Lee admitted.

"He left him behind."

"Not necessarily. He might have been carrying him," Lee replied.

Once, nearing the edge of the coppice, Lee discerned again that strange, flat depression, and once again he saw the four small holes, situate about three inches, each one, from the four corners of the parallelogram.

With infinite care, Lee took the measurements of the four sides and the distances of the holes. He came back to the foot of the lean-to and compared them with the other imprint.

He found the measurements to correspond exactly. The relative distances of the four holes were perfectly similar.

"This man," Lee said thoughtfully, "was carrying something pretty heavy. It may have been a box, the bottom of which contains four nuts of about half an inch in diameter."

"But what about the child?" Nipper asked.

"I cannot say—not yet," Lee said. "But I think we've made a pretty complete examination, now, Harker. Supposing you run down with Nipper to the car. While you are fetching the local police and ringing through and making a report, Nipper and I will be taking a few photographs."

The Yard man nodded.

So Nipper and the Yard man strode off, striking into the coppice and swinging round into the narrow drive, at the end of which the big car waited in patient fidelity.

Nelson Lee was about to make another survey of the snow about the house when a sudden point occurred to him.

He remembered the pink stain in the snow below the frame of the shattered window. He had seen something attached to a small piece of glass which indicated a certain possibility.

Quickly he sprang up the steps and entered the hall where the carcase of Pharoah was lying.

He bent and examined the forepaws of the huge bear. The left paw gave him no clue. When he examined the right an exclamation broke from him.

The paw was badly cut, and the hair thereabouts was matted with blood and congealed. Something glinted in the light of Lee's torch, and, transferring the torch to his left hand, at the same time supporting the formidable paw, he applied his fingers and thumb and drew from the lacerated pad a piece of glass!

CHAPTER 7.

Lee Sorts out the Evidence!

AMONG the flippant and junior members of the legal profession in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn, the old-established firm of Moore, Fogg & Co., solicitors, was a daily subject for humour.

The name certainly sounded like a weather forecast, added to which there was something in the nature of the firm which lived, unconsciously, up to its name.

Fog was certainly the correct term to apply to the extent of commercial clarity which existed in those dingy offices, and the possibility of more fog became obvious to any client as soon as he had entrusted his business to their care.

It was, therefore, with some misgiving that Nelson Lee descended the much worn and winding staircase and entered the small cubicle where visitors were subjected to the preliminary cross-examination of a perky office boy, whose function in that office was similar to that of a sparrow who twitters at the barred window of a dungeon.

Why the amusing impertinence of this office-boy was tolerated in the outer office of the historic firm was one of the minor mysteries of the City. It was amazing even to the office-boy himself.

No visitor, however staid, no client, however dignified, was proof against his Cockney wit. When there was no other subject of humour handy, he fell back on his own firm and made fun of them.

As Nelson Lee entered he poked his head round the corner, a pen gripped between his teeth.

"Moore, Fogg?" Lee queried.

"Don't think so, sir. More like rain, I fancy!"

"Anyone in?" Lee asked, suppressing a chuckle.

"Yessir. I am!"

"I refer to the firm, not the furniture," Lee said, and the boy quizzed him quickly, apparently enjoying the retort.

"Some furniture you can't sit on, sir," he said. "I'm the outside representative. Who might I have the pleasure of informing you ain't in?"

"May I see Mr. Moore?" Lee asked.

"Old Moore?" asked the boy with a grin.

"Mr. Moore," Lee insisted. "May I speak to him?"

"You might if you went to one of them spiritualist meetings," the boy said. "I have heard he was a rare one for rapping on the table when he was alive."

"Deceased?" queried Lee.

"No, sir. He wasn't diseased. Just died of old age."

"Mr. Fogg, then," Lee said. "Perhaps —"

"And perhaps not," said the boy. "Mr. Fogg retired five years ago. He was always a retiring sort of gentleman, so I've heard."

"Do you carry on the firm by yourself, then?" Lee asked, beginning to get impatient.

The boy shrugged his shoulders humorously and pointed with modesty to a black cat on the rug.

"Not altogether, sir," he said cheerily. "She's a great help. We—— Yessir?"

The inner door had opened quickly, and a grey head protruded.

"Nobbs!" the head snapped. "Who are you talking to?"

"Meself, sir," said the youth.

"Then show him in," retorted the head.

"Certainly, sir!"

The office boy winked at Nelson Lee with frank familiarity, and disappeared into the inner office. A few minutes later Lee heard a cheerful whistle issuing from inside; the door opened, and the boy's face came round.

"Name, please, sir?" he chirped.

"Lee!"

"Lee, sir!" said the office boy, drawing his head in.

"Come in, sir," he said, popping it out again.

The detective chuckled. There was something very refreshing about this young Cockney sparrow, chirping away in the fusty atmosphere of the law.

He entered, and an elderly man, with grey hair, a tired manner, and pince-nez glasses, worn as near the tip of his nose as possible, nodded to him graciously. He waved Nelson Lee to a chair.

"Let me see," he said slowly. "Have we an appointment?"

"No," said Lee. "My business is rather urgent, and——"

"Indeed? Yes! Quite so! But let me apologise to you for that boy, sir——" He glanced towards the door. "I trust he was not too impertinent?"

"No," Lee said smiling. "He is an original youth."

"Intensely original," said the solicitor with great emphasis. "Far too intensely original, Mr. Lee." He cocked back his head and peered through his glasses. "He is irrepressible, sir—irrepressible!"

"I should gather so," Lee said.

"Oh, dear, yes," the solicitor assured him. "Believe me, Mr. Lee, I sack him regularly every Saturday, and have done so for twelve months."

"And you take him on again?" Lee queried, with a smile.

"Oh, no, sir. He just comes up on the Monday as usual. And, really, sir, he's got a remarkable memory. I don't know what I should do without him. But what can I do for you, Mr. Lee?"

"There is a matter in which I would like you to help," Lee said. "I am a detective, Mr.—er——"

"Reeves!" said the partner.

"I'm a detective, Mr. Reeves—a private investigator. In common with Scotland Yard, I have just come from the investigation of a somewhat tragic circumstance connected with—I believe—one of your clients."

"One of my clients? Dear, dear! I am sorry!"

"I believe you have had business in the past with a certain gentleman connected with the show business," Lee said. "His stage name was Dr. Haroun."

"Dr. Haroun," the solicitor repeated thoughtfully.

"He was an Egyptian by birth," Lee explained. "His baptismal name, I believe, was Mahomet el Hessim."

The cloud went from the face of Mr. Reeves. He took off his glasses and waved them.

"Yes, yes! I remember well. It is years since we last had business. But in the past we have conducted some minor litigation for him. And what has happened to Mr. el Hessim?"

"He has died," Lee said, "under rather tragic circumstances."

"Really? You don't mean that foul play——"

"It is not improbable," Lee replied. "It was part of my duty as a detective to make a thorough examination of his papers. I found the name of this firm mentioned, and some rather fragmentary reference to a will. Have you that will in your possession, Mr. Reeves?"

"I am not sure. We may have."

He pressed a bell, and the office boy appeared as if by magic.



Even as Lee staggered blindly across the dark—
plunged helplessly into the

"Papers referring to Mr. Mahomet el Hessim. Find them, please," the solicitor said, almost briskly.

"Ma—who?" chirped the boy.

"Here—I will write it down," Lee said. "Mahomet el Hessim."

"Draw it if it won't write, sir," chirped the boy.

"Nobbs, kindly hold your tongue!" snapped the solicitor.

The boy turned, put out his tongue, and standing with his back to the desk, held it

between finger and thumb, winking at Lee as he did so. Mr. Reeves sniffed angrily. Lee handed the boy the slip of paper.

In less than two minutes he had returned carrying the necessary documents—a rapidity which completely mollified the solicitor.

"That boy, Mr. Lee," he explained, "is a natural, burrowing animal. He never forgets where he files a thing. He has the same instinct as a dog which hides a bone. He burrows like a mole, builds like a beaver, and



dow, the fugitive gave a strangled cry, slipped, and wirling waters of the river.

has the organising ability of an ant. But let us glance at this will."

For some minutes Lee waited while the solicitor perused the parchment. Presently, Mr. Reeves looked up.

"It is a peculiar will," he said. "Mr. el Hessim had apparently no kith nor kin. In the event of his death his first stipulation is that his 'pets' are to be killed. I suppose he kept cats and dogs, eh, Mr. Lee?"

"He kept animals—yes," Lee said, smiling to himself.

"His specimens are to be presented to the

Wurtenheim Museum of Natural History at Boston, U.S.A. His house, the 'Hermitage,' and all furniture, etc., is to be sold, the proceeds to go to the International Showmen's Benevolent Fund."

"Is that all?" Lee asked.

"No. We, as his solicitors, are empowered to take over and to destroy all private documents, with the exception of one document. This is contained in a linen envelope, three and half inches by six inches, marked with a red cross on the face, and sealed in purple wax with the stamp of a Scarabaeus, or Sacred Beetle. I imagine that it would be easily identified," Mr. Reeves said. "Perhaps, in your examination, Mr. Lee, you came across this—"

"No, I saw nothing answering to that description," Lee said. "What are the instructions concerning this document, Mr. Reeves?"

"It is to be handed intact to one or two people," the solicitor went on, reading the will carefully. "He described them as his old comrades, Johann Vandenburg and Frederick Ortheris, music-hall artists, of no fixed abode, but at the time of writing working under the Coburn Empires Circuit with the Grimaldi Troupe of Animal Trainers. In the event of the previous death of either of these gentlemen, the document is to be handed to the survivor. Should they both be still alive, then it must be handed to one in the presence of the other, and the surrender of the document acknowledged by both signatures."

"And supposing they are both deceased?" Lee asked.

"Then the document is to be destroyed, unopened!" the solicitor said.

Nelson Lee nodded thoughtfully, and the solicitor handed him the will so that he could confirm all Mr. Reeves had told him.

Nelson Lee read through it carefully, and then rose to his feet, taking out his notebook and making a quick note.

Half an hour later he had returned to the Grays Inn Road, and Nipper greeted him with an eager glance.

"Any news, gov'nor?"

"Nothing extremely vital. What about the negatives? Any result?" Lee inquired.

"I think so; yes. We shall have at least one decent proof."

"Good! Be very careful how you fix them. I should get on with an enlargement. I have a number of things to do to-day."

"Are you going out again, gov'nor?"

"I think not. There is more to do inside."

"I have had a ring from Harker, while you were out, gov'nor," the lad said. "He rang up from the Hermitage, so apparently he has rigged up the 'phone again down there."

"What has he to say?"

"He has made one or two important discoveries."

"Ah—he has?"

"Yes. He has been to the local railway station. The porter there testifies to a man having alighted from the eight-fifteen train.

He was a huge man—a giant. The porter swears he was over ten feet in height, but Harker puts it at about eight feet. And he was broad in proportion."

Nelson Lee's eyes had become suddenly bright. He stared at the lad with keen interest.

"We were fools not to have made inquiries at the station ourselves," he muttered. "What else?"

"It's rather strange that no one else saw the man," Nipper went on. "But the station is lonely and rather isolated. But the porter was full of it. He had never seen such a man. It seems to him more like a fairy tale."

Nelson Lee nodded and smiled.

"Well?"

"Nothing much else, guv'nor. The man was immensely tall, very broad, and walked with huge swinging strides. He carried a large Gladstone bag, and wore a soft felt hat, high in the crown, which added to his apparent height. When he handed his ticket to the porter, he asked him if he could direct him to the residence of Dr. Haroun."

"He asked the porter that?" queried Lee sharply.

"Yes. The porter offered to take him there, as there was not another train for an hour. But he shook his head and listened while the porter gave him the direction. Then he strode off, and that was the last the porter saw of him."

"He was alone?" Lee queried, frowning.

"Yes."

"And he did not return to the station later on?"

"He was not seen again."

Nelson Lee stared at the lad thoughtfully, pacing slowly up and down the room.

"All right, young 'un," he said eventually. "Get on with the negative. This affair will perhaps straighten itself out."

Among the many minor arts and crafts of which Nipper had become a skilled exponent not the least was the art of photography. It was a subject which had always interested him, and it was for this reason, perhaps, that he had made it a careful and most elaborate study.

Before they had left the Hermitage, the previous night, Nipper had taken some photographs which might possibly prove of overwhelming importance—powerful links in the chain of evidence which was to elucidate the mystery of Dr. Haroun.

Now he passed back into the simple but effective dark-room set aside for the purpose, his face a pale crimson in the soft rays of the red lamp, peering down over the negatives, as he rocked them patiently in acid solution.

When Nipper had returned to his task Nelson Lee moved over to the 'phone and demanded a number quickly.

"Hallo! Are you there? Is that the Coburn Empires Syndicate?"

"Yep," came the sharp reply.

"You have a list of the artistes working your circuit, I presume?"

"Sure thing! Who's speaking?"

"My name is Lee," the detective said. "Nelson Lee. I'm making a few inquiries—"

"Detective? Look here, Mr. Lee, there ain't anything wrong, I hope. Our little syndicate is on the square."

"Nothing wrong with the syndicate at all. There's just a couple I'm interested in. Benefit under the will of a client—you follow?"

"Ah, sure—that sounds better. Who are these guys, Mr. Lee?"

"Their names are Johann Vandenburg and Frederick Ortheris," Lee said. "Possibly comedians of some sort."

"Don't know 'em," the voice said promptly. "I know every performer on our switch—every solo and double turn, that is, Mr. Lee."

"Oh, I believe these two belong to a troupe," Lee added. "The—er—let me see—the Grimaldi Troupe of—"

"Grimaldi Troupe? Ah, yes. We've still got them. They've been on our books for some years. They are just in the middle of a third tour. But as to Mr. Vanderbuggle—or whatever his Anglo-Saxon tally is—I can't say exactly what people the Grimaldis have got with 'em now. We pay them en bloc, and they make their own arrangements. But, half a minute, though. Hold the line, will you, Mr. Lee?"

Lee waited, drumming on the table with his fingers until the voice of the theatrical agent came again.

"I happen to have a little list here—just remembered. Had to draw it up during that last Government inquiry about foreign artistes working in this country. Had to put down their nationality and all that. I've got the Grimaldi Troupe amongst 'em here. What name were these two? Let's see. Johann Vandenburg and Frederick Ortheris. Is that the radiant pair?"

"Yes," Lee said eagerly.

"Well, they are still with the Grimaldi Troupe. Got stage names, of course. Call themselves 'Thelong and Shortovit.' Do you get me?"

"Do you mind spelling that out?" Lee said.

The agent spelt out the names, and Nelson Lee smiled as he made a note of them.

"Where are the Grimaldi Troupe this week?" he asked.

"Let's see. Grimsby—er—Norwich. Norwich this week. Week after they go to Ipswich."

"Thanks very much," Lee said, putting up the receiver.

He seemed satisfied to an extent, as he moved into the laboratory, and, closing the door behind him, he put on over his dressing-gown the loose white mantle which he always wore when conducting chemical experiments.

He was in the laboratory for some time—time well spent, although it deepened the mystery. For in the sample of whisky taken from the glass in the dining-room at the Hermitage he found enough prussic acid to form a fatal dose!

There was a deal of such work to be done in this case. He had to make further inquiries

of the railway people, and also to send the copy of the hieroglyphics found tattooed on the arm of Dr. Haroun to be deciphered by an expert at the university.

In the thick of it all Harker arrived to talk things over.

"What news?" Lee asked him.

"Nothing fresh. The chief is rather pleased with what we have dug out. Have you managed to let any fresh light in, Lee?"

"I've managed to clear one or two items up," Lee said, handing the Yard man a match. "But mine is what the chief would call 'fancy fretwork,' I suppose!"

Harker smiled.

"He certainly believes in going for big facts before you nose round for small ones. We've been discussing a little reconstruction. It seems to work out pretty well. We know our man, anyway, and he should be simple to find."

"How do you size it up, then?" Lee asked with interest.

"Very briefly. Mahomet El Hessim was murdered by this big fellow, who arrived by the eight-fifteen train. Leastways, we aren't sure it was actual murder. Might possibly have been manslaughter."

"In what way?"

"If El Hessim was killed by the fracture of the skull sustained by his fall, then it could hardly be called homicide. In any case, I don't think it was premeditated."

"No?"

"No. Otherwise the man would have been at greater pains to conceal his arrival. He would not be likely to have got out at a small railway station. He would most certainly not have asked the porter to direct him—thus establishing his destination. No. The chief reckons it was unpremeditated."

Nelson Lee nodded, for the logic was sound.

"I reckon that between the two men there was some quarrel, some difference of opinion about something or other. The big fellow may have been threatening to wring the Egyptian's neck unless he acceded to some request or other. This puts the wind up El Hessim, and caused him to seek our assistance. He might easily get the wind up over a man of the size of this one. He knew that the big fellow could simply catch him up and snap him in two.

"Well, the big fellow came, and was met by a boy, who was already in the house. This boy was in co. with him apparently. He might even have been the subject of the dispute. One never knows. They come to the door of the Hermitage, and probably the Egyptian refused to let the man in. So the big fellow forced the door.

"After that there was a row, high words, and in a fit of fury the big man seized El Hessim and shook him like a rat, threw him down—and killed him. That put the wind up him. He made a hasty search for something among the Egyptian's papers, then took his departure. Whether he left the boy behind or took him with him we can't say—not yet; but we know our man, and the

first thing to do is to secure his arrest. Probably when we get him all the rest will be cleared up."

"It will undoubtedly clear up a good deal. But excuse me a moment, Harker. I want to put a call through."

Nelson Lee moved over to the telephone.

"I want a trunk call," he said in a low voice—"the Gala Theatre, at Norwich. I want the manager. Yes, the Gala. Will you get them for me at once, please? Thanks!"

He returned to his chair, and Harker went on.

"The big man is our quarry," he said. "The theory doesn't cover all the details we dug out together. But the chief is not very keen on snow prints. They are so easily obliterated. They lead you up the garden more often than they prove anything."

"On the other hand, I consider snow prints as being very often tantamount to a confession," Lee said quietly.

"The chief says go for this man. Aim at the big facts, and the little ones will fall into place," Harker said. "You remember that you expressed the opinion that El Hessim was strangled by his own ape, Lee?"

"Yes."

"You arrived at this chiefly because of the big span on the throat and the immense force with which he had been hurled down, didn't you?"

"More or less, perhaps."

"Then this man provides it. He probably has the hand of a giant. There is no doubt but that he is immensely powerful. It leaves very little doubt in my mind that he was the assailant."

"And how about the three glasses of whisky?" Lee asked.

"An attempt on the Egyptian's part to mollify him, probably. Three glasses were poured out. The boy probably didn't touch his. It is pretty clear."

There came a ring at the telephone, and Nelson Lee moved over, speaking in a low voice into the receiver and listened intently. He put his questions so that Harker could not hear them very distinctly.

After a few minutes he put up the receiver and drew in a deep breath, pursing his lips. It was with Lee a sign of profound satisfaction.

"This affair looks pretty mysterious," Harker said, looking over at him. "But I think we've touched the button, Lee."

The detective nodded thoughtfully.

"It's a pretty straightforward reconstruction, Harker," he admitted. "But if you are forming a complete picture out of a set of jig-saw puzzle pieces, there isn't much satisfaction in leaving out a piece just because it is small. The small parts are just as much parts of the whole picture as the big pieces. I will tell you how I differ from you and your opinion."

The Yard man listened attentively.

"In the first place," Lee said quietly, "you assume that the giant arrived at the station

done. I am of the opinion that he did not!"

"What? The boy came with him?"

"There is no boy in it. It is mere supposition."

Harker looked at him, amazed.

"But surely, Lee—the porter's evidence——"

"The porter is an observant fellow; but he is wrong. Two people arrived by that train. Two people arrived at the Hermitage—as we saw by the footprints. And two people—the same two—left together, which we did not see by the footprints."

The Yard man gazed at Nelson Lee, bewildered.

"Two people!" he muttered. "But——"

"Two men!" Lee said quietly.

Harker stared at Lee and then at the fire. Presently he was gazing at the detective again.

"Then one of them must have left the station by another way, unobserved."

"The second man left by the same way," Lee insisted. "In the big man's bag!"

Something akin to a snort broke from the Yard man. He stared at Nelson Lee, his brows contracted deeply.

"In his bag?" he cried incredulously.

"Yes. The big fellow carried him!"

"Then he must have been a decidedly small man," Harker said.

"He was. He was a dwarf."

"A dwarf!"

"Yes. The pair were Goliath and David—giant and dwarf. Railway fares are an expensive item these days. It is a method which would recommend itself to anyone who had similar opportunities. When they were safe from observation the giant released his small companion, and they walked together. That was how we saw the footprints. When they left the Hermitage the big man was carrying his friend in the same way. Hence the absence of any signs but those of the big man's boots and—one other!"

"What was that?" Harker asked.

"Something of which I took careful measurement," Lee said. "The square imprint of a bag, with four metal studs equidistant from each corner!"

The Yard man stared at Lee for a moment, and then a gasp escaped him.

"Vale of Jehos, but I believe you're right, Lee! A giant and a dwarf! Accomplices in murder! What a stunt! That makes our task even easier."

"Much easier," said Lee.

"We'll get this pair in custody and squeeze the truth out of their strange bodies. Our first job is to secure them," said Harker.

"On that point we are agreed," Lee said with a smile. "If necessary, you can put your hands on them to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes. I know where they are. Do you feel like a journey to Norwich?"

"Why to Norwich?"

"You will find this couple performing there at the Gala Theatre. They appear in a company of animal trainers, calling themselves the Grimaldi Troupe."

"By Jehos, Lee, but this is good news!"

"Their stage names are Thelong and Shortovit. Actual names, Vandenburg and Ortheris."

"Thelong and Shortovit!" echoed Harker. "What's that—Polish?"

"No," Lee said, smiling. "Hybrid English. It was that name which first set me thinking hard about certain matters. Don't you see anything peculiar about——"

"Jove, yes! It didn't occur to me at first. The long and the short of it! The giant and the dwarf!"

Nelson Lee nodded and smiled.

"I was speaking to the manager of the Gala Theatre just now," he said. "He told me that Vandenburg and Ortheris did not appear at the theatre last night. They stayed at home, the big man being; so he said, indisposed. That is an important item, Harker!"

"Vital," said the Yard man. "I'll take a trip to Norwich to-night, and have them apprehended immediately after the show. I did not think we should be as smart as this, Lee. The mystery will be solved probably before to-morrow."

"I wish I shared your optimism," Lee replied. "But any way, they should——"

The head of Nipper appeared round the door. During the whole of Harker's visit there had come no sound from the dark room. The lad had been intent on his work.

There was now upon his youthful face a look of intense eagerness and excitement.

"I've got it out—a perfect print, guv'nor," he said. "Will you come?"

Nelson Lee glanced at Harker and rose from his chair.

"Nipper has stumbled on something. I can tell from his face," he said.

"What has he been doing? Developing those photographs?" the Yard man asked.

"Yes. He says he has a perfect print. If he has, Harker, then we have secured the most vital clue of all."

"Of course; yes. The imprint upon the glasses will, ten to one, be that of the man who committed the crime, and who rifled the safe—the man we are after!"

"What is the betting that it is our friend, the giant?"

"Ten to one!" said Harker, with confidence.

Nelson Lee merely shrugged his shoulders, refusing to commit himself, and, leaving Harker in the chair, he crossed to the dark room.

The red lamps had been switched off, and in its place a powerful white electric light switched on. Upon the table were a number of baths and chemicals.

"What luck?" Lee asked quickly.

"Most promising, guv'nor," the lad said with suppressed excitement. "There were

six negatives altogether. Of these, three show nothing tangible at all. Too blurred and indistinct for anything. The other three are good; two, quite excellent."

"Splendid," said Lee. "Which are they?"

"There is one off a wineglass. That is good. Another off a wineglass. That is excellent. The one, too, I took off the piece of negative we found in the safe is perfect. The hot, sensitive surface of the glass after the explosion reproduced an excellent impression almost without any enlargement."

Nelson Lee nodded with keen satisfaction.

"Couldn't be better," he said.

"By the way," said Nipper. "One of the bad negatives is useful, too. It shows the edge of a swirl corresponding to our impression of El Hessim's thumb!"

"Good again!" Lee exclaimed, recognising the importance of knowing the Egyptian's fingerprints, so that they might be eliminated. "Let's see your prints."

Nipper produced the photographs, and together they bent over them until Nipper handed Nelson Lee a fifth print—taken some time ago—and a low, peculiar whistle drifted slowly from Lee's lips.

It was some time before the two of them joined Harker outside. The Yard man was drumming impatiently upon the arms of his chair.

"Something to interest you, Harker," Lee said. And the C.I.D. man sprang up with alacrity. "You see this print?"

"Yes; it's very clear. Deucedly good!"

"That was taken from one of the wine glasses. You see this fragment here? Showing the edge of a swirl? Would you say they belonged to the same man?"

"Yes," said Harker, after a careful examination. "Yes; it is!"

"What of that one?"

"This is a proper cast," Harker said promptly. "Perfect in every detail. But it is the same print of the same man."

"El Hessim!" Lee said quietly. "We took the cast of this thumb before we left. It shows that he was one of the party and that he actually raised his own glass. Now, look at the others!"

Nelson Lee handed the Yard man two more prints. After a careful examination he pronounced them identical.

"They are!" said Lee. "What is more, Harker, this is the thumb-print of the man we are after!"

"How are you sure of that?"

"Logical certainty," Lee said. "We may take it that the murderer of El Hessim was the person who drank the whisky with him, and who subsequently rifled the safe. We may also take it for granted that the safe was blown open and rifled after the murder—eh?"

"For a certainty!" Harker said.

"Then, if we have a fingerprint which appears on one of the wine glasses and also on something inside the safe—a print which is

not the Egyptian's—it is logical to assume that it is the fingerprint of the criminal!"

"Without a doubt," Harker agreed.

"Then you have the prints there," Lee said. "The one in your left hand was taken from the wine glass. The one in your right—that very plain one—was taken from a piece of broken negative which was in the safe, and which the criminal must have taken hold of, probably when he was searching for—for what he sought!"

Harker glanced eagerly at Lee, and then at the two prints. His eyes glistened.

"A vital clue, Lee!" he exclaimed. "A vital clue!" He waved the prints in his hand. "This is our man. We've got him! Mr. Vandenburg, the giant from the Gala!"

"You still think that, Harker?"

"Certain of it," the Yard man said, his lips coming together firmly.

"There's one more print," Lee said quietly. "Look at it. I got it from my collection—my private collection."

Harker took it, peered at it eagerly, and then looked up sharply.

"The same print! The same man!" he cried. "Identical, Lee!"

"Would you stake your reputation on that, Harker?"

"Yes, I would!" the Yard man said promptly.

"So would I," Lee said. "And the strange thing is that I know whose fingerprint this is!"

"You do? Whose?" Inspector Harker cried.

"Well, I can soon explain," said Lee. "I have not been so idle as you may have imagined. I have no idea why the giant and the dwarf went to the Hermitage. They may tell us themselves. But I do know that under the will of El Hessim they inherit a certain strange envelope sealed with the seal of the Sacred Beetle. What was in that envelope I do not know. But I do know this: that was what the murderer sought, found, and took away with him. For it was not in the safe when Nipper and I examined the contents."

He paused, and Harker made a gesture of impatience.

"Go on!" he urged.

"In this will, which you can see for yourself at the offices of El Hessim's solicitors, Messers Moore, Fogg & Co., the murdered man speaks of the giant and the dwarf as his old comrades, so I presume they were in his troupe at some time. That rather connects the crime with the dead man's showmanship days. I thereupon had inquiries made in the stage profession, and it was easy enough to find out several things.

"Weeding out the important from the unimportant, El Hessim toured South America for some time, and made a deal of money out there. Vandenburg and Ortheris were with him then, and he was in partnership with a Spaniard named Carlotta, who has now retired and is living somewhere in

Spain. Another member of the troupe, was also a Spaniard, named Juan Vadillo."

Harker looked up sharply.

"The name is familiar, but I can't place it," he said.

"You will in a moment. The Juan's skill lay in the art of hypnotism. He used to hypnotise members of the audience, and all that sort of thing. But he was greedy, and on his return to this country with the troupe, he used his hypnotism to make robberies all the easier for him. In short, he dabbled in crime and was very successful in his way. Owing to his extraordinary eyes, the crooks of the underworld called him the——"

"The Hawk!" cried Harker. "I remember him, now. We caught him two years ago and he went to prison for robbery."

"I was in on that case," said Nelson Lee. "That is how his fingerprints happen to be in my collection. Harker, the man who murdered El Hessim is Juan Vadillo, the Hawk! But why he murdered Dr. Haroun, why he took that envelope, what is in it, and what it means—that we have yet to discover! But the connection's there. Link by link, we are weaving the chain! I have sent the hieroglyphics on Dr. Haroun's arm to be deciphered by an expert, but so far I have not yet heard the result. But the net is closing, Harker. Make no mistake about that!"

CHAPTER 8.

The Long and Short of It!

A TELEPHONE call to Scotland Yard soon placed Detective-inspector Harker in possession of the startling information that Juan Vadillo, alias the Hawk, had been released from prison, at the expiry of his sentence, a month previously, and a little reflection reminded the Yard man that the letters from El Hessim appealing for protection had been written during that month!

Even then, his mind was inclined to be more occupied with Johann Vandenburg, the giant, than Juan Vadillo, who was a slim-built man of medium height, and therefore totally unable to throttle El Hessim, lift him from his feet and hurl him to the ground, so that his skull was caved in against the bronze fender.

Nothing would satisfy Harker but that he went at once to Norwich, armed with full authority, as fast as cars, aeroplane and train could take him. And Nelson Lee and Nipper went with him, because Lee was anxious to hear all that Vandenburg had to say.

It was easy enough to find out where the incongruous pair were lodging, and easy enough to make sure they were in by following them home from the theatre. Five

BILLY BUNTER



is one of the leading characters in Frank Richards' yarn dealing with the thrilling holiday adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. in Egypt, entitled:



BILLY BUNTER'S BARGAIN

which appears in today's MAGNET. A quainter or more mirth-provoking fellow than Billy Bunter of Greyfriars you could not wish to find. He never fails to make you laugh with his amusing and amazing adventures. Be sure and read this great yarn in

the Famous School Story Paper

The **MAGNET** Now on Sale. **2^{D.}**

minutes after they had entered, Nelson Lee knocked at the door of the house.

"Mr. Vandenburg from the Gala Theatre?" he asked.

"What about him?" said the landlady, who had learned the advisability of caution.

"And Mr. Ortheris?"

"What about 'em?"

"We would like to see them, please!"

"I don't know that there's anybody of that name staying here," she said. "If you'll wait——"

"Thanks!" said Lee, and before the landlady could utter a protest, he and Harker stood with Nipper in the little hall.

The landlady passed up the stairs, and a moment later they heard the deep rumble, which was the voice of the giant, followed by the yapping of the dwarf.

"We ain't in! We don't live here! Tell 'em to 'op it!" snapped Ortheris audibly. "Don't be a great fool. Joe. It's that tailor—I know! I ain't paid him, and——"

Harker glanced at Lee, and the next moment, uninvited, they strode over the threadbare carpet of the stairs.

The landlady, meeting them on the landing, frowned and looked perturbed. Then, in anxious dumb show, she beckoned them forward, indicating the room with her thumb, and winking, saying at the same time in a severe tone:

"It's no use you coming up, gentlemen. Them gents don't live here. I've never heard of 'em."

Nelson Lee could not repress a smile, but his face was stern, as was that of the Yard man, as they pushed open the door of the small bed-sitting-room, which constituted the apartments of the strange pair.

It was an ordinary room in an ordinary house, but it was rendered remarkable by the fact that two beds stood end to end—the couch of Vandenburg.

The giant himself sat upon a box by the fire, his eyes turned rather apprehensively towards the door. He was a tremendous man, even in a sitting posture, and the size of his head and face were large, even for his massive shoulders.

He looked for all the world like the pictures of the giant in the pantomime, except that his face was not so hideous, and was certainly lacking in any expression of fierceness or aggression.

It was a weak and rather childish face, with something resembling a pout about the lips, and two large eyes, the expression of which were almost cow-like in their meek placidity.

Ortheris, the dwarf, was not to be seen, but the eyes of both the detectives were turned upon the box on which Vandenburg was seated.

It was one of the many places of concealment in the room which the dwarf might have found useful.

Harker stepped forward quietly, assuming his official capacity.

"Mr. Johann Vandenburg, I believe," he said.

"Ja!" said the big man, rather nervously.

"I am a detective from Scotland Yard. I have a warrant here for your arrest, and for——"

"Vot is dat?" The bovine placidity disappeared from the eyes of the big man. They became startled like the eyes of a hare.

"A warrant for your arrest, Mr. Vandenburg, and also——"

"No, no! Dot is not true! For me?" The giant rose and towered over the detectives

It seemed that he could have taken the three in one clasp of his mighty arms and crushed the life from them. And yet the man seemed totally unaware of his own strength. He seemed scared—afraid.

Harker was about to repeat what he had already said twice, when there came the familiar "Yap-yap" of the dwarf, issuing from somewhere—exactly where neither Lee nor Nipper could determine.

"Chuck 'em out, Joe—chuck 'em out!"

"My warrant is for you and also for your companion, Frederick Ortheris!" Harker said.

"Who?" inquired the yapping voice again, and a head appeared from over the top of the big ewer which stood upon the washstand.

Nelson Lee laughed—he could not help it. The effect of that red face—and bald head—popping out from the ewer like a jack-in-the-box was indescribably funny.

The fact that the little man was angry made him all the funnier. His face was scarlet with rage and he glared at Harker balefully.

"Here!" he cried shrilly. "Don't come any of your spruce on us, old chicken! Joe and me ain't done nothing. You better 'op it! Chuck 'em out, Joey, before I start drorin' it across 'em meself!"

The little man had scrambled out of the ewer, and as he stood up beside it on the washstand it became obvious that he had not been at very great pains to conceal himself inside it.

He was an elderly little man, and badly in need of a shave, which made his appearance all the more ludicrous.

"It is my duty, as an officer of Scotland Yard," Harker said, ignoring the little man's violent speeches from the washstand, "to arrest you both on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Mahomet el Hessim, of the Hermitage, Redbridge."

"El Hessim! Murder?" gasped the big man; and then his nerves seemed to get the better of him. He became almost pitifully afraid.

"No, no!" he cried. "I do not know anything, sir! Me and Tich—we know nothing, please!"

He spoke in the guttural tones of a Dutchman—which he was—and his pronunciation of English was very imperfect.

"Please, sir, I tell you all that happen. I—I——"

The dwarf had sprung—or rather, fallen—down from the washstand, and the little man was consumed with rage. He darted over and kicked hard at his companion.

"Stow your gab, you bullock's brains!" he said fiercely. "Get out of it before I drop you one! I'll see these blokes!"

The big man stopped obediently, and there was a look, not of anger or contempt, but of real appeal in his eyes, as he gazed down at the dwarf beneath him.

Vandenburg seemed to accept it as quite a reasonable possibility that Ortheris could "drop him one." The dwarf himself seemed quite confident of his ability to carry out his threat.

He controlled his big companion much as a small nigger controls an elephant. Now, he stepped forward and, with folded arms, struck a ridiculous attitude of defiance. His rage increased under the smiles of the detective.

"Look here," he said, "you can rub them grins off your dials. What d'you want? Let's hear your business, and then 'op it! Joe and me wants our supper."

"I have told you once!" Harker said sharply.

The dwarf frowned and directed a look of very real contempt at the Yard man.

"If you wants Joe, you wants me!" he said. "If you wants me, you wants Joe. You won't part us, but I'll warn you of this," added the little Cockney freak fiercely, "you don't lay your hooks on Joe until I've heard all about it—so now! You touch 'im, and you'll hear about it—from me!"

"You are his bodyguard, I suppose?" Lee said, with a smile, for the little man obviously regarded himself as the other man's protector in more ways than one.

"I dunno nothink about bodybelts. What's more, I don't know what business you've got to chip in, neither. I don't care, anyhow, whether you're coppers, or 'tecs, or what. You don't touch Joe till I know what it's for."

"In that respect I can oblige you," Harker said. "I want both of you."

"What for?"

"For the murder of El Hessim—better known as Dr. Haroun."

The little man stared hard at Nelson Lee.

"You're a holy friar!" he said suddenly, but his assertion was in the nature of a rather scared question. "He ain't murdered! Haroun done in? He can't—"

"I must warn you," Harker said quickly, "that anything you say now may be taken down and used as evidence against you."

"Against me?" queried the dwarf irritably. "Don't be a fool. I ain't done nothing. Nor's Joe."

"You will have every opportunity to prove that, Ortheris. I am sorry to interrupt your supper. If you will accompany us to the station, and care to—"

"Station!" gasped the little man, and the mention of it seemed to bring realisation suddenly.

The police-station to him was the tangible symbol of the law. He looked over quickly at the big man, whose expression showed a mixture of fear and stupidity.

"Look here, boss," the dwarf said quickly

—and with a changed tone—"you ain't going to take us to the station?"

"Those are my instructions," Harker said.

"For murder?" the little man gasped.

"For being concerned in the murder of El Hessim."

"But we ain't been concerned in it, guv'nor," he cried. "Straight, Joe and me is innocent!"

"Where were you last evening?" Harker asked quietly.

"Here—in Norwich—honest!"

"At the theatre, I suppose?"

"Yes, boss. Me and Joe give our turn as—"

"You are lying! You did not!" the Yard man barked suddenly.

"No! We did not! We—we—"

"Stow your gab, Joe!" yapped the small man fiercely, "or I'll—"

"Den tell dem de truth, Tich," rumbled the giant.

"Look here, boss, we'll make a clean breast of it," the dwarf said. "We was going to lie low because—because things didn't look very rosy. We been to the Hermitage, Joe and me. We went last night."

Harker nodded, writing quickly in his notebook.

"How did you go?"

"By train," the small man said. "We have never been there before."

"You took two tickets," Lee put in quickly.

"Yes," said the small man, staring over at him.

"You lie again," Lee said sharply.

"Tell dem de truth, Tich," said the big man hoarsely. "Ve only took vun, sir. Tich travelled in my bag. I carry heem!"

Nelson Lee glanced over quickly at Nipper. Here was the proof of at least one theory.

"That's right. Only, I thought you might be a railway detective," the dwarf said. "Joe carried me out through the barrier in his bag. We walked up through the snow to the wall what runs round the 'Ermitage, or whatever he calls his house. Then—"

"Just a moment," Harker said calmly. "Why did you call on El Hessim?"

"He was an old boss of Joe's and mine. We used to work for him."

"But you say you've never been to his house before?"

"No, we ain't, not to the Armistice—I mean, Hermitage. Have we, Joe?"

"We neber go at all except last night, sir," the big man asserted, nodding vigorously. "But we know Dr. Haroun very vell. Him old pal. Travel round de globe—ja!"

"But what made you leave your performance and go to Redbridge last night?" Harker asked.

"We had an urgent call from him."

"A letter?"

"No—by the telephone. He rang up the theatre."

"He knew where you were performing, then?" Lee said.

"We didn't know he knew," the dwarf said.

"We hadn't heard nothink of him for over a year, had we, Joe? Nothink! We was sur—"

prised to get his message. He asked us to come at once. Both of us. Extra urgent."

"Did he say why he wanted you?" Harker asked.

"No, he didn't," the small man replied. "Straight, boss! It's gospel truth I'm telling you, ain't it, Joe?"

"Himmel—ja, mynheer. Dot is right, sir," rumbled the giant anxiously.

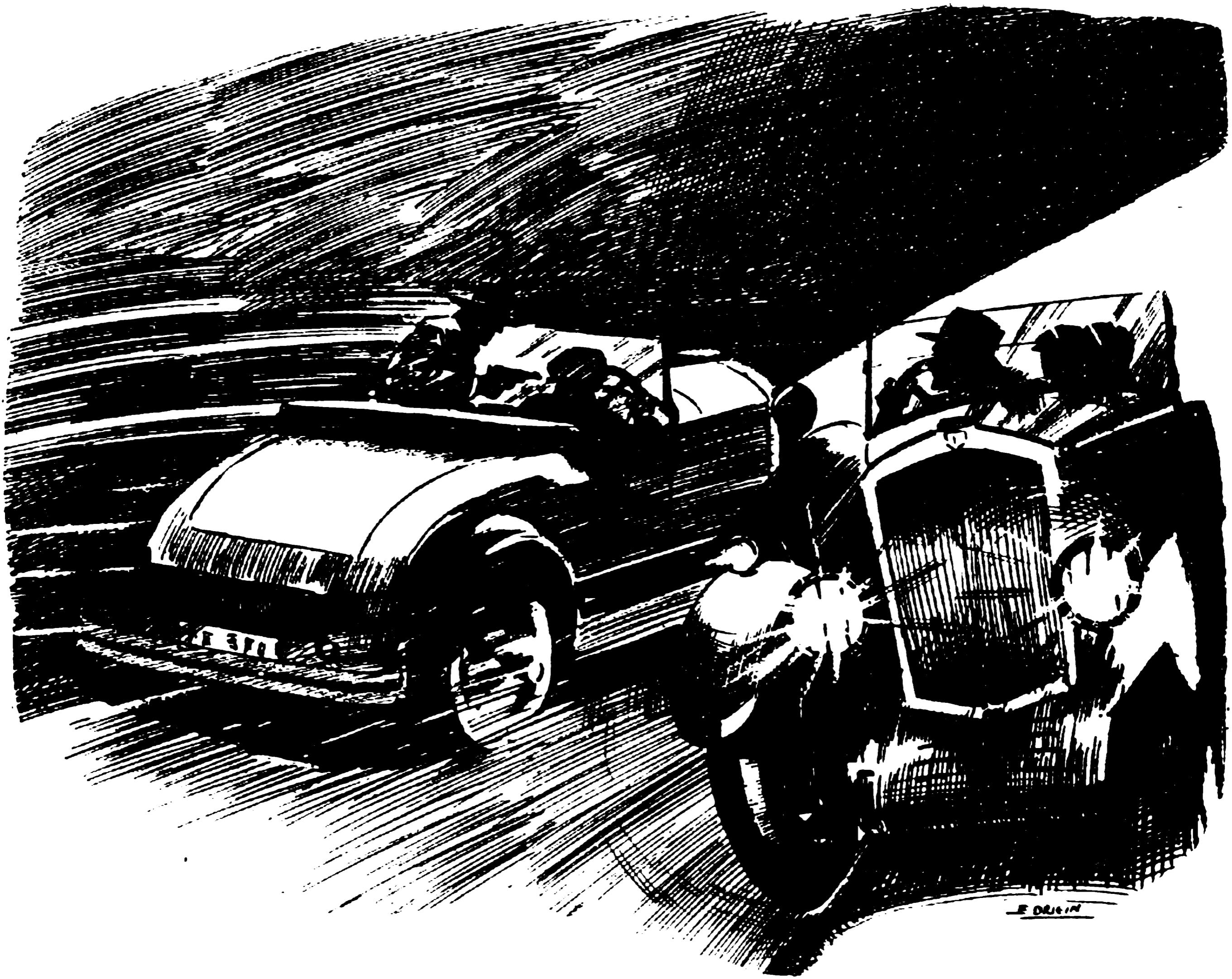
"And you visited Dr. Haroun last night—eh?" the Yard man went on, looking down at the dwarf, who had climbed up now on to a corner of the table.

head he took the pencil, and in a heavy, painful hand jotted down a few sentences in low Dutch.

Harker handed the paper to Nelson Lee, and resumed his questioning of the midget.

"You were saying a little while back," he continued, "that you reached the wall of the Hermitage. What did you do then?"

"Joe waited while I went up to the house to have a nose round. In the telephone message Hessim told us to be careful how we came up to the house, but he wouldn't say why."



In a second the rocking car had flashed by—but in that brief moment Nelson Lee glimpsed a figure that stood swaying on its feet, holding a revolver that pointed directly at the man at the wheel!

"Yes, boss."

Harker took a leaf from his notebook and a pencil, and pushed them across.

"Just jot down there exactly what your movements were on leaving the railway station," he said.

"I can't write," said the small man promptly.

"Then perhaps you will, Vandenburg."

"He can't write neither—not English," said the little man, and seemed intensely relieved to think he had countered the Yard man. But his relief was short-lived.

"Then let him write it in Dutch, or Flemish, or German," Lee said quietly.

It took the big man some minutes to grasp exactly what Harker required of him. But when once the idea had sunk into his great

"And I suppose you went up to the house and whistled for your pal—eh?" Harker said.

"Nothink of the sort, boss!" snapped the dwarf. "If you ask the questions I'll do the answering. I don't want you setting traps for me—and that's straight."

"Very well," said Harker, a little piqued. "What then?"

"I went back and told Joe the house seemed quiet and O.K. So he popped over the wall, and we came up to the front door."

"Did you notice anything strange about the front door?" Lee asked.

"Yes; it had been forced a bit, it seemed. But Joe and me didn't take much notice. It might have been done by one of the animals! that Haroun had about him."

"And how did Haroun, or El Hessim, seem when he let you in?" Harker asked; and once more the little man on the table glared at him balefully.

"Come off it, gov'nor!" he said fiercely. "You don't catch old birds with sieves and clothes pegs. What are you trying on?"

"I asked you a straightforward question," the Yard man said sharply.

"Then I'll tell you straight in reply," said the small man. "We didn't see Haroun!"

"You didn't see him?"

"No. Did we, Joe?" He glanced over at the big man, who nodded vigorously. "We knocked for half an hour. Raised the dead, we did, on that knocker. But we got no reply. We wondered what was up, after him 'phoning for us like that. So we beat it round the side of the house and to the back; and we looked in through the door windows."

"And did you see anything?" Harker asked.

The dwarf turned to his giant companion.

"Tell 'em what we see, Joe," he said.

"We see Haroun on de floor—lay down," said the Dutchman. "Ve could not see verree much. I said to Tich, I break in. See vot is de matter. Him look dead——"

The eyes of the big man were almost starting from his head with terror. His broken English gave no real meaning of it. His face and eyes spoke volumes.

"That's it," cried Ortheris shrilly. "We see poor old Haroun stretched out in a manner which put the breeze up both of us. Joe was going to break in and see. I say, 'No. Half a minute! We don't want to stand no one else's rub! Go easy for a few minutes. P'r'aps I can git in another way!'"

"And did you succeed?"

"I'm telling you! We walked round the house till we came to a small lean-to wiv the roof and a winder over it."

"Give us a bunk up here, Joe," I says. And I 'ops up and gits on the window sill. But it was a blamed good job I didn't get in, else I shouldn't have got out again. Haroun had still got Pharaoh prowling about, like he always used to!"

"Pharaoh?" Lee queried, feigning ignorance.

"Yes, a bear! He'd had it for years. We knew Pharaoh well enough in the old days, didn't we, Joe? But he didn't know me, of course, out there on the sill, trying to raise the sash. He come at me with a spring, and smashed the pane as he tried to grab me. It scared me a bit, but it fair put the wind up Joe. Didn't it, Joe?"

"And you couldn't get in?" Harker queried.

"No. I reckoned we'd do better to 'op it. As it was, we was leaving our trail about us in the snow. So I hops in the bag again, and Joe took me off quick. Didn't we, Joe? He carried me two miles to a tram terminus. From there we went to Liverpool Street, and caught a late train down last night."

"You swear that to be the truth?" Harker asked sharply.

"On my oath, boss!" the small man said.

"Himmel—ja!" the big man echoed.

"Do you mean that you left the Hermitage without entering the house—that you were content with a purely fruitless journey?"

"We wasn't content; we had to put up with it. Besides, we didn't like the look of things."

"What do you mean by that?"

"What we see—through the French windows—at the back!"

"You suspected there might have been foul play?" Harker asked.

"Yes."

"And yet you take to your heels without a word to anyone!"

"Bad news can wait," the dwarf said sulkily. "Me and Joe didn't want to be roped in. But it seems we might jest as well have gorn to the p'lice right away. Besides," he added, "we didn't know that it was foul play. He mighter bin asleep, all we knew. He might have been drugging a bit. He always did dope, Hessim did. But there was the off chance it was foul play, and me and Joe didn't want to be mixed up in it!"

"What had you to be afraid of?"

"Nothink! But you never knows what sorter case the cops is going to make out against you if they put their minds to it. We was in a fix, and the first thing we thought of was getting clear. We couldn't do nothink!"

"Had you gone to the police station you could easily have proved your statements."

"Yes," said the dwarf, "and be roped in on a trial, or somethink, or detained and not able to give our turn. What would the troupe do? And how would the police care how Joe and me got on if we lorst our contract through it? No, I said to Joe, 'If someone's done the dirty on poor old Haroun, it can't be helped. It ain't us.' Didn't I say that, Joe?"

"Dot is so," said Johann Vandenburg.

Nelson Lee looked over at Harker and took up the questioning, plying the dwarf and the giant with sudden, trivial questions. But neither of them corrected their statement or had to pause to consider their reply.

Harker came over to Lee and peered down at the leaf from his notebook upon which the giant had written in his native language.

"Does it compare?" he murmured in Lee's ear.

"Yes. What the man says here corresponds exactly with the midget's story."

"H'm! They're either speaking the truth or they are deucedly clever liars," the Yard man growled.

Nelson Lee shrugged his shoulders, glancing at Nipper. This statement, made by the dwarf Ortheris, which Harker had recorded in his notebook, was identical in every particular with Lee's careful reconstruction.

The story which Nelson Lee had built up from the snowprints had been perfect in every particular, except that he had omitted, strangely enough, to perceive the footprints

which must have been left when the two men passed round to the back and peered through the glass of the French windows to see the tragic spectacle in the library of the Hermitage.

The dwarf's statement bore out the evidence of the boy who had taken fright and run. It corroborated the evidence of the footprints leading up and down the steps in front, round the back to the small outhouse.

It confirmed Lee's assumption respecting the attempted entry through the window, and that in making a hasty retreat the dwarf had been carried in the brown handbag of Vandenburg, as he had been from the station.

Harker's lips were pursed as he faced them.

"I shall have to search you, please," he said. "If you have nothing to be afraid of, you will submit readily."

"Oh, ja! Search eef you like. Here I am!" rumbled the big man, stepping forward and extending his huge arms.

"I don't see it's necessary," cried the dwarf angrily. "Haven't we told you everything? I— Joe, quick!"

Harker had seized the little man by the arms, pinning him tightly, hoisting him up on to the table, where he kicked and raged in an access of fury.

"Grab his legs; he's quite a little Tartar!" Harker said, somewhat out of breath.

Nipper seized him by the legs, and, helpless, the dwarf turned and reviled his companion for permitting the outrage.

"Shot oop, Tich!" the big man said appealingly. "Let dem search you. It is no matter. Ve haf done notings."

Nelson Lee, beckoned by the Yard man, stepped forward and ran his hands through the pockets of the dwarf, taking out a few small papers and one or two articles of no value.

From the pocket of his coat he took a small phial containing pale yellow pellets about as big as a sixpence.

A strange, uncomprehending look came into the face of the detective as he peered at them.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "Prussic pellets!"

It was the poison, the sediment of which he had found in the whisky—El Hessim's whisky—he had analysed a few hours before!

CHAPTER 9.

The Clue of the Hieroglyphics!

"I HAVE here," said Nelson Lee, looking over at Nipper, "a note from Professor Marron, the Egyptologist, about the hieroglyphics upon El Hessim's forearm."

"What does he say?" Nipper asked eagerly.

"It is short, and to the point. I'll read it," the detective said.

"My dear Mr. Lee,—The hieroglyphics which you send me interested me very much, though I confess I find them a little puzzling. They are not technically perfect, and the message they appear to convey seems so much jargon, so far as its historical bearing goes. It seems as though a student of this form of cipher had used hieroglyphics in which to express some phrase with an up-to-date bearing, employing them as a form of code."

"Exactly," said Nipper. "The professor is an astute fellow, guv'nor. I suppose you did not tell him what—"

"Nothing at all," Lee said. "I simply sent him my copy to make the most of. But listen:

"The characters, so I should judge, refer to a certain object of value which appears to be buried under a house somewhere abroad. The figures 43 and 11 are mentioned, with a reference which inclines me to the belief that they indicate a certain latitude and longitude—a difficult fact to render into Egyptian, for the Ancients, of course, knew nothing of terrestrial and astronomical divisions. I have glanced at the map and find that Lat. 43 and Long. 11 intersect somewhere near the coast of Galicia, in Northern Spain—if this interests you. But I must warn you that this assumption of mine is not infallible.

"In addition to the hieroglyphics, I notice that there is indicated two figures—seemingly meant for men. I thought at first that it indicated a man and a child, but there are certain indications in perspective which point to a huge man and a very small one, possibly an Abyssinian, and a member of the dwarf tribe of Africa.

"That is my best impression of this rather weird little document. I trust it may help you in your research.

"Yours very sincerely,
"RODERICK MARRON."

As Nelson Lee finished reading he glanced up and caught a meaning glance in Nipper's eyes.

"The giant and the dwarf again, guv'nor," he said. "It looks as if El Hessim had inscribed a portion of his will in tattoo upon his own body."

"Probably in case the document were lost," Lee said thoughtfully.

He went over to the bookcase and studied carefully an atlas of the Iberian Peninsula.

"This reference to Spain may be important," he said. "One must not forget that Dr. Haroun was on tour for a long time all over the world with his troupe, which contained at least two Spaniards—Carlotta, his partner, and Juan Vadillo, alias the Hawk. This mention of Galicia may refer to either of them."

"Or both of them," added Nipper.

"It is possible," agreed the detective.

Nelson Lee leaned back in his armchair, for he and Nipper had returned from Norwich, leaving the law, as represented by Inspector Harker, to take its inevitable course in respect of Vanderburg and Ortheris.

But Nelson Lee had returned with a kink in his chain of evidence which set him wondering strangely. The discovery of the Prussic acid tablets upon the dwarf had upset his calculations.

That bottle was a powerful point for Harker's first assumptions of the guilt of this strange couple. The anger of the dwarf and his resistance to search was another. Could it be that they were the guilty parties after all? Were they clever enough to so arrange their tracks as to lead Nelson Lee utterly astray? And then to arrange a story so careful in every detail that it confirmed all the detective's logical premises?

"What are these?" Lee had asked the dwarf, referring to the prussic tablets.

"Cough lozenges!" the little man had snapped viciously. "Will you try one?"

And then the huge man had interrupted again, realising in his dull way, apparently, that his companion of the few inches was jeopardising their chances by foolish displays of temper.

"Dot is tablets to put to sleep der animals for always," he had rumbled. "Dis morning we poison vun elephanter. Veree old; too old for de show. Tich put him away. He doctor all der animals."

Lee had interviewed the manager of the Grimaldi Troupe before leaving the cathedral city, and he had found that the big Dutchman had spoken the truth.

Ortheris was the unofficial "vet." for the troupe. He doctored some animals, trained others, and when some became too old he killed them off. Only that afternoon a firm of fat distillers had carted away the carcass of an old elephant.

"Yes, we always use the prussic tablets," the man told Lee. "They are quick and easy. One kick, and the fellow is 'out.' It is very humane. Yes, they are favoured by most menagerie keepers."

Even after this, however, the coincidence kept Nelson Lee thinking. He was preparing, now, to review once more the whole complex problem when Harker came in, nodding and throwing his hat down upon the table.

"Well?" said Lee. "What now? How's the case?"

"All joints and cross pieces, like a wire fence," the Yard man said, with a fed-up grunt. "We've got our men now, but they're a regular box o' tricks, Lee. We seem to be getting no forrarder. I've been trying to squeeze a confession out of them, but they stick to the same story—every line!"

"It may be they're sticking to the truth."

"Bah! No; those prussic tablets were a sad smack for that little reptile, Ortheris. He raised Halifax when we tried to search him. He had forgotten to tuck 'em away. A bad

oversight that, Lee. But they're clever, and no mistake! They've worked it all out, and they've got a nice story by heart. Can't catch 'em tripping any old how."

"You're tried, then?"

"Well, Ortheris made a long statement this morning. He says that he and Vandenburg were first brought together under the management of Doctor Haroun, who was then travelling England with an animal and magician show. That was years ago. They toured Belgium and Germany together, and then went out to the Argentine for a spell, where they made quite a lot of money. Haroun then struck up a partnership with a Spaniard named Carlotta, and did very well indeed. After three years Carlotta returned to Spain, and El Hessim sold the goodwill of the show and came back to England, where he retired and settled down as a sort of recluse!"

"A weird sort of recluse, too," Lee said. "Was he quite right in his head? Did they say?"

"I asked Vandenburg that, and he said 'No.' Haroun was badly mauled by an elephant with the distemper, or something, and had never properly got over it. He was rather melancholy and addicted to drugs."

"And do they remember Juan Vadillo?"

"The Hawk?" said Harker. "Oh, yes! They know him as Vadillo, not as the Hawk. They say that Vadillo and Haroun were always quarrelling over something. They never knew what it was. Vadillo left the show before Haroun retired, and the Egyptian seemed glad to see the back of him. Vandenburg and Ortheris have not seen nor heard of Juan Vadillo since, and don't want to, apparently."

"Both these johnnies tell the same yarn, Lee. When the Egyptian settled down at the Hermitage they got a job on a circuit here with the Grimaldi Troupe. Two years ago El Hessim sent for them and told them that they were to benefit under his will. If he died first they were jointly to receive a certain document. He would not tell them what it was, but Ortheris said that he elicited a little information here and there, and believed it referred to certain valuables which El Hessim had collected and concealed somewhere or other. Neither of them paid a great deal of attention to it, as there did not seem any immediate possibility of the Egyptian dying. That is their yarn, Lee!"

"And how often have they seen El Hessim since?"

"Not at all until the night before last," Harker said with a sceptical smile. "They are a clever pair of birds, Lee. We shall have a job to bring it home even now."

"To what part of Spain did this man Carlotta retire?" Lee asked carelessly.

"I never heard. Wait a bit; they did mention some place that sounded to me like sardines. But it's of no consequence."

"Isn't it?" cried Lee. "Here, Nipper, here's an important wireless message I want sent out. Get a taxi and buzz along to the G.P.O."

He scribbled the note while Nipper hailed a taxi.

"To Don Miguel Cerveza, Consula Inglesa, Corcubion.

"Do you know anyone named Carlotta between Corunna and Vigo? Man I want is retired from show business in Argentine. Believe wealthy and owns large house in your district. Reply direct.

"NELSON LEE."

Don Miguel Cerveza was the British Consul at Corcubion and an old friend of Nelson Lee's, and the detective did not doubt but that the answer would be expedited on his behalf.

He was right. Nipper waited barely half an hour, and then came dashing back to Grays Inn Road with the reply.

"Yes. Know Carlotta quite well. Lives Sardinero. Runs cinematograph in Corcubion and Teatro, in Coruna. Retired showman."
"CERVEZA."

Lee's lips came together firmly, and his eyes glistened.

"Sardinero?" he exclaimed. "Lat. 43, long. 11. Jove, Nipper, we've struck a trail! The Hawk wanted something—that document—out of Doctor Haroun's safe. That document referred to the valuables that Haroun intended leaving in his will to Vandenburg and Ortheris. He knew that the Hawk meant to get those valuables—meant to find out where they were. And he was afraid."

"And where are they, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"The secret is told in the hieroglyphics," said Nelson Lee. "Carlotta has them at Sardinero. The chances are the secret is also revealed in the document which Vadillo stole from the safe. 'Phone the aerodrome, Nipper. The Hawk must be well on his way to Spain by now, and we'll have to follow."

CHAPTER 10.

The House of Don Carlotta!

IN the patio of the Hotel Francia at Corcubion, Nelson Lee met Don Verveza, the British consul, a man as fearless as he was nomadic, whose friendship Lee had gained years ago in South America, and which had always been maintained.

He had assimilated Nelson Lee's rapidly spoken story with a number of quick nods and a calm which was not characteristic of his race. It had already been found out that a man answering to the description of Juan Vadillo, alias the Hawk, had landed at the port from a steamer only that morning.

"And you think he has gone to Sardinero?" said Don Cerveza.

"For a surety, yes," Lee said.

"To the Casa Carlotta?"

"Si!"

"You mean to pursue him?"

"I must. I need a guide."

Don Cerveza took the detective to his room in the hotel, and drew him to a bureau, from the drawer of which he took a revolver and indicated another lying there.

"Shall I need two?" he asked. "For I shall come with you. I know the way."

"I warn you, old friend," said the detective. "The encounter may be desperate."

The eyes of the Spaniard gleamed suddenly. His teeth showed white as he smiled.

"Diez!" he exclaimed. "You would not believe how dull things are in Galicia."

Thus it came about that the car which sped out of Corcubion on the westward road carried a welcome addition to Lee's forces.

Peasants in the rustic attire of the province stepped into the sparse hedges long before the car approached and waited, watching them with a curiosity which was still fresh.

The quaint outskirts of the Spanish town were quickly left behind. The stretches of the fields and poorly cultivated land gave place to a broad vista of desolation. A vast, undulating moorland, dotted with great boulders, rolled away on either side of the road.

It was here in these fastnesses of Northern Spain that the historic brigands had made their last stronghold.

It was a powerful car which Lee was driving, with a perfect engine and a magnificently sprung body which laughed at the undulations of the road. In the body behind Cerveza lolled back, eagerly expectant. Beside Lee at the wheel sat Nipper, peering ahead.

The sun had sunk long since over the grey uplands, and the dusk was deepening quickly. Nelson Lee bent and switched on the vivid headlights, which illuminated the rather narrow road for a long distance.

For some time they sped on in silence, until the dusk deepened into night and a sudden fall in the temperature brought a white mist rolling down upon them.

"How much farther?" Lee asked, turning to the Spaniard behind.

"Not very far, Senor Lee. But you must be careful in a moment. You see where that ridge falls and ends in a small precipice on the brink of that road? There is a dangerous curve at that—"

He sprang up suddenly, and Nelson Lee peered ahead, though he did not slacken speed. Ahead of them, round the curve in the road, there appeared on the mist a vivid luminance, as if a fog had suddenly been lit up from behind.

It grew brighter and more vivid as they approached. Suddenly Lee slackened—an instinctive measure of precaution which saved their lives.

For the luminance had become suddenly concentrated in two blinding points of light. It was as if two burning eyes had flashed suddenly into being.

They seemed to hang for a moment on the curve, and then dart forward, straight at them, dazzling, blinding.

"It's a car, gov'nor! Look!"

Had Nelson Lee tried to stop or back he would have courted disaster. In the instant that he realised that this was a huge car flying at a breakneck speed, he opened out, and their own car leapt forward to the edge of the road.

He swung the steering inwards and jammed on the brakes with such force that the whole car curveted like a horse.

In that instant there came a hoarse cry. It seemed almost in their ears. The blinding headlamps passed them. The bonnet of the incoming car missed them by an inch, and the hood bumped on to them and then rebounded as the car leapt forward on the straight road.

In the brief second that the car took to flash by, Nelson Lee caught a glimpse of a Spanish chauffeur at the wheel, his eyes bulging with fear, and behind him stood a slim, tawny man, a revolver in his hand, as if forcing the chauffeur to do his bidding at the point of a gun.

"Nipper! It's Vadillo! The Hawk!"

Nelson Lee sprang up from the wheel, snatching out his automatic. He had seen, and he had understood. The Hawk had found what he sought and was anxious to get away with it!

In that instant, as Lee started to his feet, the Hawk saw and recognised him. He half-turned and waved his hand mockingly—screaming at the top of his voice.

"Adios! Adios!"

He waved his free hand—the hand that gripped the revolver. Under the other arm he carried what seemed to be a small box. Nelson Lee fell forward and sighted along his automatic.

Crack! Crack!

A scream came suddenly from the receding car, and Juan Vadillo toppled forward across the side of the car, and the box he carried had fallen out into the road. A little farther on, as the car swerved wildly, the Hawk himself slid from the vehicle and dropped in a huddled heap beside the road, but the car, held on its way at a reckless speed, rapidly careering out of sight.

They approached the huddled heap cautiously. Nipper made a detour, then, suddenly darting in, snatched the revolver from the nerveless fingers of the Hawk. But the action was scarcely necessary. Juan Vadillo was not only badly wounded by Lee's bullet, but he was also injured by his fall from the car. Yet there was a contemptuous smile on his thin lips as he raised his head and gazed at Nelson Lee.

"So," he exclaimed, "you win, senior."

"Yes. The right always win in the end, Juan Vadillo," replied the detective.

"I always swore to get Haroun's treasure. Once," said Vadillo, "Haroun insulted me. I did not turn up at the show and disappointed his public. He was rude to me about that. I wanted revenge. I was never made for the show. I wanted bigger things."

He paused as a spasm of pain shook him.

"You knew about the treasure?" queried Lee.

"Yes, I knew he and Carlotta had it, but I did not know where they hid it. I told Haroun I would come back and wring the truth out of him—hypnotise it out of him, and then rob him. Ah, yes, he knew I would find him, sooner or later."

"I understand," said Nelson Lee. "I can fill in the blanks. When Haroun knew you had come out of prison he guessed you would visit him, and he was seized with panic. You entered the house, and he offered you drink, trying to reason with you. But the whisky was poisoned, so you made him take a drink himself from the decanter before you accepted one.

"And then, as you started to hypnotise him, Doctor Haroun called up his pets. The first to come was the ape. To save yourself you had to hypnotise the ape and force it to attack and kill its master. The brute throttled Haroun, then flung the body from him so that the skull crashed against the bronze fender. Then you ransacked the safe and found the will that left the valuables to Vandenburg and Ortheris."

"But it is marvellous!" gasped Vadillo weakly. Yet it is true. It was difficult, yet I did it. But I lose. Adios, senior. The game is up!"

His body went limp. There was a slight groan, and Juan Vadillo had gone to answer for his sins.

AND the treasure of Dr. Haroun's was found in the black box. It was a rope of five enormous black pearls of stupendous value.

Yet they did not all belong to Dr. Haroun. He owned it jointly with Carlotta. It had been found impossible to divide it equally without destroying its value, so the two men had agreed to keep it intact until one of them was in real urgent need of money, then it should be sold and the money divided equally. Meanwhile, the pearls were in the box and buried in a corner of Carlotta's garden, the secret of its hiding-place being told in two places, once in the hieroglyphics on the arm of Dr. Haroun, and once in the stolen will, by which Vandenburg and Ortheris inherited Dr. Haroun's half share.

Needless to say, the Hawk had had no difficulty in hypnotising Carlotta, and stunning his gardener and digging up the box containing the pearls. After that his one idea was to get away out of Spain, but Nelson Lee arrived a shade too soon for him.

Vandenburg, the giant, and Ortheris, the dwarf, were duly released. Carlotta sold the pearls and sent half the money to the two incongruous companions. Which ended, as far as Nelson Lee and Nipper were concerned, one of the strangest cases of their careers.

THE END.

(If you want a long Thrill don't miss next week's Powerful Detective-Thriller!)

Now Let's Have A Little Chin-Wag On Our Own, Chaps!

My dear Chums,—
Here's a conundrum for you: Why is the first of September of every year a red-letter day for boys and girls all over the world? That's an easy one. Because the Annuals are published on that day! There you are. I bet you all guessed that one, for who isn't looking forward to seeing what the new editions of your favourite Annuals are like?

Well, let me tell you. They are better than ever. Those named below are the pick of the bookstalls:

- "The Greyfriars HOLIDAY Annual," price 6/-.
 "The Popular Book of Boy's Stories," price 2/6.
 "The MODERN BOY Annual," price 6/-.
 "The New ZOO Annual," price 6/-.
 "The Modern Boy's Book of MOTORS, SHIPS & ENGINES," price 7/6.

This latter is a new Annual, and, let me tell you, a really remarkable book which gives the latest information and pictures of the engineering marvels of to-day.

A good many readers, so I understand from their letters, have saved up their money already to buy their favourite Annual as soon as it is published. That is a splendid idea. Of course, some of you may not be able to do this. But there are not many of you who, in the course of the next few months, do not receive an Annual either as a birthday gift or a Christmas gift from a thoughtful relative.

The great point to remember is, choose your book from the five mentioned above and you will be getting the best that money can buy.

NEXT WEEK'S PROGRAMME.

There are two great stories in next week's issue. One is the grand detective-thriller, and the other, the St. Frank's School tale. "Doublecrossed!" stars Nelson Lee, Nipper, Lord Dorrimore and Wolf in a most amazing series of adventures. It is packed with non-stop thrills and contains a sensational surprise at the end. My opinion, which will be yours next week, is that this yarn is one of the best yet.

"Waking Up St. Frank's!" features all your favourite characters, including one who has gained great popularity, Fighting James Kingswood, the new headmaster of St. Frank's. Fighting James continues his process of putting pep into the school, with astounding results. The tale is a winner all the way.



Letters to the Editor should be addressed to **NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.**

PEN PALS.

The following readers are anxious to make pen pals:

H. Quick, 21, Heber Street, Redfield, Bristol, wants correspondents; age 12-14.

Colin L. Chambers, 131, Cass Street, Ashburton, New Zealand, wants to hear from

any fellows interested in the Scout movement who would join the Ashburton-Scoutcraft Correspondence Club.

Jack Hastings, 19, Home Street, Wellington, New Zealand, wants to hear from readers who would like to join the Austral Correspondence Club.

Ronald Harris, 47, Ruskin Avenue, Sutton Road, Southend-on-Sea, wants correspondents.

Morris Kolsky, 63, Plumbers Row, Whitechapel, London, E.1, wants correspondents.

Donald Portwin, 5, Corio Street, Moonee Ponds, W.4, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wants correspondents in England: interested in football, cricket and stamps.

Ronald W. Wakeham, c/o Birdwood P.O., South Australia, wants correspondents in the United States and Canada.

K. Moody, 39, Aquila Road, St. Helier's, Jersey, Channel Islands, wants correspondents interested in stamp collecting.

Joseph Baguley, 34, Chalgrove Road, Homerton, London, E.9, wants to exchange stamps with readers anywhere.

Readers' Prize Jokes.

Old Lady: "I suppose you sailors are very careful when you go to sea?"

Sailor: "Not at all, mum, we try to be as 'wreckless' as possible!"

(M. Kutner, 22, St. Andrews Road, Stoke Newington, N.16. A penknife.)

Teacher: "William, what is a synonym?"

William: "Please, teacher, it's a word you use in place of another when you can't spell the other one!"

(J. Finegan, North Park, Doneraile, Co. Cork. A grand prize.)

Rich Motorist: "One gallon of petrol and hurry up. It's push you need here. That's how I made my money. I pushed and pushed."

Garage Boy: "Well, sir, you'll 'ave to push some more. There ain't a drop of petrol in the place!"

(J. Shaddick, 16, St. Aubyn Street, Devonport, Plymouth. A pocket wallet.)

The HEAD'S FOE!

There is no question about the popularity of Fighting James Kingswood, the new headmaster of St. Frank's, in spite of the fact that one or two are mystified by his occasional nocturnal expeditions into the neighbouring countryside.



Kingswood adds to his popularity by offering a boxing belt to the lower school, and with the aid of a friend in the boxing profession, one Kid Williams, he conspires to bring Archie Glenthorne, the slacker, into the list of competitors with great success.



Quite Funny!

"WELL, that's that!" said Reggie Pitt complacently.

"That" was the winning knock in the Remove versus Fourth match. The game had been quite a good one, as such Form games go, and the Remove had won comfortably—proving clearly enough that that other memorable game had been a flash in the pan. This afternoon, Boots and his men were not inspired, as they had been then.

Yet they had played good cricket—much better cricket than formerly. The Fourth was alive now—and enjoying itself much more, in consequence. And the Remove Eleven had found that it could not take things easily, as of yore. All the players had been forced to do their utmost.

But as it was practically tea-time, and as a few spots of rain were falling—the sky having become overcast again—it was decided to call it a game, since there was really no object in carrying on full time.

"Well, you managed it, you Remove bounders," said Bob Christine, grinning. "But you've got to admit that Handforth was lucky. We nearly had him in the slips twice—"

"Lucky, be blowed!" said Handforth. "What was the matter with your fieldsmen? Got butter on their fingers, or something?"

"We won't argue," chuckled Bob. "Let's go along and sample Mrs. Hake's special ice cream—"

He broke off suddenly, an expression of startled surprise coming into his eyes.

"What's wrong?" asked Reggie Pitt.

Bob Christine gulped.

"Am I seeing things?" he gurgled. "Am I dreaming? Look! Can you see what I can see?"

All the cricketers turned and stared. Then they jumped.

Certainly, there was every excuse for their bewilderment.

Who should be in sight, attired in airy shorts and running-shoes, but Archibald

Winston Derek Glenthorne himself! Trotting beside him was a burly, cheerful-looking man, also in running-shorts, with the addition of a white sweater.

"Who said that the age of miracles had passed?" asked Vivian Travers. "The one and only Archie—running! What's come over him?"

"Hi, Archie!" yelled Handforth.

Archie and Kid Williams were on the farther side of Little Side, and it was quite evident that they had no intention of pausing near the cricketers. They were off to the meadows, beyond, and apparently making for the towing-path.

But, hearing that hail, Archie called a halt.

"The lads!" he explained, with a wave of his hand. "Priceless chappies, Kid, old thing. What about a few introductions?"

"Don't know as we ought, sir," said Williams. "Standing about won't do you any good."

"Oh, but really we haven't started yet!" protested Archie. "Might as well let the populace know. I mean to say, these chappies belong to the Remove—and they'll be frightfully delighted to hear that I've decided to win the good old Belt!"

"Mebbe you're right," said Mr. Williams, nodding. "O.K. with me, sir!"

They trotted towards the white-flannelled cricketers, and soon they were completely surrounded.

"Greetings, all!" beamed Archie. "Allow me to introduce Mr. Kid Williams."

"Pleased to meet you, young gents!" grinned the Kid.

"I really don't know his real first name," said Archie, "but it doesn't matter."

"Percy, sir," said Mr. Williams apologetically. "When I was a kid, I was called Perc."

"Good gad!" said Archie, horrified.

"I know, sir," agreed Mr. Williams. "That's why, when I went in for boxing I called myself the 'Kid.' Bit of an improvement, eh?"

Great School Story, "WAKING UP ST. FRANK'S!"



There came a rending crash as the rotten woodwork of the bridge collapsed, and the next moment juniors and housemaster were sent hurtling into the river!

"Let us not pursue the painful subject," said Archie. "Well, chappies, what about it? I haven't heard the thunderous applause yet. What about the good old congratters?"

"Before we congratulate you, Archie, we want to know what you've done," said Handforth.

"It's not what I've done, old scream—it's what I'm going to do!" said Archie. "Mr. Kid—that is to say, Mr. Williams—is my trainer."

"You're—what!" went up a yell.

"That's rather biffed you in the mid-riffs, what?" smiled Archie. "But it's absolutely official, laddies! My trainer!"

"Fact, young gents," grinned the Kid. "We fixed it up this afternoon. And let me tell you this—Master Glenthorne is going to surprise the natives!"

"You can cut out that 'going to' stuff," said Travers. "I can give you my word that he has surprised the natives already!"

"You'll be dashed delighted to hear, old things, that I'm going to win the Kingswood Belt for the Remove," explained Archie calmly.

"Whaaaaat!"

"It's as good as mine already!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a chuckle at first, and it only came from a few of the startled juniors. Then it swelled, and grew, and before long all the young cricketers were howling with merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Archie!"

"Archie, the fire eater!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gradually, Archie's expression changed. He looked pained at first, and then startled and finally indignant.

"Odds insults and slurs!" he shouted. "What's the dashed idea, dash you? Where's the joke?"

"Oh, dear!" sobbed Reggie Pitt, holding on to Grey for support. "You're the joke, Archie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

If there was one thing needed to determine Archie Glenthorne once and for all, it had now been supplied. His Form fellows regarded him as a joke! They shrieked with laughter at him! His pride had been touched—his dignity hurt. From that moment onwards he was prepared to move Heaven and earth to win the Kingswood Belt. Nothing should stop him—nothing should hinder his triumphal progress to success.

"Laugh, dash you!" he said, his voice quivering. "Kid, old dear, we'll be going! Take no notice of these blighting blighters! I'm absolutely ashamed to acknowledge them as my pals!"

"Cheese it, Archie!" said Reggie, suddenly becoming serious. "No offence, old man."

"Rats!" said Handforth aggressively. "It's like Archie's beastly nerve to butt in! Doesn't he know that I'm going to win the Kingswood Belt for the Remove?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By George! Are you laughing at me now?" gasped Handforth.

"You're even funnier than Archie!" said Buster Boots, grinning from ear to ear. "What's the matter with you poor, pitiful Remove chaps? Don't you know that the Kingswood Belt is going to be won by the Fourth? You can't produce a man to lick Lawrence? What's the good of trying? You know jolly well that Lawrence stands in a class alone!"

"Does he?" said Pitt promptly. "Well, it's about time that the Remove produced somebody to knock Lawrence off his perch."

"Thanks!" said Ernest Lawrence good-naturedly.

"Nothing personal, old man," said Reggie. "We're your pals, and I don't think that anything can ever spoil our friendship. But if the Remove can produce a man to lick you in this boxing contest I rather think that the Remove will have proved its superiority in the Junior School!"

"Absolutely," said Archie, nodding. "Frightfully sorry, Lawrence, old thing, but I'm afraid your sun is setting. A couple of murky clouds, in the shape of my fists, are on the dashed horizon. You'd better do some snappy training, old thing, because I'm well after you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And as Archie trotted off, with Kid Williams by his side, the juniors forgot the argument, and roared with fresh laughter.

But Mr James Kingswood, who had witnessed everything from the seclusion of his garden—which was near by—smiled quietly to himself.

"So far, so good!" he murmured. "I don't think my judgment is at fault. Young Glenthorne possesses the same grit, the same stamina, the same determination as his brother. He is a winner!"

And Fighting Jim was delighted at the

success of his harmless, but well-intentioned, little ruse. Certainly, Archie Glenthorne was well off the mark, and there was not a doubt in the Head's mind that he would stay the course.

Mr. Pycraft Shows His Teeth!

BY mid-evening everybody in the school had heard of "Archie's latest."

The seniors, of course, took little or no notice. What went on in the Junior School was quite beneath them. But in the Junior School, Archie was the sole topic of conversation. He had come back from his run looking more or less "all in," and he was not quite so enthusiastic as he had been—although his determination was as granite-like as ever.

"You've done fine, young gent—and after a few days of this you'll revel in it," declared Kid Williams. "You leave yourself completely in my hands, and I'll make you forget that such a thing as a cushioned lounge was ever made!"

"At the moment, old thing, I'd rather not forget it!" said Archie. "I mean to say, where's Phipps? Kindly lead me to that same dashed lounge. The good old bones are slightly dithery."

"Which only shows, sir, that you're out of condition," said Mr. Williams complacently. "Well, I'll let you have an hour's rest now. But after that I shall need you in the gym for a bit."

"Oh, I say! Not really? Not to-night?"

"Why, sir, you're not weakening already?" asked the Kid, shocked.

"Good gad, no! Never let it be said!" exclaimed Archie hastily. "I'll be there, old thing."

Mr. Williams was much in evidence. He had established himself as an inmate of the Ancient House; a room had been provided for him, and it had been arranged that he would take his meals with Phipps. So he really fitted in quite smoothly.

And before long he became quite a popular character. Handforth and Travers and Pitt and the others liked him immensely. There was something remarkably likable about this bluff, honest, smiling boxer.

He was the very antithesis of the "bruiser" type. He was clean limbed, clean minded, and one of Nature's real gentlemen.

Not everybody approved of him.

Mr. Crowell, for example, regarded Kid Williams with a frown. Mr. James Crowell was the Remove master, and, generally, he was a very fair man.

But he was shocked to learn, via one of the prefects, that Kid Williams was a fixture, for a week or two to come, in the Ancient House. Mr. Crowell felt that it was his duty to have a word with Mr. Alington Wilkes, the Housemaster.

"Are you aware, sir, that young Glenthorne has imported a professional boxer into the school?" asked Mr. Crowell bluntly.

Old Wilkey regarded him with a smile.

"I know that Glenthorne has engaged a trainer, yes," he replied.

"A professional boxer, sir."

"Is that anything against him?"

"Well, do you think that it is quite the thing?" asked Mr. Crowell diffidently.

"Certainly, I know nothing against the man, and I do not wish to be unfair, but it is hardly in keeping with the dignity of the school——"

"Perhaps it is just as well, now and again, to forget the dignity of the school, Mr. Crowell," said Old Wilkey gently. "I can assure you that Williams is a man of exemplary character. Mr. Kingswood vouches for him; it was Williams, indeed, who was personally associated with our headmaster when the latter won the heavyweight championship of this country."

"Oh, well, that is a different matter," said Mr. Crowell, relieved. "If the headmaster is fully aware of Williams' presence, and approves, then I have nothing more to say. Nothing of that nature, at least. But I would like to add that I am distinctly pleased to see that Glenthorne is stirring himself."

"There's more in that boy than we know of," said Old Wilkey, with a chuckle. "He comes of sound, solid stock, and his loafing is more or less a pose. When young Glenthorne puts his mind to a task, he goes at it wholeheartedly. I rather think he's going to surprise us."

"You really believe he is in earnest about this training?"

"I'm certain of it, and, as far as I'm concerned, I am going to give him all the help I can," said Mr. Wilkes. "I'd like you to do the same, Mr. Crowell. You are his Form-master, and a word of encouragement from you now and again, will go a long way."

"You may be sure that I will do more than that," smiled Mr. Crowell. "I will relax on his studies, since he is determined to go all out for the Kingswood Belt."

THERE was another master who was vastly interested in the introduction of Kid Williams into the school. Mr. Horace Pycraft, to be exact, was in a state of heated indignation. As it happened, he had been away that afternoon, and he knew nothing of the matter until he returned—and then, crossing the Triangle, he caught sight of Kid Williams calmly sitting on the stonework on the top of the Ancient House steps.

"Hey!" said Mr. Pycraft sharply. "What are you doing there, my man?"

"Me?" said Mr. Williams. "I'm waiting for my young boss."

"You—you what?"

"Master Glenthorne."

"What are you talking about?" said Mr. Pycraft unpleasantly.

"You're going out of your way to be snappy, ain't you?" said the Kid, staring. "Master Glenthorne has engaged me as his trainer. He's going in for boxing, and I'm

going to knock him into shape. Anything else you'd like to know, sir? My name's Williams—Kid Williams, of Camberwell."

"Well, upon my word!" gasped Mr. Pycraft. "The impudence! The astounding effrontery. Do you imagine for one moment, you common fellow, that you can remain at this school?"

"Mebbe I am common, but that's nothing against me, is it?" retorted the Kid truculently. "Go to Camberwell if you like. Ask anybody in the streets if they've ever heard a word agin Kid Williams."

"Bah!" snapped Mr. Pycraft, turning on his heel.

He almost ran towards the Head's house. Rather foolishly he took it for granted that Archie Glenthorne had engaged the boxer without consulting anybody in authority. And Mr. Pycraft was determined to have the man thrown out without a minute's delay. He had a particular delight in going to the Head, too, for the Form-master had not forgotten what he had seen during the night.

He fairly bounced into Mr. Kingswood's presence.

"This is an honour, Mr. Pycraft," said the Head gently. "I am not aware, however, that I invited you to attend me this evening."

"Sir, I make no apology for bursting in upon you like this!" said Mr. Pycraft nastily. "It is my duty to tell you that the discipline of this school is being set at nought. The very dignity of St. Frank's is outraged. A low, common boxer, a pugilist, a bruiser, has been engaged by Glenthorne of the Remove——"

"One moment, Mr. Pycraft," interrupted the Head ominously. "Did I understand you to say a common bruiser?"

"I will add to that, sir; I will describe him as a drunken good-for-nothing!" shouted Mr. Pycraft. "Oh, that's surprised you, hasn't it? Allow me to inform you, Mr. Kingswood, that I was awake last night when you brought that drunken ruffian into the school."

"Is that all you have to say, Mr. Pycraft?"

"I protest, sir, I protest strongly," went on Mr. Pycraft excitedly. "Not content with allowing the junior boys to play fast and loose with authority, you must needs bring this pugilist into the school. Make no mistake, Mr. Kingswood. I saw you bring Williams here, and I saw Williams' condition. I object to this man being in the school. Good gracious. Do you realise, sir, that I have to rub shoulders with the fellow?"

"That will be Williams' misfortune," said Mr. Kingswood calmly.

"Really, sir."

If Mr. Pycraft had been less excited he would not have exposed his hand like this. But he had been foolish enough to imagine that the Head would crumple up. For Mr. Pycraft had come to the conclusion that Kid Williams knew something to the Head's dis-

credit, and for that reason Mr. Kingswood had allowed him to remain.

"I won't stand it!" shouted Mr. Pycraft shrilly. "I'll let everybody in the school know the truth about the wretched man. I tell you, sir, I saw him last night——"

"What you saw last night, Mr. Pycraft, is of no interest to me," interrupted Mr. Kingswood, rising to his feet. "I know Williams to be a man of absolute integrity, and I should advise you to be very careful what you say. I will add that I am only keeping my temper with difficulty. This interview is ended."

Mr. Pycraft backed away.

"I was only doing what I thought to be my duty, sir," he faltered. "I don't think it is right that this man——"

"What you think, Mr. Pycraft, does not interest me in the least," snapped Fighting Jim Kingswood. "I tell you frankly, sir, that I am just about sick of you and your complaints."

"Sir."

"You heard me!" roared the Head, pointing to the door. "Now get out. If young Glenthorne chooses to employ Williams as a trainer, good luck to him. As for what you saw last night, you can shout it from the housetops if you wish, but before you do so you had better be quite certain of your facts. Williams is a great fighter, Mr. Pycraft, and if he chooses to settle matters with you in his own inimitable way I shall take no steps to protect you. So think well before you do any of that shouting."

Mr. Pycraft tried to speak, but no words would come. He fairly slunk out of the study, and he did not fail to hear the headmaster's expression of disgust as the door was closing.

Mr. Horace Pycraft had been an enemy before, now he was a much more dangerous enemy. For then and there he decided to leave no stone unturned until he had humbled James Kingswood in the dust.

Handforth Means Business!

"I'VE got to get some hooks," said Handforth thoughtfully.

It was nearly dinner-time; and the burly Edward Oswald was leaning against one of the chestnuts in the Triangle. Church and McClure were near by. Church was fixing a new roll of film to his camera, for he was an enthusiastic amateur photographer, and he had a secret hope of snapping Handforth to-day while the latter was in running kit, just to show him, in cold black and white, how out of condition he was. McClure was day-dreaming about a new pair of tyres for his bicycle.

"Hooks?" said Church, looking up. "What do you want hooks for?"

"Brass hooks ought to do," continued Handforth reflectively. "Or, better still, some of those ornamental ones with gilt knobs. They'll look jolly well in the study wall."

"Going to hang something up?" asked Mac, becoming interested.

"The belt, of course," said Handforth impatiently.

"What belt?"

"The Kingswood Belt, you fatheads!" roared Handforth. "After I've won it I must have some place to hang it."

Unfortunately he was interrupted at this point by loud and nasty peals of derisive laughter. Church and McClure seemed to have an idea that it was one of Handforth's jokes.

"I've never known such a chap," said Church, his mirth changing to indignation. "You're always counting your chickens before they're hatched. You poor ass. You've more chance of winning a coupon motor-car than you have of winning the Kingswood Belt."

"I've only got to lick Lawrence," said Handforth, staring.

"That's all!" agreed McClure. "And before you only lick Lawrence you've only got to lick Archie Glenthorne and Reggie Pitt."

"I don't count them!" interrupted Handforth impatiently.

"Then you'd better start counting now!" growled Mac, thoroughly exasperated. "Do you realise that you're absolutely out of condition? You're fit enough for football, of course, but football isn't boxing. Look at Archie. He's going into this thing earnestly and with tremendous determination. Unless you're jolly careful, Handy, Archie is going to give you the licking of your life in the eliminating contest."

"By George!" said Handforth, looking startled, as though the idea had never occurred to him before. "It wouldn't do any harm if I went into training, would it? There's no sense in taking things for granted. That's the worst of you chaps. You never think of anything. Why couldn't one of you have suggested days ago that I should go into training?"

Considering that Church and McClure had been suggesting it hourly all the week Handforth's remark was somewhat humorous. It was characteristic of him, however, to get a big hustle on now that he had come to the decision. Nothing would satisfy him but to dash indoors straight away and get into his running togs. He automatically appointed Church and McClure his trainers.

"What about old Crowell?" asked Church.

"What about him?"

"He might object."

"Don't be silly! Why should he object?"

"Well, he's rather fussy about afternoon lessons," said Church casually. "If we cut afternoon school he'd kick up an awful shindy."

Handforth was disgusted. On the way to the School House he gave his chums a bitter lecture on the unsympathetic attitude of Form-masters in general, and the beastliness of Mr. Crowell in particular.

However, as soon as lessons were over he bucked up considerably, and Church and McClure were only too ready to go for a run with him. He was their chum, their leader; and, although they took it for granted that he would be knocked out of the contest fairly early, they wanted him to put up a good show. Their loyalty was sound.

Handforth was all the more determined now, because the redoubtable Archie was making tremendous efforts. With Kid Williams in charge of him, he was rising at unearthly hours, running all over the countryside, jumping hedges and fences like a two-year-old, and putting in regular sessions in the gym. Furthermore, he had rigidly placed the tuck-shop out of bounds for himself, and the mere sight of an ice-cream—which he had hitherto been quite partial to—made him shudder. It was an eloquent indication of his earnestness that he had even cut out tea. Phipps sometimes brought him a cup of weak, washy stuff which went by the name of tea, but Archie knew better.

With such an example before him, Handforth was spurred on to great efforts.

"I'll show Archie!" he said grimly.

And off he went, with Church and McClure in attendance, for a brisk cross-country run. Archie's trainer was taking his man for a four-mile run. Good! Handforth would go for a five-mile run!

"And, what's more, I'll come back fresher!" he said confidently.

They cut across the meadows and took to the footpaths in order to obtain the welcome shade of the woods—for it was a sweltering hot afternoon.

"I wonder what the Head's doing?" said Handforth suddenly, as they trotted. "I saw him come out just before we started in hiking kit. There's something rummy about these rambles of the Head's. Where does he go? What does he do? Haven't you noticed that there's always something mysterious about his jaunts? He goes off into the woods and vanishes."

"Forget the Head!" said Church gruffly. "You've got a bee in your bonnet about him, Handy. You ought to know that Mr. Kingswood is as straight as a die; and your suspicions against him——"

"I'm not suspicious," interrupted Handforth. "But you've got to admit that there's something squiffy in his movements. On principle, I don't trust a man who does secretive things. I like people to be open——"

He broke off abruptly.

"Talk of his Satanic Highness!" murmured Church.

It was certainly rather odd that Mr. Kingswood himself should appear at that very moment from the trees of Bellton Wood, about half a mile away. The Head had not glanced in the direction of the boys, who were approaching the fringe of the wood across a meadow. Mr. Kingswood, in fact, was making tracks for some graceful, leafy willows which shielded the river from view.

"Observe the man of mystery!" said Mac sarcastically. "He comes out of the wood like the murderer of Maria Marten, and at the moment he is probably on his way to the Red Barn——"

"Fathead!" said Handforth, turning red.

"Well, don't be such a chump!" growled Mac. "The Head can't go out for an afternoon's stroll without you jumping to all sorts of idiotic conclusions."

Handforth was about to defend himself when he checked. Another figure had come out of the wood—and this figure was indeed furtive and mysterious. He came out with a little run, then he crept to a neighbouring bush and crouched behind it whilst he stared in the direction which Mr. Kingswood had taken.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" ejaculated Handforth loudly.

Considering that he prided himself on his detective abilities, this was an incautious act on his part. For the furtive figure fairly leapt round and revealed himself—although the boys had known it earlier—as Mr. Horace Pycraft.

And Mr. Pycraft's attitude of guilt was quite comic. But not so comic as his attempts to stroll off with apparent unconcern a moment later. He vanished amongst the willows, and Handforth & Co. gazed at one another in wonder.

"The spying rotter!" said Handforth indignantly.

"Eh?"

"You saw, didn't you?" demanded Handforth.

"Yes," said Church gently. "But you yourself——"

"Old Pieface was deliberately spying on Kingswood," continued Handforth darkly. "He was so jolly intent upon it that he didn't even see us. It's a pity he looked round. I don't know what attracted him——"

"It might have been your voice," suggested McClure mildly.

"Anyhow, he was shadowing the Head—spying on him!" proceeded Handy with some haste. "Did you spot how rattled he was when he turned round and saw us? Come on! Let's hurry!"

Even Church and McClure were intrigued. It was an uncommonly curious thing for a Form-master to act as Mr. Pycraft had been acting. Church and McClure could understand Handforth making an ass of himself by trailing the Head; but for Mr. Pycraft to do the same thing was extraordinary. It even gave some sort of corroboration to Handforth's own suspicions—as Handy was shrewd enough to see.

Reaching the willows, they came within sight of an ancient rustic bridge which spanned the River Stowe. And Handforth instinctively called a halt. For there, in the very centre of the bridge, draped artistically on the rustic wooden support, was Mr. Pycraft. He apparently wished it to be thoroughly understood that he was merely admiring the view.

"The cunning old fox!" whispered Handforth. "Trying to throw dust in our eyes!"

Kingswood has gone on, but Pycraft daren't follow, knowing that we were so close behind. By George! I know how to make him abandon the trail!"

"It's none of our business," said Church impatiently. "Let's go the other way."

"And allow Pycraft to 'tail' the Head?" said Handforth with a glare.

"Not likely! He deserves everything that's coming to him—and by the time it's come his enthusiasm will be a bit damped."

Church and McClure, observing that Handforth's gaze was fixed upon the rustic bridge, twigged. And, twigging, their faces split into wide, appreciative grins.

That rustic bridge was somewhat celebrated.

Its origin was lost in antiquity. Nobody knew who had built it, and nobody seemed to be responsible for its upkeep and repair. It had been badly in need of repair for years.

Mr. Pycraft, carelessly leaning on the rusty rail, apparently did not know that that rail was more for ornament than for use. And the crazy boards, under foot, were warped and rotted, as were the supports.

Still, as long as one crossed the bridge cautiously, there was no danger. Even a heavy man could pass over without risk.

But running across that bridge and jumping on it was distinctly foolhardy.

"Come on!" said Handforth loudly. "We can cut across the rustic bridge and then go by the footpath to Edgemore Lane."

"Go ahead!" grinned Church.

They went ahead. With Handforth leading and his chums close on his heels, they fairly thundered on to the bridge. And the bridge rocked and shook and quivered and shuddered.

"Boys—boys!" shrieked Mr. Pycraft, clutching wildly at the rail. "For Heaven's sake, be careful!"

"Hallo, sir!" greeted Handforth, thumping on. "Lovely afternoon, sir!"

The bridge swayed ominously.

"Hallo! There's something wrong— Look out!" yelled Handforth wildly. "This giddy bridge is heaving about—"

Craaaaaaash!

The entire centre of the bridge collapsed in fragments, and Mr. Horace Pycraft, with a fiendish yell, went hurtling down towards the placid water, followed by the juniors.

Splash! Splaaaaaaaash!

The three juniors did not mind in the least, for their airy running togs were not much heavier than swimming suits.

But Mr. Pycraft minded a lot. He was dressed in an ordinary suit, and there were all sorts of things in his pockets which would not be improved by this immersion. Moreover, Mr. Pycraft was no swimmer.

He came to the surface gasping, beating the air with his hands and gurgling with panic.

"Help!" he babbled. "I'm drowning! Help!"

(More fun and sensational adventure in next week's chapters of this Grand School Story.)

GROSE'S, Ludgate Circus, LONDON.



FOOTBALL JERSEYS

All Colours and Designs.

12/9 per doz.

SEND FOR ILLUSTRATED LIST POST FREE.



GEO. GROSE & CO., 8, New Bridge St., London, E.C.4

BE TALL. Your Height increased in 14 days, or Money Back—Complete Course, 5/-. Booklet free privately.—**STEBBING SYSTEM**, 28, Dean Road, LONDON, N.W.2.

BLUSHING, SHYNESS.—For FREE particulars simple home cure write Mr. HUGHES, 26, Hart St., LONDON, W.C.1.

STAMMERING. Stuttering, New, remarkable, Certain Cure. Booklet free, privately.—**SPECIALIST**, Dept. A.P., 28, Dean Road, London, N.W.2.

DON'T BE BULLIED!

Some special lessons in Jujitsu. Large Photo Plate of Japanese Champions and full particulars sent free. Stamp for post. Better than Boxing. Learn to fear no man.

Or send P.O. 1/- for First Part, to—"A.P.," "Blenheim House," Bedford Lane, Feltham, Middx.

BE TALLER! Increased my own height to 6ft. 3 1/2 ins. Treatment £2.2s.—Details 2d. stamp.—A. B. M. ROSS, Height Specialist, SCARBOROUGH, ENGLAND.

BLUSHING, Shyness, "Nerves," Self-consciousness, Worry Habit, Unreasonable Fears, etc. cured or money back! Complete Course 5/-. Details.—L. A. Stebbing, 28, Dean Road, London, N.W.2.

MY GREAT OFFER



Write for my free Bargain Lists of the best A.L.L. BRITISH cycles, 14 DAYS' APPROVAL. CARRIAGE PAID. Cash price £3 10s. or terms. All accessories FREE. Value 21/-.

2

WEEKLY

O'Brien THE WORLD'S LARGEST CYCLE DEALER, 17 COVENTRY

STOP STAMMERING! Cure yourself as I did. Particulars Free.—**FRANK B. HUGHES**, 26, Hart St., LONDON, W.C.1.

AGENTS WANTED to sell PRIVATE CHRISTMAS CARDS. Magnificent collection of beautiful Cards. Sample Book free. Highest commission. Valuable prizes. Apply Denton Ltd., Dept. D, 29, Accrington.

THE "BRITANNIA" AIR PISTOL.



A British Produced weapon upholding all the traditions of BRITISH WORKMANSHIP. Positively the most accurate MACHINE-MADE pistol ever produced at the price. Beautifully finished. Shoots with great force and penetration, being made entirely of BEST STEEL. It will wear for ever. Unrivalled for indoor and outdoor use. Target and Rat Shooting.

Price, plated, ... 8/6 each. With supply of Price, gun blued, 9/- each. Darts and Slugs.

Send for list of Guns, &c., post free, from the maker: **FRANK CLARKE**, 39/41, Lower Loveday St., BIRMINGHAM.

300 STAMPS for 6d. (Abroad 1/-), including Airpost. Barbados, Old India, Nigeria, New South Wales, Gold Coast, etc.—**W. A. WHITE**, Engine Lane, LYE, Stourbridge.