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November 12th, 1932,

Gripping Long Complete Detective Story of Non-Stop Thrills—

DESERT FOES!



CHAPTER 1.

The Disturbance at the Theatre.

IT may be set down as a truism that two-thirds of the adventures that happen to men are the result of sheer accident.

Lord Dorrimore and Nipper, Nelson Lee's assistant, happened to have nothing to do that particular evening, which saw them ultimately book a couple of stalls in a well-known West End theatre; and it was also

accident or sheer chance that arranged it so that they should not get to the theatre until close on nine o'clock, or at least an hour after the play had started.

Nelson Lee was in the North of Scotland at the time, but was due to return the following morning; and Dorrimore knew that Nipper, who always fretted after his guy'nor, would be glad of some sort of relaxation to pass away the time.

They reached the foyer of the theatre, and were just in the act of presenting their tickets

—Starring Nelson Lee, Nipper and Lord Dorrimore!

A strange adventure in the heart of London and the mysterious theft of a small jewelled brooch. These are two events which result in Nelson Lee undertaking an amazing quest—a quest which leads him along perilous and unknown trails through the Syrian Desert. This is a story which shows the famous detective at his best!



to the attendant, when there came from the wide passage that led round the boxes an angry shout, and the unmistakable thud of a hard fist against flesh.

"Hallo! What the dickens is that?"

Nipper made a rush past the attendant, and Dorrimore and the official, following, saw the youngster vanish round the bend of the passage from whence came the sounds of battle.

Sprinting after the youngster, Dorrimore reached the spot and saw a couple of men locked in each other's arms, squirming on

the thick carpet of the corridor. They were outside a box, the door of which was open, and an elderly gentleman—a rather fine figure, dressed in evening clothes and with silvering hair—was regarding the fight with an expression of keen dismay on his face.

"Now, then, gentlemen—now, then!"

The attendant, taking up this official rôle, slipped past Dorrimore and bent over the two struggling figures. Dorrimore noted that one of them was a slim, good-looking youngster, while the other was a bearded individual.

The bearded man had been wearing a turban, for the folds of that head-dress now lay in a heap close to the wall. So far as Lord Dorrimore could see, the youngster was distinctly getting the worst of it; for, although he had managed to get the under hold on his adversary, the man with the beard had wrapped a pair of lean hands round the youngster's neck and was setting to work in a very effective and cool way to choke the life out of him.

Already the youngster's face was growing red and swollen, and, realising that quick measures were imperative, Dorrimore shot past the attendant, and, gripping at the lean brown wrists of the elderly man, he gave them a fierce tug.

The tall aristocrat felt that he was handing bands of steel, and the extraordinary strength of these wrists struck him at once. But Lord Dorrimore had a command of strength that few men can boast of, and, after a first ineffectual effort, his second, more powerful one, saw the bronzed hands released from the throbbing throat.

By this time the attendant had gripped the half-strangled youth round the waist, dragging him clear. Dorrimore, still holding on to the tough wrists of the lean, brown-bearded man, allowed his prisoner to rise to his feet. A pair of dark, very calm eyes regarded him as the owner of them dropped back against the wall beside the box; then Dorrimore, noting that there was no trace of rage—nor indeed of any other emotion—in the rather handsome brown face, released his grip on the wrists.

But he took care to step in between the man and the young, dishevelled figure in evening clothes.

Nipper, who had been watching his companion's deft handling of this quarrel with a grin on his face, stooped now and lifted the turban from the floor, then took a pace forward and held it out to its owner.

"This is yours, I believe," he said.

The bearded man turned, and, with a dignity which was rather extraordinary, considering the circumstances he was in, gave Nipper a bow and spoke in French, a language which he seemed to know very well, and one of which both Nipper and Dorrimore had full command.

"A thousand thanks, m'sieur," the grave voice said, as the owner took the turban.

By this time the attendant had managed to pacify somewhat the raging youngster, and now the old gentleman who had been standing in the open doorway of the box came forward.

"This won't do, you know, gentlemen!" the attendant said. "We can't have rows like this going on in the theatre. I'll have to send for the manager, and he'll probably ask you to clear out."

The bearded man, who had not moved from his position beside the wall, had shaken out the folds of his turban, and was now setting to work with stolid indifference to arrange it round his head.

Dorrimore, who, next to Nelson Lee, had as sound a knowledge as anyone of Arabian ways and customs, had noted that the turban which the man was adjusting on his head had certain distinctive colours wound into it—one in particular which marked the true follower of the Prophet, and one who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca—that is to say, the man was a Hadj.

"I want this man arrested," the youngster in evening clothes burst out. "He's a—*a* thief! You didn't see it, uncle, but, by James, there's not the slightest doubt about it! This fellow has got the brooch which Aunt Emily lost a fortnight ago. He had it in his turban; I saw it there quite distinctly. But it's gone now!"

To Nipper, watching keenly, the faces of the two were a study. The youngster, apparently named Cyril, was obviously of the public school type, healthy, impetuous and very honest. Whatever lay behind the fight it was certainly the truth that Cyril believed every word he was saying.

Yet the man facing him had that calm Oriental dignity which no European can ever hope to achieve. The bearded lips parted in a half-smile, and the keen, quick-turning eyes softened slightly into what was the nearest approach to a smile that the impassive Arab is ever capable of giving.

"WHAT sayest this youth?"

Just why the brown-bearded man should have turned to Dorrimore and asked him that question in Arabic, is a problem, but it seemed as though the tall aristocrat did know that tongue and the man had sensed it, and a smile crossed the adventurer's lips as he replied, in Arabic:

"This youth says that thou art a thief," he explained. "But he is excited. I should not pay any attention to him."

The tall Arab shrugged his shoulders.

"He came upon me suddenly," he said, in his grave, dignified accents. "I had noted that he observed me while I stood among the others, and when I came here he approached me with wild words which I did not understand."

"What does he say? What's he talking about?"

Cyril had made an effort to link up his collar again, and had managed to rearrange his tie to some extent. But with his ruffled hair and highly indignant look he made rather a funny picture.

Dorrimore turned to him.

"Look here, old chap," he said. "I am afraid you've made a mistake. I know nothing about your trouble, of course, but this fellow says you simply rushed at him like a bull at a gate, and—well, he had to defend himself."

"I must admit that this is true," the silver-haired gentleman put in. "I happened to be at the door of the box here, and I saw you. Cyril. You didn't give the fellow half a chance. You simply jumped at him and tried to throw him."

"That's all very well, uncle," Cyril retorted, "but you didn't see the beginning of it. I watched the beggar right up here and I tackled him on the matter. Then, as he didn't answer me, I made a snatch for the brooch. He dodged me and grabbed the brooch out of his turban and put it in his pocket, I think. He bolted up the passage like a rabbit, and I thought he was trying to get away. I wasn't going to stand for that, so I tackled him and brought him down. But, by James, he's as tough as a bull!"

Cyril raised his hand to his throat and rubbed it ruefully, an action which Dorrimore saw did not escape the attention of the tall Arab, for he turned suddenly and spoke to Dorrimore.

"Tell the youth that I hope I have not hurt him," he said. "He has courage, and indeed there is much strength in those slender arms of his."

This is not by any means a bad speech for a man who has been roughly handled to make, and Dorrimore turned to Cyril.

"Our friend here says he hopes he hasn't hurt you," he remarked. "And it seems to me that there has been a mistake in some way or other. The best thing you can do is to let me question him. What do you say this brooch is like?"

Cyril turned to the silver-haired gentleman, who was now by the side of the group.

"You can describe it best, uncle," he said. "It was lost about a fortnight ago and Aunt Emily has been awfully upset about it."

The old gentleman addressed thus turned to Dorrimore.

"My name is Sir Anthony Denville," he began. "I am half-inclined to think I know your face, sir."

Dorrimore held out his hand.

"We have met before, Sir Anthony," he said. "My name is Dorrimore, and, unless I am mistaken, you were governor general of a province in India—Meerut—four or five years ago?"

"Yes, I was! By Jove! I think I remember you now. Aren't you Secret Service?"

"Yes."

They shook hands then, and it seemed as though that action cleared the air somewhat, for Cyril began to realise now that Dorrimore and Nipper were by no means antagonistical to him, a fact which he had rather thought was the contrary before.

By this time the attendant had realised that the little affair was practically over and there was very little chance of it being repeated. But he still stood on the outskirts of the group, fidgeting a little, and Dorrimore turned to the ex-governor-general with a smile.

"I think we might as well make a move from here, Sir Anthony," he suggested. "I don't mind intervening if I can be of any assistance to you, and we could carry out

any investigations in a more private place than this."

Cyril nodded.

"That's a good idea," he said. "Let's go along to the smoke-room; it's not far along the corridor here."

They found a quiet corner in the smoke-room and seated themselves, then Sir Anthony, with what was a distinctly apologetic look towards the brown man, turned to Dorrimore.

"The brooch to which Cyril refers is rather unique in its way, and my wife has had it for many years—ever since she was a child, in fact. It is made out of rolls of twisted gold wire, and in the centre of it there is a small miniature portrait of a girl—her sister, Stella. I believe the history of the brooch is that my wife, Emily, and Stella, who were twins, had similar brooches given to them on their fiftieth birthdays, and the miniatures were painted by a very famous artist of the day. Emily's brooch had Stella's portrait on it, and Stella's brooch had, I believe, Emily's."

He looked across at his nephew.

"My wife only wore the brooch now and again, and about a fortnight ago, while Cyril was staying with us at Langham, my wife came to us and said she had missed the brooch. We searched for it, but could find no trace of it. My wife was very much upset about it, because although it was not of very great value she regarded it as one of her most treasured possessions, for it is the only photograph she had of her dead sister."

"That's just it, uncle," Cyril broke out. "I know that Aunt Emily thought no end of that brooch, and when I saw it in this fellow's turban it absolutely riled me. I only asked him where he got it from, but he simply wouldn't answer me. He merely bolted."

It was obvious that Cyril was now beginning to realise that this silent, grave man who sat back in the chair, listening so intently to what was obviously a speech he did not understand, was certainly a long way from being of the type that one puts down as a thief. Dorrimore turned to the brown-bearded man.

"There is an explanation to all this," he said in Arabic. "This youth, as I have told you before, imagined that he saw you in possession of something which belongs to his aunt—a brooch which he says was in your turban. What is your name?"

It seemed to the tall aristocrat as though the Arab hesitated, then he raised his head.

"I am Shiek Ibraim, of the Ben Nazel," he said, in slow, dignified tones. "This youth has made a mistake. Tell me what he says, and of what he accuses me?"

Dorrimore leaned forward.

"The youth says that about a fortnight ago his aunt, Lady Emily Denville, lost a brooch which she values highly, and he also says that he saw that brooch in your turban when you were standing with the others in the foyer."

CHAPTER 2.**The Lost Brooch !**

THE Arabs seldom, if ever, betray any sign of emotion, yet both Nipper and Dorrimore, who were watching the bearded man, fancied that they saw a new light come into the black eyes for a moment as they turned and looked across at Cyril.

Then the shiek shook his head, and, slipping his hand into his pocket, he drew out a notebook and held it out to Dorrimore.

"Thou wilt see from this that I only came to this country two days ago," he said. "Here are my papers and passport. These alone will prove that I could not have been the thief of this jewel lost two weeks ago."

The papers were convincing, for they proved that Sheik Ibraim had arrived in London only the previous day, and had made his report to the usual authorities.

Dorrimore went through the documents, then held them out to Sir Anthony.

"I'm afraid this rather indicates that you were wrong, Cyril," he said. "Your uncle agrees with me."

Sir Anthony Denville drew out the paper from the pocket-book, and read through the various documents, then he arose to his feet, folding the papers and handing them back to the sheik with a bow.

"I am sorry, sir," he said, in French. "My nephew was somewhat impetuous, but you must please forgive him. If there is anything I can do for you I shall be only too pleased. Here is my card."

The silver-haired gentleman drew out his card-case and held a strip of ivory board towards the Arab. Sheik Ibraim took the card, and, after glancing at it for a moment, slipped it into his waistcoat-pocket.

"It was nothing," he said. "After all, youth is impetuous, and I have no quarrel with this young man."

And, to prove his words, Sheik Ibraim arose to his feet and held out a strong, sinewy brown hand towards Cyril. The youngster, completely cornered, hesitated for a moment, then shot out his own fist, and the two late antagonists shook hands.

"That's that," said Lord Dorrimore, with a smile, "and—well, I think it is now about time we went in to the show, just to see what is happening there."

Sir Anthony put his hand on Dorrimore's shoulder.

"I think you had better join us in our box, Dorrimore," he said. "We are very much obliged to you for what you've done. I really think that had it not been for you this hot-headed nephew of mine might have found himself inside Bow Street by now."

They moved away from the smoke-room, while the brown-bearded sheik, with a low bow, went off up the passage. Sir Anthony and his party entered the box.

Cyril had dropped back beside Nipper, and he gave that youngster a rather rueful grin.

"It's all very well for uncle to settle the matter this way," he said, "and I'm not going to jaw about it any more, but hang it all, I know that my eyes are all right, and I could bet anything it was my Aunt Emily's brooch that that fellow had in his turban."

Nipper laughed.

"You're a sticker, anyhow," he said. "You can't possibly bring a charge of theft against that Arab considering that he only landed in London yesterday and Lady Denville missed her brooch a fortnight ago."

"Oh, I'm not going to bring a charge against him," Cyril returned. "Although I still think he's got my aunt's brooch tucked away in his pocket this very minute."

"Are you quite sure about it?"

"I'd bet my last bob on it!" Cyril declared. "You see, when I tackled the fellow I pointed to the brooch, and he looked at me mighty curiously, then he dodged round the passage and bolted, and I went after him. But when I caught him again he turned his head and I saw that the brooch had gone. Of course, he had had plenty of time to take it out of his turban by then, and I'm sure that's just exactly what he did do."

They entered the box, and Cyril and Nipper took their seats in the front, then presently Cyril touched his companion on the arm and indicated one of the lines of seats in the lower part of the house.

Quite distinctly in the line could be seen the tall figure of the Arab sheik wearing his coloured turban.

Cyril studied his companion thoughtfully.

"Who are you, anyhow?" he asked. "You look jolly clever."

Nipper chuckled, and gave his name.

"I'm called Nipper," he explained, "and although I'm not very clever myself, I just admit that solving little problems is my profession, or, at least, it is the profession of my guv'nor, and I help him."

"Who is your guv'nor?"

"His name is Nelson Lec, and he is a detective."

"I say! Hang it all, I've heard that name before. Lee, eh?"

There was no doubting the look of eager desire that came into Cyril's eyes as they regarded Nipper.

"Why, it's jolly lucky that I met you," he said, "for if anyone can get to the bottom of this affair I reckon it's your guv'nor. Now, look here, Nipper, I don't like to be sat on, and although I have shaken hands with that beggar, I'm convinced that he's laughing up is sleeve at me. I'll be ragged no end by Uncle Tony and the rest of the folks at Langham, if I don't get to the bottom of this."

He leaned closer.

"Isn't there any way that we can find out whether that beggar really has got the brooch in his pocket, or not?" he asked. "Come on, Nipper, you ought to know. Say you thought the fellow had something of yours, but you weren't quite sure about it. What would you do to get to the bottom of the matter?"

Now it just happened that at that very moment Nipper was glancing down into the lower part of the theatre, and fortune or chance made him cast his eyes towards an immaculately attired figure leaning against one of the pillars. The young detective stared for a moment, then a glint came into his keen eyes.

He nodded his head in the direction of the figure.

"You see that fellow down there?" he asked.

"You mean that distinguished-looking chap who might be an Italian count, or something?"

The young detective laughed.

"Yes, that's him. His name is Chadwell, and my guv'nor and I know him as 'Two-fingered Tom.' He is perhaps the most skilled pickpocket in London."

"A pickpocket! By Jove!"

Now, when a man looks hard at another man, in nine cases out of ten that other becomes conscious of the scrutiny, and presently Two-fingered Tom turned his head and looked up at the box. Cyril saw him start, straighten up, and then commence to move away from the pillar.

"Why, the beggar knows you!"

Nipper laughed.

"Yes, I'm afraid he knows me all right," he returned.

The youngster by his side clutched at Nipper's arm.

"Look here!" he said. "I know what you're driving at, and, by James, I wish you would do it. Couldn't you get that fellow to—to practise his profession—now?"

Nipper shook his head.

"That's a bit risky," he pointed out. "It's committing a felony, really, you know."

"Oh, no, it isn't!" Cyril said. "We don't want him to—to pinch anything. We simply want to find out if my aunt's brooch is in that Arab's pocket. That's all. If that fellow is as skilful as you say, he could easily carry out that job."

Under other circumstances it is extremely doubtful whether Nipper would have fallen in with such a risky proposition, but Cyril had a way with him, and at last Nipper, after turning the proposal over in his mind for a moment, decided to chance it.

THEY made some sort of excuse to Dorrimore and Sir Anthony, who were swopping yarns about the little department in Meerut, and then went out of the box, and going round to the right, finally found themselves in the lower part of the house.

The sleek, well-dressed Two-fingered Tom had shifted his position, but, after stalking for some time, Nipper finally ran him to earth in the passage leading from the stalls. By that time Two-fingered Tom had realised that the young detective was after him, and he waited, leaning against the wall, until Nipper came up.

"Good-evening, Chadwell!"

The crook looked at Nipper out of narrowed eyes.

"No good, Nipper!" he said. "Nothing doing. You can search me."

"That may be," said Nipper. "In any case, it's always worth while to know just what you fellows are most capable of. But, look here, I want you to do something for me. It'll be an easy enough job to you, and it won't go down against you."

"What is it?"

"There is a man in the seventh row of the stalls, an Arab, wearing a turban. Do you see him?"

They had moved back, and were standing just within the heavy curtains now.

"Yes. What do you want me to do?" the crook asked.

"I simply want you to tackle that man wearing the turban and find out if he has a brooch in any of his pockets."

"A brooch, eh?"

"Yes."

Two-fingered Tom laughed.

"Very well, Nipper. I don't mind doing that. But, to tell you the truth, I'm not out on my old job to-night. I've cut it for the last five or six months. I find that there are other and easier ways of making money, besides being much less risky."

They looked along the row of stalls again.

"Seventh row of stalls. The man with the turban, eh?"

"That's right."

"Very well, Nipper."

"You saw us in the box," the young detective went on. "Well, we'll be up there until the end of the performance. If you can slip round and give us your report at any time, it'll be all right."

Two-fingered Tom gave a quick nod, then went back to his post by the pillar, while Nipper and his young companion left the stalls and made their way back to the box. Some five or ten minutes later the act came to an end, and the usual stir in the audience took place.

Cyril was on tenterhooks, and at every sound that came from outside the box he looked round, half-expecting to see the immaculate figure of Two-fingered Tom. But the orchestra started again, and the curtain went up on the third act without any sign of the well-dressed pickpocket. The piece came to an end, and Dorrimore and Sir Anthony left the box with Cyril and Nipper bringing up the rear.

"Come along, Cyril," said Sir Anthony. "We are going to the club to have supper. I have asked Lord Dorrimore and Nipper to join us."

They went out under the glass-roofed entrance with the crowd, and Sir Anthony's car came along.

Now Cyril could have taken his solemn oath that it was the uniformed attendant who held the door open for him to enter the vehicle, and he had not noticed anyone else standing near.

Yet a moment after the car had started off there came an excited gasp from the youngster, and he leaned forward in his seat, his hand outstretched.

"Uncle!" he said. "Look—the brooch!"

The interior of the car was lighted by a small electric bulb, and under the glow of it they could see, lying in Cyril's hand, the twisted gold frame with the likeness in the centre.

"How the deuce——"

"I don't know," Cyril said. "I found it in my pocket here."

Across the vehicle Nipper shot a quick grin at Cyril, and enlightenment came to the youngster.

"By Jove, do you—do you think that chap slipped it into my pocket?"

"Not the slightest doubt about that," Nipper said. "It's characteristic of Two-fingered Tom's way of doing things. By James, he's outdone himself this time, and no mistake, for we told him we didn't want him to get the brooch, didn't we?"

This, of course, was all double Dutch to Sir Anthony and Dorrimore, and the old baronet turned to Nipper and asked for an explanation.

The young detective grinned.

"Well, Sir Anthony, your nephew was still doubtful whether the Arab was telling the truth or not, and after we had returned to the box I happened to recognise someone in the stalls who—whom I knew would be able to help us—and apparently he did help us more than we bargained for, for there is the brooch."

Sir Anthony's limousine halted at the club, and the four entered the building for supper, blissfully ignorant of the fact that the tall Arab had followed them, and was watching them with eyes that glinted beneath his lowered brows.

Cyril was obviously very much gratified at the unexpected turn of events, and could not conceal his triumph. The brooch was handed round for inspection, then Cyril took it again and slipped it into his pocket.

"I'm going to give it back to Aunt Emily myself, uncle," he said. "I think I deserve that after your showing me up this evening, you know."

"Better hand the brooch over to me, Cyril," said Sir Anthony, "and I'll give it to your aunt to-morrow. You won't be down to Langham until the end of the week, you know."

But Cyril was not to be persuaded.

"No fear, uncle," he said. "You've had the laugh of me all this evening over the business, you know, and I think it is only right and fair that I should take the brooch back to Aunt Emily myself, and prove to her that I wasn't such a fool as you all wanted to make out."

It was after twelve o'clock before Dorrimore and Nipper and Cyril left the quiet club in Pall Mall, where Sir Anthony was staying, and sauntered up Jermyn Street, where Nipper said good-night to the other two and

took a taxi to the Gray's Inn Road, while Dorrimore went on to his chambers and Cyril to his hotel, the Marlox.

CHAPTER 3.

Nelson Lee Called In.

"WHO is that, please?"

"Nelson Lee!"

"Oh, my name is Sir Anthony Denville. I want to speak to Mr. Nipper."

"Nipper is not in just now, but I expect him in for lunch."

There was a moment's silence; then the voice at the other end of the wire spoke again:

"Look here, Mr. Lee. This is rather important. I wonder if you would come along to the Marlborough Hospital? I met your assistant last night, and he told me what your profession was. I think something has happened which will be worth your while to look into. My nephew, Cyril Denville, who was with your assistant and myself and Lord Dorrimore last night, has been seriously injured, and is at present lying unconscious in the hospital here. I am afraid that there has been foul play, and I shall be glad if you will come round."

"Very well, Sir Anthony. I'll be there within the next half-hour."

"Now, what the deuce has Nipper been getting up to?" Lee thought, as he stood beside the desk for a moment. "I don't know this man, Sir Anthony Denville. But perhaps he is a friend of Dorrimore's. I'll just ring him up and see."

Lee did ring up Dorrimore, to find that he was out, and all he could do was to leave a message asking Dorrimore to call at Gray's Inn Road as soon as possible.

Five or six minutes later Nelson Lee left his chambers and, hailing a taxi, was driven to the Marlborough Hospital, where presently he found himself in the head surgeon's room, shaking hands with Sir Anthony Denville.

The old baronet appeared very much distressed, and there was an eager look in his eyes as he took Lee's extended hand.

"I was hoping that Nipper would have turned up," he said, "for, really, I think he might be able to handle this affair better than you just now, Mr. Lee. You see, he was a witness to a certain incident that happened last night, and I am inclined to think that my nephew's present condition was brought about through that incident."

"What has happened to your nephew?" Lee asked.

The baronet turned to the head surgeon, who nodded to Lee.

"He's got a very severe wound on the head made by some blunt instrument which we think was probably a heavy electric standard in his bed-room at the Marlox Hotel," the surgeon declared. "He was found this morning about eight o'clock,



Along the theatre corridor Lord Dorrimore saw the young man in the deadly grip of the strange Arab. In a moment the sporting peer and an attendant had raced forward and dragged the two apart.

when the valet entered his bed-room with a cup of coffee. Mr. Cyril Denville was lying on the floor, and the room looked as though there had been a very fierce struggle in it."

Sir Anthony turned to Lee.

"I have already notified the police authorities," he said, "and they are making inquiries at the hotel, but so far as I can gather, no one seems to know anything about what happened. Cyril seems to be going on as well as he can just yet. He is still unconscious, of course, and we can't get any information out of him until he is quite fit. I would suggest that we both go round to the hotel, Mr. Lee, and see if we can find out anything there."

Realising that Nipper and Dorrimore were in some way implicated in the matter, Lee

had no option but to agree to the old gentleman's suggestion, so they left the hospital and presently found themselves in the hall of the quiet, old-fashioned hotel, where they found the manager awaiting them.

It appeared that the police had been there and made a careful investigation of the room, and had left word that they would return later.

"So far as I can see, Sir Anthony, it can't be a case of robbery, because all Mr. Denville's things are intact. The valet who unpacked for him has gone through the whole of your nephew's belongings and nothing is missing."

The manager led the way upstairs and into the room on the second floor, and as it had been entered by no one but the valet

and the police, there were plenty of traces visible of the grim fight that had taken place.

The blankets had been drawn out into the centre of the room, and one pillow was lying in the corner, while the little table which usually stood beside the bed was overturned, and one of the legs was smashed.

On the dressing-table were laid out sleeve-links, gold watch, and a set of pearl studs, together with a little heap of notes and a gold cigarette case.

Sir Anthony went across and examined the articles, then nodded his head.

"Yes, I think these are all the valuables Cyril ever carried about with him," he agreed. "I gave him fifty pounds on Monday, and I see there are over thirty here, so that doesn't look as though he has been robbed."

Nelson Lee had only just casually glanced at the articles, for his interests were centred on the bed.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Lee?" the manager, who knew the detective well enough, asked.

"The matter seems clear enough to me," Lee returned. "I should say that your nephew, Sir Anthony, was in bed when he heard someone in the room, and made a dive at the intruder. They probably closed in to fight. The intruder dragged him off the bed and they fell on the floor together. The table was overturned, and I suppose this electric standard came under the hands of the man who was wrestling with your nephew, and he made use of it."

Lee lifted the electric lamp standard, turning it round, revealing an indentation in one part of the brass base. Where the solid wood base was fixed into the brass were a couple of strands of fair hair.

"Yes, that settles it, Sir Anthony," Lee said, with a glance at the baronet. "This is evidently the weapon that was used."

"But who on earth could have done it?" Sir Anthony put in, with a quick catch in his breath.

Nelson Lee turned to the baronet.

"You are quite sure there is nothing missing?"

"No, I don't think so. Cyril was never a great one for jewellery, and he didn't have— By Jove! I forgot! The brooch!"

He turned and looked at the dressing-table again, then wheeled on the manager.

"Where are my nephew's dress clothes?" he said.

"In the wardrobe, sir, just as they were found this morning."

The wardrobe door was open, and Sir Anthony made a hurried search through the garments hanging there, turning out the pockets of the dinner jacket.

"It's gone," he said, "and, by Jove, I think we've found the reason of this murderous attack."

"What is it?"

It was then that Sir Anthony told Nelson Lee of the incident that had happened in

the theatre on the previous evening, and he saw from the look in the detective's face that Lee was also of the opinion that it was the brooch that had been the cause of the attack.

"But I can't understand it," the manager broke out. "I can assure you, Sir Anthony, that no one entered the hotel after your nephew. I sent for the night porter and questioned him myself, and he said that Mr. Denville was the last one to come in while he was on duty, and no one left it before eight o'clock, or, at any rate, while he was there. You see, he goes off duty at seven, and he didn't know anything about what had happened until I sent for him, when we discovered your nephew at eight o'clock this morning."

The manager turned to Nelson Lee.

"There's only one thing which the night porter did mention to me, Mr. Lee, that might have some bearing on the case," he said. "There was a gentleman who came as far as the door of the hotel with Mr. Denville and said good-night to him there. But after Mr. Denville had gone up to his room the gentleman returned and left a note for him. The night porter put the note in the letter-rack outside the reception office, but it is not there now."

"To whom was it addressed?" asked Lee.

"Mr. Denville, I suppose," the manager said. "But I'll soon find out."

He left the bed-room, and five or six minutes later returned with the night porter, who, in answer to Lee's queries, cleared up one important point.

"Oh, no, sir! The letter wasn't addressed to Mr. Denville; it was simply addressed to Room 65."

Nelson Lee shot a keen glance at the night porter.

"And how did the gentleman know that Mr. Denville occupied Room 65?"

The porter cudgelled his brains for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I suppose I must have told him," he said. "As a matter of fact, he asked me what number room Mr. Denville occupied, and I gave it to him."

The manager turned to his subordinate.

"You had no right to tell anyone the number of a guest's room," he said. "You know well enough you should not do it."

The night porter began to stammer an apology, but Lee intervened.

"It's all right," he said. "After all, I don't blame the night porter at all. He was simply caught napping as we all are at times. I should say, guessing roughly, of course, that someone made the acquaintance of Mr. Denville, somewhere, and accompanied him to his hotel. The night porter heard them part at the door. That done, the unknown man returns as if he has forgotten something and speaks to the porter, who, thinking things are quite all right, gives the number of Mr. Denville's room. He is then asked to take a letter and place it in the rack. While he is absent from his post at the door the

assailant enters the building—it was either the man who handed in the letter or someone who paid that other to find out the number of the room. It is a simple trick, but if it had failed, the assailant would have tried some other way."

The manager dismissed the servant, who went away with a rather woebegone expression on his face, then Lee turned to the baronet.

"I don't think we can get any further information here," he said, "but what you've told me interests me keenly, Sir Anthony, and I think that the best thing we can do is to get in touch with my assistant and Lord Dorrimore, although I doubt very much if they know anything at all about what has happened to your nephew."

He regarded the old, grey-haired man quietly for a moment.

"This brooch appears to have a very great value set on it by the man who took it away from your nephew, for he was even prepared to go very near to murder to accomplish his desire. Yet, you say the brooch was not really valuable?"

"No, not at all valuable to outsiders," Sir Anthony said. "I should think that the gold might be worth some nine or ten pounds, and the little miniature perhaps the same. In any case, I think twenty pounds would have covered it."

"And yet someone thought it worth while to carry out a very elaborate scheme and even half kill your nephew, in order to obtain possession of it."

"Yes. It looks like that. But I can't understand it at all."

It was certainly a very interesting little problem, and Nelson Lee, after getting the baronet to promise to inform him as soon as Cyril became conscious again, returned to his chambers in the Gray's Inn Road, and shortly after one o'clock Nipper and Dorrimore entered the quiet rooms to find the detective awaiting them.

There was a rather grim expression on Lee's face as he shook hands with his young assistant and his friend.

"Nice sort of mess you've been making of things, young 'un," he said, turning to Nipper. "Cyril Denville has been half murdered and is now lying in Marlborough Hospital in a very precarious condition."

CHAPTER 4.

Amazing Developments.

"GREAT Scott!"

Dorrimore dropped into the nearest chair and stretched his long legs out in front of him.

"Hang me if I didn't think something like this would happen," he broke out. "That young idiot would go away with that brooch in his pocket, and I felt in my bones that he was simply asking for trouble."

Nipper wheeled on his friend.

"Do you know, Dorrimore, I had exactly the same feeling," he confessed. "Somchow or other I felt that that sheik would get hold of the brooch again by hook or by crook!"

He turned to Nelson Lee.

"But it wasn't really our fault, guv'nor," he explained. "We simply walked into the affair in a very accidental way."

"Oh, well, we'd better have some lunch and discuss the matter over the table," said Lee, leading the way into the dining-room.

He extracted every scrap of information from them, and there and then began to make his plans. Dorrimore was sent off to find the sheik, while Nipper was sent to find Two-fingered Tom and find out if anything had happened.

Nipper returned first with the news that the pickpocket had been caught by the sheik and forced to find out in his own way the number of Cyril's room at the hotel, thereby confirming Lee's rough guess. Two-fingered Tom was terrified of the Arab and anxious to let the affair drop.

But Dorrimore came back from the hotel where the sheik had put up, with the news that the Arab had gone, and had even left his turban behind him, wearing, apparently, an ordinary cap.

That news was significant, for an Arab will not discard his turban, which he regards almost as sacred, unless something drastic demanded it of him.

"And, strangely enough," said Dorrimore. "No one knew when he went or where he's gone. But in his room I saw a road map on which was underlined the name of a village—Clonbury—where Sir Anthony's house, Langham, is situated. If that means anything, Lee, I pass on the news."

"It means a lot," replied Lee. "But there are several things to do, and I think we shall have to get them done to-day and start for Clonbury first thing in the morning. And, under the circumstances, as you, Dorrimore, have met the sheik before and would recognise him again, it would be as well for you to come with me. Can you arrange that?"

"Certainly," Dorrimore returned. "Just name your time and I'll be here."

Nelson Lee studied his road map for a moment, then announced that the car would be ready and waiting at eight the next morning. And on the following morning Lord Dorrimore and Nelson Lee motored out of London heading for Clonbury, while Nipper made his way to the club where Sir Anthony was staying.

He found the old baronet at breakfast, and there was no mistaking the look of relief as Nipper was ushered into his presence.

"I'm just going to have a look at Cyril after breakfast," he said. "I've had a message from the hospital to say that he is now awake, and from what I can gather he seems to be doing all right."

Any doubts that they might have had concerning the condition of Cyril were dissipated when, on entering the ward they found that youngster seated up in his cot, making a very

steady and deliberate attack upon a rather substantial breakfast.

Cyril dropped his knife and fork and looked up at Sir Anthony, and Nipper halted beside the cot. The upper part of the youngster's head was swathed in bandages, but there was a grin on his young face as he held out his hand.

"They were jolly well going to starve me here, uncle," he said, "but I wouldn't stand for it. From what I can make out I've been asleep for the best part of a day, and I'm as hungry as a hunter now."

They begun to chat together, then presently the surgeon came into the ward and seated himself on the edge of the cot.

"It's quite all right," he said, turning to the baronet. "Your nephew is as strong as a bull, really, and there's no reason why he shouldn't have a decent meal. That crack on his head simply scattered his wits for a few hours, but it didn't do any damage to his digestive apparatus, as you can see."

He wagged his finger towards Cyril.

"But you're not going to get out of that bed till to-morrow," he went on. "That much I insist on."

"Oh, very well!" Cyril said. "I suppose I've got to put up with that. But I want to know what happened. Did you collar that confounded sheik?"

Sir Anthony exchanged glances with Nipper.

"Then it was the sheik who attacked you?"

"Why, of course! Didn't you know that?"

"My dear Cyril, you seem to forget that you've been unconscious for a day, and we haven't been able to get any sort of story out of you. Just let us know what happened?"

Cyril laughed. He was young enough to make light of the incident that another man might have brooded over.

"I don't really remember very much," he confessed. "I was as tired as a dog when I got into my bed, and must have dropped off to sleep at once. I think it was the opening of the wardrobe door that wakened me, for that particular door sticks rather badly, and makes no end of a squeaking row when one opens it."

He turned and nodded to Nipper.

"That sheik of ours was bending forward rummaging in among my clothes," he went on. "I saw him quite clearly, for the window was open and there was a little bit of light coming through it, and I saw his turbaned head against the glimmer."

"What did you do, then?"

"Well, hang it! I felt rather indignant, and I shouted at the chap. At the same time I reached for the electric switch on the little standard lamp beside the bed, and turned it on. But before I could get out of bed that fuzzy old Arab went for me, and, by James, let me tell you he is some wrestler."

The youngster leaned back on the pillows and smiled.

"He got me by the ankles, and the next thing I knew I was flat on my back on the

floor, with half the blankets on top of me, and that old ruffian squeezing my windpipe. I've had a few skirmishes in my time, but I never was tackled so neatly as that, and I'll admit old Ibraim had me beat from the first."

He raised his hand to his bandaged head.

"I don't really remember when I got this," he continued, with a comical grimace. "I suppose it was while we were doing the cat and dog act on the floor. Anyhow, if he hadn't given me a clump across the head he would have probably choked the life out of me, so perhaps, after all, it was just as well that he did use the lamp standard." He paused a moment, then added: "But just why did he do it I can't imagine, unless—of course——"

"Oh, I can soon tell why he did it," Sir Anthony put in. "All your belongings were left behind—watch and money and suchlike. But there was one thing that the sheik did remove—that gold brooch of your Aunt Emily's."

Cyril sat up in his cot again.

"The gold brooch, eh? But do you know, uncle—that was a mistake on my part. It wasn't Aunt Emily's brooch at all!"

Sir Anthony sat bolt upright on his chair and looked at Cyril for a moment.

"What on earth do you mean?" he gasped. "Didn't you get that fellow to steal the brooch from the sheik because you were so sure it was your aunt's?"

"Yes, I know that. But I was jolly well mistaken!"

Nipper leaned forward.

"This is getting interesting," he said. "How do you know it wasn't Lady Denville's brooch?"

Cyril smiled.

"Well, while I was undressing I took the thing out of my pocket and had a good look at it, and although the frame was exactly the same as Aunt Emily's brooch, the picture in it was quite different, for I distinctly remember that the head in my aunt's portrait was that of a light-haired girl, while the one which I had taken from the sheik was of a dark-haired girl."

He was silent for a moment.

"Besides," he went on, "I turned the brooch over, and I found that someone had inserted a round piece of carved stone in the back part. There was a crest of some sort on the stone, which I think was a 'J.' Anyhow, although I'm not an Arabic scholar, I'm sure it was Arabic that was engraved on the stone."

Sir Anthony leaned against the cot and shook his head.

"Then it appears to me that whatever has happened was more or less your own fault," he said, "for, in the first place, the sheik told you he hadn't stolen your aunt's brooch, and you didn't believe him. Then you stole his brooch from him, and—well, upon my word, Cyril, I consider the old chap was quite justified in acting as he did."

"Oh, yes, I admit that," Cyril said. "But the old Arab was clever. He must have got hold of that pickpocket fellow—we'll never know how he discovered who had taken his brooch—and he terrified the man somehow. This Two-fingered Tom came to tell me that I was in danger and accompanied me to the hotel. But from what the surgeon has since told me, and putting two and two together, it seems that the pickpocket had orders to find out the number of my room for the sheik. Even then, if we know how the man entered the hotel, how did he get out again. Not that it matters now. The thing is done. The trouble is that I never thought of telling the beggar that he could have the brooch when I saw him in the room. I suppose if I'd done that it would have saved my bacon."

"I doubt it," said Nipper. "In the first place the sheik would probably not have believed you. Then, again, he was no doubt well aware that he was carrying out an illegal action. I don't suppose he knew or cared whether you were dead or not when he left you."

"That I admit," said Cyril. "For if ever a fellow looked as though he was going to squeeze the life out of a chap it was Sheik Ibrahim."

He stretched himself.

"Anyhow, I'm jolly glad it's all over, and if ever I do meet that sheik again I'll apologise to him, for, after all, he was only getting back his own property."

CHAPTER 5.

Lady Denville Vanishes.

"IT'S what one might call a coincidence, Mr. Lee," the ruddy-faced police-inspector said, as he shook hands with the man from Gray's Inn Road. "I've never met you before, but, of course, I've heard a lot about you, and turning up as you have done like this is rather in the way of a miracle."

They were standing in the beautiful carved-oak hall of Langham Towers, and behind the police-inspector stood a white-haired butler, wearing a very troubled expression on his face.

"What has happened?" Lee asked.

The butler appeared to be doubtful for a moment, and the inspector smiled.

"It's all right, Clark," he said. "I know you don't want any fuss made, but it is just as well to make a few inquiries, and anything you say to Mr. Lee will be quite confidential."

The butler was eyeing the man from Gray's Inn Road quietly, and the keen, clean-cut, clever face seemed to reassure him, for he turned presently, and, opening a door, led the way into a small ante-room, followed by the visitors.

"I've only just arrived," the inspector whispered, "but as far as I can make out, her

ladyship had not been seen at the Towers since yesterday afternoon."

His voice carried to Dorrimore, and Lee gave his friend a quick glance.

"You mean to say that she has vanished?"

The inspector shook his head.

"Oh, I wouldn't go as far as to say that," he remarked. "As a matter of fact, Lady Denville, although she is bordering on the fifties, is one of the spryest creatures in the whole county. She drives her own little two-seater, and—well, she can give some of the younger ones a start and a beating when it comes to sheer vitality."

He turned and looked at the butler.

"Clark here is worried to death because his mistress has not been home all night, and Sir Anthony is at present in London. He doesn't know what to do about it."

The butler had arranged chairs for the visitors, and they seated themselves. Then the old fellow, standing beside the table, nodded to the inspector.

"I'll tell you exactly all I know about the affair," he said. "Her ladyship went out yesterday morning for a walk into the town, and she did not return till about noon, for lunch. I waited on her at table as usual, and she—well, she asked me to get her some food and pack it up."

He looked at Nelson Lee.

"Lady Emily does some very queer things now and again, sir," he continued, "and we don't pay much attention to them. But it is the first time as I can remember that she ever asked me to pack up a couple of pounds of rice, and a big chunk of fresh dairy butter and some ground coffee."

"Rice, butter and coffee," the police-inspector repeated. "It seems a queer choice for a meal."

"I made 'em up into a parcel for her, and she went out again as soon as she had finished her lunch. She wasn't gone for very long, not more than about half an hour, and when she came back again, she went straight up to her room, and Marie, her maid, tells me that she got dressed in one of her tweed travelling costumes. Her ladyship sent Marie down to tell me to get her two-seater ready, and I went out and saw to it, for the chauffeur is at present in London with Sir Anthony. As far as I can remember, it was a bit after half-past two when her ladyship passed in front of the house here in the car—and that was the last I've seen of her."

The butler was silent for a moment.

"Maybe it was wrong of me not to mention anything about it till this morning," he went on, "but as Inspector Shadley can tell you, gentlemen, her ladyship often does queer things, and nobody pays much attention to them. She goes about all over the country in that little car of hers, and it has often been one or two in the morning before she has got back."

He looked across at Nelson Lee.

"I wouldn't be worried about it now, sir, if Marie hadn't told me that she finds Lady Emily has taken a small case with her. She

says there are several articles of clothing missing from her ladyship's room, and also a small case."

Inspector Shadley laughed.

"But Lady Denville might have gone to stay with some friends for a few days, Clark," he put in.

The old fellow shook his head.

"I don't think so," he returned. "You see, although her ladyship is careless like, she wouldn't have gone away without letting some of us know, and if she had put up anywhere last night she would be sure to have sent a telephone message through."

He looked at Nelson Lee.

"Maybe there's no reason for me to be anxious, sir, but there was a man came along here to-day, the carrier, who said that he saw her ladyship in the car right away along at Gledary Cross going in the direction of Southampton, and there was a man with her—a dark, foreign-looking chap, in rather shabby clothes."

The old chap spread his hands.

"The carrier told me that her ladyship seemed very interested in the man, for she was talking away to him as she drove. But, according to the carrier, the man wasn't a very pleasant sort of individual. He said he was sure he was a foreigner, and a bad 'un at that."

Nelson Lee had made no comment on the story, but he glanced across the room now and again to Dorrimore, and in the tall man's mind a certain swift suspicion leaped which it seemed that Lee shared.

"I leave this entirely in your hands, Mr. Lee, if you don't mind," Shadley said. "The matter is not exactly one for the police yet. We have no definite news of her ladyship, and, being rather eccentric as she is, I think we are quite safe in allowing the matter to rest for a day or two. But I did think of sending a telegram to Sir Anthony, or getting Clark to do so."

"That wouldn't be a bad idea," Lee agreed. "As a matter of fact something has happened in London which I have no doubt will make it necessary for Sir Anthony to return here to-day. I suppose you haven't heard what happened to Mr. Cyril?"

"No. I've heard nothing."

Nelson Lee gave the inspector a brief account of what had occurred in London, but did not mention the part the sheik had played.

The butler invited the three visitors to have lunch, and afterwards they set out to the village.

"You seem rather interested in this, Mr. Lee," Inspector Shadley said, "and I'm rather glad. For although I don't think anything serious has happened, I must admit that one or two of the things you've discovered make it sound rather queer to me. Why should Lady Emily go and meet this mysterious stranger and give him grub in that out-of-the-way fashion? Then to take him in the car towards Southampton?"

"Perhaps the man wanted her to do so," said Lee. "In any case, the affair has developed in an extraordinary way, and I'm going to ask you to telephone all round and try to discover traces of the car."

It was a long tramp to the village, and when they reached it, Inspector Shadley went at once to the police-station, and the useful telephone came into operation.

They had the registered number of the two-seater, and a very accurate description of the car, and so, following the carrier's statement, the inspector rang up village and town all along the route.

Now and again he drew a blank, but here and there he did receive information concerning the car. Our county police are not nearly so unobservant as the average individual fancies, and now a town, then a village, testified to the fact that a two-seater answering the description had passed through their main thoroughfare.

At one place some twenty miles from Southampton the report came that the car had stopped at a garage, and the lady driver had bought another tin of petrol.

To this town Inspector Shadley made the request that the garage proprietor should be communicated with, and after waiting some nine or ten minutes the man came to the 'phone. Nelson Lee questioned him, and received one rather interesting item of information.

Lady Denville had asked the garage proprietor for the nearest route to the big aerodrome which stands close to Southampton, and this information the garage proprietor was able to give her.

"An aerodrome, eh?" said Dorrimore. "That sounds interesting."

Nelson Lee rose to his feet.

"It is interesting, old chap," he said; "so interesting that I am going down there now. You'd better look up the route on the map to the aerodrome, and get the car ready. There's no time to waste!"

They reached the Southampton air port about five o'clock. Lee was able to find the manager of the place, and after introducing himself, stated his business.

"I want to find Lady Emily Denville," he said. "And I understand that she came here last night in a two-seater car."

The manager looked up from his desk swiftly.

"Yes, that's right," he said. "Lady Denville did come here last evening. In fact, her car is in one of our garages now. She wanted to see a nephew of hers, Mr. Richard Denville, who is partner in an aeroplane firm that park several of their machines with us."

He smiled.

"I suppose you know that our aerodrome takes in everybody, so long as they pay our fees and young Mr. Denville has been giving one or two joy rides here this summer."

This was an entirely unexpected development, and Lee glanced across at Dorrimore,

"Can I see Mr. Denville?" he asked.

"Yes, I think he is here. I'll send one of my clerks round with you to the hangars."

The manager touched a bell, and presently Nelson Lee and Dorrimore were walking across the aerodrome towards a long line of hangars, and their guide halted at last in front of one, the doors of which stood wide. There were a couple of mechanics inside, and the clerk beckoned to one of them.

"This gentleman wants to see Mr. Denville. Where is he?"

The mechanic shook his head.

went off last night with a lady in his aeroplane, and hasn't returned?"

"Yes, sir. That's right."

"Was there anyone with the lady?"

"No, sir. But we reckoned she came all ready for the flight, because she was wearing a leather cloak and a helmet."

"What sort of a machine was it that Mr. Denville flew?"

The mechanic gave Leo full details concerning the 'plane, and after a few more



Two figures shot swiftly across the sand and the first sign Nipper had of their presence was when, with a swift, lithe leap, they flung themselves on the youngster and dragged him to the ground.

"That's what we've been trying to find out all day," he returned. "What's happened?"

"Oh, nothing much. Only a lady came to see him last night, and this gentleman wants to know where she went."

The mechanic grinned.

"I remember that lady," he said. "It was shortly after she arrived that Mr. Denville told us to get his old bus ready, as he was going to take the lady for a flight. He left here shortly after half-past six, and as far as we knew he was going to come back again, but he didn't turn up, so I expect he's gone up somewhere and settled there for a day or two. We've been expecting some message from him all day, but haven't heard a word yet."

Nelson Lee came forward.

"You mean that Mr. Richard Denville

questions the detective turned and nodded to the clerk.

"I'd like to see the garage now, if I may," he said. "I want to find out if Lady Denville's car is still there."

It was a long walk across to the garage, and when they entered it the clerk called to the man in charge, and presently Lee and Dorrimore found themselves studying a small, dust-covered two-seater, with the number plate that Inspector Shadley had said belonged to her ladyship.

There was nothing further to be gained from the garage, and when Lee and Dorrimore left the aerodrome they had to admit that, for the moment, their line of march was in the air.

Apparently Lady Denville had arrived at the aerodrome alone, and the point was:

where had she left her brown-bearded companion?

"It seems to me," said Lee. "That her ladyship came here to persuade her nephew to help her, and that the 'plane picked up the shiek at some lonely spot along the coast. But we can do no more now until we have found out what Sir Anthony thinks of it all. One thing is certain, Lady Emily is a willing helper of Sheik Ibraim, but just why she is going to all this trouble is a complete mystery."

CHAPTER 6.

The Romance of the Desert.

"**B**UT it's perfectly outrageous. I know that my wife is a remarkable woman in many ways, but I can't conceive it possible that she would go off in an aeroplane—with an Arab! You are quite sure there is no mistake, Mr. Lee?"

It was a highly indignant and amazed Sir Anthony that sat in Nelson Lee's consulting-room in the Gray's Inn Road. Dorrimore and Nipper were present at that interview which took place late the following morning, after Lee's return from Southampton.

"I don't think there can be much doubt about the identity of Lady Denville, nor of the Arab," said Nelson Lee. "And, as you see, I have received this cablegram from the aerodrome at Poissy, stating that Mr. Richard Denville and his machine did reach there yesterday morning, shortly after ten o'clock, with two passengers who answered to the description that I sent to the French police."

"Yesterday, while at Southampton, I communicated with all the possible aerodromes that I could think of, and I was lucky enough to pick up information concerning your nephew's aeroplane from Dover. It had landed there late the previous evening, and, so far as I could gather, your nephew and Lady Denville stayed at an hotel close by. The aerodrome people at Dover said there was a third individual with the party, but he had kept well in the background, and they couldn't find out where he stayed. But as he joined the party again the following morning when they started off for France, there is little doubt but what he is still with your wife and nephew, Sir Anthony."

He looked across at the baronet.

"The point is whether you want to intervene now, or not," said Lee. "I am of the opinion that we could hold up the fugitives—if you care to call them such—by communicating with the French police. But it just occurs to me that by doing so we might interfere in plans that might have wider influences than we suspect."

He was silent for a moment.

"I had word with the Foreign Office this morning," Lee went on. "They knew that Sheik Ibraim had visited this country, but could not find out what his business was. As his absence from his tribe is causing trouble in Syria, they are anxious that he

should return; therefore, it might not be wise to hinder him. When I told the under-secretary that I thought Sheik Ibraim was going back to Syria——"

"Syria? Good heavens, Lee; do you think that my wife is going to—to Syria—with that confounded Arab?"

"It may have been her suggestion," said Lee dryly. "You see, Sir Anthony, we are in the regions of guess work now, for we do not know the particular reason why Sheik Ibraim should come here to seek your wife. So far as we know, the only connection that the sheik had with your family at all lay in the fact that the sheik had that brooch which belonged to your wife——"

"No, no! That's quite a mistake!" the old baronet broke out.

"As a matter of fact, Cyril told us yesterday that he had made a mistake. The brooch, although wonderfully like the one my wife lost, was not it."

The old gentleman then told Lee the report that Cyril had made at the hospital, and Nelson Lee leaned across the desk.

"Unless I am mistaken, Sir Anthony, your story concerning that particular brooch was that there were two of them. They were the property of your wife and her twin sister. Was that twin sister dark or fair?"

"My wife was dark," the baronet said, "and her sister, so I understand, was very fair."

Nipper leaned forward.

"By James, guv'nor, you've got it! That brooch that the sheik wore had the portrait of the dark-haired lady in it, and must have belonged to Lady Denville's sister."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"That is certainly the point that occurred to me, young 'un," he said.

A long silence fell on the inmates of the room, then Sir Anthony drew a deep breath.

"I never met my wife's sister," he said. "She left this country when she was quite young—seventeen or eighteen, I believe. She was going to India, and so far as I have heard she had fever when the boat reached the Suez Canal, and she was landed at Alexandria. I understand that she died in the British Hospital out there. In any case, that is the story my wife had."

"And yet, Sheik Ibraim turns up in England with a brooch identical to the one your wife wore, and it had your wife's portrait in it. Doesn't that suggest that it was this twin sister's brooch that Ibraim had?"

"Of course it does. But how could that be so? Where could he have got it from?"

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"That's more than I can say, Sir Anthony," he returned. "But I think that if we really want to get to the bottom of this affair we will have to go to Syria. Personally, I have been asked to do so by the Foreign Office, for they are anxious now that Sheik Ibraim should get back to his tribe without undue delay, and my fears are that travelling as he is with Lady Denville, complications may arise."

"In fact, trouble has already started. The Foreign Office have been informed that Ibraim's son, Yussuf, who was educated in France, and up to now has been the apple of his father's eye, has revolted against his own father for some inexplicable reason, and it is rumoured that the sheik's wife, the mother of Yussuf, has unaccountably disappeared. As the tribe of Ben Nazel live on the main railway route across the desert to Mecca, trouble there interferes with trade and communications, and the Foreign Office, with whom Ibraim is friendly enough, desire peace at that spot."

"That settles it, then," said Sir Anthony, with a groan. "I don't want to interfere with anything the Foreign Office suggest."

Having thus gained the consent of the baronet, Nelson Lee, Nipper, and Lord Dorrimore set out for Syria. On reaching Marseilles, Nelson Lee made a few discreet inquiries which ultimately led him to a hotel where presently he found himself face to face with Mr. Richard Denville.

As soon as Lee mentioned his name and business the young airman's face betrayed the mental anxiety that the affair had caused him.

"A detective, eh? Hang me if I didn't expect something of this sort to happen," he exclaimed. "She left me here, and by Jove, I'm not going back to England until she returns here. Mind you, Mr. Lee, I don't feel at all anxious about Aunt Emily. That Arab whom she is travelling with is a jolly fine chap, and I should think my aunt will be safe enough with him. Besides, I can't really blame her, you know, for if you heard that a sister, or someone whom you had thought was dead years ago, was still alive, but practically on the verge of death, well, I suppose you would be inclined to go across half the world to see her."

"What's that? You mean that Lady Denville's sister is alive?"

The young airman nodded his head.

"It's a queer story, Mr. Lee," he returned. "I wouldn't make a start from Southampton until my aunt told me something about it. It appeared that this sheik fellow met Aunt Emily and showed her a brooch, a brooch with her own photograph on it, and he said that it was also a photograph of—his wife!"

"Great Scott!"

Richard Denville gave Nelson Lee a brief account of the story told to her ladyship by the sheik. It appeared that Lady Denville's sister had not died at Alexandria, but had been carried away from the hospital, while she was still unconscious and had been taken to Beirut, by a Greek physician and his family.

They had gone on up to Damascus, and just what they intended to do with the beautiful young English girl remains a problem, for it happened that Sheik Ibraim, then a slim, handsome Arab, filling a big position in Damascus, had met the Greek with the English girl, and had been attracted at once by the pale, lovely face.

From what Richard had gathered Lady Emily's sister had been suffering not from fever, but from some mental malady that had caused her to lose her memory. That might have explained how she came into the keeping of the Greek doctor. In any case, that mystery would never be solved, for the girl herself never remembered what happened during those dim days.

Yet the upshot of her meeting with Ibraim was that three or four months later, while she was still ignorant of her own true identity, the sheik and the white girl were married, and he had taken her away to his desert home in the oasis of Ben Nazel.

"It's a romance, Mr. Lee," said Richard Denville, "and I must admit that it fairly stirred my blood. Although the sheik's wife could not remember who she was when he married her, her memory gradually returned as she grew stronger, but not until some years had elapsed, and—well I suppose she realised that it was not much use attempting to get away from where she was, and in any case I should think she was pretty fond of Ibraim, for he's a jolly decent sort."

"What brought the sheik to England?"

"That I don't quite know," Dick said, "but it has something to do with my aunt, for the sheik's wife had given him the address where he would be able to find Aunt Emily. You see, though my aunt married Sir Anthony, the house at Clonbury belongs to her; it has always been in her family."

He looked at Nelson Lee for a moment.

"I suppose we get rather stodgy in England, Mr. Lee, and that story coming from Aunt Emily was like a breath of pure adventure to me. Anyhow, she told that she was going to see her sister, and the sheik was taking her there, and—well, hang it all, I simply had to fall in with her plans."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"And now, if you like, Mr. Lee, you can hand me over to the police; I've no doubt I shall get into trouble for my share of the adventure, for, of course, we pilots have to promise not to break any international regulations before we are allowed to fly our buses. I know I ought not to have come across the Channel without reporting the matter. But there it is. My aunt was convinced that if she appeared in front of the authorities they would have asked so many useless questions she would never be able to get away in time. And besides, I've no doubt my uncle Anthony would have put a spoke in her wheel. So she decided to take the quicker way out of the difficulty and has left me behind as hostage."

Richard Denville was perfectly correct. He had broken a very stringent international law, and could have been arrested and brought up for trial there and then.

But regarding all the circumstances of the case, Lee felt that it was not for him to interfere, and he left the young airman with the assurance that, so far as he was concerned, the matter would go no further.

Nelson Lee's interest strayed away to the Syrian desert whither he and his companions travelled as hard as they could, and as fast as they could, on the heels of Sheik Ibraim and Lady Emily Denville.

CHAPTER 7.

Nelson Lee in Syria.

THE terrible sandstorm had passed over the Syrian desert. Two Arabs stood beside their horses peering over the sands towards the glistening ribbon of the railroad, waiting for the coming of the man they had sent there to gather information they needed.

One of the Arabs was young, handsome, athletic. The other was growing old, his nerves were on edge. His eyes, red-rimmed, were peering over the wind-swept space, and there was no sign of any other living being within sight.

"Where is Djala?" the elder man queried.

Yussuf, the son of Ibraim, had managed to straighten himself up now, and he grasped at the arm of his companion, while he stared across the sun-baked desert.

"There is no sign of him," he said. "Ah, what is that?"

Far to the left they caught a movement that only keen, hawk-like eyes could have observed. Something detached itself from the end of the sand dune, and as it came into view it revealed itself as being a horse.

"All right, let us go there."

Their own steeds had stood docilely behind them during the terrible sandstorm, and now Yussuf and his companion mounted and headed across to the long dune, finally drawing rein within a few yards of where the riderless horse stood.

"Yes, this is Djala's animal."

Yussuf slipped from his saddle and approached the animal. The older man followed him, and they examined the horse and saddle critically.

"But where is Djala? What can have happened to him?"

There was no sign of the rider of that horse, and it seemed as though the sudden suspicion came to both bedouins at the same time.

"Perhaps he is—is under the sand—here?"

Yussuf stretched out a long arm, pointing to the new heap of sand, and the elder Arab's face was grave as he nodded.

"It may be so," he said. "Allah wills it. See, the horse is covered with sand!"

Yussuf and his companion, after another glance at the long sand dune, turned away. The bedouin is inclined to take life easily, and the fact that the messenger whom they had expected was now lying buried deep in the sand dune was accepted by them as a stroke of Allah.

Yussuf was the first to climb into his saddle, followed by the elder Arab, who took

the reins of the third horse; then they started off at a steady canter, heading westward.

As they vanished over the sandy dunes something moved on the farther edge of the ridge of sand, and up above its round top there appeared a head.

It was turned in the direction that the two shapes were taking, and it remained there motionless until the robed riders had completely vanished over the slope.

Then the head dipped down again, and presently a slim figure in a brown robe went sprinting away from the sand dune, heading for a cluster of rocks which stood on the right.

Reaching the head of the cluster, the slim figure halted, sending a call up:

"All right, guv'nor!"

From the other side of the rocks a figure arose and beckoned to the slim youngster, and it made its way through the rough boulders to vanish behind the higher outcrop of rocks.

Below the rocks was a cup-like depression, and here four horses were huddled together with a tall man in attendance.

About a couple of yards away from the tall man lay a robed figure, tied hand and foot—the spy, Djala!

The Arab lay flat on his back, and the fact that there was a piece of his own robe wedged between his strong teeth indicated that his capture had been a sudden and drastic affair.

"Well, young 'un! What's the report?"

Dorrimore and Lee and Nipper were dressed in native garb, and, indeed, the tall aristocrat in his blue burnous, with his hawk nose and strong features, was by no means a bad example of the wild bedouin type.

Nipper dropped into a sitting position and mopped his brow.

"It's all right," he said. "They've gone, and, by James, I'm not sorry, either. I had to hang on to the near side of that sand dune for the best part of an hour, and I can tell you I feel as though I was half roasted."

The little declivity in which Nelson Lee and his companions had pitched their camp was a natural stronghold, and the fact that it lay well up in the rocky stretch of ground had saved it from the dreaded simoom.

The presence of Nelson Lee and his companions there in that desert was the natural outcome of the sequences of events that had followed their departure from Marseilles.

They had reached Damascus, and although Lee had made several inquiries, he had been unable to find any traces of her ladyship or the sheik.

That fact did not trouble Nelson Lee much, for he realised that the sheik would probably do his best to avoid being recognised in Damascus, and presently Lee did succeed in picking up a certain amount of information.

He discovered that a white woman—English—had left the train at the station before Damascus, and had been seen to

leave the town with an Arab along with a small camel caravan.

Nelson Lee and his companions had gone off to this town and had managed to pick up the trail. A caravan composed of a certain number of carpet merchants who were returning to the coast had left that town, and, so far as Lee could gather, the sheik and her ladyship had bought a couple of camels, and had travelled with this caravan on the first stage of its journey.

Nelson Lee, Dorrimore and Nipper started off in pursuit, and at the end of five days they found themselves in the little native town of El Hala, which was close to the Mecca Railway, and was the recognised stopping-place for caravans heading towards Persia and the Syrian desert.

The carpet merchants had, of course, gone towards the coast, but Lee discovered that the sheik and Lady Denville had taken the other road, and, aided by a map and a few inquiries, Lee was satisfied that her ladyship and Sheik Ibraim were heading for the desert.

At El Hala, Dorrimore had noticed Djala. The man had come into the little courtyard of the place where Lee and his companions had found lodgings. Djala had spoken to Dorrimore, and although he was a very good Arabic scholar, he was convinced that Djala had had his suspicions aroused.

Yet when the three adventurers started off from the town there had been no sign of Djala, and it was not until they were on the second day of their journey that Dorrimore, having forgotten something that he had left in the camp, rode back to it, when he found the bedouin spy searching the ground around the camp.

As good luck would have it, Dorrimore had caught sight of Djala first, and had halted at once, and as soon as he was satisfied with the man's identity, Dorrimore had turned his horse round, galloping back to Lee and Nipper.

He had warned them of what was happening, and realising that there was a menace in Djala's conduct, Lee determined to collar the man.

They had reached the sand dune, and had found that hollow pocket which made such an ideal camp, for concealed as it was behind the rough boulders, and being well below the ground level, it enabled them to keep a good look-out on the space in front of them without being seen.

To Nipper had devolved the task of watching for Djala, and that youngster's quick eyes had picked out the other two Arabs hiding in the rocks on the other side of the sandy stretch.

He had reported this to Nelson Lee, and then the fortunate coming of the sandstorm made it possible for Lee to carry out a very clever ruse.

Djala, true to the custom of his people, had dismounted from his horse, and with his robes wrapped about his head, had waited the passing of the storm.

Further, he was absolutely helpless, and an easy victim to the sudden rush with which Dorrimore and Nelson Lee had tackled him.

They managed to collar the man, tie him up and get away just before the simoom broke.

Nipper had grabbed the horse, and it was a breathless helter-skelter rush that the three friends made which carried them away from the danger zone of the storm and on across the rocky ground, to plunge into the deep hollow where they had left their horses.

Nipper, however, found that Djala's steed would not follow him, and he left it at last to take its chance.

And so, being sent back by Nelson Lee to see what had happened after the storm was over, Nipper had caught sight of Yussuf and the other Arab riding towards the sand dune, and a quick idea had come to him.

He had led Djala's horse to one of the sand dunes, then forced it to lie down, and had set to work to throw handful after handful of sand over it.

He had then waited until Yussuf and the other Arab were close, and Nipper had slipped away up the sand dune and buried himself in it to watch events.

He had seen Djala's horse struggle up out of the sand, and had witnessed the little scene that took place when Yussuf and the other Arab drew rein beside the horse.

Nipper's sharp ears had even caught one or two of the words that Yussuf had spoken, and he was able to gather from them the opinions of the two bedouins.

They were apparently convinced that Djala was dead, and he didn't feel at all inclined to enlighten them.

And now, after hearing Nipper's account of what had happened, Lee turned his attention to Djala. The gag was removed from the Arab's bearded lips, and the bonds that had held his hands and feet were loosened.

CHAPTER 8.

The Captive!

"**A**RISE, my friend," said Lee. "If you suffered any inconvenience it was your own fault."

Djala held out his hand.

"Water!" he demanded. "That accursed sand has filled my throat."

They handed him a water bottle, and Lee noted as he tipped it to his lips a cunning look came into the Arab's eyes, and quick as a flash the detective realised that he had made a mistake. For no bedouin will give a drink to a stranger until he himself has first placed the bottle to his own lips.

And so, much to Nipper's astonishment, Djala, lowering the bottle, looked at the three robed figures, then a crafty smile crossed his heavy lips.

"I speak English," he said, dropping into that tongue, "and I know that you are English."

It would have been useless then to have attempted to deceive the man, even if it had been worth while to do so.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"That's quite right," he said. "We are English, but we also know something about you. Why were you spying on us at El Hala?"

"I did not spy!"

Djala seated himself on the ground again, tucking his robe around him. He had completely recovered his nerve now, and it was obvious that he was prepared to lie to the utmost.

But he did not know the manner of man with whom he had to deal, and Nelson Lee, taking a pace nearer to him, nodded into the brown-bearded face.

"You were spying," he said. "At El Hala you tried to find out why we had come there and what we were doing. You were sent there to watch, and when we left El Hala, you, too, left it. You came out here, meaning to join the two who were waiting for you. But failed in that, and you will not join them until we know why you were sent to watch for us."

Djala's eyes narrowed. Nelson Lee was reckoning on the fact that, according to Nipper's account, Djala had not seen the other two Arabs. The tall sand dune had stood between him and them, and the coming of the storm had forced Djala to dismount and kneel to await the passing of the cloud on the wrong side of the sand dune.

Nelson Lee was, therefore, prepared to make use of this knowledge of his, and he smiled to himself as he saw the look of half suspicion that came into the bedouin's face.

"They did not wait for me, eh?"

"No, they had other and more important things to do," Lee returned. "After all, you are only a very small man in this affair, and they did not trouble much over your fate."

The brows of the Arab darkened and his long, powerful fingers clenched.

"And they left me, eh?"

"Why not? There was more interest awaiting them at Ben Nazel."

Of course, this was pure guesswork on Lee's part. He had no idea who Djala was, nor was he sure that the bedouin did belong to the tribe of which Sheik Ibraim was the head.

But his hit was a shrewd one, and it brought Djala to his feet with a bound.

"They will find that I am no small man," he said. "I have served Yussuf well and faithfully. But I am not a dog to be cast aside as he chooses."

Nelson Lee remembered at once the name of the sheik's son. There could be little doubt but what the man to whom his prisoner was referring was Yussuf, the son of Sheik Ibraim, who had revolted against his father and was causing the Foreign Office so much trouble and perturbation.

"If they had not thought you of little worth they would have waited for you,"

said Lee, playing on the man's wounded dignity.

Djala broke out into a fierce torrent of rich Arabic, breathing many threats of revenge for the slight that he fancied had been placed upon him.

"I am Djala al Hamoud," he declared. "Men speak of me in Damascus as being one to be feared. As for Yussuf, he is but a boy, and he will have to explain to me. But now that you know so much about me, perhaps you will also know what happened at El Hala before you came there?"

As a matter of fact, Djala made a mistake then, and rather gave himself away. Lee, quick as a flash, picked up the meaning that lay behind the words.

"I know that Sheik Ibraim came to El Hala."

The Arab leaned forward.

"We were waiting and watching for him," he said. "But he escaped us. We only received news that he was in El Hala five days ago. I went there, but it was too late. Then the news came to me that three strangers had arrived in the town and I sought you out."

A smile flickered on his face for a moment.

"So you see you were wrong," he added. "It was not to spy on you that I was at El Hala, but to find out what Sheik Ibraim was doing."

He drew himself up with a delightful gesture.

"We are not children, we of the Ben Nazel!" he broke out. "We heard that our sheik had gone to Damascus, and it was rumoured that he was deep in the confidence of the Turks, those who would drive us away from these desert lands of ours. He was a traitor to our tribe. And it was to find out the truth that I sought information."

"Then you do not know where he has gone?"

"No. There are many places where he could vanish here, and perhaps he has been warned about what has happened among his tribe while he has been absent."

He looked at the detective.

"If you are Sheik Ibraim's friend, it would be wise for you to try and find him and warn him. There is no room for him in the tents of the Ben Nazel. Let him keep away!"

"You say that your sheik is a traitor," said Nelson Lee; "but I think you are mistaken. It is folly to condemn a man unheard. Why not have waited until he returned before deciding?"

Djala laughed.

"That would have been foolish," he said. "We cannot fight against guns and the machines that fly in the air. If we struck at all we had to do so quickly. And we have done that. We hold the oasis of Ben Nazel and no train can run along the railway now. It is a far cry to Damascus, and there are not many troops. The Ben Nazel have

revolted against their sheik and have found a better man in his son."

Nelson Lee continued to question the bedouin, but although the man was ready enough to let himself go on boasting, the information he gave was very little.

Presently the dusk came, and, as is usual in that part of the country, another stage of the journey was begun. Dorrimore rode behind the little party with the Arab, Djala, by his side, on the spare horse. Djala's hands had been tied and Dorrimore held the reins of his horse.

Their course was due east, and they followed it until the moon rose somewhere about midnight, when they reached a tiny oasis which provided water for themselves and their mounts.

Nelson Lee had gone off for a look round the oasis, and was away for the best part of an hour. When he came back he found Dorrimore and Nipper lying under their blankets, with Djala wrapped in his cloak, sleeping quietly within a few paces of them.

"I have made a few discoveries, Dorrimore," Lee said, "and they are rather interesting in a way. I feel sure that the sheik and her ladyship, with their servants, pitched camp here three or four days ago. In fact, I know that her ladyship has been here, because this is a proof."

He slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out a little scrap of cambric. Nipper had lit a small fire close to where they were lying, and from the feeble glow shed by it Dorrimore was able to see that the cambric was a handkerchief with the initials "E.D." worked in one corner.

"Not much chance of making any mistake about that," said Dorrimore. "The oasis of a Syrian desert is not exactly the place where one finds many objects of this kind."

"But I've made an even more important discovery," Lee went on. "Two men on horseback reached here two or three hours ago, while it was still light, and I should think that they found the traces of the other camp as soon as they arrived, and went straight on after the party. Anyhow, there is no sign of them having made a stay there. I am inclined to think that it was this sheik's son, Yussuf, and the other man whom Nipper saw."

"By Jove, that's rather serious, isn't it?" said Dorrimore. "For if your surmise concerning the identity of the party who camped here is correct, then it simply means that Yussuf is already on the heels of his father and her ladyship; and from all accounts Yussuf is a dangerous man."

Nelson Lee lowered his voice.

"What we require now, Dorrimore, is a thoroughly reliable guide who would take us to Ben Nazel," he murmured. "Fortunately, we have one at our hand, but I am inclined to think that he would allow us to cut off his head rather than let us make use of him—if he knew."

Nipper leaned forward, then, a glint in his eye.

"You've got some scheme, guv'nor," I know," he said. "What is it?"

"I am going to waken our friend here in a moment," he said, "and ask him to direct us to Ben Nazel. The probabilities are that he will put us on an entirely wrong track, but that won't make any odds, for what I shall do, then, will be to tie him up in such a way that if he struggles a little he will be able to get out of his bonds. We'll go off, leaving him here in your charge, Nipper—"

"Dash it, guv'nor! I don't want to——"

Nelson Lee raised his hand.

"That's all right, young 'un. I've no intention of really leaving you behind. This is my plan."

He spoke for a few moments, then presently Dorrimore arose and crossed to where Djala lay. Nelson Lee waited beside the fire till Dorrimore came back with their captive, then the detective made his request.

"We want to go to the oasis of your tribe, Djala," he said. "We have business there, and it is urgent. We know that we are close to Ben Nazel, now. Which is our best way?"

The lean bedouin stepped up to the fire, then extended his arm pointing through the fringe of trees.

"A good horse would carry you to Ben Nazel in an hour from here," he said, "and it lies in that direction. Follow that star and you will reach it."

He indicated a bright star low down on the horizon, and the fact that the star was almost due south was a plain indication to Dorrimore and Nipper that Lee's assumption that Djala would try to mislead them was perfectly justified.

"If you have lied to us we will come back here and punish you," said Lee. "And we will make sure that you are here when we return."

He nodded to Dorrimore and the tall aristocrat, who was perhaps one of the best manipulators of rope when it came to making sound, serviceable knots, set to work to tie up the wily Arab, and the succession of granny knots that Dorrimore managed to tie, would have broken the heart of a sailor.

Finally, Djala was wedged against the slender trunk of a date palm, and a couple of lengths of grass rope were fastened around his body and the trunks, and Nipper was solemnly warned to keep a sharp watch on their prisoner.

Djala's black eyes had a malignant light in them as they followed the movements of his captors. He saw Dorrimore and Lee go off to where the horses were standing, watched them saddle their animals, then ride through the trees heading for that star, which the bedouin had chosen so carefully. And when the soft padding sound of the horses' hoofs had died away in the silence Djala transferred his attention to his young guard.

CHAPTER 9.

In Merciless Hands.

NIPPER had taken up his position on the other side of the fire and had made a great display of the revolver which he had drawn from his belt and had placed across his knee.

At first the youngster's head was held very erect, and his eyes were staring steadily at Djala. But as the long moments passed Djala noted that the slim figure began to sway slightly, and over the bearded lips of the bedouin a smile of grim relief spread.

He began to work steadily at the bonds round his arms then, all the time keeping his eyes fixed on Nipper.

To Djala it seemed as though the youngster was soundly asleep by now, for his head was forward and his whole body had relaxed. By the time that the Arab had released his arms, the figure opposite him had tilted on to its side, and was apparently oblivious to anything around him.

The fire had died down to a thin, red glow, and Djala, after one fixed steady scrutiny of the recumbent figure on the other side of the fire gave a final shake to his bonds, and they fell away and he arose to his feet, standing motionless for a second or so.

Lee had taken care to disarm Djala when he had been made a prisoner, and a quick temptation came to the heart of the bedouin. He had noted that the revolver which lay on the youngster's knee was a very good one, and it is certainly a fact that the average Arab shares with the Afghan that intense desire for first-rate firearms which makes him such an expert thief.

But strong though his desire was to possess himself of that beautiful weapon, Djala realised that he was jeopardising his chances of escape, were he to get any nearer to his custodian. So, after one last look at the recumbent form, Djala turned and slid across the open space without making a sound.

"Well, that's that," Nipper thought to himself.

He had moved his pose slightly now, and was able to see across the cuplike hollow which marked the wall. He knew that Djala had gone across to the other side in order to possess himself of his own mount which Dorrimore had left standing by itself.

Presently the soft pad of the horse's hoofs in the sand came through the silence, and Nipper saw the distinct figure of Djala on the horse moving through the trees.

Nipper waited until the figure vanished, then he arose to his feet.

"I don't know where on earth the guv'nor and Dorrimore are," he muttered, "but if they're going to follow this beggar it's time they were getting after him. In any case, I think I'd better take a hand in the game."

He slipped across the site of the camp, and presently found himself beside his horse which was still fully saddled.

Nipper led the animal out to the verge of the desert, and thanks to the fact that

the moon was well up in the heavens, Nipper saw the clear hoofprints that Djala's mount had left behind it.

They ran directly eastward, and, after allowing another two or three minutes to elapse, the youngster climbed into the saddle and started off on the trail.

He had no desire to keep close contact with Djala. It was quite sufficient for him to have those clear hoofprints as guide. Lee had wanted to find the oasis where the Ben Naze! tribe had pitched their village, and if the



**Nelson Lee came down the slope in a mad rush
A mighty punch from the detect**

detective's calculations were correct, Djala was heading for that spot now as fast as his horse would carry him.

Nipper kept his animal going at a quiet, sober trot, and as it was a portion of sandy desert he was crossing then the horse made very little sound.

Presently the young detective began to feel rather perplexed, and he kept a sharp look-out to the right and left, half expecting to see his guv'nor and Dorrimore appear. But when an hour had passed and there was still no sign of either of his friends, his doubts increased until at last they were almost certainties.

"Hanged if I can make out what's happened," he told himself. "After all, the gov'nor and Dorrimore knew exactly what was going to happen. They expected that darned Arab to cut loose from the ropes and clear off, and he did so. Why the dickens aren't they following me?"

He had expected, of course, that Nelson Lee and Lord Dorrimore would have kept well out of sight for the first two or three miles; and indeed, Nipper was still not at all certain that they were not following Djala,



and crashed straight into the oncoming Bedouin. He sent the Arab spinning away.

even then, keeping to the left or right of the track.

The youngster had not so far caught sight of the Arab, but he had deliberately kept well in the rear, being content merely to follow the track. Now, however, he decided to push on and try to get closer to his guide.

The animal that Nipper rode was a rather good one, a slim, grey Arab horse of undoubted worth, and it required very little urging to make it break into one of its steady gallops.

The road was clear enough for Nipper to be able to pick up the track and avoid any

obstructions, while the cool night air made the ride a real pleasure.

He must have covered five or six miles before he reached the edge of a stretch of rougher ground, and the grey animal checked its pace.

Nipper had been looking out for the first sign of a fluttering robe ahead, but he had so far been disappointed. When he reached the rocky stretch the youngster, after a very careful survey of the ground, drew rein for a moment, slipping from the saddle, then he began to lead his mount down the slight slope.

He had reached what was practically the beginning of a stretch of more fertile land, and presently he found himself passing clumps of bushes, scrub and tufts of dried grasses—the familiar camel-grazing ground, patches of which are to be found all across the Syrian desert.

Now a camel has a tang all of its own, and when Nipper had been trudging steadily forward for ten or fifteen minutes, the warm, sour, tainted smell came to his nostrils. It brought him to a halt, sharply, for he knew that the presence of camels meant also the presence of men.

"I wonder if I'm going to land myself in a blinkin' hole?" the young detective muttered. "I'm hanged if I like the look of things at present."

He moved on again, picking his way over the rough ground, leading his mount behind him. When the moon is shining one is often deceived by brain pictures, and Nipper began to people that plain with all sorts of shapes. It is not difficult for a bush to become a kneeling man, or a patch of scrub a tent, when one's imagination runs riot.

And yet the attack, when it did come, came so suddenly that the youngster had no chance whatever of defending himself.

He was avoiding every patch of scrub or bush that he saw, giving them all a wide berth. He had noted the darker shadow on his left, but had taken it to be a boulder. He passed within twenty yards of it, and he did not see the long shadow move and break into two swift-moving human figures.

A grey and brown blanket carefully arranged over two kneeling men will, provided that the lighting be favourable, make quite a passable imitation of the brown, rugged boulders that are one of the features of the Syrian landscape.

The bedouin is a past-master at the art of deceiving an enemy, when it comes to attack or defence. The two figures shot swiftly across the ground, and the first sign that Nipper had of their presence was when, with one swift, lithe leap, the leader of the two flung an arm round the youngster, dragging him to the ground.

As soon as Nipper felt that arm close round him he began to fight. He was strung up and ready for just some sort of attack as this, so although taken entirely by surprise, he did not let his adversaries have it all their own way.

He managed to screw himself round as he fell, and thrust his hand down to his belt, reaching for the revolver. But as his fingers closed on the weapon, his attacker grabbed at the slim, sinewy wrist and forced the hand down, so that Nipper could not withdraw the revolver.

They fell on the sand together, and a wild-cat struggle took place. Finding that he could not draw his weapon, Nipper used his other fist, and had the grim satisfaction of sending his knuckles home twice on a hard, bony jaw.

The man sprawling above him gasped at the impact of the fist, but he did not release his hold, and the other man, coming up with a rush now, flung himself on to his knees, and, watching his opportunity, gripped the youngster by the throat, forcing his head down.

What followed after that Nipper had only a brief recollection, but the fight ended when one of his attackers flung a heavy, evil-smelling blanket over the youngster's head and shoulders, tying it there, carrying the cord round the slim arms and fastening them to the sides.

In the hot, stifling folds of the blankets that ugly camel taint was again evident, and half suffocated and breathless, the young detective felt himself being lifted and slung over a saddle to be tied there, then later on the beasts to which he was tied began to move forward, first at a trot, then at a tearing canter, and Nipper, after a valiant struggle with himself found unconsciousness coming to him.

He made a desperate effort to free his hand, but he was absolutely helpless. He had been tied across the saddle in a way that made it impossible for him to move hand or foot, and the steady jolting and pain of his awkward pose, brought with it the inevitable result.

His mind slipped away into that hazy dream-world that nature, in her kindly way, opens to the human being who has reached the end of his endurance.

CHAPTER 10.

The Bedouin Patrol.

IT was Nipper who had made a mistake so far as following Djala was concerned, and, as a matter of fact, it was really the trail left by Yussuf and his companion that the youngster had quite by accident stumbled across.

The place where Djala had emerged from the oasis was much farther to the right, and Lee and Dorrimore, who had moved away from their place of concealment as soon as they saw the Arab leave the encampment, were safely hidden behind a fold of the ground, when Djala, setting his horse to a canter, came out from the oasis and struck off eastward.

Nelson Lee and Dorrimore followed their man, but kept well to the left, and saw to it

that the moon was in the right direction, that is to say, shining towards Djala.

And so, after a long, hard ride, Nelson Lee and Dorrimore found themselves putting their forces to a stiff gradient, and when reaching the top they had a view of a long rolling valley, at the far end of which stood a cluster of houses.

To the left of the valley there arose a group of low hills, and the wadi, or valley, was evidently a well-cultivated one, for here and there they could pick out the little patches of cultivated ground that lay around the Arab town.

"I think that must be Ben Nazel, old chap," Dorrimore said, as he eyed the dim outlines of the town ahead.

They had noted Djala riding over the crest, some distance to their right, and, realising that it would not be safe for them to follow their guide any further, Lee began to move along the verge of the valley heading for the low hills.

Here they had a meal—a few native cakes, washed down with water—then, leaning back against the boulders, Nelson Lee fixed his eyes on the distant town, and watched the first coming of the dawn, which gradually revealed the extent of the valley and the houses.

The first thing that attracted the detective's attention was the fact that outside the town here ran a number of criss-cross cuttings, and it did not take a second glance to recognise them.

"Trenches," said Dorrimore.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, that's right. And it looks to me as though Ben Nazel is playing the part of a besieged town, only there's no sign of anyone besieging it."

Beyond the town on the other side of the valley were the telegraph poles and railway lines.

"Hallo, Lee! Someone coming out!"

Dorrimore reached out and touched his companion on the arm, pointing down to where a well-defined road ran through the palm groves to the town. Up from the town side of the road, a feather of dust was rising, and presently Lee could make out the figures of five or six horsemen accompanied by a party on foot.

They came down the road in something like military order, and when they reached the spot where the trenches ran, Lee saw the groups divide, some to the right, and the others to the left, while three of the horsemen came on riding down the road.

"By Jove! That certainly looks as though they mean business," Lee said. "Those are the pickets going to relieve the men in the trenches, and the fellows on horseback are doubtless a patrol coming for their usual scouting operations."

They watched the little parties of relief vanish to the various trenches, then turned their attention to the three scouts riding side by side along the road.

"They certainly do look business-like, Lee," Dorrimore said, as he watched the trio with the keen professional eye of the born soldier. "They ride just like a party of Life Guards down Whitehall. I don't know who's been training them, but he has taught them their business all right."

The trio were now almost underneath the rocks behind which Lee and Dorrimore were hiding, and the tall aristocrat could hear the voice of one of the Arabs shout something quite clearly.

He ventured to raise his head and look over the edge of the rock. One of the men had gone on up the road while the other two had dismounted from their horses and were leading the animals up the rugged side of the hill.

"Just our confounded luck, Lee," he said. "If those fellows don't shift from the way they are heading now they'll walk straight into us."

They found out afterwards that they had chosen in the dusk what was, perhaps, the best place to keep watch on the valley, and that was why the two bedouins were now heading straight for that particular clump of rocks.

Half-way up the slope the Arabs left their horses and continued to climb. As luck would have it they separated, one man keeping nine or ten paces to the left of his companion.

The man on the left, a tall, fierce-looking fellow, was coming straight for the boulder behind which Lee and Dorrimore lay, and discovery was absolutely inevitable.

"He's asking for it, Lee," said the tall Englishman, "and we'll have to give it to him."

The tall aristocrat slipped round behind the higher boulder, and, allowing his body to stretch itself out flat there, he waited. The scurrying of a few tiny pebbles down the slope was followed a second later by the quiet, regular breathing of the climber; then Dorrimore saw the man's long shadow coming over the top of the rock.

The sun shining on the other side of the valley picked out the shadow quite clearly, and it was this that gave Dorrimore his chance.

For while the shadow was still rising over the rock, the tall Englishman rose to his knees, and, turning round, slipped down to the other side of the boulder. He saw a pair of thin legs just in the act of disappearing over the top of the rock, and, having thus flanked his man, Dorrimore took full advantage of the opportunity.

His hand shot out, and he gripped at the fellow's ankle. One quick tug saw the Arab come sprawling back over the top of the rock, and, as he did so, Dorrimore closed with him.

But quick though he was, he was not able to stifle completely the cry of warning that came from the parted lips of the Arab.

Nelson Lee heard the half-gasped cry, and knew that the other Arab would also have heard it. From behind the boulder there came the heavy breathing and the clatter of

a steel weapon, certifying to the grim struggle that was going on there between Dorrimore and the man he had attacked.

The Gray's Inn Road man drew himself up to a crouching pose, and waited, listening intently. He heard a call from the right, then the clatter of small stones indicated that the other Arab was hurrying towards the spot.

Nelson Lee's hand shot out and his fingers closed round a solid fragment of flint. Then he raised his head cautiously and peered over the edge of the boulder.

The second man was about eight yards away from him, but his head was turned in the direction from whence the sounds of the struggle came.

The Arab had drawn a heavy Army pattern revolver from his coloured belt, and was holding it ready poised as he scrambled along the steep slope.

There was only one thing to do, and Lee did it. He took a full-armed swing and sent the fragment of flint whizzing through the air, straight for the head of the oncoming man.

As soon as the stone left his hand Lee leapt after it, and as the missile caught the Arab on the side of the neck and sent him reeling, Lee was within three or four yards of his man.

A mad rush saw him close on the Arab, and a quick, deft stroke of his hand knocked the revolver out of the fellow's fingers. They clinched, and, unable to keep their balance on the rocky surface of the slope, staggered down for a few paces, tripped up, then went rolling over and over down the rough ride, followed by a cataract of stones and rubble, until they fetched up against another heap of brown boulders, and it was just Lee's luck that his adversary should be the one to take the jolt against the hard buffer.

The turbaned head came in contact with the rock, and the concussion was quite enough to daze the bedouin. There was no time to stand on ceremony, and it was up to Lee to take full advantage of his good fortune.

He shifted his grip, and clenching his fist, he swung it round in a swift, deft jab. The knuckles landed on the point of the jaw, and without a groan the bedouin dropped back against the rock, stunned.

As Lee rose to a kneeling position he heard a low hail from above, and looking up, saw Dorrimore's tall figure just rising from among the boulders. There was a grin on the walnut-juice-stained face, and the big man waved his hand down to his companion.

"All right?" he called.

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes. All correct."

Dorrimore ducked down again, and presently he came scrambling round the edge of the rock, and Lee noted that the tall aristocrat was carrying a gaudy burnous, turban, military belt and cartridge bandolier that his adversary had worn.

"Better tie your fellow up and gag him, same as I did to mine," Dorrimore suggested.

"No good attempting to get away from here dressed as we are, and I suggest that we borrow these fellows' togs. Djala is bound to have got into Ben Nazel, and I should think that these three chaps have probably been sent out to try and locate us, or, at any rate, to keep a look-out for our party. Anyhow, it strikes me these hills are rather dangerous for you and I to hang around in too long."

It was certainly a sound suggestion, for, of course, Djala was bound to have described the party, and the chances were that he had already done so; and, as Dorrimore suggested, these men were now on the look-out for them.

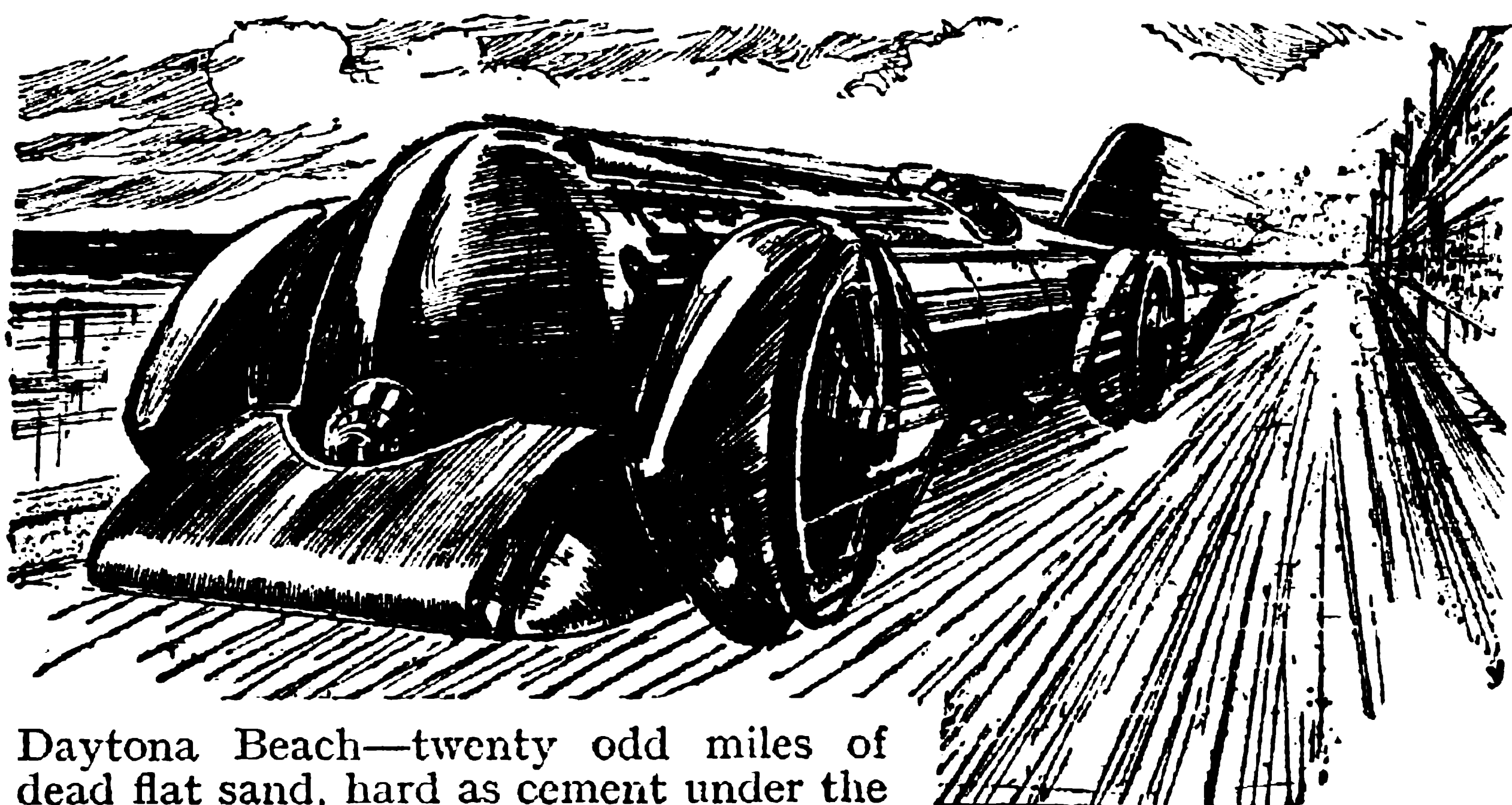
Nelson Lee stopped, therefore, and removed the burnous and turban, and other distinctive parts of the man's clothing; then, after tying the Arab up and slipping a gag between his lips, Lee and Dorrimore arrayed themselves in the gaudy garments, and stepped boldly out from behind the rock, moving down the slope towards the horses

that had been ridden by the Ben Nazel men. They climbed into the saddles and turned the animals' heads in the direction of the road again.

On reaching the road they turned away from the town, and, on rounding a spur of the hill, they saw that the road divided, one portion of it going down along the edge of the valley, while the other continued to climb through the hills, and they chose the latter direction.

"But I can't understand where Nipper has got to," said Lee, as they rode on their way. "I told the youngster to follow Djala and pick us up on the way, but perhaps he's got a bit mixed up. In any case, if he decided to wait till the morning, he's bound to be able to follow our tracks."

This was certainly logical, and so Lee and Dorrimore continued to ride on up the road, which gradually narrowed until at last it was little more than a goat track, running along the flanks of the hills.



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They were now in a much wilder part of the country, and it was only occasionally that they could get glimpses of the town of Ben Nazel lying in the valley below.

CHAPTER 11.

A Desert Secret!

AT last, after a climb that must have extended for three or four hours, Lee and Dorrimore found the road open out on to a little plateau, and half-way across the plateau there stood a solid stone tower with one or two small out-buildings beside it.

They had not expected to find a habitation of that sort in the hills, and they came to a halt at once, watching the place for a long moment. There was no sign of smoke rising from it, nor could they detect any movement in the tower nor the houses by the side of it.

"Might as well take a shot, Lee," Dorrimore said. "I don't suppose there is any-one in there, and if there is not, it seems to me that it will make a rather serviceable hiding-place for you and me."

The twenty minutes' ride across the plateau found them under the shadow of the tower, and they dismounted from their weary horses; then, attaching the bridles to a solid stone post, Lee and his companion turned and entered the tower.

The lower chamber was very dark, lighted only by a couple of narrow, slit-like windows set in the thick wall, and, on ascending the stairs, Lee came to a halt at the top, for he saw that someone had recently spread dried rushes as a crude sort of cover for the floor in the room.

"Somebody has been here not so very long ago," commented Dorrimore, in a quiet tone.

He spoke in English, and although he had not raised his voice in any way, yet in that hollow chamber the sound carried quite clearly, and suddenly the two men heard a rustle from the far side of the chamber. Then a door opened and there emerged a figure in Arabian dress—a very slim, delicate figure which at first glance might have been mistaken for that of a boy.

But as it came nearer to Lee and Dorrimore, the light shining from a window behind them fell full on the face, and the grey hair, deeply coiled away from the delicate ears.

"I heard you speak English," came the quiet, cultivated voice, in the same language.

"You are Lady Emily Denville," Lee said.

The slim figure came to a halt then, and the helmet was tilted farther back from the brow, while a pair of brown eyes regarded Lee with a steady scrutiny.

"That is quite true," she said. "I am Lady Denville. Are you the two men whom I heard had followed us from England?"

Nelson Lee nodded.

"Then you knew about us, Lady Denville?"

"Oh, yes, the sheik and I knew all about you; and it was a very great nuisance, I can tell you. Both the sheik and I knew that you would be able to trace us as far as El Hala, but we certainly did not anticipate your finding us up here in Jedal's Tower. Not even the sheik's own tribe know where we are. How did you manage to find us?"

"Then the sheik is here?" said Lee.

"I never said so," she returned dryly. "As a matter of fact, he is not here at the moment."

She was so very calm and self-possessed that one might have thought she was in Langham Towers instead of being stuck away on the top of a lonely plateau in the heart of the Syrian desert.

Dorrimore chuckled.

"I congratulate you, your ladyship," he said. "By Jove, you have got more nerve than most men, and whatever you came out here for, I sincerely hope you manage to carry it out."

Her ladyship regarded Dorrimore placidly.

"I don't know why you have interfered in this at all," she declared. "The matter was purely a family one, concerning myself and—and someone whom I had—had given up as dead years ago."

Then a sudden idea seemed to come to her, for she leaned forward and touched Lee on the arm.

"But as you are here," she went on, "I might as well let you see something of the little mystery. Come with me."

She led the way across the rush-strewn floor of the chamber, and, entering a dark archway, went up another flight of steps, and Lee and Dorrimore following her, found themselves at the top of the tower.

There was a high parapet round it, and in one corner of the space a dark camel-hair blanket was erected in the form of a tent. Beneath this canopy was a native couch, and stretched on the couch was a figure in native dress.

It had raised itself on one arm as her ladyship appeared, and as Nelson Lee and Dorrimore came to a halt, the detective noted that, although the woman was dressed in the native garments, and was wearing a veil and usual head-dress, the face was pale and wan, and distinctly European, and something familiar about it made Lee eye it searchingly for a moment. Then the extraordinary resemblance struck him, and he turned and looked at Lady Denville.

"This is my twin sister, Stella," Lady Emily said, with a quick catch in her breath, "and the reason why I came out to Syria was to see her once again."

The woman on the couch moved slightly, and Lady Denville leaned forward, arranging the cushions behind the slender shoulders.

"You are English?" a faint voice said; and, from the way in which the woman picked her words, it was obvious that she had almost forgotten her mother tongue.

"Yes, dear, they are English," Lady Emily said. "In fact, they are two gentlemen who

have come out here to—well, to see what I am up to, I suppose. They were sent by that ridiculously obstinate husband of mine, and I have decided that they might as well know the truth."

She seated herself on the edge of the cot, taking the frail white hand in her own; then she turned to Lee. Lady Denville's eyes were very moist and kindly, and the usually haughty expression had changed to a wondrously soft one.

"Sheik Ibraim is Stella's husband," she said, "and he came all the way to England to find me because—well—many years ago, Stella had a mental complaint and lost her memory——"

"We have heard about that from your nephew, Mr. Richard Denville, whom we met at Marseilles," said Lee.

"Then if you have heard all I told him," continued her ladyship, "it saves me a lot of explanation. It seems that Stella had a return of her malady, and, as you may know, anything to do with the brain is regarded by Mohammedans as being inflicted by Allah. In the ordinary way, the tribesmen would have been extremely sorry for the sheik's wife. But there was one man who made out, or tried to do so, that Allah was beginning to show his anger against Sheik Ibraim, and that eventually that anger would fall upon all the tribe. In other words, he made out that the sheik and his wife was a danger to everyone at Ben Nazel, and that the tribe had better find a new ruler.

"Sheik Ibraim was not afraid of this enemy of his who fought with his tongue, but he did fear the enmity of the tribe against his wife. In addition to that Stella began to be delirious at times, and in her delirium she repeatedly called for me. Thinking that if I could be found and persuaded to visit Stella it might ease her tortured brain, if not cure her malady altogether, the sheik did a desperate thing. He decided to visit England, unknown to all. He had to do this secretly, because his enemy had already started the story going that the sheik was in communication with the Turks, whom the Arabs hated, because they wanted to force the tribe to leave the oasis.

"To make doubly sure, the sheik had his wife brought up here by two men he could trust, knowing she would be safe, because the tribesmen believe this tower to be haunted and will not come near it if they can help it. So far, the sheik's plan worked out well. He found me, and I defied all the rules and regulations to get here quickly. My coming has actually brought recovery to my sister, and with care she will soon be fit and well again.

"But during his absence the sheik's enemy has poisoned the mind of Ibraim's son against his father. In any case, Yussuf has revolted, and it is reported that the tribesmen mean to kill Ibraim as soon as he reappears. Now, with his two men, the sheik has ventured down into the valley to find out how things stand, and to make up his mind what to do.

And now, to complicate matters, you have found us here."

"It seems to me that we are in a pretty pickle," Dorrimore said to Nelson Lee later, when, at her ladyship's suggestion, they had retired to the lower portion of the tower and prepared themselves a meal.

They found that the tower was well supplied with native food, and despite Lady Denville's assurance that she was perfectly safe, neither Lee nor Dorrimore felt inclined to leave the two women absolutely unprotected.

They had been able to make a much more accurate guess at the state of affairs at Ben Nazel than Lady Denville could have done, and it was obvious to Lee that matters were much more serious there, and trouble might break out there at any moment.

It was arranged therefore that Dorrimore should remain behind in the tower while Nelson Lee went off to try and get in touch with Sheik Ibraim, and her ladyship gave the detective directions as well as she could as to the way the sheik had taken when he and his two followers had left the tower.

NELSON LEE set off on foot, for Lady Denville had assured him that there was no possible chance of riding down, for the first part of the way the sheik had gone, and this assurance was swiftly borne out, for at the end of half an hour's steady going Lee found himself scrambling down what was little more than a goat-track.

The path grew worse and worse, until at last it led down into the bed of a dried water-course, and apparently stopped there; but after a search Lee discovered traces of foot-prints leading along the edge of a rough patch of scrub, and on rounding a projection he struck another pathway which led down a sharp decline, and ahead of him he saw the dark stretches of desert.

He halted for a moment to take stock of his position, and it was just as well that he did so, for presently a movement from the left caught his eye, and he saw the turbaned heads of a couple of bedouins appear round a neighbouring spur.

The men were working their way along that boulder-strewn slope in a way that would not have disgraced a Red Indian, so far as cunning in concealing themselves was concerned.

A long half-hour passed, then Lee saw that they were heading now for a patch of scrub that lay about five hundred yards from where he was kneeling. He turned and climbed up the projecting rock until he reached the top of it, and by doing this he was able to see a cleared space beyond the scrub, and he noted that there were a couple of hobbled horses grazing on the rough ground.

By this time the two bedouins had reached the patch of undergrowth, and Lee saw the ragged robed shapes vanish into it.

Then a movement from the left of the scrub caught his eye, and he saw a tall figure in native robes rise to his feet, and stretch himself. The figure was dressed in flowing

garments, and even at that distance Lee saw that the man obviously a leader of some sort, for in his turban was the mark of the Hadj, and after studying the figure closely for a moment, Lee realised who it was.

The brown beard and keen, hawk-like visage had been described to him too often to make any mistake. It was Sheik Ibraim, and there was little doubt in Lee's mind but what these two men were working towards him through the scrub were a couple of his disloyal tribesmen.

The detective scrambled down the rock and began to move swiftly along the path heading down the rugged slope towards the patch of scrub. He was able to keep a sharp look-out on the scrub, and he knew that his movements would not be seen by the men who were now working their way through it.

His swift rush had carried him down the slope, and he was within a few yards from the thick patch of undergrowth when he saw a figure lift for a moment on the centre of it. Quick as a flash, Lee dropped on to his hands and knees, and knelt there for a moment, afraid that he might have been observed.

But as no warning cry came, he raised his head again and saw now that the two men were just on the edge of the scrub, and the sheik was ten yards away with his back towards them.

They must have risen noislessly, for their quarry had evidently not heard any movement.

Lee, rising to his feet, began to move swiftly along the edge of the scrub, picking his way carefully round it.

The two men were moving forward with catlike stealth, and they were three yards away from the sheik before they made their final leap. By this time, Lee had reached to within ten or fifteen yards, and as he saw the two sinewy figures throw themselves bodily on the taller one, the detective gave a shout, leaping forward.

That shout possibly saved the sheik's life, for it made him turn his head, and the leader of the two attacking Arabs whose hand was already raised with an ugly knife glinting in it, was not able to deliver the blow.

With speed that was wonderful for a man of his age, the sheik darted in under the upraised arm, and while he gripped at the lean wrist of his attacker with one hand, his other hand closed round the thin, scraggy throat, and they thudded into the second man coming down in a heap together.

Nelson Lee covered the last couple of yards with a headlong bound and flung himself bodily on top of the writhing figures. He was just in time to grab at the upraised hand of the second bedouin which, grasping a long horse pistol by the muzzle, was aiming a blow with the butt end at the turbaned head of Sheik Ibraim.

There is a certain trick of ju jitsu which is a very useful one, consisting of a twist of the wrist and a quick backward jerk.

Properly carried out, with the correct knowledge of leverage, it will break a man's arm, and that is just exactly what did happen to the murderous bedouin.

The man's arm snapped like a carrot, and he rolled away from the heap with a shriek of agony. It was drastic treatment, but it was needed, for the sheik was now flat on his back, and his antagonist, a younger man, had managed to wrest his arm free.

This man Lee tackled in a deft way. He swung his fist round and brought the hard knuckles thudding against the lean head just under the ear. It was a stunning blow, and the knife slipped from the man's fingers, while he rolled on to his back, howling with pain.

THE fight had been fierce enough while it lasted, but it had not lasted long, and Lee arose to his feet holding out his hand to assist the sheik to rise.

As he did so the man whose arm he had broken made a snatch at the pistol lying on the ground at his side, and, raising his uninjured arm, he took quick aim.

It was the sheik who saw that movement, and he lunged out, kicking at the lean, brown fist. The pistol went off with a loud report, and the heavy slug snarled past Lee's head, then the bedouin rolled over on the sand again, and lay there, mouthing his rage.

There is no fighter so tough and indomitable as the bedouin, and, realising that these two men were still capable of giving trouble, Lee tackled the nearest one, rolling him over on his back and tying his wrists together.

As he arose from performing this task, he saw that the sheik had already carried out a somewhat similar performance on the other man, for he had tied his ankles together and the man was sitting up now, his injured arm dangling, and his swarthy face twisted in a look of half-savage agony and hate.

"Who art thou?"

The sheik had turned towards Lee now and addressed him in Arabic.

The detective smiled.

"I am an Englishman," he said in that language, "and I came out here to find you, Sheik Ibraim—all the way from London."

"I heard about you," he said. "You have followed very close on our heels, and, by Allah, I am not sorry for that now."

He drew his fine figure erect and pointed to the two men.

"Behold these dogs, who would turn against their chief," he said. "They are men of my own tribe, the Ben Nazel, and I have been their father and their leader for years. You saw just now that they were ready to murder me, and would have done so, had it not been for you, an unbeliever!"

His voice was deep, and there was a certain amount of feeling vibrating in it. Lee saw that the man did not resent the mur-

derous attack on himself so much as the fact that it was men of his own tribe who had carried it out.

The man with the broken arm looked across at Sheik Ibraim for a moment, then he pointed to him.

"We are not traitors, Ibraim," he said. "It is you are the traitor, for you left us to seek our enemies and tell them our plans. You would have sold us to the men who would turn us from our desert homes. That is your way of doing!"

"That is a lie, Hassan!" he sheik returned slowly.

"Then if it is a lie, why did you go away without a word of warning to us? And why did you not even tell your own son?"

In the eyes of the sheik there came an angry glint.

"I'll settle with Yussuf when I meet him," he said.

Ibraim stared for a moment, then he turned on his heel and looked at Lee.

"These men are children," he said. "Someone has lied to them and has brought all this misery about. I have been here waiting for the return of my men, for I sent them on ahead to find out what was the trouble that had come to my tribe. These men have now told me, and I think I see light."

He turned to the bedouins again.

"Who told you that I was here," he asked.

The man with the broken arm smiled grimly.

"We caught Mohammed Ali while he was trying to get into the town, and we persuaded him to speak," he said.

There was no need for him to say more so far as the method by which the Arabs had prevailed upon Sheik Ibraim's trusted subordinate to open his mouth. The bedouins are quite capable of applying torture when needs be, and a pallor crossed the sheik's face.

"He told all?"

"Yes. We know that you were in Jedals Tower with the white woman and the mother of Yussuf."

The bedouin drew himself erect and pointed towards the hills.

"By this time the tower will have been attacked," he went on. "We were sent to see that you did not get back there and give the alarm, Sheik Ibraim."

A hoarse exclamation broke from the lips of the sheik, and he turned to the detective.

"You hear what that dog says!" he broke out. "It means danger to that wonderful woman who has done so much. We must get back to the tower and try to save her and my wife."

"They are not altogether unprotected," Lee said quietly. "I have left someone behind who will give a good account of himself, although I am afraid he will not be able to stand against a combined attack. Still, he will do his best, and we must get there as soon as we can."

AND so there began a swift return journey, and it was Sheik Ibraim who led the way up the tortuous paths and through the dried watercourse, and on and on, climbing steadily until at last they were well up in among the hills.

But even although they did not rest for a single moment, it was late in the afternoon before they reached the final stage of their journey, and as they came to a halt for a moment under the lee of a great boulder, the crackling sound of musketry came to their ears.

"It is coming from the tower," said the sheik with a quick, indrawn breath. "It means that the attack has already commenced."

They went on again, stumbling over the boulder and across the ragged slopes, and dusk saw them on the verge of the plateau, and, creeping forward to where a high, jagged boulder stood out on the edge of the plateau, Lee and his companion were able to catch sight of the tower.

About four or five hundred yards away from it there were huddled a little knot of horses, and the crackling of rifle fire had increased now, so that Lee and his companion could see the flashes from the various sides of the plateau.

"Ah! Someone is firing from the tower. Look!"

The sheik extended his hand, and after a moment Lee saw a flash from the roof of the tower, indicating that the defenders were still holding the fort.

Dusk falls rapidly in that part of Arabia, and within half an hour the plateau was plunged in darkness, but still the occasional flashes of red from the attacking force and the crisp crack of the reports indicated that the men of the Ben Nazel were keeping up their desperate fire.

Nelson Lee and Sheik Ibraim began to creep forward then, and presently the detective was able to discover one important feature. The attack, so far as he could see, was being carried out from three sides only, and that indicated that the attacking force was not in very great numbers, for they had left one side—that nearest to Lee and his companion—open.

Presently Sheik Ibraim arrange a plan of campaign.

"They will not have got to the sheds where the horses are," the sheik said, "and if we can get to them we may still be able to rescue the white lady and my wife. By Allah, but it is a madness that has descended on this tribe of mine, for I swear to you that it was not the desire to play traitor to them that made me leave them as I did."

He regarded Lee thoughtfully for a moment, then a smile crossed his lips.

"I can tell you my story in a very few words," he said.

"I have heard it," said Lee. "Partly from the aviator, Mr. Richard Denville, and partly from Lady Emily."

"Good!" said the sheik. "It saves time. But you cannot understand it all. These things would not have been necessary if it were not for the cunning tongue of one man who was jealous of my power. The tribe of Ben Nazel had met with bad luck. The crops had failed. There had been sickness amongst the horse and the camels. This man made out that Allah was angry with me, and pointed to the sickness of my wife as proof of it. My wife was afraid that even Yussuf, her son, would turn against her, and prevailed upon me to take her to the Tower of Jedals secretly, and then to bring her sister to her. This have I done. The coming of Lady Emily has gone far towards curing my wife, but now even my son seems to have believed the man with the poisonous tongue instead of believing in me until I could return and explain. All I did had to be done quickly and in secret, because I hoped to steal a march on my enemy. Only Allah can say whether I shall win through or not. But enough of words. Time means all to us now."

They were creeping quietly over the plateau, and now they came to a halt within a few hundred yards of the tower. They moved with the stealthy noiselessness of men accustomed to picking their way in the dark, and when the low outlines of the sheds behind the tower appeared in front of them, the sheik turned and nodded to Lee.

"I will go to the sheds and prepare the horses, then when you hear a low hoot of an owl, you will know that I am ready for you. You must make for the tower and tell them of our plans. Our only hope now is a quick dash for the railway. My tribesmen will not expect anyone to come from this side, and in that we have a chance of success."

Nelson Lee waited till the robed shape of the sheik had vanished into the darkness, then the detective moved towards the tower. But when he was within forty or fifty yards from the building, he saw a movement close to the wall and came to a halt.

His quick eyes presently detected a robed shape creeping along the side of the wall, away from the tower, and working his way forward, Lee came to within a couple of yards of the shape, then he arose to his feet.

But as he did so a loose stone rattled, and the figure pressed against the wall, turned and threw itself headlong at him, gripping at his throat.

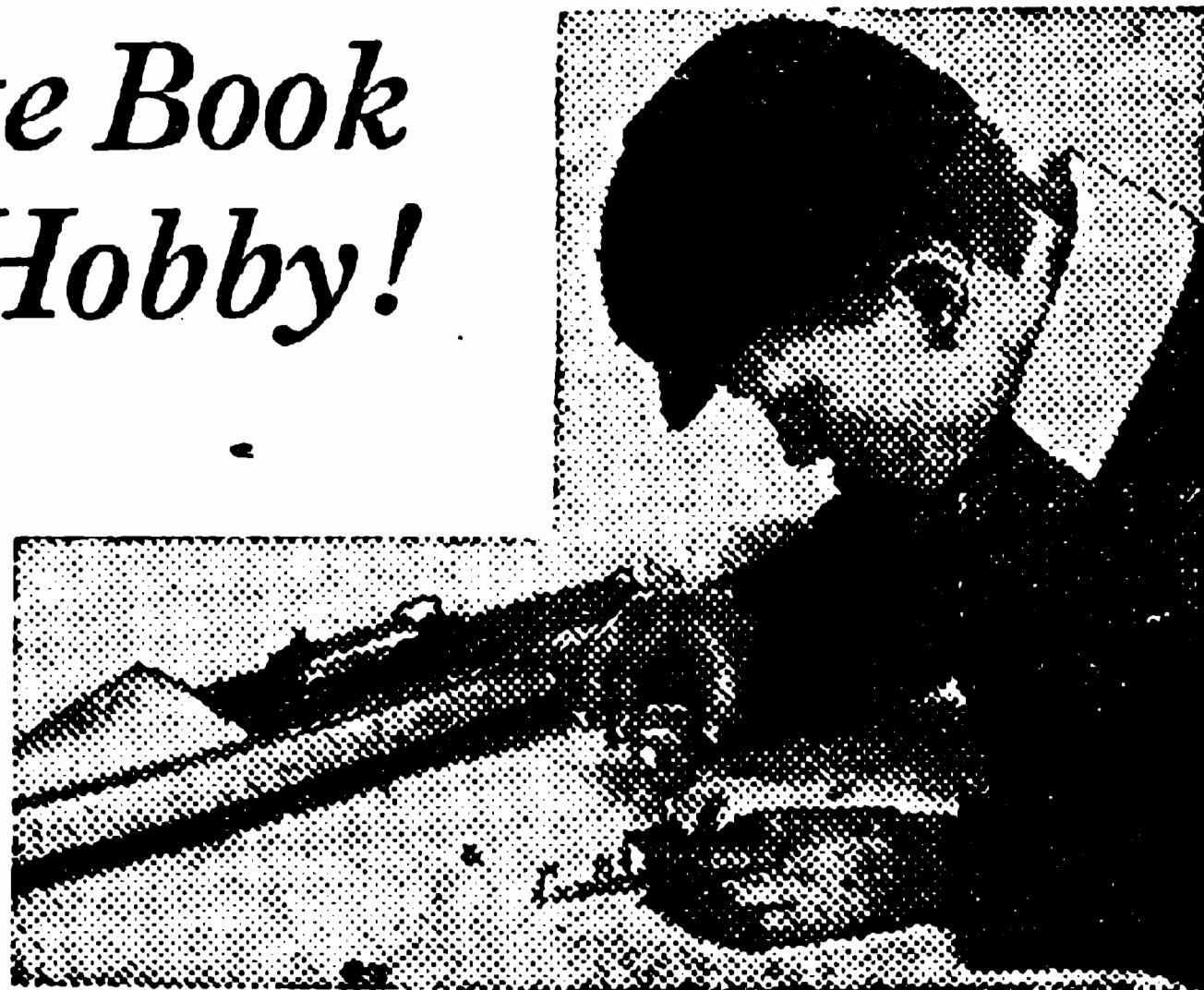
LEE made a quick swerve and avoided the reaching fingers, then, as they clinched and rolled over together Leo heard an unmistakable voice sound:

"You darned skunk——"

"Dorrimore!" the detective broke out, and the long arms that had wound themselves round his body fell away at once.

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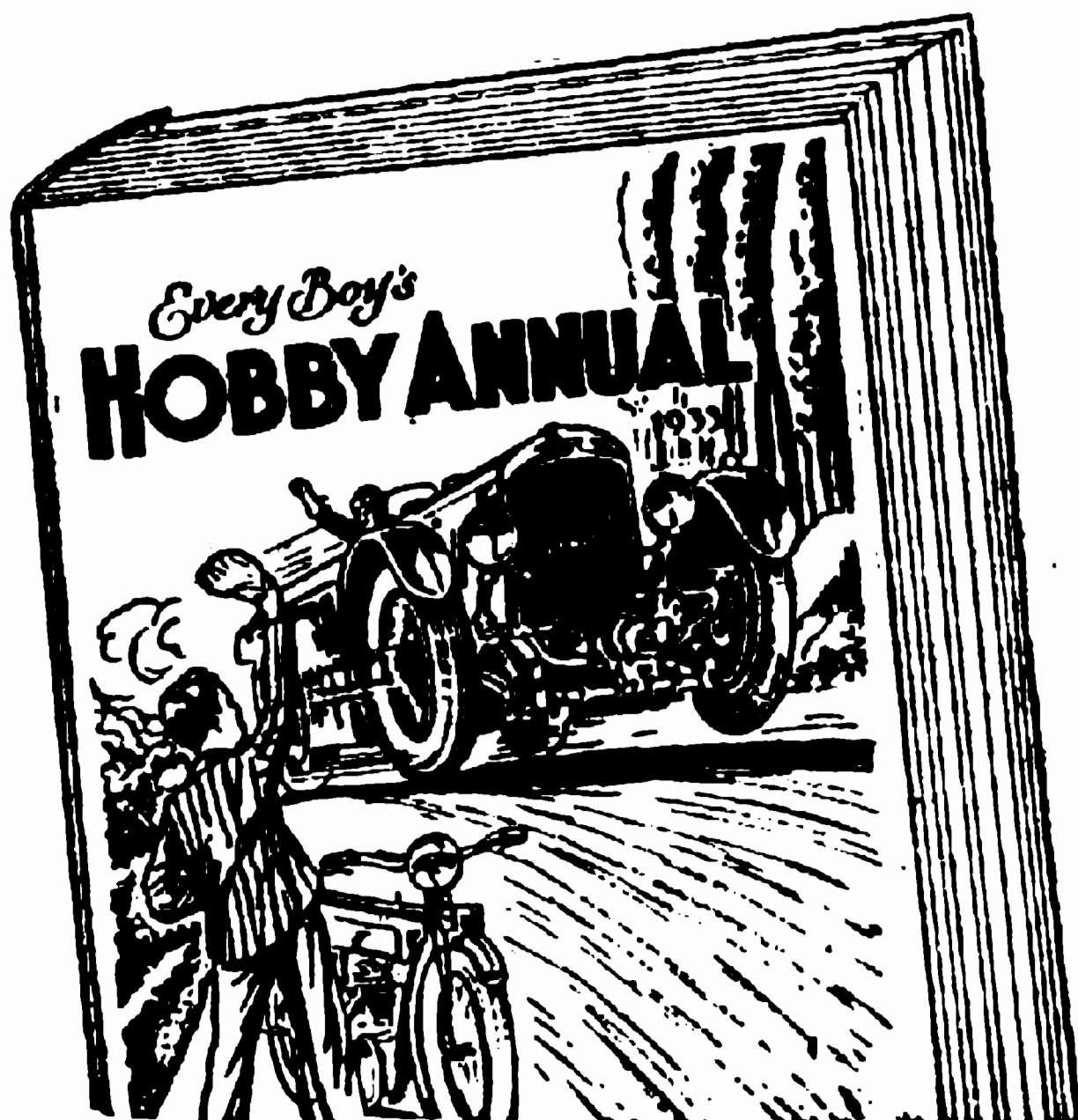


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"By James! Lee!"

They fell apart and turned to one another.

"I was just making for the stables," Dorrimore said. "It's the only chance we've got to get away from these beggars. They're bound to make an attack as soon as the moon rises, and there's about a score of 'em—far too many for me to handle."

"You needn't trouble to go to the stables," Lee returned quickly. "The sheik is there. Go and tell her ladyship and the sheik's wife to get ready. We'll leave here as soon as we get the signal."

When Dorrimore vanished into the doorway again, Lee took up position there, watching the dark expanse of ground in front. The firing had ceased now, but that was by no means a reassuring sign, rather did it suggest that the attackers might be closing their forces in and preparing for a sudden onslaught.

The ten minutes that Lee spent there were the longest he had ever known in his life, and it was with a feeling of profound relief that he heard from close by the low hoot of an owl, and as the signal died away, a creak came from the arched doorway, and a small figure came gliding out.

"That you, Mr. Lee?"

It was the calm voice of Lady Denville, and she put out her hand, touching the detective on the arm.

"It's all right," she said. "That wonderful man, Lord Dorrimore, is bringing my sister. He has to carry her."

A few minutes later the tall figure of Dorrimore appeared, bearing the light burden in his arms, and without a word the trio turned and started across towards the sheds.

As they reached the building they saw the sheik standing in the shadows cast by the low-roofed stable, and by his side were the horses.

"Quick! Mount!"

The sheik had gone up to Dorrimore, and although the tall aristocrat hesitated for a moment, there was no mistaking the gesture the old Arab made, and Dorrimore transferred the burden into the brown, sinewy arms of the bedouin.

The sheik went towards his horse, and, lifting his wife to the front of the saddle, climbed into it, then, with the rest of the party mounted, and led by the sheik, began to move away from the sheds.

It was only then that Dorrimore noted that the sheik had muffled the animal's hoofs, so that they made no noise as they moved onward.

Nelson Lee and Dorrimore had dropped behind the little party, and they rode with their heads turned over their shoulders and their ears on the alert.

"We must reach the railway," the sheik said. "There is a place there, a water tank, which, if we do but reach it, we can hold out against all the men of the Ben Nazel tribe."

And so, through the night, the little party rode like the wind, heading for their new sanctuary.

CHAPTER 12.

Nipper Meets the Sheik's Son.

"WHAT I want to know is, where the dickens am I?"

Nipper, propped up in a heap of miscellaneous baggage, with his hands tied behind him and his head awl, was staring out across a square courtyard-like space that was filled with camels and horses and men.

So far as Nipper could see there was no one paying the slightest attention to him, but presently a figure detached itself from one of the fires and came across to where the youngster lay bearing a native bowl filled with water, which he held out to the prisoner.

That drink of lukewarm fluid was life itself to Nipper, and he took a long swig at it, then the brown-bearded man, eyeing him grimly, nodded his head.

"Our young sheik wants to see you," he said. "Come!"

It was by no means a comfortable journey that, for from every side of the square there came jeers and angry comments, while one fierce-looking Arab thrust a long arm out and shook his fist in Nipper's face, while the fellow bawled out some uncouth threat.

"Huh! I don't seem to be a very popular turn," Nipper decided. "I wonder what they've got against me, anyhow?"

He found himself outside a row of sheds, and here he was taken charge of by a couple of Arabs, who presently marched him in through one of the doors, and brought him to a halt in the centre of the chamber beyond.

From the look of the place, Nipper decided that it had once been used as a waiting-room, but it now obviously formed the headquarters of this nondescript ragged army.

There was a table in the centre of the room, and at it was seated a figure in a handsome silk robe, wearing a high towering turban, and as Nipper was dragged forward and brought to a halt in front of the table, his eyes searched the face of the man opposite him.

Yussuf, for it was the sheik's son, as Nipper guessed in a flash, fixed his piercing gaze on the young detective's face.

"Who are you?" he asked. "And what are you doing in my country—you, an Englishman, disguised as an Arab? What does it mean?"

He spoke in English, a language of which he seemed to be a master, and after Nipper's first shock of surprise had worn off, a feeling of contentment came to the lad.

"I came to Syria as a friend of the Ben Nazel tribe," he said. "My master and I, and a friend, came here to discover a white woman, and the Shiek of Ben Nazel, your father."

"You ought to have stayed in Damascus if you wanted to find my father," Yussuf said, with a bitter note in his voice. "He is playing the traitor there, although he has come back here to the desert now, I believe, to try and cheat us."

Nipper stared for a moment.

"You are wrong there, Yusuf," he said. "I know that Sheik Ibraim had never been to Damascus. He has been to England."

The slim, handsome figure at the table leaned back, and looked hard at his prisoner.

"My father has been in England? You lie!"

"I don't lie," Nipper returned. "Why should I be here with my gov'nor were it not that we were forced to come to follow your father, Sheik Ibraim? Your father left England with a certain white woman, who travelled with him all the way from England to El Hala. We traced them to El Hala, and then we lost sight of them, but we heard that they were going to the oasis of Ben Nazel, and we were following them."

"My father—in England!"

It seemed to Nipper as though the figure opposite him could not believe the statement, but his voice had altered slightly, and there were indications of doubt in his eyes as he fixed them on the young detective.

"If you are lying to me I will soon find out the truth," Yussuf said. "Meanwhile, you say my father was in England. What took him there? Have you no proofs to show me that he was in England?"

"I have no actual proofs," Nipper said, "but I will tell you all I know."

He made a brief statement of the strange circumstances under which he first met Sheik Ibraim, and when he mentioned the brooch and the discovery that Cyril Denville had made of the Arabic inscription on the back, Yussuf, who had been leaning forward in his chair during the account, rose slowly to his feet, and in his face was bewilderment and dismay.

"You are telling the truth," he said. "I know that brooch, for it is my mother's. Always did she wear it, for the face in it was that of her sister—her sister who lived in England."

"The lady who is with your father now is your mother's sister," Nipper went on, "and it was to bring her to Syria that your father went to England."

"Allah! That rings true! I have been tricked and lied to. That scoundrel, Mustafa Bay Asah, has betrayed me! Listen! You are English, and you will have to help me now," exclaimed Yussuf, in English. "I see it all. It has been a plot brought about by the man in the tribe who hates my father. They persuaded me to play the part of leader, but it was to further their own evil ends. Where is my father? Where can I find him?"

Nipper shook his head.

"I don't know," he returned. "But I should think my friends are with him by now."

"Your friends? Tell me, where are they?"

Nipper could only give a very rough outline of what had happened on the previous night, and it did not assist Yussuf very much, but it served to strengthen his resolve, and presently the agitation on his face vanished; and there crept over it a look of grim determination.

"Listen to me, my friend," he said. "You and I will have to play a part for a little while longer. I will still pretend to be your enemy, and you must act as though I was such. I know, now, why they came here and left the oasis. Mustafa Ben Adah has divided the tribe, and he has here with him all the men who hate my father. I wondered when I saw the men who rode with us that he should have chosen them. But I see why now."

His hand closed on Nipper's shoulder.

"I have been a fool, and have fallen into a trap," he said. "But we are not beaten yet. I will send you back with these men, but you must wait for me. Now that you have opened my eyes I will find out the truth."

Then suddenly he stepped back a pace and broke out into angry Arabic in a hot flow of words which brought the two men running from the door to grip at Nipper's arms.

"Take the dog away!" cried Yussuf. "He is a traitor and a spy. See to it that he does not escape. Away with him!"

He raised his fist and shook it in Nipper's face, then turned his back, and the bedouins, grinning savagely, dragged the young detective out of the shed and back across the courtyard to his position among the baggage.

But before they left him this time they saw to it that his ankles, as well as his arms, were securely bound. By this time Nipper knew that he was not at the oasis of Ben Nazel, but at the nearby station on the Mecca railroad.

For the rest of that day Nipper lay in among the bales, watching the movements that were going on in the camp. He noted one tall, grey-bearded Arab who wore the Hadj mark on his turban, and seemed to be in authority, and the youngster decided that this was the infamous Mustafa Ben Adah.

Once or twice during the afternoon horsemen rode into the depot and made their way to where Mustafa sat in a circle of his tribesmen, but so far as Nipper could see, Yussuf did not put in an appearance during the period of time.

When dusk began to settle the young detective was inclined to believe that Sheik Ibraim's son had not been able to do what he had desired.

Just as the sun set, Nipper noted three or four men go down to where the derelict train stood, and a couple of them detached the engine from the train, while the other two clambered into the tender and set to work to light the fires.

Presently a circle of interested Arabs gathered round the engine, laughing and joking, and passing remarks to the four or five men at work on it.

"I suppose the train was here when you rushed this blinkin' station," the youngster decided, "and you collared all it contained. It must be rather unhealthy, travelling by train in this part of the world at present."

About half an hour later a sudden shriek from the engine testified to the fact that the amateur stokers, whoever they were, had succeeded in getting up a fair amount of pressure of steam on the engine.

That long shrill shriek brought nearly every bedouin in the depot at a run to the train, where a great chorus of chatter and laughing broke out as the robed figures clambered all over the engine, examining the interior and jesting with their begrimed comrades.

Another hour passed, then suddenly Nipper heard a faint scraping movement from the other side of the heap of bales, and a long arm stretched itself out and touched him on the hand.

"Be still, my friend. It is Yussuf."

A sharp knife severed the bonds around the young detective's arms and ankles, then a hand was thrust under his shoulder, and he was dragged over the bales to the other side, where Yussuf's keen, handsome face glowed down on him in the dusk.

CHAPTER 13.

A Wild Drive!

"YOU are my friend for life," the young Arab said. "Your words this morning were true ones, and I have sought and proved and questioned until I have got at the truth."

The youngster seemed to be suffering from some grim emotion, for his slim figure was trembling as he sat on the edge of the bales.

"Listen to me," he went on. "My father has been the victim of a plot, even as I have, and he is now in danger, just as we are. Mustafa has got me here, with his own men, while twenty miles away, close to the oasis, my father, Ibraim, has taken refuge in the water-tank with your friends and my mother. He has already been attacked by some of Mustafa's men, but my father and the men with him are well armed, and have kept them at bay."

He halted and drew a swift breath.

"I know now that I am a prisoner here even as you are," Yussuf went on. "So long as I remain in the camp no harm will come to me—yet. But I have heard that Mustafa has given orders that if I attempt to get away I am to be shot. So I am not really leader here, although those cunning rogues pretend that I am."

Nipper saw the glint that came into Yussuf's eyes.

"But I am not altogether friendless," Yussuf went on calmly. "and within the next hour you and I will be free from this place—after I have had my revenge."

He stretched his hand out, pointing through the darkness.

"I have a few friends," he said, "and perhaps you may have seen some of them at work. They were on the engine, and it is standing there ready, with steam up, now."

He leaned forward and put his hand on Nipper's arm.

"You Europeans are all clever," Yussuf went on. "Can you drive a steam engine? None of my men are able to do that, although one of them has managed to get the fires going and steam up."

Now, although Yussuf did not know it, Nipper was, as a matter of fact, quite an expert engine-driver, and had often taken a turn on the footplate during some of his journeyings to and fro with Nelson Lee. For the youngster was well known on the English railways, and always made friends with the engine-drivers and stokers.

"Yes, I can drive an engine all right, Yussuf," Nipper said. "Only put me on that darned footplate, and I'll make the beggar go!"

"Good! It is Allah himself who is working for us, for only by the use of that engine can we get away from here and down to the water-tank to save my father and mother and your friends. Listen!"

Yussuf leaned forward.

"An hour before the moon rises Mustafa Ben Adah is going to take most of his men from here and ride down to attack the tank. They will swarm on to it, and, brave though my father is, he will not be able to withstand that attack."

He looked at Nipper.

"But fleet though our horses are, the iron steed is fleeter, and we will wait until Mustafa and his men start. Then we will start in our turn, and it will be a race for life."

His low chuckle came to Nipper's ears.

"They blew up the line above the station, but it is clear and unbroken right down to our oasis. If you will drive the engine I will see to it that we take with us something that not even Mustafa and his men can face."

The hand that was resting on Nipper's arm tightened.

"I found a machine-gun and much ammunition in the shed there," he went on. "I did not tell anyone of my find, for I meant it to be a surprise for these men, whom I trusted. Thank Allah I didn't speak of it, for now it will be a surprise, and one that they do not expect."

He rose to his feet, and, going to the end of the heap of bales, peered across the depot.

"You will wait for me here," Yussuf went on. "No one will disturb you, and you will see Mustafa and his men ride off. Afterwards, when they have gone, watch the engine, and when you get a signal from it, come. Men may try to stop you, for Mustafa Ben Adah will leave a few behind. But here is something that will clear your way."

It was an automatic revolver that Yussuf slid into Nipper's hand, and the young de-

detective felt a grim thrill run through him as his fingers closed on the small butt.

A few moments later he was alone, and he slipped back across the bales and resumed his old position. But now there was no thought of fatigue or sleep in his mind, and he watched the scene in front of him closely.

After a time, Mustafa's men swung out through the wide gates of the depot, and it was only for a few moments that the clatter of the horse's hoofs awoke the silence. Then began another wait; but now Nipper's attention was fixed on the outlines of the engine and the derelict train.

He saw from the glow on the footplate that the fires were still burning brightly, and presently came the signal he was waiting for. The glow leaped into a great white light as the furnace door was opened, and Nipper saw distinctly the tall figure of Yussuf standing on the footplate. The figure raised its hand and beckoned in his direction.

"That's the signal," Nipper thought, rising to his feet.

When anyone has to face a dangerous journey, the best way to complete that journey is to do it as swiftly as possible.

Nipper's cat-like rush from the heap of bales carried him half-way across the square before any of the few figures left around the fires realised that he had moved.

Then suddenly he heard a shout, and out from the line of camels a ragged shape sprinted after him. The man was bawling out something as he came, but Nipper brought him down with a bullet in his leg.

Nipper had about forty yards to cover to reach the engine, and he knew that there would be a few moments' delay before he could start it, so he put his best effort out in that last final sprint.

As he reached the steps that led to the footplate a long arm stretched itself out and caught him under the shoulder.

"Well done, my friend! Quick!" Yussuf's voice said. "Get to your post, and I'll look after these dogs!"

Nipper staggered across the footplate, and began to make acquaintance with the engine, for although he was fairly expert at the game, he was not quite sure how this particular specimen was operated.

A shot rang out, and the bullet clanged against the steel side of the cab. Then Nipper, glancing over his shoulder, had a vision of a mob of angry figures rushing towards the engine.

They were not more than five or six yards away, and the leader of them, in fact, was already in the act of leaping for the step, when—

Crack, crack!

From the tender, where the coal was packed high, there came the sharp, sibilant staccato reports of the murderous machine-gun, and the whirl of bullets spat into that angry mob of gesticulating men.

With his heart in his mouth Nipper leaped at the control and swung it downward; then there came the welcome hiss of steam; the

quick, soft snort, and the wheels began to revolve.

As the engine moved away from the depot Nipper looked back at the tender, and he saw, sprawling across the black coal, the long, slim figure of Yussuf.

The machine-gun had been propped up on its tripod, so that its muzzle was just above the level of the side of the tender, and it was from that position that the young Arab swept the depot with a last swift burst of firing.

A shower of bullets came in reply, followed by an angry yell; then Nipper saw distinctly the figures of eight or nine horsemen come galloping out of the gates of the depot and commence to follow the engine as it started to move down the railway line across the level track.

For the next ten minutes Nipper lived in a world that was half a dream. The engine was by no means a good one, and had evidently been subjected to rough usage, and it was all the young detective could do to keep it on the go.

He had to act as his own fireman, too, and the job of opening that furnace and casting in coals, standing, as he did, in the full glare of the light, made him a well-marked target which the bedouins did their best to hit.

The fleet Arab horses were quite capable of keeping up with engine, and shot after shot rang out, to come whirling across the level footplate.

One bullet flicked the back of Nipper's hand, making him wince, then the furnace door was slammed to again, and he jumped back to his post at the control.

And now the effect of that skilful stoking began to reveal itself, and at last the crazy old engine that had drawn so many pilgrims along its peaceful way from Damascus to Mecca, began to pick up speed, and the bunch of galloping bedouins was soon left behind.

As the engine rounded the bend there came a shout of satisfaction from the tender, and Nipper, turning his grimed face round for a moment, saw the slim, youthful figure of Yussuf poised on the top of the heap of coals waving his hands and yelling his defiance at the men of his tribe.

"That shows your spirit, I reckon, old chap," the young detective thought, his own nerves a-tingle.

CHAPTER 14.

United!

IT is very doubtful whether the railway line to Mecca ever saw such a sheer, headlong sprint as Nipper sent that engine at that night.

Certainly the engine was never subjected to such a strain, and it fairly wheezed and coughed its protests as its wheels spun round on the shimmering metals.

Mile after mile was covered, then presently Yussuf came clambering down from the tender and grabbed at Nipper's arm.

"Look!" he screamed, his lips close to Nipper's ear. "There is Mustafa Ben Adah and his men."

He extended his finger to the left, and, following the direction, Nipper saw a great huddle of horsemen riding headlong towards the lines. They had emerged from a fold in the desert, and the moon, that was now high in the heavens, pouring down on them, revealed a mass of galloping steeds and wild, robed figures.

It must have been an instinct that told Mustafa that that rushing, flying monster on the rails meant disaster to his plans, and the cunning, scheming bedouin certainly did his best to avert that disaster.

He had still some seven or eight miles to travel before he reached the water tank, and he knew that the engine going at that speed would beat him in the mad race, and so, after escaping from one danger, Nipper and Yussuf found themselves plunging headlong into another.

The Arabs had been riding across the desert some two miles from the railway lines, but the noise of the engine, as it roared along the rails, had given them warning in ample time, and now they were heading straight for the bridge that carried the line over a dried watercourse.

"Let me help you, my friend," Yussuf shouted, his lips close to Nipper's ear. "What shall I do?"

There was only one thing Yussuf could do then, and Nipper made a gesture, pointing to the furnace, then towards the coal, and in another moment the furnace door flashed open and the torrent of light pouring out revealed the two grimed, dust-covered figures on the footplate.

Then Yussuf, taking charge of the long-handled shovel, began to stoke that furnace for dear life, and in response to the leaping flames the speed of the engine increased until at last it was surging along the rails like a thing alive.

Half a mile away from the bridge, Nipper, who had been watching the approaching avalanche of riders, saw the leading figures reach the bridge before the engine, and he turned and yelled out a warning to his companion.

"Quick! The gun!"

Yussuf leaned out from the rocking cab and glanced at the galloping shapes, then he slammed the furnace door to and once more clambered on to the coals.

Nipper dared not look over his shoulder, for all his attention was held on the driving of his charge. To the average individual it appears an easy matter to drive an engine on rails, but it is not so easy as it seems, especially when that engine is being driven at more than ordinary speed.

Every curve in the rail, every gradient has to be looked out for, and when one is driving along an unknown track, there is disaster waiting at every dip and turn.

With his teeth set and his eyes glinting, the young detective stuck to his job, and in

less time than it takes to tell the engine had thudded its way over that remaining half-mile of track and was drumming towards the bridge.

From the footplate the long, yellow gleams of light from the fire sent shafts across the desert, and suddenly, above the roar of the engine, Nipper heard the quick, angry rattle of machine-gun fire.

Yussuf had waited his opportunity, had waited until the light from the furnace was streaming full on the advancing horsemen. Then the son of Sheik Ibraim picked out the massive grey-bearded figure of the rogue who had betrayed him—the man who had caused him to turn from the father he loved.

The muzzle of the machine-gun was trained full on that shape, and a storm of bullets came rattling out from it.

There is nothing so deadly as a machine-gun at short range. Under the slim, powerful wrists of Yussuf, the weapon was under perfect control, and the first mass of horsemen received the full shock of that volley.

It crumpled them up as a scythe cuts through tall corn. Men and horses went down with a crash, and the speeding railway engine snorted on.

Yussuf, forgetting his danger, forgetting everything in the fierce triumph that ran through his veins, leaped to his feet and sent a yell back to the disorganised and discomfited horde of rebels.

He had seen Mustafa Ben Adah go down, and he knew from the way that the man had fallen to the ground that he was dead almost before he had left the saddle.

"So let all traitors perish!" yelled Yussuf; and his voice, clear, high and penetrating, carried to the ears of the bedouins above the drumming of the engine wheels, and they roared across the bridge.

And so, with a clear track ahead of him, Nipper drove the engine on until it came to the spot where the tall water tower stood, and here Yussuf climbed down and shouted out his sharp commands.

The engine halted exactly opposite the water tank, and as the light from the cab struck upwards the young detective saw first one and then another head peer over the edge of the high steel tank.

And something familiar in the shape of the heads and shoulders made the youngster send up a shout.

"That you, guv'nor?"

"Yes."

"And Dorrimore?"

"Yes."

"Right-ho! Nipper reports all's well!"

There came climbing down from that tank, down the narrow iron ladder that led to the top of it, figure after figure; first a slim one in native robes that revealed itself to be that of Lady Emily Denville.

Then came the sheik, with Dorrimore following, carrying a muffled burden—a burden that Yussuf ran to meet, and with a quick catch of his breath gathered into his strong

young arms almost before the bearer of it had landed on the ground.

Sheik Ibraim had not recognised his son for a moment, nor was that to be wondered at, for Yussuf was covered from head to foot with coal dust, and his splendid robes were torn, begrimed and ragged.

But at the sound of his voice the brown-bearded old sheik made a quick movement, reaching for a weapon that hung from his belt.

It was rather fortunate for Yussuf that Nipper had followed him. He saw that quick, threatening gesture, and the young detective, leaping towards Sheik Ibraim, made a frantic clutch at the arm that was raised to strike.

"Wait a bit," he panted in halting Arabic. "Yussuf has been deceived and betrayed. Give him time to explain. Strike afterwards if he deserves it. But first let him speak, and listen to what he has to say."

Yussuf had gathered his mother into his arms, and he turned now, his head back and his eyes fixed on the sheik who faced him in angry dignity.

"Strike, if you will," Yussuf said. "I have done wrong. But I trusted those who betrayed me. Yet no man should go against his father, and so I am ready now and here to bear the punishment I deserve."

IBRAIM'S face was set and grim, but as he looked at his son, standing there with that warm, living burden in his arms—that English woman who had been wife to Ibraim, the Sheik of the Ben Nazel, and mother to his son—the rage died out of the Arab's face, and Ibraim stepped back a pace, passing one hand over his eyes in bewilderment.

"I will listen to you, my son," he said. "Say on!"

And there, under the shadow of the tall water tank, with the light from the engine glowing on the little group, Yussuf told his story, how Mustafa Ben Adah had declared that the sheik had, in fact, gone to Damascus to bargain with merchants who desired to buy the mineral rights in the oasis of Ben Nazel—that Sheik Ibraim intended to sell his land to these men, and that the tribe of the Ben Nazel would be ruthlessly driven from the oasis that had been their home for hundreds of years, to wander, homeless, in the desert.

In proof of all this Mustafa had pointed to the fact that the wife of the sheik had vanished. He made out that Ibraim did not intend ever to return to the oasis again until he had reached an agreement with the men who would drive the tribe from their home. He had even gone so far as to produce men

ready to swear on oath that they had seen the sheik in Damascus.

Mustafa Ben Adah had not been trusted by all the tribesmen, therefore, knowing that the Arabs would not rise in revolt at his bidding, he had poisoned the mind of the son against the father, and, angered at what looked like his father's treachery, Yussuf had led the revolt at the bidding of Mustafa, had blown up the railway and cut the telegraph wires, and placed the oasis in a state of seige, prepared to resist to the last drop of blood any effort to drive the tribe from their ancestral home.

But Nipper had opened his eyes to the truth. He knew now that it had been necessary for the sheik to hide his ailing wife from the libellous Mustafa Ben Adah until the coming of her sister should complete her recovery from her malady. Yussuf knew now that his father had not been a traitor to the tribe, had never been to Damascus at all, but to England on behalf of the wife he loved.

And now, having saved his father and mother, and the friends who had come to their aid, from Mustafa's men, he threw himself on the mercy of his father.

Thus, calmly, not sparing himself, Yussuf told his story, and at the end of it Sheik Ibraim drew a deep breath, then stepped forward and put his arm round his son.

Thus, for a moment, father and son stood, with the mother between them—a group reconciled.

Nelson Lee felt a touch on his arm, and, turning round, saw the slim figure of Lady Denville standing by his side.

"I think we have completed this, Mr. Lee," she said, "and you can tell Sir Anthony that it has really been worth while."

Many things happen in the East that are never recorded in the Western world, and no one outside the circle that is really interested in Eastern affairs know just how it came about that a disloyal and turbulent tribe suddenly took to ways of calm and peace, and even went to the trouble of replacing certain stretches of railway line and renewing the telegraph wires they had cut down in a certain district in Syria.

But the whole case is written in Nelson Lee's diary, and a footnote is added, detailing how Lady Emily Denville later brought her ailing sister to London, where a specialist performed an operation on the sheik's wife which was eminently successful. And the mother of Yussuf returned to the oasis of Ben Nazel in perfect health and strength, where she still lives in peace in the tents of her husband's tribe.

THE END.

Another Remarkable Long Complete Detective-Thriller—

Starring Nelson Lee, Nipper and Lord Dorrimore, entitled:—

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which deals with perilous adventures in London and in the heart of the Balkans. It is a winner!

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

COCK O' THE WALK!



A Form captain is as important a person as the Head himself in the opinion of Edward Oswald Handforth, the new skipper of the Remove ! But when Handy tried this stuff on his Form he stirs up a whole heap of trouble !

Tea!

“**O**H, my hat!” Edward Oswald Handforth, the Remove skipper, looked dismally round the study. He had come charging into the room ready for tea, when he stopped abruptly and gave a start. Instead of the air being filled with the appetising odour of hot tea and buttered toast, the air was stagnant and chilly.

Instead of a warm fire crackling in the grate, there was a dead-looking mass of cold cinders. Instead of the table being spread with sardines and boiled eggs and cakes and pastries, it was cold and bare, and littered with odd bits of paper.

“My hat!” said Handforth, with a chilly clutch at his heart.

Dismay was Handforth's chief emotion.

He was aware that he had received a nasty jolt—a hard, jarring eye-opener. Until this moment he had forgotten all about his new arrangement. He had overlooked the fact that he had literally kicked Church and McClure out of Study D, and palmed them off on Hubert Jarrow.

He had performed this master stroke the previous night, after tea had been over and forgotten. The importance of having the study to himself had overshadowed every other consideration.

“Great corks!” he said, aghast.

For the realisation came upon him that he couldn't very well rout out Church and McClure, and force them to prepare tea for him. They didn't belong to his study now. Naturally, they were having tea up the passage, in Study J.

And he—Handforth—was just as naturally supposed to prepare his own tea. Since he was quite alone, who else was there to perform these duties? Church and McClure had always done everything as a matter of course. They were so accustomed to looking after the fire, making the tea, washing up, and generally busying themselves in the study, that they had done these things automatically. And Handforth had taken it as a matter of course, too.

“Great Scott!” he muttered, scratching his head. “Here's a go!”

He walked over to the fireplace, and gazed at the dead ashes rather dismally. How did one make a fire, anyhow? With a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach, he suddenly realised that he hadn't made a fire for weeks—for terms! His chums had always attended to these trifles.

And Handforth's very principles forbade him collaring a weaker junior and compelling him to do the work. That would be tantamount to bullying, for nobody would perform such duties unless they were threatened with

physical violence. As for having anybody fag for him, the very thought was unthinkable. True, he was Form captain, and a very important person, but he was down on fagging with a firm hand. It was all right for the Sixth-Formers to have their fags, but it had always been Handforth's contention that the juniors should look after themselves. Until this minute he had always overlooked the fact that Church and McClure had always looked after him.

• No, there was only one way out of this difficulty—and that was to set to work and light the fire, and prepare his own tea. Either that, or go into Hall for the wishy-washy stuff that the school provided. And no fellow in his right senses would do this as long as he had some money in his pocket.

"Oh, well," growled Handforth, "I've got the study to myself, anyhow, so I suppose I've got to put up with a few inconveniences. But, by George, I hadn't thought of this! What a beastly lot of rot!"

He looked round for something to light the fire with, and didn't even know where his chums had usually kept the firewood. He hadn't got a match, either. The study was provided with a radiator, so it wasn't exactly cold; but it looked very, very cheerless.

And then Handforth noticed something else.

Opening one of the cupboards in search of firewood, Handforth felt rather like Mother Hubbard. Bare shelves met his gaze. There wasn't a crumb—there wasn't even a tin of sardines or a pot of jam. And, with a start, he noticed that his sole crockery consisted of one plate and one cup. And these weren't much good, either. The plate had a chunk out of it, as though somebody had taken a bite; and the cup was not only minus its handle, but there was a crack extending down one side which admitted the daylight.

"Why, the—the rotters!" gasped Handforth. "They've pinched every giddy thing! How the dickens can I make tea— Yes, by George, where's the teapot?"

With a growing sense of acute uneasiness, he dimly remembered that most of the crocks had belonged to Church and McClure. During the previous term there had been a catastrophe in the study. There had been a free fight, and Church and McClure had got the best of it, after making Handforth sit down on a trayful of crockery. And he distinctly remembered compelling them to buy a fresh lot, out of their own money. Naturally, they had taken all these things away when they had changed their quarters.

"Oh, help!" murmured Handforth. "I told 'em to do it, too! I told 'em to shift all their things—every single article—and clear out!"

This recollection rather stunned him. It rendered him helpless. How could he go for his chums baldheaded after they had merely carried out his orders?

He swallowed something, and sighed.

After all, Church and McClure were pretty useful chaps. Handforth was just beginning

to appreciate them to the full. He was realising what a number of things they usually did from sheer force of habit. With a start he understood, for about the first time, that his chums had literally waited upon him hand and foot. For now that they were no longer here, he was like a ship without its rudder.

His dilemma was almost tragic.

"What the dickens can I do?" he moaned. "I can't get along without the bounders, and I daren't ask them to come back, or they'll lord it over me like a couple of Indian rajahs. I daren't show a sign of weakness of that sort. And yet I've got to have 'em! My only hat! What a beastly fix!"

He wandered out of the study disconsolately, and paused in the corridor. A faint, tantalising odour of a frying kipper came to his nostrils. A very humble smell, but it touched Handforth's heart, particularly as it was accompanied by the intoxicating aroma of hot tea.

Something drew him irresistibly towards Study J. He didn't even know he was going in that direction.

Within Study J, Church and McClure were very cheerful.

"Wonder what old Handy's doing now?" Church was saying, as he passed the plate of toast to Jarrow. "Of course, his fire's out, and he's got no teapot——"

"And he never thought a thing about tea until the last minute," grinned McClure. "We can take these things for granted. Well, I'm happy enough. It'll teach the fathead a lesson. It'll make him appreciate us a bit more, perhaps. Not that we need it—we're not out for that sort of thing, goodness knows. But he deserves a hard jolt for biffing us out last night!"

"Supposing we edge along, and take a peep?" suggested Church.

"No fear!" said Mac. "Our game is to appear absolutely indifferent. That'll bring him to his senses sooner than anything. If he comes here, we'll pretend that we've never been more content in the whole of our giddy lives. That's the stuff to give him, Churchy!"

"Yes," said Church slowly. "I suppose it is."

As a matter of fact, Handforth's chums were nearly as miserable as he was himself. They didn't reveal it to Jarrow—they affected to be serenely happy. What was the use of visiting their troubles upon his head? Besides, he would only jaw for about half an hour, and lead the conversation, by devious routes, to a hundred-and-one inconsequent subjects.

Handforth & Co. were a staunch trio. They didn't even realise themselves how closely they were bound together.

Handforth, out in the corridor, arrived at Study J, and opened the door. He looked in, and reeled slightly. The smell of hot buttered toast, tea, and fried sausages nearly overcame him.

"Hallo!" he said in a hollow voice.

"Hallo, Handy!" said Church cheerily. "Come to inspect us?"

"Eh?" said Handforth unsteadily. "Well, no—I just looked in, you know. Having tea?"

He saw the table through a kind of mist, and his mouth watered as he noted the pile of toast, the delicately-browned sausages, and the steaming tea. By George! They couldn't let him go without inviting him to this gorgeous spread! Incidentally, it was quite an ordinary tea, with nothing special about it at all.

"Yes, we're a bit late," said Church, setting his cup down. "New quarters, you know—not quite settled down yet."

"You—you seem to have just started," said Handforth hintingly.

"Why, yes," agreed McClure. "Lazy beggars, eh? Of course, you've finished your tea long ago. A Form captain can't waste time over tea, naturally. I suppose you're just going up to change for footer practice? We shan't be long, old son."

Handforth leaned against the doorpost, and all the sunlight seemed to fade out of his life.

Hal Brewster to the Rescue.

CHURCH and McClure, being shrewd youths, diagnosed the symptoms without any difficulty. Edward Oswald Handforth, for all his aggressiveness, was a very artless sort of fellow. For a moment his chums were almost on the point of weakly throwing their good resolutions overboard.

Handforth's abject misery touched them. But it was Edward Oswald himself who made this impossible.

"Footer practice?" he said with a start. "Why, yes, of course! You chaps had better get a hustle on, too!"

"You've had tea, then?" asked Church.

Handforth pulled himself together, and revealed a bold front.

"Tea!" he repeated tartly. "I've got a fat lot of time to bother about tea, haven't I? I'm above that sort of thing! I can't waste my time over nothing! If you chaps are too long, I'll slaughter you!"

He reeled out, and closed the door. The sight of that well-spread table was too much for him. He felt that if he had remained he would have aggressively invited himself to the feed—and that would have been fatal.

For Church and McClure had taken it for granted that he, as Form captain, had finished his tea long ago. And he simply could not admit that his fire was out, and that he had utterly failed to fend for himself! No, the strong course was to get away as quickly as possible, and give his chums the impression that he was perfectly indifferent.

He would have had another eye-opener if he could have known that his chums were in no way deceived. As soon as he had gone, they glanced at one another rather compassionately, and Church shook his head. He held a chunk of sausage on the end of his fork, gazing at it wistfully.

"I say, oughtn't we to have invited the old ass?" he asked huskily.

"No!" growled Mac. "He asked for this, so let him have a jolly good taste of it! Of course, he hasn't had any tea, and he's dying for some! Weakness now, my son, would ruin everything. We've only got to keep it up, and he'll eat out of our hands to-morrow!"

"By jingo, you are right!" agreed Church.

"A very interesting experiment," remarked Jarrow, who had been listening with some amusement. "I take it that you are merely making a convenience of my study? That you will clear out as abruptly as you cleared in—at the crucial moment?"

"Sorry, Jarrow, old man," said Church.

"I'm afraid you're right—but you don't mind, do you? And keep it dark, you know—Handy's a good old scout in his own way, and we don't want to crow over him."

"Don't mention it," said Jarrow readily. "For that matter, you can stay here as long as you like—I haven't had such a good tea for weeks! You fellows have an amazing knack of doing things. I mean, you're so tremendously efficient. Efficiency is a quality I always admire, and you've got it very strongly developed. Speaking of development, I'd like you to have a look at my camera. I was developing some films yesterday, and——"

But Church and McClure, with their thoughts centred upon Handforth, weren't listening. Jarrow rambled amiably on, and it didn't matter to him whether his audience was listening or not. In the meantime, Handforth had got back to Study D. He looked in, shuddered, and went out again. He stood in the corridor, shivering. What was a fellow to do? Hang it, he couldn't go into Hall——

"Ah, Brother Handforth, why this pensive mood?" asked William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth, as he came round the corner. "You resemble a fellow who has just heard that he has been ruthlessly cut out of the will without a shilling. I am at a loss to understand this glassy-eyed preoccupation. I thought the joy-bells were ringing in honour of your recent triumph?"

"Tea!" said Handforth absently. "By George, and fried sausages—— Eh? Speaking to me, Browne?"

"Much as it pains me to break in upon your appetising reverie, duty must be done, Brother Handforth," said Browne. "A voice from afar is calling you. In other words, you are wanted on the 'phone."

"The 'phone?" repeated Handforth.

"The telephone."

"I'm wanted on the 'phone?" he said, starting.

"Such is the momentous fact, brother," said Browne.

"Why by?"

"I presume you mean, by whom?" asked the skipper of the Fifth, "but——"

Browne paused, for Handforth, without waiting, had marched off to the junior

Common-room, where there was a public telephone. Fortunately, Browne, who had received the call in the senior Day-room, had had it switched through to the other instrument. St. Frank's was well provided with telephones.

Handforth entered the sound-proof box, and closed the door.

"Hallo!" he growled, as he placed the receiver to his ear. "Who's that?"

"Brewster!" came Hal's cheery voice. "Did they, by any chance, have to go and dig you out of your grave? I've been waiting here for about ten minutes!"

"Sorry!" said Handforth gruffly. "Old Browne only just told me I was wanted. What's up?"

"How about coming over to tea?" suggested Brewster.

Handforth nearly dropped the receiver.

"Tea!" he yelled joyously.

"My hat! Are you starved, or something?" asked Brewster. "This invite seems to have come pretty opportune, by the sound of your voice——"

"Nunno! I—I was only thinking, you know," said Handforth, pulling himself together with an effort. "Tea?"

"Yes, tea."

"You mean tea?" said Handforth breathlessly.

"Of course I do, you chump!" chuckled Brewster. "Why not get into your Austin Seven, pop over, and we can discuss Wednesday's match while we're browsing on the sausages and mashed?"

"Sausages!" roared Handforth, with a jump.

"Three each!" said Brewster. "We've laid in a good supply!"

"I'll be there in three minutes!" panted Edward Oswald.

"Don't be so rash—you can't do it in three minutes," said the River House junior.

"Besides, tea's a bit late—we haven't fried the sausages yet. What's the time now? Five-fifteen. Get here at about six, old man, and we'll have a ripping spread ready for you."

"Oh, rather!" said Handforth feebly. "But I mean, six——"

He paused, aghast. Six o'clock seemed something like the next century. He wasn't any hungrier than usual, but in his present mood he felt that he hadn't tasted food for epochs.

"Yes, six," said Brewster. "All fixed? Good! Start in about half an hour, and you'll just hit it nicely. But don't come earlier, or we shan't be ready. Is that understood?"

"Yes," said Handforth. "Thanks awfully——"

"Right!" came Brewster's voice. "Toodleoo!"

"But wouldn't half-past five be a lot better?" asked Handforth, licking his lips.

"I mean, sausages—— Hey! I say, Hal! You fathead! Well, I'm jiggered! The blithering idiot has cut off!"

He hung up the receiver and went out of the box. His hunger had an edge-like keenness—similar to a freshly-ground razor. And, after all, he could put in half an hour on Little Side.

"Yes, by George!" he murmured happily. "Then, at a quarter to six, I'll tell the chaps to carry on, and I'll buzz off. I'll leave 'em in the dark as to where I'm going! It always pays to be a bit mysterious!"

He went out in a cheery mood, and found that the weather conditions were not exactly ideal for football practice. Heavy clouds had rolled up, a premature darkness had fallen, and the skies were weeping. The rain splashed dismally down into the Triangle.

"Oh, rats!" said Fullwood as he joined Handforth at the doorway. "This has made our footer practice look a bit sick, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know——" began Handforth.

"Then we do!" put in Church as he came up. "None of your rot, Handy! You might make the chaps practise in the rain—but you're not going to supply us with acetylene flares, I suppose? We can't play in the dark!"

"No," said Handforth absently. "Who said we could? As a matter of fact I'm going out soon. So it doesn't matter."

"Going out?"

"Yes—business," said Handforth carelessly.

"Something to do with the captaincy, eh?"

"I've just been on the 'phone, you know," said Handforth with exaggerated indifference. "Brews—— I mean, hot sausages—— The fact is," he added hastily, "it's very urgent business, and I can't disclose it."

He stalked off, and Fullwood chuckled.

"Observe the deductions of a sleuth!" he said. "I will now elucidate the mystery. Handforth has been invited to tea by Brewster, and they're going to have hot sausages. Elementary, my dear Watson—elementary!"

And Church and McClure glanced at one another and were content. When Edward Oswald Handforth was forced to go out on a wet night, and travel two or three miles to get his tea, it was a sure sign that his plight was pretty desperate!

Still Tea-less.

PURRRRRR!

The engine of Handforth's neat little Austin Seven purred with unbounded energy, and seemed anxious to be off. It was just twenty minutes to six, and Handforth simply couldn't wait any longer. Hot sausages had become an obsession with him—particularly as Church and McClure had partaken of that very same fare themselves—and the only road in the world led to the River House School. The thing was really ripping. Without anybody at St. Frank's knowing, he could have his tea, and pretend that he had merely gone over to see Brewster about the football!

Handforth was in the very brightest of moods. Tea at St. Frank's was out of the

question. It was too late to go into Hall, it was impossible to invite himself to somebody else's feed, and the very thought of Study D made him wince. Brewster's invitation had come like a shower in the desert.

There was nobody to see Handforth off, and he was pleased. It was raining fairly hard now—not heavily, but with a drizzling persistence. And it was almost dark, owing to the lowering clouds. He pressed the accelerator, and the Austin Seven sang sweetly as she nipped across the Triangle.

With his mind lingering lovingly on the coming feed, Handforth drove down the lane. In fancy, he saw himself toying with a delicately browned sausage, and, of course, there would be toasts and cakes, not to mention pots and pots of steaming tea——

"Hallo!" murmured Handforth. "Who's this josser?"

He came back to earth, for a man was standing in the middle of the road, holding both his arms up—a clear signal to Handforth to stop. The stranger was wearing a mackintosh, and on that road were two big suitcases. Apparently, he had been trudging along in the rain.

"Nerve!" growled Handforth, as he applied the brakes and pulled up.

He opened the door and looked at the man. He was tall and slim, with a small moustache on his upper lip. A youngish man, and evidently in no particularly good humour.

"Are you from St. Frank's?" he snapped irritably.

"Why, yes——"

"I thought so—I thought so!" said the stranger. "It's a pity you couldn't get to the station in time, young man! Making me trudge all through this filthy mud, and in this rain, too!"

"The station?" repeated Handforth blankly.

"Don't sit there staring!" rapped out the other. "Help me to put these suitcases in the car! Why on earth you couldn't be at the station to meet me is a mystery! I shall speak to the Doctor pretty sharply about this!"

"But—but——"

"Don't argue, boy—I'm in no mood for nonsense!" said the man. "When I found there was no car to meet me at the station I was furious—I am still furious! Confound it, why don't you move yourself——"

"But—but I can't help your troubles!" broke out Handforth warmly. "I wasn't sent to the station to meet you, or anybody else! I'm going to the River House School to have tea and hot sausages—— I mean——"

"Oh!" interrupted the other. "In that case, perhaps I was a little too brusque. I am sorry, my boy. Please forgive me—but one is apt to be rather hasty on a night like this. Perhaps you will be good enough to give me a lift to the school?"

"But—but it's not far, you know——"

"Nevertheless, it is still raining, and these

bags are heavy," said the stranger. "By the way, which House do you belong to?"

"Why, the Ancient House——"

"Splendid! The very House I am entering myself!" said the new arrival with more cordiality. "This is a fortunate meeting, indeed."

"You!" gasped Handforth. "But—but you're too old!"

"The Ancient House is in need of a temporary housemaster, I believe," said the other dryly.

Handforth started, and remembered the rumours that had been floating about during the early part of the day. So they were founded upon fact! And this tall, rather hasty-tempered man was the new temporary housemaster! At any other time Handforth would have been all over him, so to speak, particularly as he was the junior skipper. But just at present he had a vision of a cosy study in the River House School, with a kettle singing on the hob, and a frying-pan sending forth curling wreaths of savouriness.

He brought himself back to earth with a jerk.

"Oh, so—so you're our new housemaster, sir?" he asked. "Awfully pleased to see you, sir. We heard a few rumours——"

"Mr. Fakenham," said the other, smiling. "Mr. Weir Fakenham——"

"Oh, so that's your name, sir?" said Handforth. "I don't mind giving you a lift to the school, Mr. Fakenham. As a matter of fact, I'm the junior skipper of the Ancient House, and you couldn't have met a more appropriate chap. Handforth's my name, sir—captain of the Remove."

"Better and better, Handforth," said Mr. Fakenham. "But I am still standing in the rain, and my bags——"

"Oh, sorry, sir!" said Handforth quickly.

He struggled out, and had the two dripping suit-cases in the rear of the car in no time. The new Housemaster took his seat in front, and Handforth resumed the wheel. With a few deft movements, backwards and forwards, he had soon turned the car about and was purring back to the school.

The distance was quite short, but Mr. Fakenham, of course, was a stranger, and didn't know the locality. So Handforth excused him. Besides, one couldn't very well do as he wished with a Housemaster—and Handforth was aware, moreover, that it would be a good move on his part to get into Mr. Fakenham's good books before he was officially introduced to the House.

Six o'clock was striking as the car pulled up in the deserted Triangle, and Edward Oswald started. Six o'clock! And he was still tea-less! He mentally growled at the working of Fate. Whenever a chap wanted to get somewhere particularly quickly, something was bound to butt in and mess it up!

"Here you are, sir—this is the Ancient House," said Handforth, nodding towards the steps. "You'll find plenty of chaps inside, and they'll soon show you round. Or if you want to go straight to the Head——"

"No, young man, I don't want to go straight to the Head," interrupted Mr. Fakenham. "As it happens I want to talk to you."

"To me, sir?"

"Yes—to you."

"Oh, but—but, you see— The fact is, sir— Well, I mean—"

"Yes," said Mr. Fakenham interrupting Handy. "I want to speak to you quite privately, Handforth. I think you said your name was Handforth? And you are quite sure that you are the junior captain of the Ancient House?"

"Why, of course, sir!"

"Then I have something very important for your own especial ear," said Mr. Fakenham, rather mysteriously. "I regard this opportune meeting as a good augury. The very boy I desired to become acquainted with I meet first. Splendid! Yes, Handforth, I have something for your private ear—and it is, indeed, imperative that I should discuss matters with you without any delay."

Handforth's last memory of the tea at the River House faded away.

Handforth Receives his Orders!

THERE was something about Mr. Fakenham's air which appealed strongly to Handforth's love of the mysterious.

"You—you mean you want me to take you straight to your study, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"That is exactly what I mean," said Mr. Fakenham, nodding. "I shall delay my visit to the headmaster until six-thirty. It is quite possible that Mr. Stokes will greet me at once, but, if so, the delay will only be brief. To be candid, Handforth, I must have this private word with you at once."

"Oh, rather, sir!" said Handforth, filled with curiosity.

They went indoors, and found everything quiet. On such a wet evening, the fellows were either in their studies, or in the comfortable common-rooms. Handforth led the way down the corridors to the Housemaster's study, carrying one of the suit-cases.

Just before they got there, as they were turning a corner, they ran into Mr. Beverley Stokes himself. The Housemaster of the West House paused, and looked inquiringly at the stranger.

"All right, Handforth—you can go straight on," said Mr. Fakenham, smiling. "Wait for me—I will join you at once!"

"Yes, sir," said Handforth.

He was rather worried. The very thing he hadn't wanted! Perhaps Barry Stokes would keep the new Housemaster jawing for half an hour. Handforth entered the study, switched on the light, and put the bag down.

But he needn't have worried. Mr. Fakenham joined him within half a minute, and he came in, closed the door, and looked round the apartment with approval.

"H'm! Quite home-like," he said genially. "I had a word with Mr. Stokes, and I must say that I like him. But you are more im-

portant just now, Handforth—I can pow-wow with Mr. Stokes later on in the evening, perhaps. Sit down, young 'un—make yourself at home. I always like to be on the friendliest terms with my boys."

Handforth sat down, and had already formed the opinion that Mr. Fakenham was the kind of Housemaster he liked.

"Yes, I always like to be on the friendliest possible terms with my boys," repeated Mr. Fakenham, as he sat down and lit a cigarette. "And that, to let the cat out of the bag, Handforth, is the main reason for this present interview."

"What, being friendly, sir?"

"Exactly!" said Mr. Fakenham, nodding.

"As far as I know, you are the only boy who knows of my arrival. One or two others may have seen us, but they know nothing for certain. I want to spring just a little surprise."

"By George! How, sir?" asked Handforth eagerly.

"Well, what about a little celebration?" suggested the new Housemaster. "A feast—a feed as I think you call it? A junior spread, in honour of my arrival? How does that fit the bill?"

"But—but I don't quite understand—"

"Lest you should gain the opinion that I am conceited, I had better amplify my little scheme," said Mr. Fakenham, with a chuckle. "I want to meet my boys here—and I am naturally alluding to the junior boys only—in the friendliest possible manner. I detest formalities, Handforth. And how better could I meet them than to make a smiling appearance at the commencement of a—er—feed? During the course of the little celebration—quite a free-and-easy affair—how easy it will be for me to become acquainted with all you youngsters."

Handforth began to scent the idea.

"Ripping, sir!" he agreed. "As it happens, I'm a new Form skipper, and I'm just getting the chaps into shape. This feed idea will help me a lot, too. There's nothing like grub for making everybody happy."

He had a fleeting vision of hot sausages, but sternly dismissed it.

"One moment, Handforth—one moment," interrupted Mr. Fakenham gently. "I want you to take the credit for this little idea. As Form captain, it will be your due. You have a dining-room here, I presume?"

"Yes, of course, sir."

"And kitchens, and so forth?"

"Well, naturally sir."

"Then it is perfectly simple," said Mr. Fakenham. "All you have to do is to take a number of boys—all the Remove juniors in this House, if you like—and raid the kitchens and store-rooms!"

"Raid them, sir?" gasped Handforth.

"Ahem! A schoolboy term, I believe!" smiled the newcomer. "Lead these boys on a foraging expedition, Handforth. Take what food you like, and prepare a royal spread in the dining-room—say for seven-

thirty. Make it appear that this scheme is your own, you see?"

"But—but Mrs. Poulter might kick up a shindy, sir!"

"Mrs. Poulter?"

"She's the House matron, sir——"

"Let her kick up what shindy she pleases, young 'un," said Mr. Fakenham, waving his hand. "Why should you care? Always remember that you have my permission."

"By George, yes, sir!" breathed Handforth. "And you're the Housemaster!"

"You have my full permission to carry this scheme into effect," continued Mr. Fakenham genially. "Take your boys—raid the kitchens—and prepare the feast in the dining-hall. Our little secret, eh? Some of the boys may be quite scandalised when you suggest it—but they won't know the inner facts, will they?"

Handforth took a deep breath.

"They'll be too scared to back me up, sir, unless I tell them——"

"You must tell them nothing," interrupted Mr. Fakenham firmly. "That would ruin everything. Haven't I already told you that the whole idea is to spring a surprise? The boys don't know I'm here—and you must give the impression that this feast is a little

brain-wave of your own. Afterwards, of course, when the truth comes out——"

Mr. Fakenham paused, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, that's all right, sir, then," said Handforth.

He nodded, and took his departure, full of the great scheme. Mr. Fakenham made sure that the door was closed, and then he went to the telephone.

"Bannington four-seven-one," he said crisply.

A brief wait, and a voice came over the wire.

"That you, Hal?" said Mr. Fakenham.

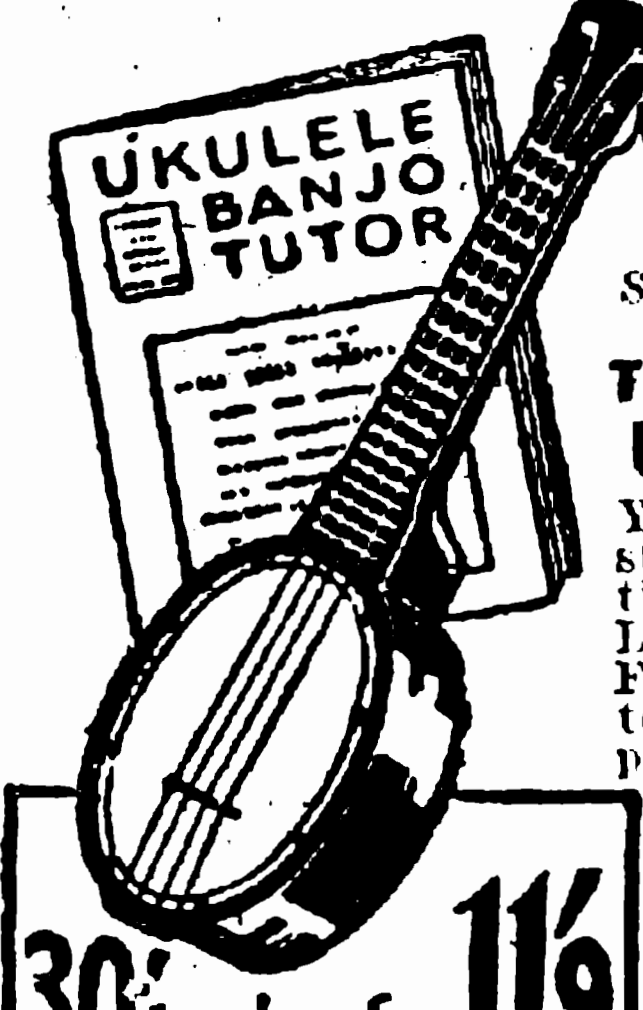
"Yes!" came the voice of Hal Brewster. "Well?"

"It's worked, my young genius!" grinned Mr. Fakenham happily. "Without any reservations, it has unquestionably worked!"

"Handy swallowed the yarn?" asked Brewster. "The game's going ahead?"

"Like a dream!" replied Mr. Fakenham. "Come along as soon as you like. I'm quitting while I'm still safe."

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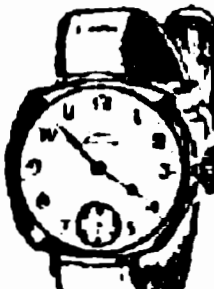
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