

50 FREE GIFTS FOR READERS EVERY WEEK (SEE INSIDE)

The NELSON LEE

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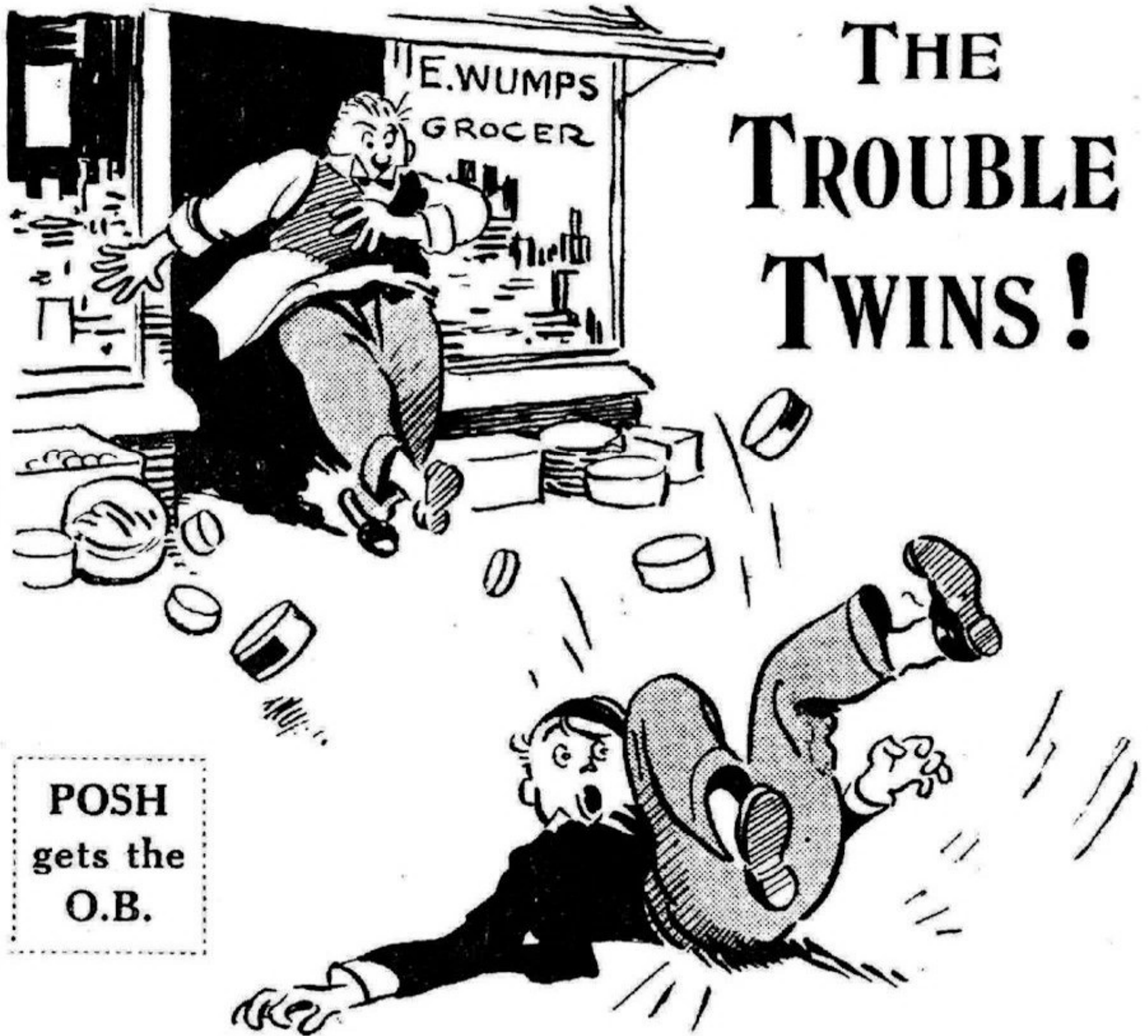
The
**VANISHED
FILM
STAR!**

New Series No. 17.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

May 17th, 1930.

THE TROUBLE TWINS!



POSH
gets the
O.B.

Sacked!

"**S**LOW!" murmured Joe Trouble—better known as Posh. "Gets slower every blooming day! Wish something would happen!"

And he flicked, in a depressed sort of way, with his feather duster at an inoffensive blue-bottle that was hovering over some pots of strawberry jam stacked just in the doorway of the shop.

Posh was a lad with a thirst for excitement and adventure, and he found life very dull as errand boy in Mr. Ebenezer Wumps' grocery establishment in the sleepy High Street of Mudridge—a dull-enough village where nothing ever happened unless Posh, aided by his twin brother Sam, made something happen.

This, unfortunately for their reputations in the village, they too often did, for not only did the twins possess an unrivalled knack for finding trouble, but Posh was a clever ventriloquist, while Sam

was an exceedingly skilful juggler and acrobat.

Having slaughtered the inoffensive blue-bottle, Posh gazed gloomily along the sleepy High Street, and then, suddenly, he stiffened. Amazement and wrath were registered on his youthful features as his gaze settled on the shop window.

Only recently Posh had spent twenty minutes of his valuable time cleaning that window, and now the shiny, glimmering surface was marred by a horrid smudge of mud.

"Well, I'm blowed!" muttered Posh. "What mean rotter—"

He paused, meeting the grinning glance of a long, lanky youth wearing a black apron, who stood at the top of a pair of steps, slinging pairs of boots and shoes on to hooks outside the window of the bootshop next door.

It was Sandy Swagg, the bootshop errand boy, and Posh's deadliest enemy.

He knew immediately that it was Sandy who

*Posh and Sam have laughed
their way through life — and
you'll laugh your way through
this rollicking yarn!*



**SAM
gets
ditto.**

As he did so the steps shot away sideways, and Sandy dropped backwards with a wild howl and a crash into a box of cooking-eggs.

As it happened, Mr. Ebenezer Wumps happened to be gossiping inside the bootshop at that moment with Mr. Fitt-right, the proprietor, and both came rushing out at once.

Mr. Wumps came first, and he tripped over the fallen steps, and fell on his

nose, while Mr. Fitt-right sprawled headlong over him, banging his chin on the back of the grocer's head.

At the same moment, in his frantic desire to get free from the embrace of the egg-box, Sandy brought the box toppling over, sending a cascade of eggs over himself, Mr. Wumps and Mr. Fitt-right, while a most dreadful smell pervaded the atmosphere. The eggs had seen better, not to say fresher, days.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Posh.

He stared at the struggling, yelling forms in dismay. But he was a modest youth—at such times—and instantly he faded back into the shop, and was busily engrossed in dusting a stack of tinned goods when Mr. Wumps, with eggs, egg-shells and a fearful aroma clinging to him, came charging in, his face red with rage.

"You—you young monkey!" he roared, shaking a fat fist under Joe's nose.

had muddied that window as revenge for a licking he had administered to the boot-boy the previous day—the third in a week. But Posh restrained the desire to rush at him now and repeat the dose. Mr. Ebenezer Wumps had threatened to sack him the very next time anything unusual happened in business hours, and Joe had already lost six jobs in the two months since he had left school.

Still, something had to be done, and Posh was determined to do it.

He waited until Sandy had turned his head away again. Then, grabbing the hooked pole used to raise and lower the sun-blind, Posh reached round and jabbed the sharp iron spike into one of Sandy's lanky calves. At the same moment he gave a curious gulp, and then a most ferocious snarling appeared to come from behind Sandy's legs.

"Gur-r-r-r-r!"

Sandy yelped and gave a convulsive leap.

"What—what's the matter, Mister Wumps?" asked Posh innocently. "Why, you're all eggy, sir! Has there been an accident—"

"Accident!" roared Mr. Wumps. "I'll give you accident, you young fiend! Up to your venwilocril tricks agen! Off you go—you're sacked!"

"But, look here, Mister Wumps—"

"Don't attempt no lies!" bawled the grocer, purple with indignation. "Weren't I just inside Mister Fittright's doorway, and didn't I see you with my own eyes poke that pole, and aren't you always up to you monkey tricks? Get out! You're fired, sacked— Look out, you—"

The warning came too late. In his wrath the grocer took a threatening step towards his errand boy, and naturally Posh backed. Unluckily he backed into a stack of tin-goods, bringing the whole lot down on top of himself and the grocer with an appalling crash.

Posh got two tins of pine-chunks and a tin of best salmon on his cranium, and howled. Mr. Wumps, raging now, made a blind rush at him.

Fortunately for Posh, the irate man trod on a tin of apricots, which instantly rolled from under his foot, and he plunged forward and buried his heated features in a tub of butter on the counter. At the same moment self-preservation caused the falling grocer to wrap his arms round the mass of butter, bringing that, and the dish on which it rested, sliding off the marble-topped counter on top of him.

To crown it all, having heard the uproar, Mrs. Wumps came rushing out from the back-room behind the shop. Before she could pull up, the unfortunate dame tripped over the tinned goods, and sprawled with a wild, unearthly shriek on top of her groveling spouse.

Posh, who could always see the humorous side of things, stood convulsed with laughter. It was an unwise thing to do. Fuming and shouting with rage, Mr. Wumps had extricated himself from his better half. He made a rush at Posh. That lad turned to bunk, but he was just a second too late. The angry shop proprietor seized him by the scruff of his collar—and next moment Posh sailed out of the shop, assisted by Mr. Wumps' sized ten boot!

More Trouble!

"GOSH! Sacked again!" mumbled Posh. Trouble dismally, as he picked himself up and walked down the street, feeling his anatomy tenderly.

"What will the old man do—take some skin off me, I expect! I must have been born on a Friday. Hallo, good! I'll slip in and tell Sam the news!"

His twin brother worked as errand boy at Gameniffs, the village poulterer, and from the distance Posh sighted Mr. Gameniff just disappearing into the post-office opposite to his shop.

It was a chance to tell Sam the sad news, and instantly Posh hurried along and nipped into the shop. It was empty, but he guessed

Sam was at work in the room behind, filleting fish, or skinning rabbits, or busy on some such task.

As a matter of fact, Sam should have been skinning a rabbit, but taking advantage of his boss' absence, he was practising his favourite juggling trick, which was to keep a rabbit, a chicken, a bottle of salad-dressing, a codfish, and a duck in a whizzing half-circle above his head.

Not knowing this, Posh darted into the inner-room, sending the door crashing into the amateur juggler, with the result that Sam plunged forward, getting the dead rabbit in his face, the deceased duck in the back of the neck, and the bottle of salad-dressing on his head, where it bounced off and smashed on the floor; while Posh howled as the chicken smote his face, and the codfish wrapped itself round his neck.

"Yow! Ow! Oh, crikey!" gasped Posh. "Sorry, old— Here, keep off, you idiot!"

But the raging Sam did not keep off.

"You clumsy owl!" he gasped wrathfully. "Take that!"

It was a hefty and unbrotherly punch on the nose. Posh took it, and returned the punch with a will. The next moment they had joined the live-stock—or, rather, dead-stock—on the sawdust-covered floor, and were rolling about in a deadly embrace, picking up salad-dressing and bits of glass as they rolled.

At this interesting juncture Mr. Gameniff strode in briskly. He was a tall, scraggy man with a perpetual fishy smell about him, whiskers like a rabbit and eyes like a codfish that gave him a very fishy look.

For a moment the poulterer did nothing but stare at the busy scene, his eyes opening wider and wider until they resembled the eyes of an octopus. Then he dived in—just as Posh grabbed the codfish by the tail and made a swipe at Sam with it. Mr. Gameniff intercepted the swipe neatly by getting his face in the way.

This happening did not improve his temper, and with a gasping sort of howl he tore the codfish from Posh's grasp and began to belabour the twins with it until, suddenly realising he was damaging the codfish even more than them, he flung it on a marble slab, and grabbed the yelling Posh by the coat collar.

Whirling him round, he rushed the unfortunate youth through the doorway, and for the second time that day Posh went for a flight in mid-air—again assisted by a hefty boot behind him. Posh landed on the pavement outside, only just avoiding a rather haughty lady who was about to enter the shop.

Sam was less lucky in his flight, however. The enraged poulterer caught him attempting to dodge out by the back door, hauled him back into the shop, and kicked.

"Out you get!" he roared. "I've had enough of you, my lad! You're sacked! Take your confounded coat, and—"

He halted, transfixed with horror, as Sam ended his flight by butting full into the fat lady, who was Mrs. Footle-Pawson-Binks, the



Posh backed into the stack of tinned goods, and the whole lot came tumbling over him and his irate employer.

squire's dame, and Mr. Gameniff's best customer.

Mrs. Footle-Pawson-Binks sat down with a gasp like a punctured tyre, while Sam's jacket, which the poulterer had flung after him, wrapped itself neatly round her bonneted head.

Luckily, winded as he was, Sam acted with praiseworthy promptness. He snatched his jacket, grabbed his cap, and then he tore wildly after Posh, who was already vanishing in the distance.

Goodbye Mudridge!

"GOSH! We've done it now, Sam!" greeted Posh, as Sam joined him at the far end of the High Street. "Sacked, I s'pose?"

"Of course! You—you footling——"

"Now, don't cut up rough at a time like this, Sam," pleaded Posh dismally. "The question is, what's to be done now? The old man threatened to turn us out if we lost any more jobs!"

"Well, that won't be much of a calamity, will it?" grunted Sam, rubbing fish-scales from his features. "I'm fed-up, Posh! The fact of the matter is we're not wanted at Mudridge—nobody understands or loves us. The old man's a drunken brute and thrashes us and collars our bit of pay."

"That's a fact, Sam!" admitted Posh gloomily. "I vote we don't wait to be turned out! Let's go out into the world to seek our

fortunes, I say. I want to join a circus, and you want to get on a music hall, and my idea——"

"Ripping!" said Sam enthusiastically. "Gosh! We could get jobs on the road for a bit, and we could give wayside shows—you with your ventriloquism and me with my juggling and acrobatics. Gee! It's great! Let's go home and pack right away!"

"I'm game!" said Posh reflectively. "We'll pack up some grub and things, and shove off before the old man comes home. Come on!"

The twins lost no time in reaching the cottage—little more than a hovel—where they lived with their step-father. The twins' mother was dead, and they had no love for their step-father, who was a brute and a tyrant.

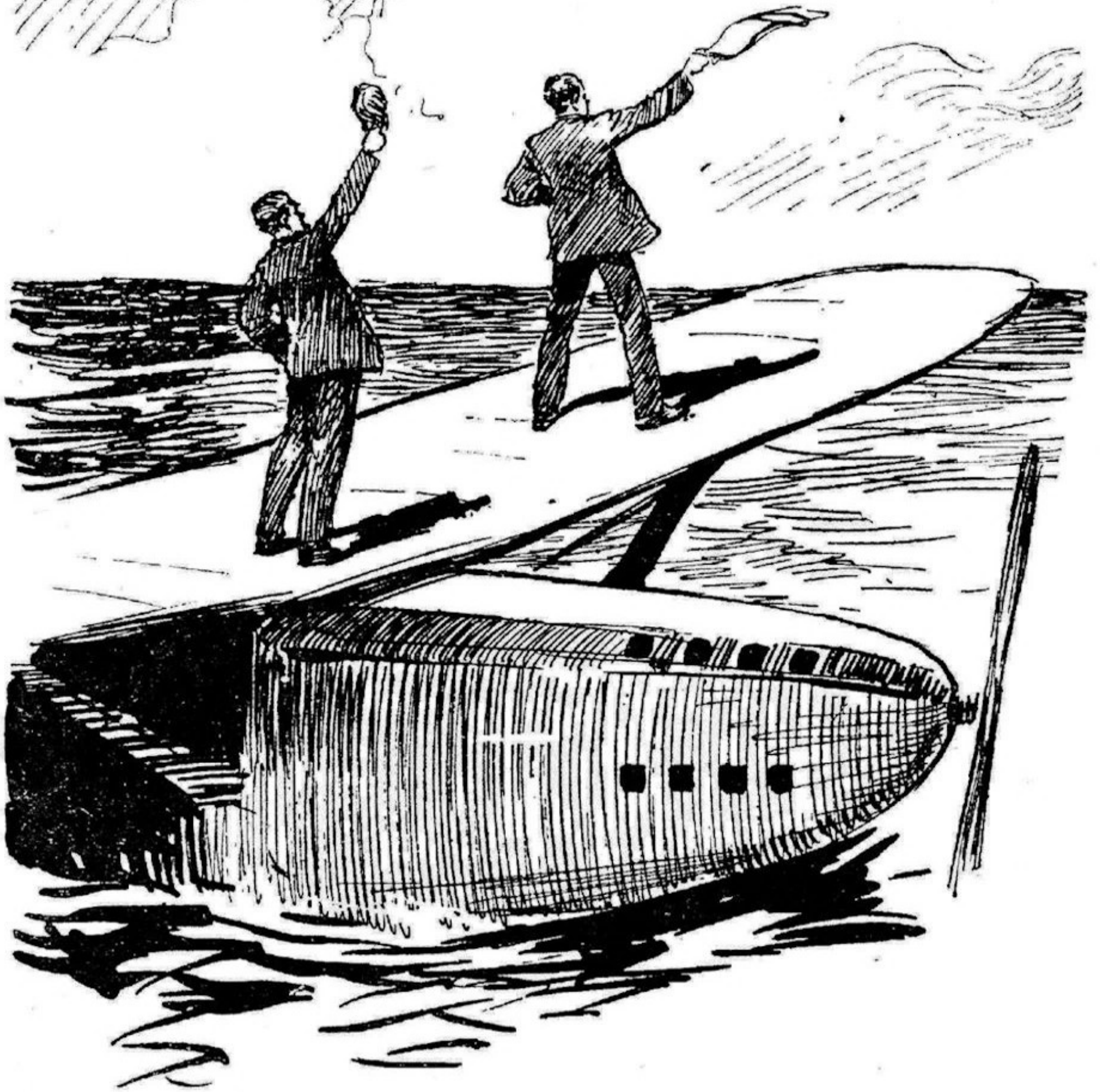
The Trouble Twins—known in the village as the "Trouble Twins"—packed their few belongings in the dismal attic where they were wont to sleep. Suddenly they heard a well-known, unsteady footstep in the back lane, and then the click of the back garden gate.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Sam. "The old man—home sooner than we expected, Posh!" He blinked out of the attic window, and groaned as he spoke. Inside the gate was a burly, roughly-dressed figure with a red and blotchy face. It was their step-father. "What's to be done, Posh? He'll want to know why we're home early, and then—look out for fireworks!"

(Continued on page 28.)

The Best Detective Yarn of the Week!

The Warrished



CHAPTER 1.

Kidnapped!

RONALD LENNOX stepped briskly out of his room at the Apollo Hotel, in the heart of the West End, and as he did so three other men moved out from a half-open doorway farther down the corridor. Lennox frowned as he saw them. He attempted to pass, but they

barred his way as he came opposite to the half-open door.

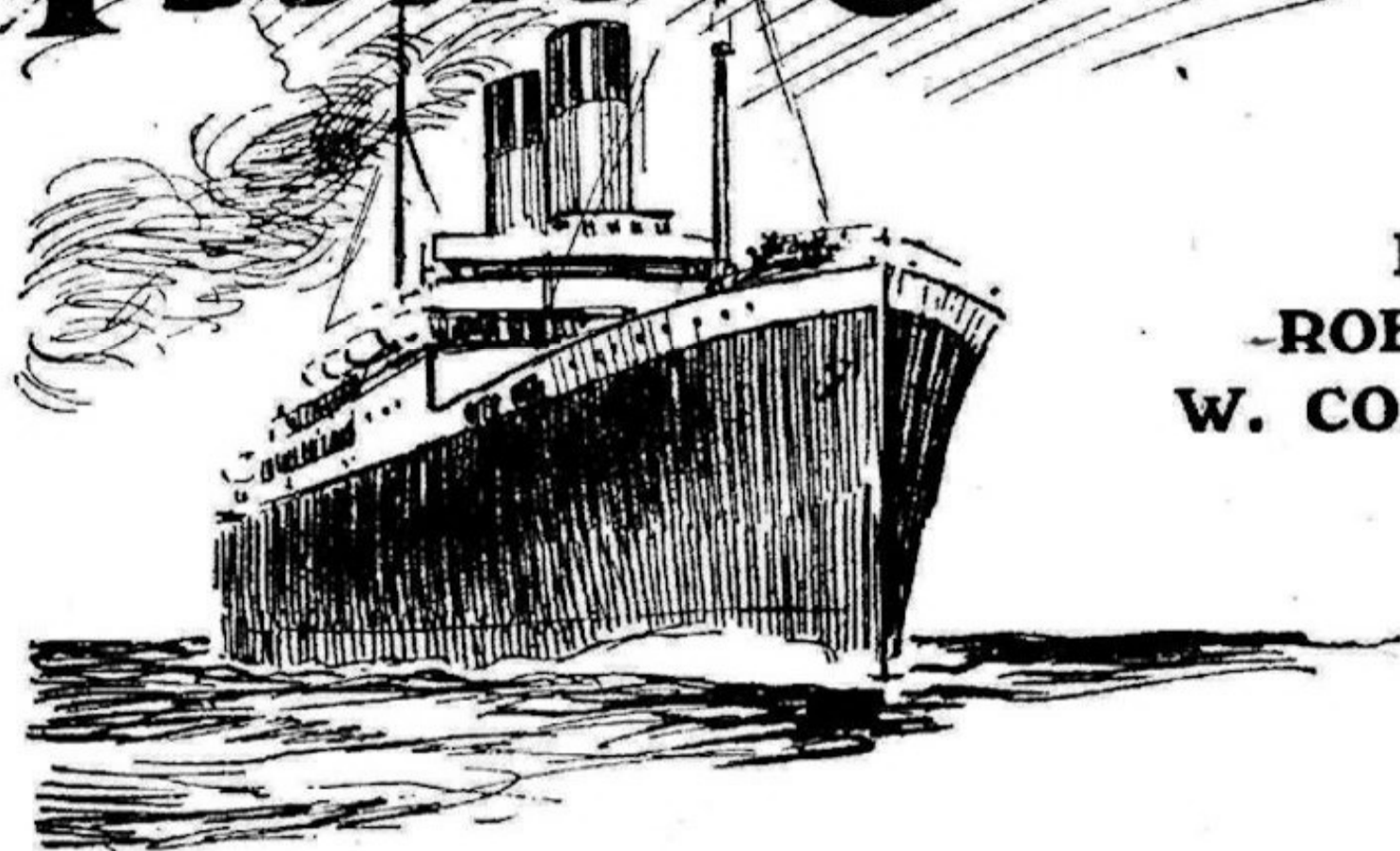
"Good-morning, Mr. Lennox," said one of the men pleasantly.

He was a big man with square shoulders and a bull-like neck. All three men, in fact, were big. Their features were hard and coarse, and their clothing alone stamped them as American citizens.

"Are we going all over that ridiculous business again?" said Ronald Lennox curtly.

Start Reading It Right Now, Chums!

Film Star!



By
**ROBERT
W. COMRADE.**

"I'm very sorry, gentlemen, but I'm in a hurry this morning. Are you going to let me pass down this corridor, or—"

"Easy, brother—easy," interrupted the man who had spoken first. "You've been giving us the run-around long enough. Get me? Would you care to step into our apartment?"

"I would not," replied Lennox briefly.

He was a tall, clean-limbed, athletic young fellow. His features were clean-cut, and he was pleasant to look upon. There were not many people in Great Britain—or in America, for that matter—who did not know the features of Ronald Lennox. Having made himself famous on the silent screen in both countries, he was now gaining fresh laurels as a talkie star.

"Look here, my friends," he said patiently, "I shouldn't advise you to start any monkey business."

"Is that so?" said the other man in a hard voice.

With one movement he sogged at Lennox, and his companions acted at the same second. The film star was hustled violently through the open doorway. The door closed, and the key turned.

"You infernal crooks!" said Lennox contemptuously, as he straightened his jacket. "What do you hope to gain by this sort of thing?"

The leader of the three men ignored him; he turned to his companions.

"Anybody see us pull this guy in here?" he asked sharply.

"Not on your life, Birdy," said one of the others. "We got him good."

Lennox eyed the man with growing impatience and anger. He had had plenty of experience in America, and he had known from the first that these three fellows were gunmen of the toughest type. They were far more at home in the Loop District of Chicago than they were in Mayfair.

"Now, get this, baby," said the man named Birdy, his voice hard and grating. "We didn't come all the way from America to this one-horse country for nothing. You've got a little package locked away in a safe deposit in Los Angeles. It isn't yours, and you know it."

Lennox laughed.

"You're making me quite curious about that little package," he said amusedly. "I'm beginning to think it must contain something of importance."

"Before we let you leave this apartment, you've got to sign an authority—"

"We've discussed this matter before," interrupted Lennox. "I've already told you that my signed authority would be useless. That package was deposited under definite

From England to America, then a 3,000 miles chase across that vast continent. Three notorious gunmen lead Nelson Lee and Nipper a fine dance—but the famous detective always "gets his man"!

conditions. It will not be handed over to anybody except myself. Do you understand? I must go to that bank in person."

"He's stalling, Birdy," said one of the men.

"No, Blondy, this is the real dope," said Birdy, shaking his head. "It's tough, but we've got to do it. This guy goes with us. Go to it, boys!"

One of the men leapt forward and grasped Lennox from the rear, pinioning his arms.

"Here, confound you—" began the young film star.

He was alarmed now, and furious, but before he could put up any sort of a struggle, Birdy clapped a heavy pad over his mouth and nostrils. Less than a minute later he was prone on the carpet, unconscious.

"Gee, Birdy, this is a tough game," said one of the other men, breathing hard.

"Quit talking, and get this guy into the trunk," snapped Birdy. "It's a tough break, having to take him with us—but it's the only way. Open her up, boys."

The others opened a big wardrobe trunk. It was of the ordinary type—one of those huge wardrobe trunks which are characteristically American. The interior proved interesting. There were no drawers, as in the usual trunk; no coat-hangers. The interior was cunningly padded, and near the top there were series of little round holes. They were air-holes.

The unfortunate Ronald Lennox, still unconscious, was carefully placed within the trunk; and so cleverly was the padding distributed that there was no fear of his being injured if the trunk was roughly handled. The lock snapped to.

"Think we'll make it, Birdy?" asked one of the others.

"Sure we'll make it, brother," replied Birdy. "I never start a thing I can't finish. All set? We'll go down to the desk-clerk and check out."

Less than twenty minutes later the three Americans, having settled their bill, had their luggage taken down in the lift. There were only a few bags in addition to the big wardrobe trunk. Everything was placed on a big car which was waiting.

Then the trio took their seats within the car, and they were soon speeding southwards through London—bound for Southampton, and the liner *Sylvania*, which sailed for New York that morning.

LESS than twenty-four hours later a stout, partially bald, excited man was ushered into Nelson Lee's famous consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road.

"Mr. Adam Pritchard, sir," announced Nipper briskly.

Mr. Adam Pritchard had called by appointment. He had made the appointment over the 'phone, only an hour earlier.

"Good-morning, Mr. Pritchard," said Nelson Lee evenly. "Sit down, won't you?"

The visitor did not avail himself of the invitation. He stood in front of Lee, a bundle of nerves. The great detective, who

spent many a leisure hour in the picture theatres, looked interestedly at this man who was responsible for so many fine British films. Mr. Adam Pritchard was, without question, the most celebrated of all British producers.

"I'm not sure that I can help you, Mr. Pritchard, but if my advice is of any value, it is freely yours," said Lee. "I understood you to say over the telephone that Ronny Lennox has disappeared?"

"He has gone—vanished—and I am in despair," said the stout man excitedly. "My picture is being held up, Mr. Lee. We lost thousands yesterday; we shall lose thousands to-day. You cannot imagine what it means."

"I think I can," said Lee. "I am not entirely ignorant of your profession, Mr. Pritchard."

"We are filming the biggest scenes of all just now," declared Mr. Pritchard. "Hundreds of extras were engaged yesterday, and they were idle. They must all be paid. Lennox did not turn up at the studios. We're on the last lap of the picture, and it will mean the loss of tens of thousands of pounds if anything serious has happened. We cannot double a man like Lennox. Unfinished, the picture is worthless. British National Pictures, Limited, will lose—"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Pritchard," interrupted Lee. "Lennox has only been missing for twenty-four hours. He may have had some sudden call; a restless fit may have seized him—"

"No, no," broke in the other. "Lennox isn't like that. He is not temperamental. Lennox is a good boy—always at the studio in punctual time. And if, by any chance, he is detained, he always telephones or gets a message through in some way."

"An unusual type of film star, surely," said Lee dryly.

"That is why I am so certain that something dreadful must have happened," said Mr. Pritchard. "It is very mysterious, Mr. Lee. Lennox was at his hotel yesterday morning. He left at his usual hour, but he never arrived at the studios."

"You are sure he left at the usual hour?"

"Yes; I have spoken with the hotel valet—the man who always attended him," replied the producer. "Lennox has no home in England, and since he has been engaged on this picture he has lived at the Apollo Hotel."

"Did he seem at all upset yesterday morning before he left?"

"Quite the contrary," replied Mr. Pritchard. "He told Jarvis—the valet—that he would be back at his usual hour. He was his own cheerful self. Before leaving he telephoned to three people, making appointments for later times in the day. Everything indicates that he had not the slightest intention of deviating from any of his customary habits."

Nelson Lee rose.

"Well, it seems that we are wasting time by remaining here," he said. "If we are to discover anything, we shall discover it

at the Apollo Hotel—for that is where Lennox was last seen."

NELSON LEE was not seriously attracted by this problem—which, in its present stage, seemed trivial enough. He felt genuinely sorry for Mr. Adam Pritchard, however, and as he had no important work on just then, he felt that half an hour spent at the Apollo Hotel might be profitable.

The management could tell him nothing. The manager and the under-manager and the reception clerk had not noticed the movements of Ronald Lennox the previous morning. Jarvis, the valet, could only corroborate what Mr. Pritchard had already told. Lennox had left cheerfully enough at his usual hour.

"It wouldn't surprise me, though," said Jarvis darkly, "if those ugly-looking Americans had something to do with it."

"What Americans?" asked Lee.

"There were three staying at this hotel," explained Jarvis.

"Real ugly fellows, and they had rooms right in this same corridor, too. Crooks, if you ask me. Yes, and what was more, they knew Mr. Lennox! Came right into his room, here, more than once."

"Oh, they knew Mr. Lennox?" said Lee, becoming interested. "Are these Americans still in the hotel?"

"No, sir; they left yesterday morning," said the valet. "Here, I say! That's funny, too! Mr. Lennox disappeared from the time he went out of this room—and those Americans left the hotel only about half an hour afterwards."

Nelson Lee was looking thoughtful after he had left Lennox's apartments. He had obtained no clue through his brief search; but the valet's words interested him. He went downstairs to see the reception clerk, and came across Detective-sergeant Carlile, of Scotland Yard, in the big lobby.

"Hallo, Carlile," said Lee. "What are you doing here? Are you on this Lennox case, too?"

"Bless your life, no, sir," laughed the Yard man. "I've heard he's missing, but there's nothing in that. These film people are an unreliable lot, aren't they? I've been making some inquiries about three American gunmen who've been staying at this hotel."

"You mean the men who left yesterday morning?"

"Yes, sir," said the detective-sergeant. "They sailed on the Sylvania, from Southampton—and good riddance to them! Birdy Rowan, Red Grogan, and Blondy Edwards—they're the three. Chicago crooks

of the worst type. Funny how these blighters get in and out of the country so easily."

Lee went across to the reception clerk.

"Were you here when the three American—er—gentlemen left yesterday morning?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Lee, and I can assure you that the hotel was glad to be rid of them."

"There was nobody with them when they left, I suppose?"

"No, not that I know of."

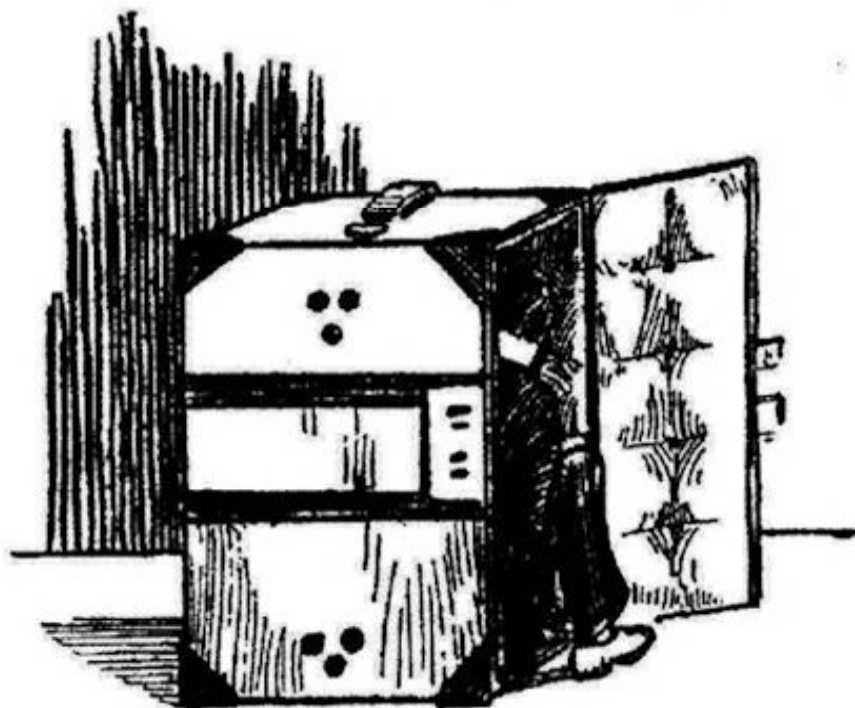
"They just took their luggage?"

"That's right," said the reception clerk. "A number of suitcases, two small cabin trunks, and a big wardrobe trunk."

"A wardrobe trunk," commented Lee thoughtfully. "One of the usual type?"

"A bit bigger than usual," said the other. "It needed two of our porters to carry it out to the car—and then it was as much as they could manage."

"Thank you," said Nelson Lee quietly. "If you don't mind, I'd like to have a look at the rooms that these American visitors occupied."



CHAPTER 2.

Discoveries!

NELSON LEE was frowning as he looked round the neat sitting-room.

It was typical of all good-class hotel sitting-rooms. Two doors led out from it, in addition to the door which opened from the corridor. There were two bed-rooms included in this suite, as well as two bath-rooms. It had been thoroughly swept and dusted, of course, since yesterday morning, but it was still unoccupied.

The detective walked about the room, using his eyes keenly. He examined the carpet with great care; he looked behind the easy chairs and the lounge. He moved the screen in the fireplace, and even peered inquisitively into the grate.

"H'm! This looks rather promising," he commented, at length.

Very carefully, he picked up some tiny fragments from the back of the grate. He did not wonder that they had been missed by the cleaners, for they were practically invisible. They were black, like the grate itself, and so small as to be almost indistinguishable. Very gingerly, using a tiny pair of tweezers, Lee placed the scraps on an old envelope. Then he went across to the window, and closely examined his find.

"What are those black scraps, Mr. Lee? How can they tell you anything?" asked Mr. Pritchard, who had been looking on curiously.

"I am afraid they tell me quite a lot, Mr. Pritchard," replied the great detective. "They tell me, in fact, that Ronald Lennox is now on board the liner, *Sylvania*, bound for New York. Furthermore, he is a prisoner in the hands of those three American gunmen."

The film producer was a picture of mingled consternation and amazement.

"But—but this is uncanny!" he gasped. "How can you know this, Mr. Lee?"

"If you look closely, you will observe that these scraps of black substance are curiously curly," explained Lee. "They are, in fact, fragments of fibre. I might as well tell you at once that I half-expected to find some such clue in this room."

"But you haven't told me what this fibre stuff is," said the film director impatiently.

"Most wardrobe trunks, Mr. Pritchard, are made of fibre—with metal hinges and corners," replied Lee. "The curliness of these scraps is due to the fact that they were cut by means of an ordinary brace and bit. In other words, a number of small air-holes were obviously cut in the big wardrobe trunk which those three Americans took with them when they left this hotel."

"Guv'nor!" ejaculated Nipper. "You—you mean that Mr. Lennox was carried off in that wardrobe trunk?"

"Exactly," nodded Lee. "To my mind, there is not a shadow of a doubt that Lennox was audaciously kidnapped from this hotel yesterday morning."

"This is ruin!" groaned Mr. Pritchard. "Lennox kidnapped—on his way back to America! And my film not completed! Even if we get Lennox back, the delay will cost us thousands— He must be got back, Mr. Lee!" he added fiercely. "By hook or by crook, Lennox must be rescued from those criminals."

The detective looked thoughtful.

"It might be possible to overtake the *Sylvania*," he said slowly.

"Overtake her?" panted the other. "How?"

"The liner called at Cherbourg, of course, and, as distances go, she's not very far out into the Atlantic, replied Lee. "A fast seaplane could reach her in only a few hours—"

"A brilliant suggestion!" broke in Mr. Pritchard. "Splendid, Mr. Lee! Who will go? How can I hire a seaplane? I'll go on this trip myself—"

"You had better not," said Lee, shaking his head. "Once more, let me remind you, Mr. Pritchard, that Lennox's kidnapers are desperate men. This situation must be dealt with delicately. It would be advisable, in my opinion, not to wireless to the liner at all—but to take these crooks by stealth. Let the overtaking seaplane come down apparently by chance. In that way, Birdy Rowan and his colleagues will not suspect that their game is known. The rescue of Lennox will therefore be made all the easier."

Mr. Pritchard clutched at Lee's arm.

"You must go, Mr. Lee!" he urged. "You are the very man—the only man! You must go on this mission!"

"If it will relieve you so much, Mr. Pritchard, I will undertake the task," said Lee, smiling.

CHAPTER 3.

The First Clash!

"THERE she is, guv'nor," said Nipper eagerly.

A wide expanse of smooth sea lay beneath the rapidly speeding flying-boat. She was seven or eight thousand feet high, and as the weather was singularly clear, the visibility was excellent. The *Sylvania*, looking like a mere toy ship, was leaving a long white trail in her wake. No wireless message had been sent to her captain; nobody on board knew that this seaplane was about to come down.

"We shall have to be careful, young 'un," said Lee, who was piloting the seaplane. "The skipper won't be at all pleased when we alight and make signals. Stopping a big ship like the *Sylvania* means delay. However, it's got to be done, and I daresay the captain will forgive me when I am in a position to give him the inner details."

"How long do you think we'll be over the job, guv'nor?"

"I hope to get it over very quickly," replied the detective. "Our best policy, I think, is to pretend to be in difficulties. Once on board, a quick word with the captain will be enough—and a search of Rowan's cabin ought to be profitable. When we've got Lennox we can leave immediately."

The detective now proceeded to provide an artistic touch. He switched the engine on and off, and the impression was given that something was wrong with it. At the same time, the 'plane dived towards the liner, banking round and circling. By now the liner's decks were crowded with people.

With a final splutter from the engine, the propeller stopped dead, and Lee sent the seaplane diving steeply over the *Sylvania*'s bows. It seemed that he had lost control and that disaster was inevitable, but at the last minute the machine flattened out, bumped gently on the water, and alighted. She took the water almost half a mile ahead of the liner, and well to starboard.

"Pretty good, guv'nor," grinned Nipper. "What next?"

"Out you get, young 'un—and wave as frantically as you can," replied Lee.

Within three minutes they were both out of the cockpit. Nipper was clinging to the main body, and Lee stood on top of the wing. Both were waving and gesticulating. To Lee's satisfaction, the great liner was already reducing her speed. She was stopping, as the detective had anticipated.

The unconscious Nelson Lee was pushed through the port-hole. He fell like a log into the sea!

Suddenly there was a jarring crash which shook the floating seaplane and nearly sent Lee hurtling into the water.

"Great Scott!" yelled Nipper. "What was that?"

Nelson Lee did not answer. He was staring down at the water. For a moment he caught a vague glimpse of something dark and bulky which floated under the greenish, foam-flecked waves. A strange gurgling sound came up from the flying-boat's hull, and within a minute Lee noticed that the craft was losing her former buoyancy. Instead of riding lightly on the waves, she rolled sluggishly.

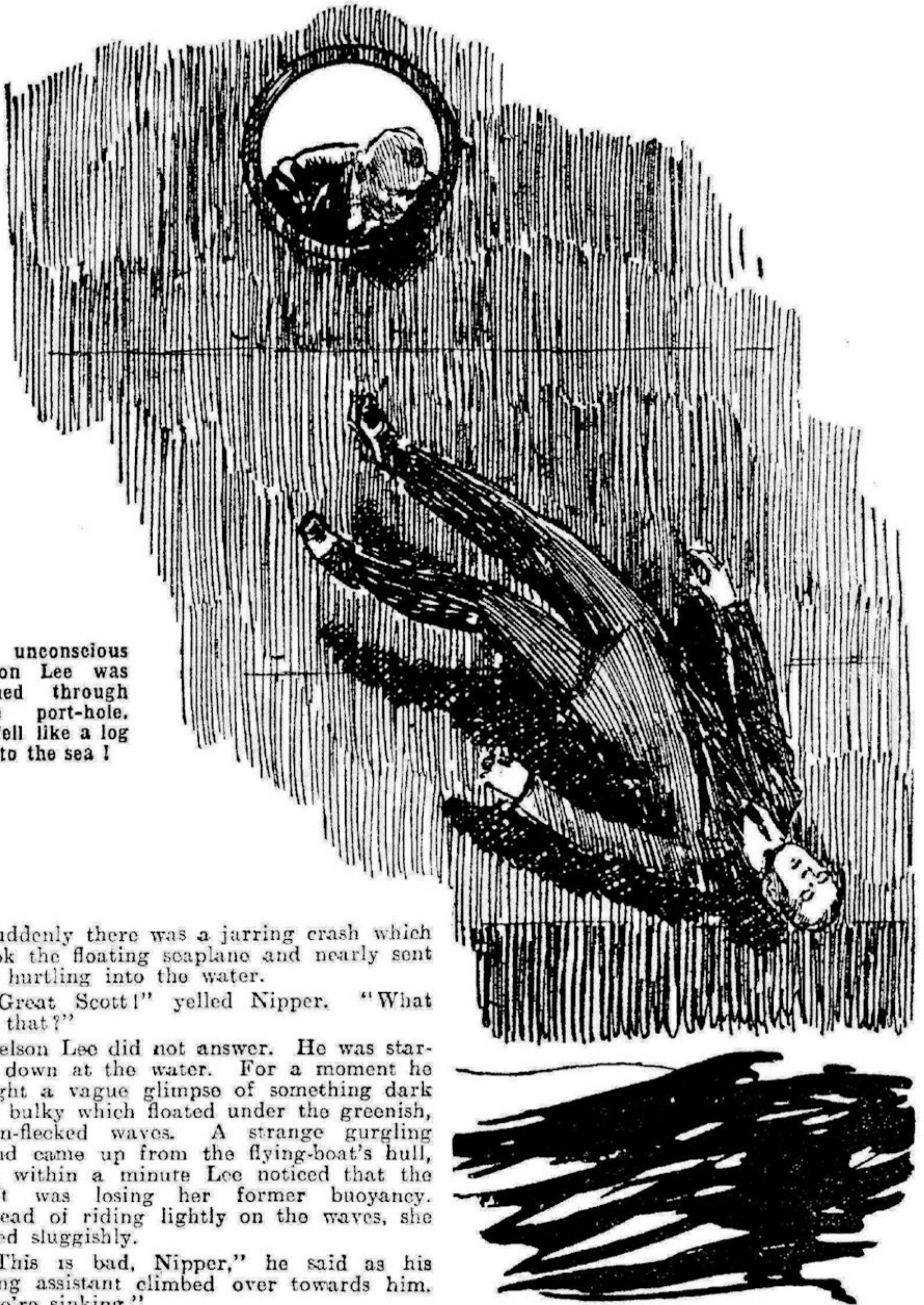
"This is bad, Nipper," he said as his young assistant climbed over towards him. "We're sinking."

"My only hat!" ejaculated Nipper, in dismay. "But they'll get a boat out in time——"

"I'm not thinking of that," interrupted Lee, frowning. "The chances are that she'll be under before the boat gets here—she's holed badly—and that means that we shan't be able to fly home. I'm afraid we're

booked for New York. Friend Pritchard won't be any too pleased."

It was an unexpected check. Lee did not doubt that a heavy bulk of floating timber had caused the damage. A mere piece of flotsam, practically invisible, just under the surface. It was no menace to ordinary



shipping; but it had been sufficient to smash a hole through the flying-boat's frail shell.

"Whoa!" yelled Nipper suddenly. "Look out, guv'nor!"

The seaplane was heeling over. Her cabin was already half-filled with water, and now the weight proved too much. She rolled drunkenly as a heavy swell came up. One wing reared, and the other plunged into the sea. At the same moment her nose dipped down, sending her tail high into the air. Lee and Nipper both leapt, and a minute later they were clinging to the tail.

SEVEN minutes later the seaplane plunged to her last resting-place. Lee had realised, from the first, that there would be no hope of salving her. The water was pouring in so rapidly that she filled up like a riddled bucket. Lee and Nipper were left swimming, but by this time a boat was rapidly coming over towards them.

"A word of warning, young 'un," said Lee, as he clung to Nipper. "As we're definitely booked for New York, we'd better go cautiously. My name is John Brandon, and I was attempting to fly the Atlantic. You are Harry Martin, my mechanic. Understand?"

"I've got you, guv'nor," replied Nipper. "John Brandon—Harry Martin." He memorised the names. "What about you, sir?" he asked. "You're not disguised—"

"We shall have to risk being recognised," interrupted Lee. "Our names are better known than our appearance. As for those American crooks, it is hardly likely that they are familiar with our looks."

Lee's words proved to be true. They were taken from the water, conveyed to the liner, and there was great excitement. The captain accepted Lee's story without question. At this stage, Lee considered it advisable even to bluff the skipper. He wanted a free hand. It would be time enough to take the captain into his confidence later on.

Lee was wise in another way. He requested that he and his young friend should be allowed to retire at once to a cabin as they were feeling the effects of their experience. In this way they avoided coming into contact too much with the passengers, thus reducing their chances of being recognised. And, secure in their state-room, Lee proceeded to go to bed.

"What's the idea, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"Sleep, old man," replied Lee. "We don't work until to-night—and we'd far better be fresh. Nobody on this ship has any suspicion that we were chasing her; our American friends are off their guard. To-night we work!"

IT wasn't until eleven p.m. that Nelson Lee and Nipper ventured out.

The majority of the passengers had sought their cabins, and the decks were deserted. Lee and Nipper only passed one officer as they strolled down the promenade deck. This officer chatted for a few

moments, asking if they were feeling fit, and then he went on his way.

Lee was interested in the smoking-room. The night was mild, and the smoking-room windows were half open. After taking a casual glance within, Lee's eyes were gleaming.

Several men were sitting round one of the green-topped tables, gambling. Three of them he recognised at once as Birdy Rowan, Red Grogan, and Blondy Edwards. Lee was surprised. He had not thought that the gunman would be reckless enough to leave their prisoner unguarded. Obviously, they considered themselves very secure. The lure of gambling was greater than their sense of caution. Lee was just moving back when he saw Rowan bend forward and whisper something to Edwards. The latter nodded, rose, and left the smoking-room.

"Stay here, Nipper," muttered Lee.

He hastened down the deck, and arrived at the open door of the outer lounge just as Edwards walked across the stairway. Edwards hurried down, and Lee was close behind. The American went down two decks, and turned into one of the electrically-lit corridors. The detective followed, and he saw Edwards disappearing into one of the state-rooms. The number of the room was 75.

It was enough for the moment. Nelson Lee rejoined Nipper, and for some ten minutes they lounged in deck-chairs. Then Lee took another look into the smoking-room. Blondy Edwards was back in his place.

"We're lucky, young 'un," murmured Lee. "I believe that Lennox is still stowed away in that wardrobe trunk. Here's our chance to get him out. If only we could do that, we'll take him straight to the captain, and get him special quarters in the officers' section. He'll be safe enough there."

They hurried down to cabin 75. There was not much chance of being disturbed. Edwards had apparently popped down to see that everything was all right. The gunmen were well off their guard. It took Lee precisely one minute to conquer the lock of the cabin door. He and Nipper passed in, and Lee switched on the light.

"Stand by the door, Nipper, and be ready for trouble," he said. "If those fellows turn up while we're in here— Better still, you go back on deck. We've no weapons, and we can't take chances. Watch outside the smoking-room, and the instant one of those men makes a move, run down like the wind and warn me."

"O.K., Chief," said Nipper.

Alone, Lee looked round keenly. The big wardrobe trunk was standing in full view. Lee could see the line of air-holes all round the top. They were so cunningly mingled with the brass ornamentations that they were almost invisible. Lee snapped the fastenings back, and with the same key that he had used for opening the cabin door he

BANG! BANG!

Who fired that revolver? Why, Loopy Lane, the Cowboy Kid. He's due to arrive in the NELSON LEE next week, and he's just letting you know all about it. Some kid, is the Cowboy Kid. Only a youngster, but there's no one to touch him with the gun, lasso, and stock-whip. As for riding—gee! Loopy's sure hot stuff! But Loopy's got no use for horses; no, siree, his steed is a magnificent tiger!

Loopy and Sheba, the tiger—how you'll love reading about this unique outfit. You'll revel in their exciting adventures; you'll be thrilled by their amazing adventures. Look out for the first stunning yarn featuring the

COWBOY KID & CO.

NEXT WEDNESDAY!

tackled the lock. At the third attempt he succeeded. Lee's skeleton keys were efficient.

"By James!" he muttered, as he swung the trunk open.

Ronald Lennox was inside, sitting on a special kind of padded seat. His arms were strapped to the sides of the trunk, and his feet were similarly pinioned. A heavy gag was round his mouth. Amazement was in his eyes as Lee quickly released him.

"You're all right now, Mr. Lennox," said Lee gently. "We've got to get out of here quickly. My name is Nelson Lee, and I've been commissioned by Mr. Pritchard to get you out of this trouble."

Lennox was nearly speechless with relief and joy.

"I'd given up hope!" he said hoarsely. "Those curs leave me alone for hours on end—locked in this trunk! At other times they've always got their guns handy, and I've never had a chance of even yelling. I'm not a coward, but suicide seems a silly game. Any shout on my part would have brought death."

"I realise that," replied Lee. "Come. We'll get out of this."

But Lennox was so cramped that he couldn't walk yet.

"The devils!" he muttered, as he clung to Lee. "I don't know how they got this trunk through the Customs. I don't think they did. I believe it was smuggled on board. Bribery, I suppose."

Within a couple of minutes Lennox was able to walk. Then Lee's attention was attracted by the sound of running feet in the corridor. He whipped to the door, but before he could open it he heard a frantic gasp.

"Guv'nor!"

It was Nipper's voice, and a thudding sound followed. The door burst open, and Birdy Rowan dashed in, gun in hand.

"Stick 'em up!" he snarled.

Before Lee could even think of obeying, Grogan pushed past and brought his own gun down with devastating force on the side of Lee's head. The attack was so abrupt that Lee, for all his agility, had stood no chance.

"Help!" shouted Lennox, his voice crackling.

"Silence that guy!" snapped Rowan.

Lennox was treated in the same way as Lee. He staggered over and crumpled up. Rowan, bending over Lee, uttered a gasp.

"This is the bird who came off that 'plane!" he said. "He's Lee! I'd know him anywhere. Didn't have a chance to spot him beforehand—and we only saw him at a distance, too. Boys, we've got to work fast. This guy goes overboard!"

He made a sign to Grogan, and they lifted Lee, carried him across to the wide-open porthole, and deliberately pushed him through.

CHAPTER 4.

Hide and Seek!

NIPPER had carried out his orders to the letter.

Arriving back on deck, he had satisfied himself that the three gunmen were still gambling. Subconsciously he had noticed the twinkling lights of another ship some distance astern. He glanced through the smoking-room window again, and was startled to see Rowan and his companions making for the door. The game must have broken up quickly. Nipper felt certain that the crooks would lounge about

for some minutes, even after the game was over.

Running hard, he reached the outer lounge and sped down the stairs. His heart almost leaped into his mouth as he heard a curse. He had been seen! And those gunmen, always on the alert, were instantly suspicious.

Nipper swung into the quiet corridor, and he was aware that the enemy was at his heels. He managed to give one husky yell, and then something struck him hard on the back of his head. He stumbled, tripped, and rolled over. He wasn't "out," but he pretended to be. Nipper glimpsed Rowan as he went into the cabin, followed by the other crooks.

"This guy goes overboard!"

Nipper heard the words faintly through the closed door. Panic-stricken he leapt to his feet. He flung himself against the cabin door, crashed it open, and was just in time to see Nelson Lee's feet disappearing through the porthole.

"Guv'nor!" he panted wildly.

"Grab that kid, and silence him!" snarled Birdy.

But Nipper needed grabbing. He leapt across the cabin, jumped at the porthole, and leaned out. He could see the wide expanse of smooth sea. The moonlight was gleaming down on this side of the vessel. All along the hull there was a whitish mass of foam. An arm came out of the sea for an instant much farther astern. Nipper's heart nearly stopped. He wriggled forward, and plunged down. It was a reckless, maddened action, but his only thought in that dreadful moment was to go to the rescue of his guv'nor.

"The young fool!" panted Birdy, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "He's simply committed suicide."

"He might yell, and the officers will hear —" began Edwards.

"Not on your life," said Birdy. "We've got rid of them both. Gee! It's been a close call, and I'm not saying we're safe even now. Get this baby back in the trunk. We'll need to watch our steps after this."

RISING to the surface after his plunge, Nipper was compelled to fight for his very life. The suction from the great liner was appalling. He felt himself being drawn relentlessly towards the swiftly-moving mass.

There was no chance of looking for Nelson Lee. Nipper swam for his own life. He used every ounce of his energy, and he only just succeeded in getting clear. Nearly exhausted, he found himself tossing about amid the white smother of foam in the great liner's wake. Never in his life before had he felt so utterly alone.

He looked round despairingly. The great bulk of the Sylvania was already looking strangely small with its mass of twinkling lights. Calmness had settled upon the sea now, and the foam was spreading out and only appeared here and there in patches.

"Guv'nor!" shouted Nipper brokenly.

"You reckless young ass!" came a steady voice over the waters.

Nipper stared wildly. Was his imagination tricking him? He swam with frantic strokes, and within a minute he saw a tiny object just ahead. It resolved itself into a face.

"I thought you were dead, guv'nor!" ejaculated Nipper, with relief.

They trod water, and floated side by side. Nipper explained the circumstances, but Lee did not appear to be listening. His brain was keen, in spite of the hard knock he had received. The plunge, and the fight for his life, had brought about a complete recovery. He was staring across the sea at the same ship's lights which Nipper himself had noticed. They were now much nearer.

"We mustn't give up hope yet, young 'un," said Lee. "This boat will pick us up, I fancy. She's making extraordinary speed, too, and she must be a warship of some kind."

"They'll never see us!" protested Nipper.

"Perhaps not—but they'll see this," retorted Lee.

He flashed on an electric torch. It was only small, but it was efficient. It was completely watertight—and, in fact, it was the torch which Lee always carried. He directed the beam towards the oncoming vessel.

A WELCOME surprise awaited the castaways. The vessel proved to be one of the British Navy's latest and biggest destroyers. The officers on duty did not fail to see that mysterious flashing light. The commander, after Nelson Lee and Nipper had been hauled aboard and provided with dry clothing, listened interestedly to their remarkable story. He was a comparatively young man, and he laughed when he had heard all.

"Well, I'm sure I never expected to have two such distinguished guests aboard my ship for this trip," he said. "And if it'll give you any satisfaction, I might as well tell you that we're due in American waters at least sixteen hours before the Sylvania."

"I am so lucky that I can hardly appreciate it yet," said Lee dreamily. "Sixteen hours before the Sylvania! That's great. And you dock in New York?"

"Right in the Hudson."

"Then if you can smuggle us ashore as soon as you arrive, I shall be eternally grateful," said Lee. "I'll get into touch with the British Consul and the New York police headquarters, and after that I fancy we'll give those gunmen a surprise."

NELSON LEE had plenty of time in New York to get in many interviews, and to make careful plans.

After the Sylvania had passed Sandy Hook, and the pilot's cutter came alongside, a number of grim-faced men boarded the liner. Nelson Lee and Nipper were not among them. They had remained in New York, on the advice of the police commissioner. They were supposed to be dead, and

they had better remain "dead" for the time being. It was better to take these gunmen by surprise.

But Birdy Rowan was not to be caught napping so easily. He and his two companions were surrounded and disarmed before they could attempt any of their favourite gunplay; but Birdy was as cool as ice.

"What's the big idea?" he asked contemptuously. "Can't a guy take a trip to Europe if he likes? You've got nothing on me, and you know it."

"Is that so?" retorted the leader of the detectives.

Birdy's baggage was examined, and the detectives were flabbergasted when they opened the wardrobe trunk. It contained the usual drawers and hangars on which clothing was hung. In fact, the detectives found nothing to substantiate Nelson Lee's remarkable story.

On board the liner, of course, there had been a big sensation when it was discovered that the two supposed Atlantic airmen had vanished. Many of the passengers had spoken of suicide—but nothing had transpired to connect Birdy Rowan and his companions with the disappearance.

Now came this further surprise. The wardrobe trunk was identical with the one Lee described, even including the air-holes, but in every other respect it was a thoroughly "honest" trunk. As for Ronald Lennox, he had apparently evaporated into thin air. The detectives were baffled. They had no warrant to search any of the other passengers' cabins—not that this would have been any good, in any case.

For Birdy Rowan had had plenty of time to make his preparations. Since that startling incident, soon after the commencement of the voyage, Rowan had thought deeply. There was always the chance that Lee had passed on his suspicions to the police. Perhaps the police would come aboard off New York before the ship docked; so Birdy took precautions.

His cleverest move was to get hold of one of the stewards, and bribe him to the extent of a hundred pounds. On the night before New York was reached Lennox was removed from his prison and placed at the back of a laundry store-cupboard—to which the steward alone had access.

The trunk was re-fitted with its drawers and hangars—which had previously been packed in the cabin trunks—and the rest was easy. As Rowan had suspected, the police came aboard. But they were unlucky. There was not even any difficulty with the customs. The three crooks came ashore in the ordinary way, and the police were helpless.

Nelson Lee was very grim when he heard, but he was not surprised. He and Nipper, disguised, were on the watch when the passengers disembarked. Neither Lee nor Nipper needed any teaching when it came to shadowing; and they had no trouble in keeping their quarry under observation—particularly as the

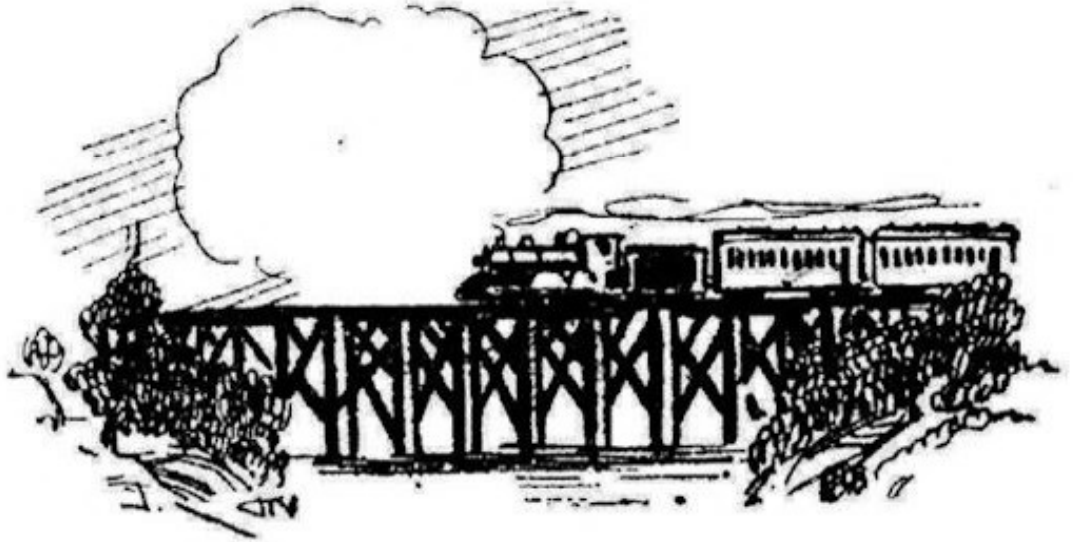
gunmen were congratulating themselves that their bluff had "got by."

Yet nothing very exciting resulted. Nelson Lee merely discovered that Birdy Rowan and his companions had booked reservations on the midnight train from Pennsylvania Station for Chicago.

"There's only one thing for it, Nipper—we've got to go to Chicago, too," said Lee.

"But what about Lennox, sir?" asked Nipper. "Everything seems to be going wrong. Where is Lennox? Do you think those rotters threw him overboard?"

"I'm not sure what to think," replied Lee gravely. "Frightened by our unexpected



activities, they may have done that to protect themselves against a search upon the liner's arrival. Yet I'm not satisfied, young 'un. Those men wanted Lennox for some very particular reason, and they're not the kind of men to abandon their game lightly. I strongly suspect that there's been fresh trickery. Anyhow, we'll go to Chicago—and on the same train."

They were at the great Pennsylvania Station well before the train was due to leave. Lee was disguised as a bent-backed, frail-looking college professor. Nipper was ostensibly his son. Lee's skill had added ten years to Nipper's age, and he bore no resemblance to his own self.

A big surprise came twenty minutes before the train was due to start. Rowan and Grogan and Edwards turned up, laughing and boisterous—and with them was Ronald Lennox! Even Lee was astonished. The thing seemed inexplicable. Lennox was laughing and chatting with Birdy Rowan as though they were the oldest of friends. Lee wondered if it would be necessary for him to reconstruct his theories.

Was Lennox "in" with these crooks? Was that wardrobe trunk business a big bluff?

RONALD LENNOX wasn't half so happy as he appeared to be. An hour earlier he had been smuggled out of his cupboard prison aboard the Sylvania, and brought ashore. And in the taxi-cab which took him up town, he had heard a few straight things from Birdy Rowan.

In the first place, he was told that if he wished to remain alive and healthy he would find it advisable to act as though he were one of their friends. At least two guns would be

covering him constantly. If he made one false move, or if he attempted to say a single word to a railroad official, he would be shot as he stood.

"And that's on the level," said Birdy grimly. "These rods of ours are silenced. Get me? You'll just flop down, and nobody will know how you got plugged."

Thus it was that Lennox boarded the Chicago train apparently on the friendliest terms with his captors. Nelson Lee made a quick decision.

"We've got to be careful, Nipper," he said, after their quarry had climbed on

board. "This is a ticklish game—far more ticklish now than it was at the beginning."

"Wouldn't it be better to have the thing finished with at once, sir?" asked Nipper eagerly. "You can get hold of the police in no time. Why not go straight up to Lennox and ask him what his game is?"

"Because I fancy that Lennox is in greater need of help now than ever before," replied Lee. "I caught sight of his eyes a few minutes ago. His face was laughing, but his eyes were not. I saw fear in them. I believe that those other men are constantly keeping him covered."



Grogan and Rowan jumped into the taxi and drove off furiously, followed by a fusillade of shots from the police.

"Phew! Could it be done, gov'nor? I mean, openly, like this?"

"I think it is being done, and if we go to Lennox as you suggest we'll have his death on our consciences," replied Lee. "These crooks are merciless—they'll shoot at the first indication of trouble. No, Nipper, we'll play a waiting game—and the longer we wait the more certain we shall be of success. The farther these gunmen get from New York, the safer they'll fancy themselves. We'll wait until an opportunity comes."

CHAPTER 5.

A 3,000-mile Chase!

CHICAGO was reached without incident. The journey took about twenty-four hours, and for the first period the passengers slept. In the morning Lee and Nipper were in the dining-car early, and



later Lennox came in—with his escort of three.

Lee noticed that throughout the journey, wherever Lennox went—even if he went to the barber-shop—he was accompanied by two of his "friends." Not for one single instant was he left alone.

By now Lee was certain that his assumption was right. Lennox was constantly "covered." There was now the problem of what would follow in Chicago. These gunmen were at home in the great metropolis of the Middle West. Lee's difficulties would increase a hundredfold.

Birdy Rowan and his colleagues got straight

into a taxi at Chicago, and drove to La Salle Station which was the terminus of the Santa Fe Railway. The journey wasn't over yet. Birdy produced four long tickets from his pocket. He was booked for the coast!

"These beauties nearly tripped me in New York, Nipper," remarked Lee. "I thought they only booked for Chicago—but they took tickets right through to Los Angeles. I fancy it's the Santa Fe trail for us, too."

"But we haven't got tickets, gov'nor, and you know what these trains are," said Nipper. "You've got to make your reservation days ahead."

"Leave it to me," said Lee.

He interviewed the railroad officials, and his authority from the Chief Commissioner of the New York police was good enough. Berths were found for Lee and Nipper without trouble.

This second railway trip started as the first—with a night's sleep. When morning came, the immensely long train was gliding through the flat, agricultural expanses of Illinois and Missouri. Not that Nelson Lee

and Nipper had much chance of observing the scenery. They were keeping a constant watch upon Lennox. Already there was a big change in him. His good looks had suffered; he was becoming haggard.

After Kansas City had been passed, and the train was roaring on its way to New Mexico and Arizona, Lennox seemed to be dropping into a condition of dulled resignation. He was listless. He did not seem to care what happened to him now. His spirit, so strong at first, was broken. His days were like nightmares. Every minute there was the menace of the silenced guns of these crooks. More than once he thought of risking every-

thing in making a dash for it—at one of the many stops it might be easy to leap suddenly out of the train—but never once would his captors allow him on any of the coach platforms or on the observation car.

Yet Lennox was not so spiritless as he appeared to be. There was not much cunning in his nature, but what little there was he now employed. Deliberately, he played into his captors' hands, forcing them to believe that he was now completely broken in spirit.

One night and two days had gone by. On the evening of the second day, with the train plunging into desolate New Mexico desert country, Lennox decided upon a desperate move. He had the advantage of knowing this route well. As a film star, he had repeatedly made the journey across America, and there was one section of the route which he well remembered. The train was due to go over that section late that night. There was a long, stiff climb, lasting for well over an hour.

If only he could escape from his captors for one single minute he could leap off the labouring train. And there was the second section somewhere in the rear! Most of these famous "Limiteds" ran in two sections—actually, of course, two trains, one following hard upon the other. At night-time the second section's headlight can generally be seen like a brilliant star far up the track.

Lennox took care to betray none of his inward excitement as he went to bed that

night. As usual, one of the crooks watched over him. They had made a practice of taking it in turn. Throughout the night, one of them was always on the watch—always with a ready gun.

Birdy Rowan had secured what is known on an American train as a "drawing-room" section." That is to say, it was a private compartment in one of the big Pullman coaches. At night, therefore, he and his companions were alone.

Lennox was counting on one thing. At least two of his captors always sat up in the smoking lounge until well after midnight—gambling, of course. It was the same to-night. Blondy Edwards was in charge of him.

The train was now labouring at its slowest up the long climb, and Lennox realised that if his desperate chance was to succeed the time to act had come.

His air of utter indifference was all to his advantage. Blondy was not so alert as usual. He even put his gun down while he searched through his pockets for a packet of cigarettes.

It was an opportunity Lennox had been waiting for. With one swift movement, he kicked his foot out from the berth, and took his guard completely by surprise. Lennox's bare foot caught Blondy on the side of the head. With a curse, the man half toppled over, grabbing for his gun at the same time.

But Lennox was there first. He gripped it by the barrel, swung it round, and never



Jokes from readers wanted for this feature! If you know of a good rib tickler send it along now—and win a prize! A handsome watch will be awarded each week to the sender of the best joke; all other readers whose efforts are published will receive a pocket wallet or a penknife. Address your jokes to "Smilers," Nelson Lee Library, 5, Carmelite Street, London, E.C.4.

A ONE-ACT PLAY!

3 p.m.—Two Scotsmen go bathing.

3.1 p.m.—First Scotsman: "I'll wager you threepence that I can stay under water longer than you, Sandy."

3.1½ p.m.—Second Scotsman: "All right."

3.2 p.m.—Both submerge.

9 p.m.—The police are still looking for the bodies.

(C. Atkinson, Alexandra Hospital, Swanley, Kent, has been awarded a handsome watch.)

FULL VALUE!

Mrs. Jones (who has been watching delivery of coal from window): "I think, coalman, that there are several pieces of coal in your cart which you dropped from my sack."

Coalman: "Oh, I'll fetch 'em in, mum And there's a bit in my eye you can have as well, when I get it out!"

(L. Skinner, 4, Ward's Hill, Minster, Sheerness, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

GIVE AND TAKE!

Old Lady to Bad Boy: "You should learn to give and take."

Bad Boy: "I have. I gave him a black eye and took his orange."

(G. Penman, 108, Tyers Street, Vauxhall, S.E.11, has been awarded a penknife.)

A TRIFLE LATE!

George Baker was late for work, and being a straightforward sort of chap he hastened to apologise to the foreman, saying:

"Sorry I'm late, guv'nor, but I live on my own, and I'm a very heavy sleeper."

"Well," said the foreman, after looking at George curiously, "I won't say anything about you being late this morning, but where were you yesterday and the day before?"

(F. Burrow, 4, Okeburn Road, Tooting, S.W.17, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

MAKING MUSIC PAY!

Uncle: "Well, Willie, how do you like the mouth organ I gave you? Are you pleased with it?"

in his life had he taken such fierce joy in hurting a man. The butt of the automatic thudded upon Blondy Edward's head. The man, an oath on his lips, crumpled into a heap.

Lennox breathed hard, rather bewildered. He had never believed that his desperate stunt would come off. Now to get off the train! He was so excited that he didn't stop to dress. He grabbed his bath-robe, wrapped it round himself, and ran out. There was nobody in the corridor. He reached the end of the coach, and tried one of the doors. It was locked—an unforeseen circumstance.

"Well, there's the observation car," muttered Lennox fiercely.

He ran from coach to coach, speeding down the corridors. One or two of the negro porters gazed after him in astonishment, but no attempt was made to stop him. Fortunately, at this late hour, practically everybody had retired.

Then the thing which Lennox had most feared occurred. He had succeeded in getting past the smoking-room in safety, but just as he was racing on towards the next coach Birdy Rowan caught sight of his running figure. Birdy only had a momentary rear view, but it was enough.

"Say! Did you see that, Red?" he ejaculated. "It's Lennox!"

"Impossible!" said Grogan. "Blondy wouldn't—"

He got no further. Rowan was running, and by this time Lennox had reached the observation car. Two people were there—a weakly-looking elderly man and a younger companion. Lennox didn't hesitate. He commenced to climb the ornamental metal rail which guarded the platform.

"Don't do that, Lennox—the train's going too fast," said the elderly gentleman sharply. "Man alive! You'll tear your feet to shreds!"

Lennox paused, open-eyed.

"Yes, you're right," said Nelson Lee, nodding. "I haven't deserted you, Lennox—I'm still looking after your interests. But tell me what has happened—quickly. Why are you here like this?"

"Mr. Lee!" panted Lennox. "Great Scott! I never dreamed— Look out!" he added, his voice rising with acute alarm.

Lee twirled round. Birdy Rowan had just appeared from the empty lounge; and Birdy's face was distorted with fear and rage.

"Lee!" he snarled. "Yes, I heard! Say, what are you trying to pull across? You blamed English bull, I'll fill you so full of lead that—"

He didn't even finish. He flung himself at Nelson Lee, and Red Grogan at the same moment tackled Nipper. Lennox, with desperate ferocity, went to Lee's assistance.

Just then the thudding wheels of the train altered their note. They now gave forth a hollow rumble. One glance was sufficient

Willie: "I should think I am, uncle. It's the best present I ever had. Mother gives me a shilling every week not to play it!"

(A. Bell, Ganton, Scarborough, has been awarded a penknife.)

THE MEMORY TEST.

At the end of the eighth round the badly-bruised boxer thought he'd had enough. His seconds, however, disagreed.

"But," pleaded the boxer, "I can hardly see my opponent!"

"Never mind that," said one of his seconds cheerfully. "Hit him from memory."

(J. Mills, 93, Buildings Street, Hucknall, Notts, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

THE TALE OF A SHIRT!

Pat: "And why do you want to sell your night-shirt?"

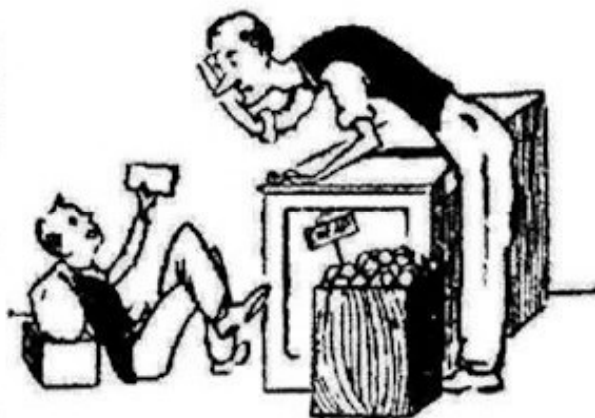
Mike: "Shure, and what good is it to me when I've got a new job as a night watchman I sleep in the day-time?"

(B. Miller, High Row, Gainford, Darlington, has been awarded a penknife.)

TAKEN LITERALLY!

Mr. Packham, the village grocer was gradually losing his temper with the new boy assistant.

"Look here, my lad," he said, "that's the



seventh time this week I've caught you asleep in the shop. What do you mean by it?"

"Well, sir," replied the puzzled youth, pulling a much-thumbed piece of paper from his trousers pocket, "this advertisement says that you wanted a boy to sleep on the premises."

(Mary Ferrario, 57, St. Thomas's Road, Hastings, has been awarded a penknife.)

YEAST IS YEAST!

As soon as tea was finished, Farmer Beeton announced to his household that he was fed up with badly-baked bread, and that he had resolved to bake the next day's supply himself.

"Good idea!" agreed a visitor. "I'll lend you a hand."

Together they departed kitchenwards, one bearing a bag of flour and the other a drum of yeast. It was past midnight and still the amateur bakers were hard at work, and the farmer's wife ventured to ask whether the bread was in the oven.

"In the oven!" cried a very distracted Farmer Beeton. "We can't keep it in the kitchen, let alone in the oven!"

(R. Churcher, 6, Chapel Avenue, Burnopfield, Newcastle-on-Tyne, has been awarded a pocket wallet.)

for Birdy; he saw that the train was crossing a gigantic trestle bridge. Far, far below stretched a deep, rocky gully.

"Now's the time!" snarled Rowan.

Red Grogan made no mistake. Nipper was an easy victim, and with a fierce pressure, Grogan sent the unfortunate cub detective hurtling over. He gave one cry as he disappeared, and it was enough to cause Nelson Lee's own downfall. For Lee, horrified at what was happening, half-turned. In that second he was off his guard, and Grogan and Birdy, thrusting Lennox aside, pitched Lee off the train in Nipper's wake!

"Now!" panted Birdy harshly. He thrust the muzzle of his gun into Lennox's back. "To your berth!" he snarled. "By Heaven! One sound from you, and I'll drill you full of holes!"

Sick at heart, Lennox obeyed. His desperate attempt at escape had failed—and Nelson Lee and Nipper had gone to their death!

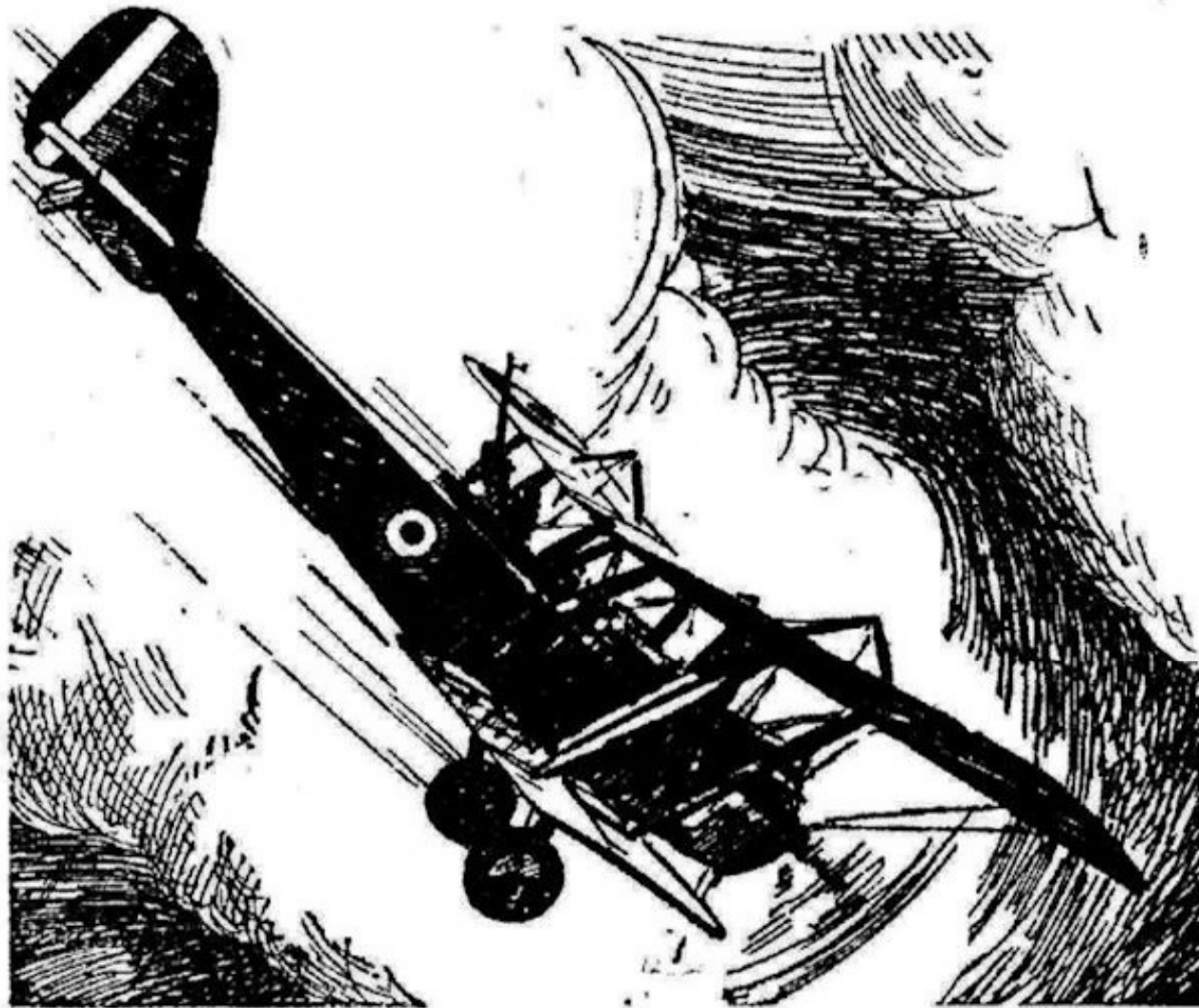
CHAPTER 6.

The End of the Chase!

IF Nipper had felt hopeless when he found himself swimming in the wake of the liner, *Sylvania*, he felt doubly hopeless now.

He was clinging by the tips of his fingers over a black abyss. Below yawned the gully, hundreds of feet deep. Once his grip failed, he would fall, crashing against the great wooden trestles—to die long before he reached the bottom of that awful drop.

He had had a remarkable escape from death. The train had been crawling over the trestle bridge, and Nipper, feeling that he was falling sheer, had clutched wildly. He struck the heavy timbers without doing himself much damage, rolled, and felt himself falling over the edge. Only at the last moment did he grip. To haul himself up was impossible, and he knew that his fingers would not sustain his weight for long.



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"Hold tight, young 'un—I'll soon have you up!"

The voice was cheery, and Nipper again experienced that extraordinary sensation of dreaming. He had heard Nelson Lee's voice, as though from nowhere, in the Atlantic. He was hearing it again. He saw a form over him. Hands came down, and closed over his wrists.

"Close shave, old man," said Lee gently.

He hauled, and a moment later Nipper was beside him on the track. It was only a single line—the Santa Fe Railway, although covering thousands of miles, has only a single track, with loops at various points. This trestle bridge was like others of its kind; it had no protective barrier at the edges. It carried the railway across this great gorge, which was like a gash in the desert.

Holding Nipper's arm, Lee led him back along the permanent way. They could see distinctly, for the great headlight of the second section of the "Los Angeles Limited," although a mile or two away, illuminated the track with fair clearness.

"What happened, gov'nor?" asked Nipper.

"You owe your life to something very like a miracle, but I escaped easily," replied Lee. "Repair work is in progress farther along the bridge, and although I fell over the edge, I landed on a wide platform just below. I fancy we only have a few bruises to show. And those rascals on the train undoubtedly believe that we are both dead."

"They believe in acting quickly, sir," growled Nipper.

"We have all the evidence we need now," declared Lee grimly. "Lennox, as I suspected, is constantly covered day and night. I shall now take definite, drastic action."

"Rather a pity you didn't let him jump off the train, sir."

"He was barefooted, and he would have injured himself badly," replied Lee. "Moreover, it is just as well that things should have happened in this way. These criminals want Lennox in Los Angeles. We'll let them take him there—and then we'll strike!"

THEY stopped the second section, and that authority of Lee's from the New York Police Commissioner again proved useful.

When morning came Lee and Nipper had discarded their disguises, and, except for a little stiffness, were none the worse for their adventure. At the next stop Nelson Lee sent off several long telegrams.

The rest of the journey to Los Angeles was without incident. One of Lee's telegrams had been sent to the chief conductor of the first section of the train, and the reply was satisfactory. Birdy Rowan and his three companions were still on board. The conductor, in response to Lee's message, had spread the news throughout the train that an old gentleman and his son had vanished in the night. Later he gave

out that their bodies had been found at the bottom of a deep gulch.

Thus, the gunmen were once again fooled into believing that they were safe.

At San Bernardino Lee and Nipper left the second section. A high-powered motor-car was awaiting them. Without losing a minute, they drove at race-track speed over the remaining miles to Los Angeles. They overtook the first section near Pasadena, and finally arrived in Los Angeles a clear half-hour before the first train was due. The end of the chase was in sight, and it promised to be exciting.

The Los Angeles police were helpful. They had a big force of armed men at the station. The Chief of Police himself welcomed Nelson Lee and assured him that he could rely upon a capture.

"We've enough crooks of our own in this city," he explained. "We've no use for these Chicago gunmen. We'll round them up before they can leave the train, and put them under arrest. They'll be sent back east, under escort, by the next train."

Nelson Lee was satisfied. His one object was to rescue Lennox from his captors. Once that was accomplished, it mattered little to Lee what the American authorities did with the gunmen.

WHEN the "Los Angeles Limited" pulled into the great terminus there was nothing to indicate that anything unusual was anticipated. As the police had expected, the crooks were almost the first people to leave the train. Lennox was close by Birdy Rowan's side, and there could be little doubt that there was a gun prodding into his back. It was necessary, therefore, to proceed carefully.

Nothing happened until the little party had passed through the station buildings and were preparing to get into a taxi. Again, Lee had anticipated correctly. Lennox was the first one to enter the taxi—prodded to do so by Birdy. This was the moment for action.

A dozen police officers suddenly emerged from the station, from other taxi-cabs, and from behind piles of baggage. They surrounded the three Chicago crooks in a flash.

"Hands up—and keep 'em up!" snapped one of the police officers.

Crack!

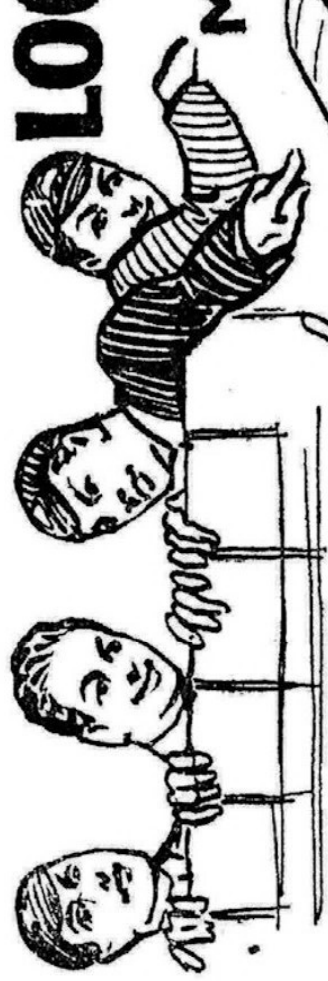
In a moment, Birdy had his gun out. He was lightning-like "on the draw," and one of the police officers fell groaning.

Crack-crack-crack!

Shouts and screams were intermingled with the barking of the pistols. Men and women ran helter-skelter in all directions. It was a typical American gun fight. Lee and Nipper—who had been advised by the police to keep back—watched with interest.

Blondy Edwards was the first to fall. He toppled over, riddled with bullets, dead on the instant. Rowan and Grogan were

(Continued on page 24.)



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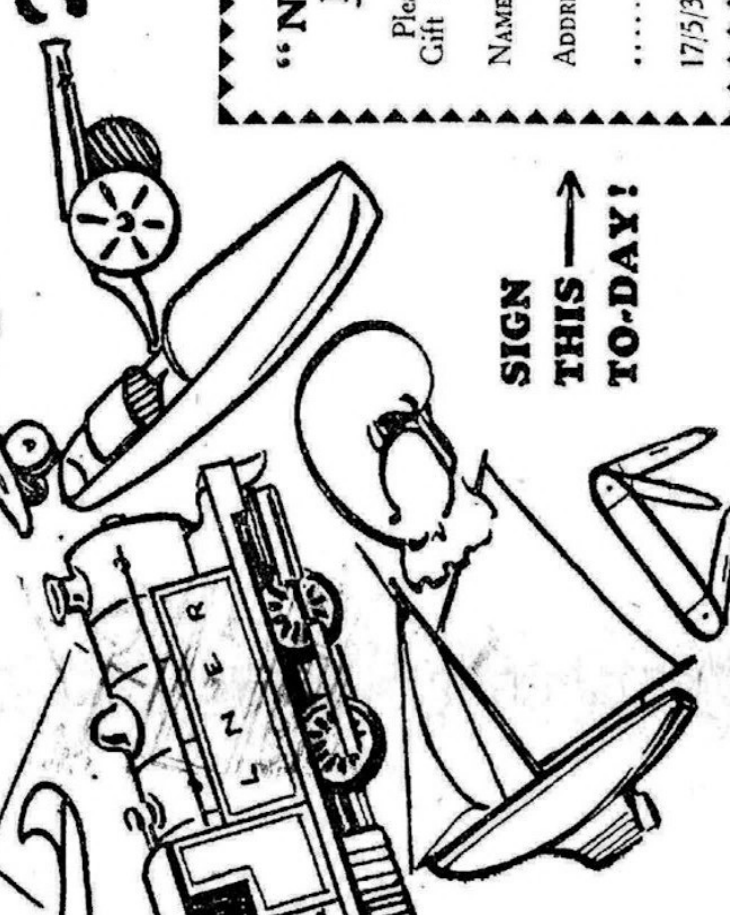
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- Samuel H. Mitchell, 6, Sydney Cottis, Cambridge Lane, W. PLYMOUTH.
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- Norah Penny, 128, Sulgrave Road, HAMMERSMITH, W. 6.
- Reginald Perry, 56, Acre Road, KINGSTON.
- Ronald D. Pye, 90, Lindsey Road, CHADWELL HEATH, Essex.
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- Frank Wilby, 52, Station Road, CHEADLE HULME.
- John Winter, 10, Lansdowne Cottages, HARLINGTON, Beds.
- Frank Wright, 26, Clatmont Street, LINCOLN.

THE VANISHED FILM STAR!

(Continued from page 21.)

more lucky—or they owed their escape, perhaps, to their skill. Four police officers were down—one dead and three injured. Birdy leapt into the driving-seat of a vacant taxi—the driver having fled at the first sign of firing. Firing hard, Grogan followed into the vehicle. Bullets pattered against the taxi's body. The gears screamed, and the vehicle shot off, nearly overturning. A fusillade of shots followed, splintering the glass. Strangely enough, not a tyre was hit.

Pandemonium reigned. Fainting women were everywhere. High-powered police cars were racing off in pursuit. Yet, within a minute, peace had been restored. The grim affair was over almost before the spectators could realise it.

Nelson Lee ran forward as the police cars sped away. He found Ronald Lennox at the door of the taxi into which he had been thrust. The young film star was looking bewildered and weak. The reaction, on the top of this hectic excitement, was showing itself.

"Mr. Lee!" he panted, staring at Lee as though he looked at a ghost. "But—but I thought—"

"It's all right, Lennox," interrupted Lee. "Before long you'll begin to think that Nipper and I are a couple of cats with nine lives each, eh? I fancy your ordeal is over now, and we'll see if we can't arrive at some explanation. I've already booked hotel accommodation."

Lennox was too overcome to make any coherent reply. He sank back into the cushions of Lee's car, unable to repress a hunted look round him. Even now, he could not believe that he was a free man once more.

They drove through the busy, noisy streets of this great city on the Pacific coast. Arriving at the Biltmore Hotel—one of Los Angeles' most imposing buildings—Lennox was taken straight up to Lee's private suite.

"You don't realise what I've been through, Mr. Lee," he said wearily. "First that ghastly experience on the boat—the wardrobe trunk and all that. Then this nightmare rail journey, with a gun at my back day and night. My nerves are in shreds."

"You're a young man—and you'll soon recover," replied Lee cheerily. "First of all, we'll eat. No. I don't want to hear anything concerning this ugly business until we've all had a good square meal."

CHAPTER 7.

Lennox Explains!

LATER, they sat by the open window, overlooking the square. The hot Californian sun was beating down, and the palms and other trees looked delightfully cool.

"I'm afraid you'll be a bit disappointed when I've told you the reason for this kidnapping business," said Lennox. "Somehow, it doesn't seem big enough. These confounded gunmen have brought me six thousand miles—and for what? I'll tell you."

"About five months ago I was the star of a talking picture called 'The Call of the Sheik' It was supposed to be located in Persia, or Arabia, or somewhere. Actually, we took all the shots on the desert at the back of the San Bernardino mountains. Not very far away, but it's a very wild country up there. I'm generally happy 'on location,' but this desert business got me down. The heat was appalling, and the dust irritated me beyond measure. But that's neither here nor there."

"One day I was feeling particularly fed up," continued Lennox thoughtfully. "The director couldn't use any of us because the visibility was too poor. I went off for a long, lonely ride. My main idea was to get up into the hills, so that I could breathe some fresh air into my lungs. Well, when I was miles from anywhere, I came across a man lying in the shelter of a big rock. I thought he was dead at first. He was parched and wizened and practically unconscious. I managed to shake him up, and he just had strength enough to gasp for water."

"But it wasn't thirst that had brought him to that condition. His name, I discovered, was Jim Millar—known for hundreds of miles as 'Desert Jim.' A typical old prospector, hard bitten and as tough as nails. It seemed that he had been attacked by a poisonous lizard, and for twenty-four hours he had been lying helpless. The bite in itself wouldn't have killed him, but the exposure which followed had pretty well cracked him up. Well, I rushed him at full speed to our movie camp—and he got better."

"I take it that you spent a lot of time looking after him?"

"Well, I suppose I did," admitted Lennox. "I made him comfortable in a special tent, and telegraphed for a doctor. He was destitute, poor chap, and as we had become friendly I—well, I helped him. I had him comfortably installed into a good nursing-home, and he was soon making progress."

"It was at just about that time—when the desert picture was finished—that I was obliged to leave for England to keep my contract with British National Pictures Limited. Poor old Pritchard! I wonder how that contract of mine stands now?"

"Never mind that," said Lee. "What about old Desert Jim?"

"Well, here's the point," replied Lennox slowly. "I told him that I should be away in England for at least three months, and he seemed very upset about it. Didn't want me to go. But in the end he was resigned, and I was a bit worried about him because he seemed to be sinking. Bad lung trouble, I believe—a sort of complication after his exposure. When I said good-bye to him he handed me a small brown paper packet, very carefully sealed. He wouldn't tell me what

it was, but he asked me to keep it safe for him.

"I couldn't very well refuse, and I promised him that I would put it in my bank, here. He said that if he died while I was away, I was to open the packet upon my return. If he still lived, I could return it to him when he needed it. That was the arrangement. Rather a loose sort of business, and I merely looked upon it as the old man's whim."

"And you did deposit the packet in your bank?"

"Yes," said Lennox. "I saw my manager, and he advised me to put it straight down in the vaults—in a safe-deposit box. Nobody could get it out during my absence."

"You mean, only you personally could collect it?"

"That's exactly it," said Lennox. "Well, the next I heard about it was in London. Those three gunmen came into my room at the Apollo, and told me a cock-and-bull story to the effect that Jim Millar was dead, and that the packet was theirs. They were his heirs, or something. Anyhow, an absurd story, and I told them to clear off. They came to me again—more menacing the next time. In the end I explained that my authority would be useless, for nothing short of my own presence at the bank would secure that packet."

"And those men thought so much of the packet that they stowed you in a wardrobe trunk, and brought you all the way to the Pacific Coast," said Lee dryly. "Somehow, Lennox, I think we had better make a move at once."

"I've been thinking ever since I left London that there must be something special about Jim Millar's packet," admitted Lennox. "Before we do anything in the matter, though, I'd like to get in touch with that nursing-home. I'm not satisfied that old Jim is really dead."

"That's easily settled," said Lee. "We'll telephone them."

They did so, and Lennox was informed that Jim Millar had died over six weeks ago. Lee took over the telephone after Lennox had finished speaking with the doctor.

Having introduced himself, and having stated that he would come along later and make the doctor's acquaintance, Lee asked a few questions.

"Can you remember, doctor, if Millar was calm at the end?"

"He wasn't calm; he was delirious."

"For long?"

"At intervals," replied the doctor. "He would have normal periods, and then the delirium would get him. However, he was more or less in his right senses all the time."

"Can you tell me what he spoke of during these periods?"

"Gold, for the most part—gold and diamonds," replied the doctor. "The poor old chap was a prospector, you know, and his mind could not travel in any other groove. His main cry was that he had made a great strike—the first in his life. Poor

old fellow! We all felt intensely sorry for him. Some of us are inclined to believe that there was truth in his words."

"Now, another thing, doctor," said Lee. "Do you mind telling me who occupied the beds next to Millar's in that same ward?"

"It was a small ward, and there was only one other bed in it," replied the medical man. "I can't quite remember who the other patient was, but I know I didn't like him. He had been shot through the lungs, and I believe the police were interested in his movements. If you'll hang on, I'll look up my records."

Lee waited, and the doctor was soon back.

"The man's name was Edwards," he replied. "I don't know what became of him after he left the nursing-home, but I daresay you'll be able to get the information you want from the police department."

"Thank you," said Nelson Lee. "I've got all the information I need already!"

CHAPTER 8.

Desert Jim's Legacy!

NELSON LEE briefly told Nipper and Lennox what he had just learned.

"It fits perfectly," he went on.

"That man in the same ward was, of course, Blondy Edwards. There can be no doubt that Jim Millar told his fellow patient the full story of his 'strike,' and also the story of the packet that he had placed in your care, Lennox. Edwards was so impressed that he got in touch with his Chicago friends."

"They took a big chance," objected Lennox. "That packet may be worthless—just a kink of the old man's."

"And it may be worth a fortune," retorted Lee. "We don't know what old Jim said to Edwards, and I don't suppose we ever shall know. But Edwards thought the game was worth the candle—and so did his associates. If you're ready, we'll go to your bank at once."

It was only a walk. The bank—a huge, imposing edifice—was situated on Olive Street. A brief talk with the manager was sufficient, and then they were escorted down into the great vaults. Vast, massive steel doors were opened. At last the grubby little packet was taken from its receptacle, where it had been lying during the past months. Lennox hesitated as he looked at the sealed cords.

"Somehow, I don't feel that this is really mine," he said.

"But old Millar definitely requested you to open it in the event of his death."

"I know; but surely Millar must have some relatives somewhere," objected the film actor. "Oughtn't we to find out?"

"There will be plenty of time to find out later," replied Lee. "The opening of this packet will make no difference either way. Besides, it may tell us where his relatives are to be found. It is quite likely that

there is a message for you inside—with instructions."

"By Jove! I hadn't thought of that," said Lennox, nodding.

He broke the seals, and setting the parcel on a small table, opened it. Lee and Nipper and the bank manager looked on with interest. There was a piece of newspaper inside, and when this was unfolded Lennox uttered an ejaculation of surprise and disgust.

"Pebbles!" he ejaculated. "Just desert pebbles!"

They lay in the newspaper, a disappointing collection after all this fuss and chase. There was no note—nothing but that pile of dull, glassy pebbles. Lennox picked one of them up, and it had all the appearance of a worn fragment of broken bottle.

"Well, I'm hanged!" said Lennox wryly. "What a fizzle!"

"Let me have that," said Lee, taking the pebble.

It looked like a piece of broken bottle, but the weight belied it as such. Lee examined it closely.

"You're wrong, Lennox," he said quietly. "These are diamonds!"

"Diamonds?" almost shouted Lennox.

"And magnificent diamonds at that," continued Lee. "Lennox, you're rich; these stones are worth over a hundred thousand pounds, I should say. I don't wonder that Birdy Rowan and his men were eager to get possession of them."

Lennox was looking dazed.

"But I never dreamed of anything like this," he said huskily.

"I expected it all along," retorted Lee. "Without question this fortune is yours. Millar left the stones to you, and even if there are any relatives, they are still yours."

"Wait a minute, gov'nor," said Nipper eagerly. "What's this?"

He reached forward and drew a piece of paper—a torn sheet from a notebook—which had been hiding between the folds of the inner newspaper and the outer brown paper.

"Hallo!" said Lennox. "Let's have a look. By Jove, it's a note, after all. Look at this, Mr. Lee!"

It was brief, and written in a scrawly, shaky hand. It stated that the writer was alone in the world, and that as he felt himself to be dying he bequeathed all his worldly goods to the man who had befriended him. He mentioned Lennox by name, and his signature was legible. On the back of the paper there was a rough map of the spot where the strike had been made.

"This settles it," said Lee. "These diamonds are lawfully yours, Lennox, and there are probably more where they came from. I congratulate you."

"While we're on that job, what about a few congratulations from me?" retorted Lennox. "I owe everything to you, Mr. Lee. In fact, I'd like you to take half these diamonds here and now. They're as much yours as mine."

"Nonsense!" laughed Lee. "I shall get my fee from Pritchard, and that is all I have earned."

"Well, you can't prevent me from making you a present after I've had some of these diamonds cut and set," replied Lennox. "Poor old Jim! What hard luck! The first strike he's ever made, and he pegs out before he can reap any benefit!"

Lee was not listening. At least, he was not listening to Lennox; his head was turned, and he was straining as though expecting other sounds from the outside vaults.

"What's wrong?" asked Lennox sharply.

"I fancy," replied Lee, "that our gunmen friends are busy again!"

IT was true.

Birdy Rowan was making a last desperate effort. He and Red Grogan, after abandoning the taxi on the outskirts of the city, had evaded the police. Birdy had friends in Los Angeles, just as he had friends in every big American city. And when he told these friends of the game, they readily agreed to help.

Rowan was certain of one thing—that Lennox would visit the bank within an hour or two of his arrival. So Rowan and Grogan, hidden in the back of the big car, waited near by. Other gunmen watched the bank at close quarters.

They had not missed the arrival of Lennox with Nelson Lee and Nipper. A fresh shock for Birdy here! Once again Lee and Nipper had turned up, and for a moment Birdy felt frightened. For the first time in his life, a detective was causing his heart to quicken its beat.

Five minutes after Lennox had entered the bank the gang moved. They staged a daylight hold-up, and planned to get the thing over so quickly that they would be able to dash in, get their prize, and escape before disaster could overtake them. The first part of the programme went through without a hitch. Eight men entered the bank. At a given signal they pulled out their guns, and ordered everybody to hold up their hands.

"The first guy who makes a sound will drop dead!" declared one of the gunmen. "Silence, everybody!"

Clerks and customers alike raised their hands. There was no sense in committing suicide. Gunmen of this type were too well known. Then Birdy Rowan and Red Grogan strode in, and Birdy nodded.

"Keep 'em cere—and guard the door!" he ordered. "Now, you! Lead the way to the vaults!" he added, thrusting his gun into the back of a startled clerk. "A guy named Lennox came in here five minutes ago with two others. They are down in the safe-deposit vaults. Be on your way!"

The clerk gulped and obeyed.

It was quick work. They entered an elevator, went down two floors to the vaults, and the clerk indicated a great circular doorway. The massive door stood open.

025
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3
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88



Rowan fired point blank at Nelson Lee—and there came the sound of shattering glass as the mirror splintered. The gunman had been tricked!

"In there!" he said shakily.

Rowan strode in. His eyes glittered with triumph. Nelson Lee and Nipper, with Lennox and the bank manager, were standing at a small table, and Lee's hand was whipping round towards his hip.

"Not this time!" snarled Birdy Rowan. Crack!

He aimed direct at Lee's heart, and his eyes nearly bulged from his head. For instead of seeing Lee fall, the whole group of figures vanished. There was a shattering of glass, followed immediately by a dull, heavy clang.

"Birdy, we're trapped!" gasped Grogan frantically.

Birdy ran forward. Just through that great circular doorway stood the remains of a big mirror. To the left there was another massive door—tightly closed. Both doors of this vault, in fact, had clanged to. The two gunmen were in a hopeless trap.

NELSON LEE had not been reckless enough to invite death from Birdy Rowan's gun. It had been Lee's idea to fix up that mirror so that the illusion was complete. Rowan, striding in, had believed that he was facing the actual people instead of the mirror.

Every clerk in the bank had been warned—every customer had been a fake customer. Lee had not known for certain that the crooks would make any raid, but he had advised the Chief of Police to be ready. All those clerks and customers had been very meek. A real hold-up, with an unstaged background, might not have been so successful! As matters were, the crooks had everything their own way. But when the denouement came, the position was reversed.

The police played a waiting game; and it paid them. The hold-up men became uneasy, then restless, and finally scared. The non-return of Birdy Rowan and Red Grogan unnerved them. When, therefore, the shrill, nerve-racking hoot of police sirens sounded by the score in the streets, they bolted. There was some firing, but very few people were hurt. The whole gang was trapped.

Getting Birdy and his companion out of the strong-room was not such an easy matter—for both of them were armed, and both were killers. However, the American police had their own methods. A tube was inserted through a grille in one of the strong-room doors, and gas was pumped into the vault. Within ten minutes Birdy and Red were senseless. They didn't awaken until they were in gaol.

RONALD LENNOX kept his contract with the British National Film Company Limited. The fact that he was now a rich man made little difference to him. He accompanied Nelson Lee and Nipper back to England.

Less than a fortnight later he was busy on the film again, much to the relief and

joy of Mr. Adam Pritchard—who realised only too well that this delay would pay him in the end; for the publicity which Lennox had obtained would assure the film a world-wide success.

And if ever Nelson Lee or Nipper are likely to forget their friendship with Ronald Lennox, they are always reminded when, on special occasions, they wear the magnificent diamond tie-pins which had been fashioned out of two of old Desert Jim's finest "pebbles."

THE END.

(Another grand long complete detective yarn featuring Nelson Lee and Nipper next Wednesday, chums, entitled: "The Dorri-more Castle Mystery!" Make sure you read it.)

THE TROUBLE TWINS!

(Continued from page 5.)

Posh looked out of the little window, and then he chuckled as he saw that his step-father had stopped just inside the gate to chat with another, still burlier man who was passing.

"It's Battling Bill Snooks!" the lad announced, with a chuckle. "You leave this to me, Sam. Finish packing quick, old sport, while I keep him busy a bit!"

Posh chuckled again, and then he gave that curious gulp—a certain sign that he was going to ventriloquise. From the scraps of conversation that floated up it seemed that the two men were discussing horses, and Posh very soon entered his ventriloquial voice into it.

"Garn!" snorted Jake Grabbs—or, at least, Battling Bill imagined he did. "Lot you knows about gee-gees, Bill! You knows more about beer by the look of your nose; like a squashed tomato what's been trodden on by a helephant, it is!"

"Eh? Wot's that?" inquired Battling Bill with great interest. "You a talkin' to me, Jake Grabbs?"

"I—I never——" Jake was gasping, when Posh chipped in again. "I never seed such an ugly-faced, hump-backed, squint-eyed, work-shy, beer-mopping kid-boxer as you, Bill! Garn! Think you can fight—why, I could knock you inter the middle of next week with one 'and, Bill Snooks!"

"Why, you—you—Blimey! I'll——"

"Take your ugly phizz off!" went on the mysterious voice that seemed to come from Jake Grabbs. "Shove off or I'll——"

The twins' step-father was still blinking in amazement about him when Battling Bill started to avenge this dastardly attack on his features and abilities. His first smack lifted Jake Grabbs two yards, at least, and then as Jake crawled up, yelling, he piled in with enthusiasm.

"Oh, crikey!" choked Posh. "He, he, he! I never expected that! Still, it wipes off a good few old sores, Sam! I'm black and blue from his lickings, and—— Oh! Gosh! He's spotted us!"

Jake Grabbs had—he had just glimpsed, through one closing eye, the grinning faces of the boys at the attic window. He gave a howl of rage.

"Stoppit, Bill—it's them blamed kids! Young Joe's a venwilotwist, and——"

"By hokey! I see 'em, Jake!" yelled Bill, understanding.

Battling Bill ceased punching. Jake whipped off his belt and rushed for the house, Battling Bill following his example.

"Hook it!" gasped Posh. "Time we said good-bye to the old home, Sam! This way!"

Sam followed instantly as Joe led the way with a rush into the front bed-room, and tore the window open. He knew the weight of his step-father's belt, without wanting to test Battling Bill's as well. Like greased lightning the twins flung their bundles through the window, slipped over the sill one after the other, and dropped into the garden below.

It was a fair drop, but they would have risked it had it been as tall as a steeple. Then they were off like the wind. They didn't stop running until a couple of miles separated them from Mudridge.

"Well, we've done it now, Sam!" said Joe soberly. "That settles it! It's the open road and the whole wide world for us now, kid!"

"Well said, infant!" agreed Sam, taking a tighter grip on his bundle of worldly goods. "We've got a bit of grub for to-night, and we've got stout hearts beatin' under our weskits as the poet said! And our motto is: 'Keep smiling!' Now let's get on!"

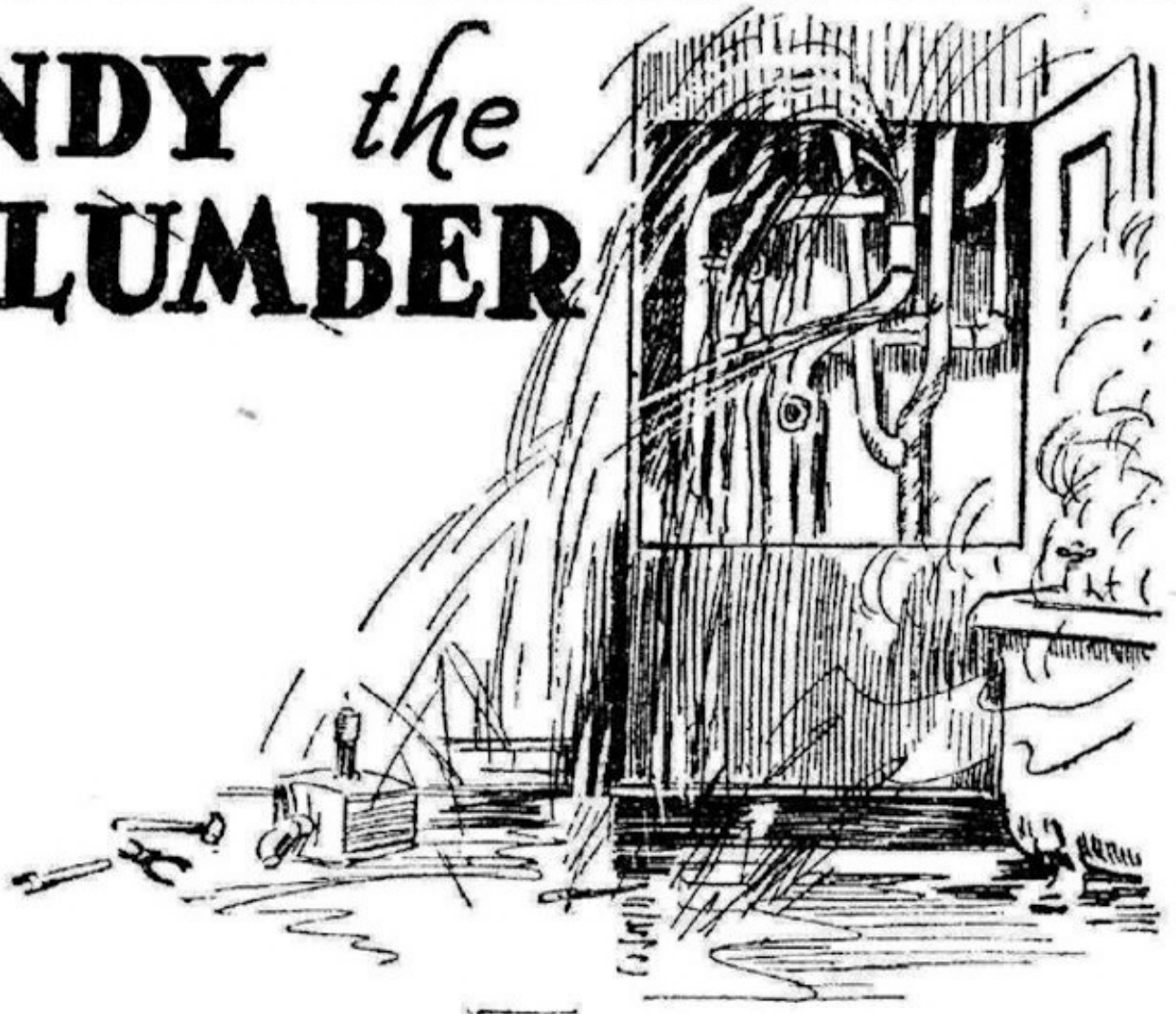
Thuswise did the Trouble Twins start forth into the cold world in search of fortune, fun and adventure, cheerily confident, despite the fact that their combined wealth wouldn't have bought a penny stamp!

THE END.

(A jolly fine series, isn't it, chums? Posh and Sam are two cheery lads, and you can rely on them to keep you smiling. Next week another member joins their ranks—and they become the Trouble Triplets! Look out for this screamingly funny yarn!)

E. O. Handforth's a Scream at all times—but he's an Even Greater Scream as—

HANDY *the* PLUMBER



CHAPTER 1. Pipes Obliges!

"DISGRACEFUL! It's lowering the whole tone of the school, playing against a dashed Council School Eleven!" said Gore-Pearce, of the Remove. "Hanged if I know what St. Frank's is coming to!"

"Disgusting!" agreed Hubbard.

"Handforth ought to be boiled for making the fixture!" said Teddy Long.

The Study B trio were strolling in the Triangle, and they gave voice to their opinions loudly. It was evening, and apparently the Removites were alone. They didn't know that at least two people had been working overtime on the half-completed school. The Modern House and the East House were still festooned with scaffolding.

A lanky, wiry figure in overalls leaned against one of the scaffold-poles on a platform twenty feet from the ground. He made no attempt to conceal himself, and if Gore-Pearce had looked up he would have seen him. Jim Parker—better known as "Pipes"—was the plumber's mate.

Incidentally, he was the captain of the Marshall Road Council School XI., and he was naturally interested in the conversation which was floating up to him. He was in no sense eaves-

dropping. The three cads of the Remove were talking openly.

"Everybody's making a fuss," continued Claude Gore-Pearce, the millionaire's son. "That idiotic match against Marshall Road was only fixed as a jape against the Carlton fellows—and just because Handforth is skipper again he says that the match has got to be taken seriously."

"Rot!" said Hubbard. "It ought to be scratched."

"Even Handy himself is a bit doubtful," continued Gore-Pearce. "These Council School chaps will probably come in ordinary clothes. Think of it!" he added, in a tone of horror. "Cricket on Little Side without white flannels! It'll look too ghastly for words. We ought to get up a protest."

They drifted out of earshot, and Pipes Parker, who wasn't to know that Gore-Pearce & Co. only represented the cads of the Remove Form at St. Franks, thoughtfully chewed his under-lip. A few moment later a dreamy look came into his eyes.

"I'm sure!" he murmured, as he came to a decision.

A grand school yarn by EDWY SEARLES BROOKS,

telling
how

**E. O. Handforth perpetrates
a jape which goes wrong—
and turns him into a
plumber!**

E D W A R D
O S W A L D
HANDFORTH,
Captain of the
Remove, hustled on to
Little Side resplendent
in white flannels, with
a cricket bat tucked

under his arm. It was the next afternoon, and the day was bright and sunny. Little Side was already thronged. Most of the Junior cricketers were having a knockabout on the spare pitch.

Handforth stiffened as he prepared to pass a dozen sturdy-looking Removites who stood in a solid group. They were the Carlton Gang—the twelve fellows who, under the leadership of the red-headed Kirby Keeble Parkington, had come from Carlton College in a body at the re-opening of St. Frank's. The Carlton Gang were, in their own words, red-hot. They were determined to make things hum. Parkington and Handforth were great rivals.

"Ought to be a good game, Handy, darling," said K. K. coolly.

"Of course it'll be a good game," retorted Handforth, pausing. "You'll see the regular Remove XI on the job this time. We haven't forgotten you fatheads were licked by those Moor View girls!"

A pained look came into K. K.'s eyes.

"Don't remind me of it, sweetheart," he said sadly. "You spoofed us and we were sunk."

"Here they come!" sang out Church.

Handforth glanced round. A number of cyclists had just come through the gateway from the Triangle. Having propped their bicycles against the wall, they advanced on to Little Side.

"My only sainted aunt!" breathed Handforth faintly.

It was true that he had anticipated that the Council School boys would not be as perfectly equipped with cricketing togs as the St. Frank's XI; but Handforth had dismissed the matter without another thought. He was no snob, and he was delighted to give these cheery chaps a game.

The spectacle that now presented itself, however, caused cold chills to pass up and down his spine. Pipes Parker led the way on to the field. He and all the members of his Eleven were dressed in nondescript, shabby suits, and all were collarless. On the skipper's shins were great pads of newspaper. Under his arm he carried a cricket bat which had apparently been fashioned from a plank of floor-boarding. Several of the other boys carried similar bats.

"You've—you've come, then!" Handforth managed to say.

"I'm sure!" replied Pipes cheerily. "Ready to start?"

Handforth gulped.

"Oh, rather," he said. "Whenever you like, old man! Let's begin."

With an heroic effort, he pulled himself together. The Junior Eleven fraternised with the visitors, and not by a word or a look did the St. Frank's boys reveal their consciousness of the incongruity of the situation. They had asked for this match—and they were sports enough to see it through. Only the cads and the snobs sneered.

And then Mr. Horace Pycraft appeared upon the scene. When Mr. Horace Pycraft

appeared upon any scene which was not to his liking, there was trouble.

CHAPTER 2.

Trouble for "Piecan"!

"UPON my word!" said the weedy, ill-tempered Form-master. He adjusted his glasses, and inspected the visitors with strong disfavour. He approached with dignity—or what he assumed to be dignity. "And what, may I ask, does this mean?" he demanded acidly.

"Just going to start a game, sir," said Handforth.

"A game? With these disreputable ragamuffins?" snorted Mr. Pycraft. "Absurd! I forbid any such thing! If you boys have no appreciation of the dignity of the school, I must remind you of it. Be off with you!" he added, glaring at the visitors. "How dare you intrude in this unwarrantable fashion?"

"Hold on, sir!" said Handforth hotly. "You can't send these chaps away like this! This is a Junior XI fixture——"

"Silence, Handforth!"

"Is something the matter here?" put in Dr. Morrison Nicholls mildly.

Nobody had noticed the headmaster was quietly sitting in the pavilion. The Head was interested in sport, and he often came down to look at the Junior games. There was now a very cold, hard light in his eye.

"This boy is impertinent, sir!" said Mr. Pycraft excitedly. "He is the Junior captain, and I am telling him that this game must not proceed."

"Indeed, Mr. Pycraft! And why must it not proceed?"

"Why? Because—because—— Really, sir, you surely cannot approve of this fiasco," stammered Mr. Pycraft, going pale. "I did not think it was customary for our boys to play games with—er—common riff-raff!"

"I am sorry, Mr. Pycraft, that you should fail to observe a—ahem!—jape when it is being perpetrated," said the Head coldly. "I welcome these Council School boys very heartily to St. Frank's—and I wish them a good game. When they have finished their little joke, they will doubtless come on to the field in a more presentable manner."

"J-joke?" babbled Mr. Pycraft. "Good gracious! I—I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Form-master fled in utter confusion, and the Head discreetly retired. Handforth looked at Pipes Parker and his "ragamuffins" with wrathful eyes.

"What's this about a joke?" he demanded.

"You headmaster's a cute 'un!" grinned Pipes. "Can't spoof him! If you'll wait two ticks, we'll soon be ready."

To the astonishment—and relief—of the St. Frank's crowd, the Council School boys, after a brief visit to the dressing-room, re-appeared in spotless flannels, and with respectable cricket bats and pads.



Mr. Pycraft gave a violent wrench. Next moment there was a rending sound as his gown was torn to tatters.

"You japing bounders!" said Handforth, grinning.

"I'm sure!" nodded Pipes. "I heard some of your chaps saying what we were going to be like, so I thought I'd try to oblige 'em."

Mr. Pycraft, in the privacy of his study, glared out upon Little Side, and his thoughts were bitter. He had been made to look foolish in the eyes of all his boys—and by no less a person than the Head himself! They should pay dearly for it! In one way or another, he would get even!

Lest it should be thought he was humiliated, he decided to go out to Little Side and watch the game. Far better appear openly than to have these wretched boys sniggering at him behind his back. So Mr. Pycraft planted himself down on a form all to himself, and pretended to watch the match.

If he had been really interested in cricket, he would have enjoyed it. Harry Gresham and the Hon. Douglas Singleton were batting, and Gresham, at least, was giving a brilliant display. Not that the Council School boys were lacking in skill; their bowlers were hot stuff.

K. K. PARKINGTON lost interest in the game when he noted what the wind was doing to Mr. Pycraft's gown. A mischievous twinkle came into K. K.'s eyes, and he gently drew Harvey Deeks and Clement Goffin aside.

"Tell me, my dears," he murmured. "We're the Red-Hot Trio of Study E, aren't we?"

"We are," said his two loyal chums.

"Then kindly observe old Piecan's gown," said K. K. dreamily. "There are sundry tent-pegs knocking about near the pav. It is allowable for us to lounge on the grass, and why should we not lounge in close proximity to he of the pie-face? Need I say more?"

"You need not!" grinned Deeks. "We're on!"

While the excitement was at its height—just when Harry Gresham had been brilliantly caught out—the Red-Hot Trio lolled lazily in the grass behind Mr. Pycraft's seat. But they didn't loll for long. Presently, they casually arose and sought pastures new.

"Pretty good game, sir," observed Biggleswade, of the Sixth, as he came along and sat down on the form beside Mr. Pycraft.

"Is it?" snapped Mr. Pycraft. "I confess I am not impressed."

Mr. Pycraft didn't like Biggleswade. Biggleswade was too easy-going—too much of a good fellow. So Mr. Pycraft got to his feet, and stalked away. That, at least, was his intention. He found that he couldn't even rise. Somebody, or something, was tugging hard at his gown.

"Biggleswade! he rapped out. "How dare you?"

"Eh? What's up, sir?" asked the prefect, staring.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A sudden yell of laughter from a surrounding crowd of juniors caused Biggleswade to twist round. Then he saw the reason. Mr. Pycraft's gown was pegged to the ground like a tent!

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated the Form-master. "What—what has happened?"

He gave a violent wrench, and a fresh yell of laughter went up as there was a loud rending tear. Mr. Pycraft's gown, all along the hem, was in tatters.

The cricketers grinned with genuine pleasure. There was a lull just then—while the new batsman was going out—and Handforth and Church and McClure and several others gathered round joyously. They had not failed to observe that the Carlton Gang stood aloof—and the Carlton Gang was looking suspiciously innocent.

"Twig 'em?" murmured McClure. "K.K. did this, or I'm a tomato!"

"K.K. is more brainy than I thought," said Handforth grudgingly.

The next moment the grin vanished from his face, for Mr. Horace Pycraft, red with fury, had planted himself in front of the Junior skipper.

"Handforth! This is your doing—you and these other young rascals!" he panted. "You and all the members of your team will write me a thousand lines!"

"Here, steady, sir!" gasped Handforth. "You can't blame us—"

"Silence!" hooted Mr. Pycraft. "I know perfectly well that you are guilty. You will write me one thousand lines. Do you understand? And every other member of your team!"

And, leaving Handforth flabbergasted, Mr. Pycraft stalked away.

CHAPTER 3.

After Midnight!

THERE was no justification for the Remove master's unreasonable punishment. But Mr. Pycraft was like that; he seldom gave impots according to the size of the offence, but by the dictates of his temper.

It was no consolation for Handforth and his cricketers to know that they were guiltless—at least, in the actual perpetration of the jape. That they heartily approved of it, and appreciated it, was another point.

"A thousand giddy lines!" said Handforth, with a glare at K.K. Parkington. "And you fatheads have got off scot free!"

"Cheer up, sweetheart," smiled K.K. "We can't allow this injustice to stand. Never let it be said! I'll trot along to Pieface and, like a hero, confess. Still, the jape was worth it."

Handforth grunted as the Carlton Gang moved off.

"They're a lot of cheeky rotters—but they're square!" he admitted.

K.K.'s visit to Mr. Pycraft, however, really did more harm than good. The Form-master hardly listened to him.

"You were all in it together!" he snapped. "It was an atrocious act of impertinence. My gown is ruined. You and your friends, Parkington, will also write me a thousand lines."

"O.K., sir. But Handforth and the rest didn't even know—"

"Enough! They shrieked with laughter at my discomfiture, and I shall certainly not rescind their punishment," interrupted Mr. Pycraft. "Parkington, you can go."

THE match ended excitingly. Only by playing hard did the St. Frank's juniors win. The Council School XI was hot stuff, and it possessed several excellent batsmen, and at least one brilliant bowler. The visitors fought hard for victory, and were within five of the Saints total when Harry Gresham, by clever bowling, secured the last three wickets for no runs in one over.

"Jolly good!" said Handforth heartily. "You fellows have given us a fine game, and I'd like to fix up a return match—on your own ground."

"I'm sure," said Pipes, nodding. "You're a sportsman."

He and his team were even more delighted when they were invited to tea in the Ancient House. Unfortunately, Mr. Pycraft had not yet recovered his good-humour; and it must be freely admitted that Handforth, at least, made an awful din. His idea of entertaining the visitors was to make as much noise as possible.

In the middle of it, Mr. Pycraft barged in, and after making a few insulting remarks, he advised the visitors to leave as quickly as possible. What was worse, he ordered Handforth and the other Removites to attend forthwith in the class-room.

"There shall be an extra lesson this evening—for two hours," he announced sourly, when the indignant juniors had gathered. "Once and for all, I intend to show you that I will not have this rowdiness."

The Removites bubbled and seethed while they worked. It made them feel no better to note that the Carlton Gang was not included in this punishment. Very wisely, K.K. Limited, guessing that Mr. Pycraft's temper was raw, had gone for a picnic on the river.

"Life isn't worth living!" said Handforth bitterly, later on in the Common-room. "Whose mad idea was it to give us Piecan as a Form-master? He's worse than a disease!"

"Why blame Piecan?" asked Jimmy Potts. "Those Carlton asses started the whole business. They japed Piecan—and Piecan has been taking it out of us. I reckon it's up to us to get even."

Handforth looked thoughtful.

"A first-class jape against those cheeky Carlton rotters wouldn't come so bad just

now, would it?" he said musingly. "K. K. needs putting in his place badly. By George! I've got an idea, too!"

"Let's hear it," said Church, without much enthusiasm.

They heard it. And everybody looked surprised and then elated. Handy, for once, had thought of a good wheeze—

SOON after midnight, while the bulk of St. Frank's slept, Handforth and a number of other Removites crept downstairs and admitted four figures in overalls. The mysterious visitors carried tool-bags and blow-lamps and similar businesslike objects.

"Good man!" whispered Handforth heartily to "Pipes" Parker. "Come on! I'll show you the way to the bath-rooms. You and your pals are bricks!"

"Cheese it!" protested the plumber's mate. "We're no older than you are—not much, anyway—and we enjoy a joke with the rest. I'm sure!"

There was a number of low chuckles. These four midnight visitors were all members of the Marshall Road XI, and, incidentally, they were all plumbers' mates!

CHAPTER 4.

Not According to Programme!

UNFORTUNATELY—or, perhaps, fortunately—events did not pan out as the practical jokers had planned. The jape was essentially one against the Carlton gang, whom Handforth and the other Removites regarded as interlopers. Good sports, but interlopers, all the same. Handy's idea was to make them go green in real earnest this morning.

But once again the juniors had reckoned without Mr. Horace Pycraft!

It must be admitted that Mr. Pycraft had no sinister thoughts of impositions this morning. He awoke in what was—for him—a jovial mood. It was not quite six, the sun was shining, and he decided he would indulge in a good hour's ramble through Bell-ton Wood before any of the daily duties scalled him.

Now came the trifling circumstance which put a kink in Handforth's plan. Mr. Pycraft found that the hot-water tap in his bath-room had got stuck. The washer had jammed, or something. This was purely a coincidence, for Pipes Parker and his fellow-plotters had not been near Mr. Pycraft's own bath-room. Handforth was reckless, but not as reckless as that.

Mr. Pycraft looked at himself in the mirror—and then uttered a horrified shriek. He was a vivid green in colour from head to foot!



Not to be done out of his bath, Mr. Pycraft wrapped his dressing-gown round his skinny figure, and went down the corridor to the next bath-room. This was one which was allocated to the use of half a dozen Remove boys—in point of fact, K. K. Parkington, Harvey Deeks, Clement Goffin, and three others of the Carlton gang.

All unconscious of what awaited him, Mr. Pycraft half-filled the bath-tub, plunged in, and actually sang. He was still singing after he had removed the plug, and it was difficult to distinguish between Mr. Pycraft's vocal efforts and the sound of the water going down the plug-hole.

He twiddled with the chromium-plated taps high on the walls—the taps that operated the shower. Mr. Pycraft always believed in a cold shower to finish with. Following his usual custom, he turned the tap, closed his eyes, and revelled in the icy deluge.

"Splendid!" he puffed, as he reached blindly for the towel.

Having rubbed his face, he opened his eyes—and then jumped. Immediately opposite the bath, on the wall, was a long mirror. And Mr. Pycraft beheld a ghastly

green demon. He was dumbfounded. The thing was skinny and weird, vividly green from head to foot, with a mass of lank, straggly hair—as green as the rest of it—sticking out at various angles.

It wasn't until several seconds had elapsed that Mr. Pycraft realised, with a shriek of horror, that he was gazing upon his own reflection. Uttering a choking gasp, he stared down at his arms and the rest of his person. He was green from head to foot!

"Help!" shrieked Mr. Pycraft wildly. "Help! Help!"

He tore at the hot-water tap, and a stream of perfectly clear water poured out. He held his hands under it, but the green remained as vivid as ever. Mr. Pycraft's brain was humming like a dynamo; his thoughts were jumbled. He had no idea how this catastrophe had come about.

Panic-stricken, and hardly knowing what he was doing, he wrapped the towel round himself, dashed for the door and unlocked it. At the same moment a crowd of juniors arrived outside the door, attracted by Mr. Pycraft's frantic yells.

"Something wrong with old Pieface!" said K. K. Parkington, who was in his pyjamas. "In our bath-room, too!"

"Wha-a-a-at!" gurgled Handforth, rushing up. "Piecan in your bath-room?"

"Yes, and he's howling like a wonky wireless set," said K. K.

"Oh, my only sainted aunt!" groaned Handy.

He cast a quick glance at Church and McClure, and a few other Old-Timers who had gathered. In that second Handy knew that the jape had mis-fired—although it had scored a bull's-eye in another sense. There was certainly no chance of the Carlton Gang being spoofed now.

For the door of the bath-room was wrenched open, and Mr. Pycraft stood there. The fellows from Carlton were struck dumb with amazement, and even Handforth & Co., who knew what to expect, felt themselves going weak at the knees. Never in their lives had they beheld such a grotesque specimen of humanity!

CHAPTER 5.

Handy "Repairs" the Damage!

KIRBY KEEBLE PARKINGTON heroically pulled himself together.

"Good-morning, sir," he said, as though he saw nothing unusual.

"Boy! Fetch a doctor!" panted Mr. Pycraft hoarsely. "I'm ill! I'm stricken with some horrible disease! Do not come near me!"

Handforth, who had visions of disaster, now butted in. In his mind's eye he could already see Big Hall, with the headmaster handling a birch, and he could see himself being bent into a most undignified attitude

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by stern-faced prefects. Handforth almost winced at the picture.

"Just a minute, sir!" he said, with a gulp. "For goodness' sake, be quiet, sir! You haven't got a disease—it's only dye!"

"Dye?" breathed Mr. Pycraft, with fresh horror.

"That's all, sir—it'll wear off in time," replied Edward Oswald. "I—I think something must have gone wrong with the pipes!"

"So that's how it goes, is it?" whispered K. K., looking at his chums. "You see, sweethearts? A lucky escape for us, by Jove!"

Mr. Pycraft was losing some of his terror.

"Dye?" he said huskily. "How could any dye get into the pipes?"

"Never mind that, sir—leave it to us!" replied Handforth.

"But—but I must do something!" babbled the Form-master frantically. "I am in a dreadful condition!"

"Perhaps it'll wear off, sir, if you keep in a dark place," suggested Handforth, with inspiration. "By George! What about this cupboard?" he added, diving across the corridor and unlocking a dark cupboard. "You get in here, sir!"

Somebody had fetched Mr. Pycraft's dressing-gown, and the bewildered Form-master was literally shoved into the cupboard. The door was locked on him. Handforth staggered into the fatal bathroom, breathing hard.

"My only hat!" he panted. "He might have aroused the whole giddy school! There's just time for me to put things right before rising-bell if I hurry!"

"WHAT'S to be done, Handy?" asked Church helplessly.

"Done?" repeated Handforth.

"You chaps must buzz across to the new building, and fetch blowlamps and solder and tools! The workmen aren't there yet—no plumbers, anyway—so we've got to do this job ourselves."

"Imposs!" said McClure, shaking his head.

"We've got to put these pipes right—and take that tank of dye away," said Handforth grimly. "If we don't, we're sunk! We can't keep Piecan in that cupboard all day, and when he comes out he'll raise the dickens of a rumpus. So when this bathroom is examined, it's got to be perfectly normal."

"And you're going to put it perfectly normal?" asked Church curiously.

"Yes!" replied Handforth with conviction.

There was a sad look in the eyes of Church and McClure as they hurried off for the tools. Handforth's idea was all right in theory—but it was liable to get badly kinked in practice.

In fact, after the burly Remove skipper had commenced the plumbing, Church and McClure flatly refused to have anything more to do with it. Not only did Handforth propose all sorts of wrong things with regard to the pipes, but he got positively violent

when Church and McClure attempted to stop him. With a black eye and a swollen nose and a thick ear between them, they retired.

And Handy, the plumber, carried on.

He found a gold mine of pipes in a big cupboard in a corner of the bathroom. There were taps, too, and having turned these off, he started in earnest with huge spanners. He unfastened joints, and more by luck than anything else he succeeded in removing the special tank which Pipes Parker had fitted up for the shower.

When it came to reconnecting the pipes, however, Handforth got into a muddle.

There was a strong smell of gas, for one thing, and this upset him. He had a vague idea that he had disconnected a wrong pipe. In the end he succeeded in joining everything up again.

Then he turned on the supply cocks at the top of the cupboard, and stood back to view the result of his labours. A fierce jet of water came from a joint which had not been properly fixed, and it sprayed over the bathroom in a violent cascade.

"Hallo! That doesn't seem quite right," muttered Handforth anxiously.

He turned on the hot-water tap over the bath, but instead of water there came a loud, ominous hissing. A waft of gas caused Handforth to reel backwards. Unquestionably, something was wrong.

The housekeeper found this out, too, in the kitchen. At that very moment one of the maids was putting the kettle on the gas-stove for an early cup of tea. The startled girl shrieked with dismay—for about ten jets of water, at high pressure, shot out of the gas-ring and played upon the ceiling like an automatic fountain.

The kitchen became half-flooded, and there was pandemonium. It wasn't long before Mr. Crowell, the Housemaster, arrived on the scene to find out what all the noise was about; and it was unfortunate that Mr. Pycraft, at just about that time, became impatient and hammered on the cupboard door. Prefects discovered him, and when they had got over their shock, they also discovered Handforth in the bathroom—vainly attempting to put things right.

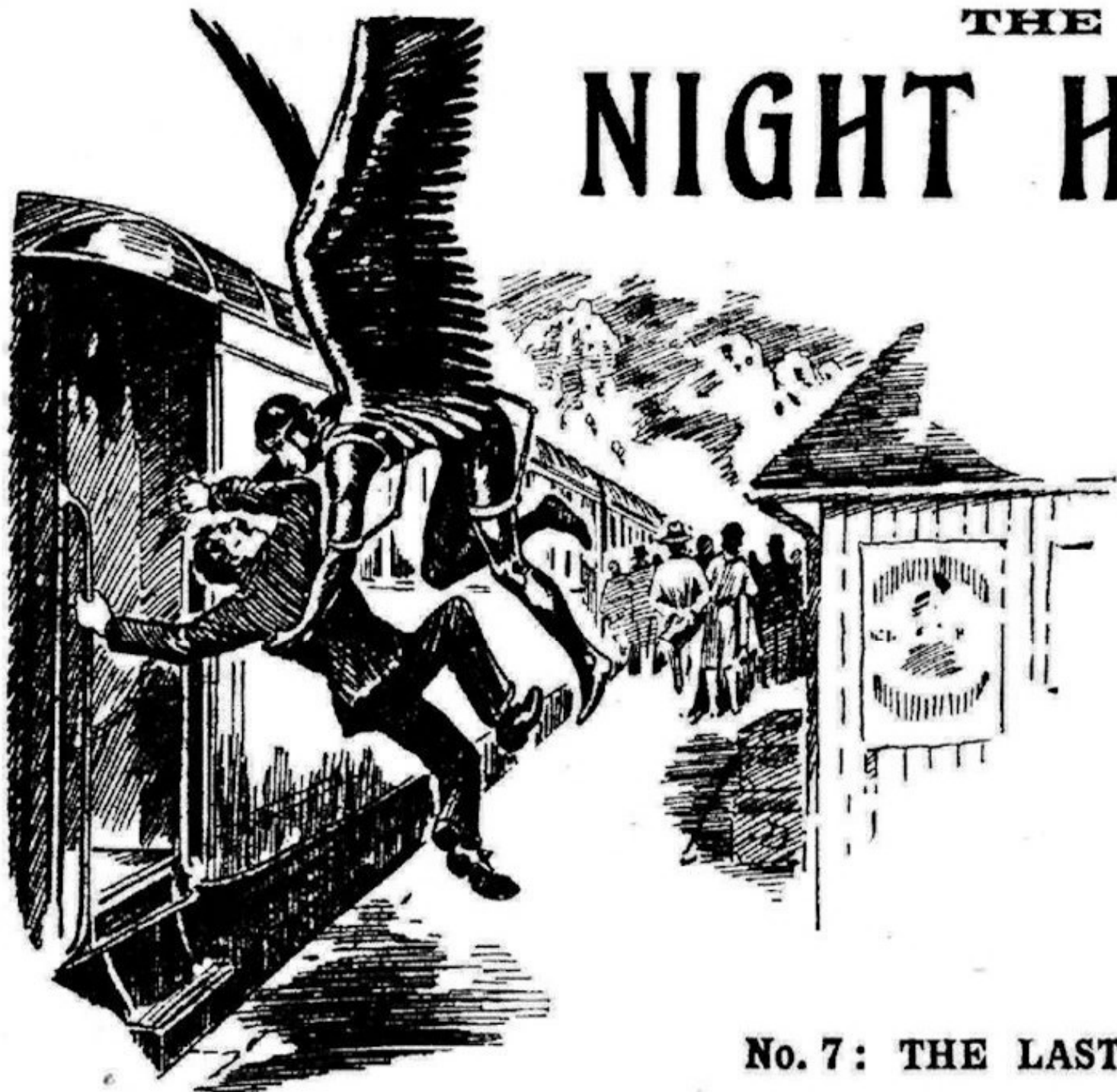
There was a tidy row about it, and that mental picture of Handy's almost came true. He wasn't publicly flogged, but he was hauled before the Head, who gave him a stinging six-hander, to say nothing of a lecture and a week's gating.

There was only one consolation for the unhappy Remove skipper. Mr. Pycraft was as green as ever, and it would take at least a week for the dye to wear off, during which time Mr. Pycraft would be confined to his own quarters.

THE END.

(More lively times at St. Frank's next week—with the two rivals, E. O. Handforth and K. K. Parkington, going it hammer and tongs in a corking complete yarn entitled, "The Jazz Japers!")

THE NIGHT HAWK!



▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲
*'Mid Alpine snows
 the last round be-
 tween the Night
 Hawk and Silas
 Benton takes place
 —in a stirring
 fight to the death!*
 ▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼▼

No. 7: THE LAST ROUND!

The Pursuing Avenger!

SIX thousand feet above the English Channel, the Imperial Airways liner, from Croydon to Paris, crashed her way through the gathering dusk, her great engines roaring in a regular monotonous song. And inside the luxurious passengers' cabin, Silas Benton, one-time master of Britain's underworld, huddled closer in his padded seat, and stared through the window beside him with unseeing eyes.

A week had passed since that terrible night when Thurston Kyle, the Night Hawk, had descended from the skies and dealt death and destruction upon every member of the Benton Gang save its leader. The vision of that disaster was still fresh in the fear-stricken mind of the man seated in the cross-Channel liner.

Escaping from the ruins of his mansion by secret passages, Silas Benton had crawled, furtive and terrified, to London, where, with the certain knowledge that his invincible foe was still on his track, he had tried to hide himself. Now, scared into flight once more, he was making a frantic dash for the Continent. He had friends in the dark quarters of every city there; Paris, Marseilles, Venice—

For a moment his sunken eyes shone. Venice! In the old Italian city, among her

canals and ancient gloomy palaces, he could begin his crooked schemes afresh, safe from the vengeance of Thurston Kyle.

Warily, Benton glanced around the comfortable, well-lit saloon, taking stock of his fellow-passengers. With the exception of a quiet-looking youth, whose freckled face was buried deep in a detective novel, they were all business men or wealthy pleasure-seekers. The crook knew two of them; a coal millionaire and a famous actress. A sneer curled his lips, and he turned again to stare out of the window into the night—straight into the mocking eyes of Thurston Kyle!

In one reeling second an icy hand seemed to reach out and clutch at Silas Benton's brain. His jaw sagged, he was as powerless to act or scream as a rabbit fascinated by a python.

Framed in the dark window, the Night Hawk's face shone white and menacing as he held on the ledge with one hand, and let the huge 'plane carry him along. His other hand came up slowly, and a long, accusing finger pointed straight at Silas Benton's heart. Then he was gone.

The spell broke. Staggering from his seat, the master-criminal fell backwards, his hands fluttering wildly above his head. Scream after scream burst from his throat, answered by a babel of bewildered cries from the other passengers.

A startled steward burst through the door. He was just in time to catch the falling man as he toppled back unconscious.

Not until the 'plane was nearing its destination did the gang-leader revive. A flask of brandy was proffered him, and he drained it feverishly. By the time the liner made her final landing, he had recovered some of his nerve, although his hands still twitched and his face was ashen-grey.

The Night Hawk was close on his heels! He was not safe yet!

Stepping out of the 'plane on to the landing ground, brilliantly illuminated by flood-lights, fresh panic seized him. Too well he knew the Night Hawk's deadly marksmanship, and he also knew that he presented an easy target at this moment; so, snatching up his suitcase, he scuttled across to the Customs, taking care to keep well amongst the other passengers. High above, swaying under his curved black wings, Thurston Kyle picked him out with powerful night-glasses, and smiled contemptuously.

There are two routes south to Italy, one via Marseilles, and the other through Switzerland. A long line of taxis were drawn up outside the aerodrome, and, running through the gate, Silas Benton jumped into the first one. A moment later he was whizzing towards the Gare du Sud at the reckless speed typical of French taxis.

And behind him, Snub Hawkins, grinning all over his freckled face, stuffed his "thriller" into his pocket and followed in the next cab.

Arrived at the station, the youngster ordered his driver to wait, and darted inside. He had to be careful now. Having kept his face hidden from Benton during the journey from England, he was fairly certain the criminal suspected nothing. But—the man was as shrewd as a cornered rat!

From behind a pile of luggage, Snub watched his master's enemy hurry across to the barrier. In an instant he had taken a platform ticket and was after him, keeping cleverly out of sight until, at last, he saw his quarry enter a reserved compartment of the long, powerful Simplon express. Silas Benton was escaping by way of Switzerland and the Alps!

It was all Snub wanted to know. Now to get in touch with the guv'nor.

At top speed, he hurried back to his waiting cab. The driver raised his eyebrows when he was ordered to drive like the wind to the Eiffel Tower, but shrugged and let in his clutch without a word. What this sturdy young Englishman expected to see from the Tower at this time of night was a mystery to him.

Snub, however, knew perfectly well what he wanted to see; and within a few minutes of gaining the top stage of the famous structure that towers above Paris, he caught a faint glimpse of a great bird, slowly cruising through the darkness on silent wings.

With a low whoop of joy, Snub flicked an electric torch from his pocket, and stabbed out a brief signal. Instantly the Night Hawk swerved, and landed softly on one of the steel girders above the boy's head.

"Well, lad?"

"We've got him, sir!" whispered Snub, glancing round to make sure he was alone. "He's bunking through Switzerland all right—Simplon express, just pulled out. He'll be out of France by dawn, but the train waits for half an hour just over the Swiss border!"

Thurston Kyle smiled in fierce triumph. His eyes narrowed.

"I hoped he would take that route!" he whispered, almost to himself. "Then this is the end!" Reaching down, he took his young assistant's hand in a grip that left it numb. "Well done, Snub!" was all he said.

In another second the Night Hawk had dropped from the girder, spread his wide, steel-feathered wings, and swooped swiftly into the sky and out of sight.

Snub stared after him with wistful eyes; then he grinned cheerfully again.

"So long, guv'nor!" he called softly. "And—good-bye, Silas Benton!"

A Fight To The Death!

ON long, slashing drives of his wings, the Night Hawk flew across France. There was no time to waste. He had to beat a fast express train to the Swiss border. As he went, he threw back his head and laughed.

Dawn found him flying in wide circles above a tiny station that lay on the plain beneath—a small frontier post consisting of a shed and a long, open platform, where trains halted for inspection by the Swiss officials. He had beaten the Simplon express; but already its faint oncoming thunder floated up to his ears.

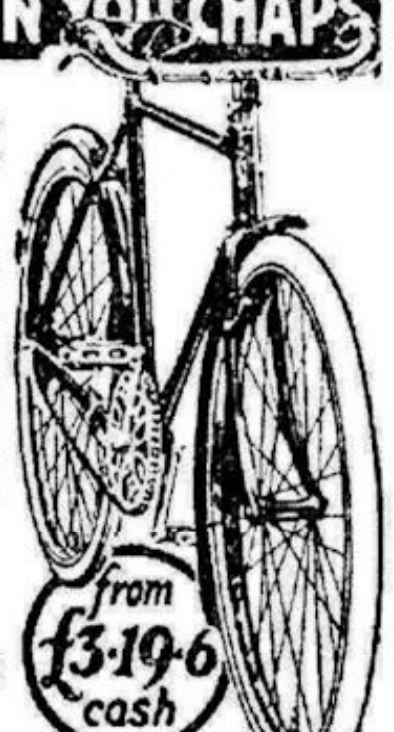
Flying lower, unseen in the dim, raw light, Thurston Kyle studied the station carefully, and nodded with satisfaction.

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Far away, and high above the vanishing night clouds, the first rays of the sun were breaking on the Alps—a magnificent line of colossal mountain peaks, the summits crowned with eternal snows.

He stared at them thoughtfully. Somewhere among those peaks he planned to stage the final settlement with the man who had killed his father. Within that barrier he would find a spot where no man had trodden before, and then—

The Night Hawk laughed—and waited.

The roar of the oncoming express grew louder, a whistle sounded, followed by the grinding of brakes as she drew up beside the bare platform.

Swiss frontier guards appeared, and within a few seconds passengers began to leave the carriages to stretch their legs or buy coffee at the small buffet. Among the first out was Silas Benton. He no longer cringed. His brisk, confident walk was that of a man who had shaken off pursuit and fear at last.

Swift as a flying arrow, the Night Hawk flicked back his wings and dived, crying his triumphant laugh as he swooped upon his enemy, arms outstretched. The sound of that laugh struck Silas Benton like a bullet. One frantic, upward glance he gave, followed by an appalling scream as he hurled himself for cover.

He was still twenty yards from the shed—only the train remained. He leapt tigerishly for the nearest open door, his hands gripped it. Then two arms clamped round his writhing body and whipped him into the air.

The capture was over in a second. Before any of the open-mouthed guards or passengers could interfere, before some of them could even look round, the Night Hawk rose again and shot clear of the shed with inches to spare, hugging his captive tightly. Heedless of the man's raving struggles, he flew up into the darkness, flattened out, and raced headlong towards the mountains. Before long a sudden dead weight on his arms told him Benton had fainted. He increased his speed, for the dawn was coming quickly.

It was in the wildest part of the high Jura mountain that the Night Hawk found the spot he was looking for. Climbing, ever climbing, he spiralled up until the coldness of the atmosphere chilled his blood, and a great rugged wall of white leapt through the dawn-mist towards him.

Floating on wide-flung wings, he drifted round the mountain peak. Tucked away beneath frowning crags of granite, he discovered a small snow-clad platform, hardly more than ten feet wide. On three sides, the mountain wall rose steeply; on the fourth was a precipice, sheer and terrible in its horrible emptiness.

The Night Hawk flew towards the platform and flung his dazed burden on to the soft snow.

Landing, he began to unbuckle his wings—

WHEN at last the leader of the Benton Gang opened his terrified eyes, he saw his sable-clad foe watching him in silence.

He glanced fearfully around; they were alone. The sight of the sheer precipice within a few feet of his elbow sent him cowering closer in the snow, while the piercing light in the Night Hawk's eyes drew his own like a magnet.

For some seconds neither spoke. Kyle was the first to break the silence.

"This is the finish, Silas Benton!" he said quietly.

He waited for the other to reply, but Benton only glared in mingled fear and hatred.

"There is no need for words between you and me!" went on Thurston Kyle. "We are alone above the world. No man has ever been here before; nor ever will again. And—only one of us leaves this spot alive!"

He pointed to the rocky wall. Furtively Silas Benton turned his head and saw the curved black wings leaning there.

"I could have hurled you into eternity just now!" continued the Night Hawk evenly. "Instead, I prefer to kill you in fair fight. Fair fight, you dog! There are the wings; but only the victor will use them after we have fought!"

His voice rang out like a trumpet call.

"Stand up, Silas Benton, and meet your end like a man!"

Crouched in the snow, the criminal snarled wolfishly. He knew that appeals for mercy were useless. Victory only would save him now. Unless he could conquer this quixotic fool and so win the wings, it meant—death!

Like a striking snake he left the ground, straight for the Night Hawk's throat. A hard fist crashed between his eyes and flung him, screaming, on his back. When he rose again a slim knife gleamed in his hand.

This time he did not rush. Instead, he crept closer to his watchful opponent, shuffling on bent knees and twitching feet. Within striking distance, he dived, his arm flashing up in the dreadful stroke of the expert knife-fighter.

At the last instant Thurston Kyle swayed and gripped that flashing wrist. A yell rang out, a curse, and a fierce chuckle; and Silas Benton was hurled with terrific force against the rocks, while his knife spun harmlessly into—nothing.

And now the Night Hawk took up the attack. Savage as a trapped lynx, Benton came to meet him. Up and down the small plateau they fought, churning the virgin snow beneath their feet.

Reeling on the very edge of the precipice, first one in danger, then the other, the two men fought their last fight. A savage kick brought Thurston Kyle to the ground. Before Benton could follow up the advantage a terrible left stopped him dead in his tracks.

They clinched, wrestling and heaving; fell away, smashing at each other's faces, the Night Hawk perilously near the fatal drop.

Yelling with triumph, Silas Benton recovered, and hurled his full weight at his opponent's thighs. With all the power of his fine shoulders and strong arms, Thurston Kyle met the rush in a crushing impact. There came a blur of arms and legs, a wild confusion of striving bodies, a gurgling whimper and a sharp cry of exultation.

Benton's ill-judged rush had left an opening in his defence. The Night Hawk now had him in a merciless hammer-lock!

Limp and powerless, the man who had terrorised Britain, the human tiger Thurston Kyle had sworn to destroy, was raised aloft, struggling no longer, but crying incoherently. Irresistibly, the Night Hawk carried his babbling, pleading prisoner to the extreme edge of the platform, where he held him, for a long moment, high above his head.

He swayed slowly backwards from the hips; braced himself firmer on the trampled snow. Then:

"Punishment at last, Silas Benton!" he cried in a terrible voice, and flung his enemy far out over the edge of the precipice.

The mountain silence was ripped to shreds by Silas Benton's last, long-drawn scream. He spun round, grasping dreadfully at space, threw up his arms—disappeared! The echo of his cry rolled among the rocks, grew faint, then died away into silence.

Thurston Kyle's revenge was complete. The Benton Gang was shattered!

The Night Hawk remained on the lip of the precipice, staring down into the mist that filled its lower depths, his broad chest heaving beneath the black leather flying-suit. But presently he turned again, and began buckling on his wings—the strong wings that had helped him to win his glorious victories.

When, at last, he took off and hung for a space in mid-air, looking back at the fateful, trampled plateau, a mighty load seemed to have lifted from his shoulders. For the first time for years, a look of peace replaced the stern expression on Thurston Kyle's handsome face.



Standing right on the edge of the precipice, the Night Hawk raised the screaming gang-leader over his head.

He was free now—free to get back to his inventions, his laboratory, and little Snub Hawkins.

He struck upwards, flinging himself joyously aloft by a tremendous beat of his quivering pinions. Presently, the scene of his last fight was left behind in its primeval loneliness; then the mountains themselves sank out of sight. Alone and free in the cool morning air, Thurston Kyle laughed contentedly.

The Night Hawk was homeward bound!

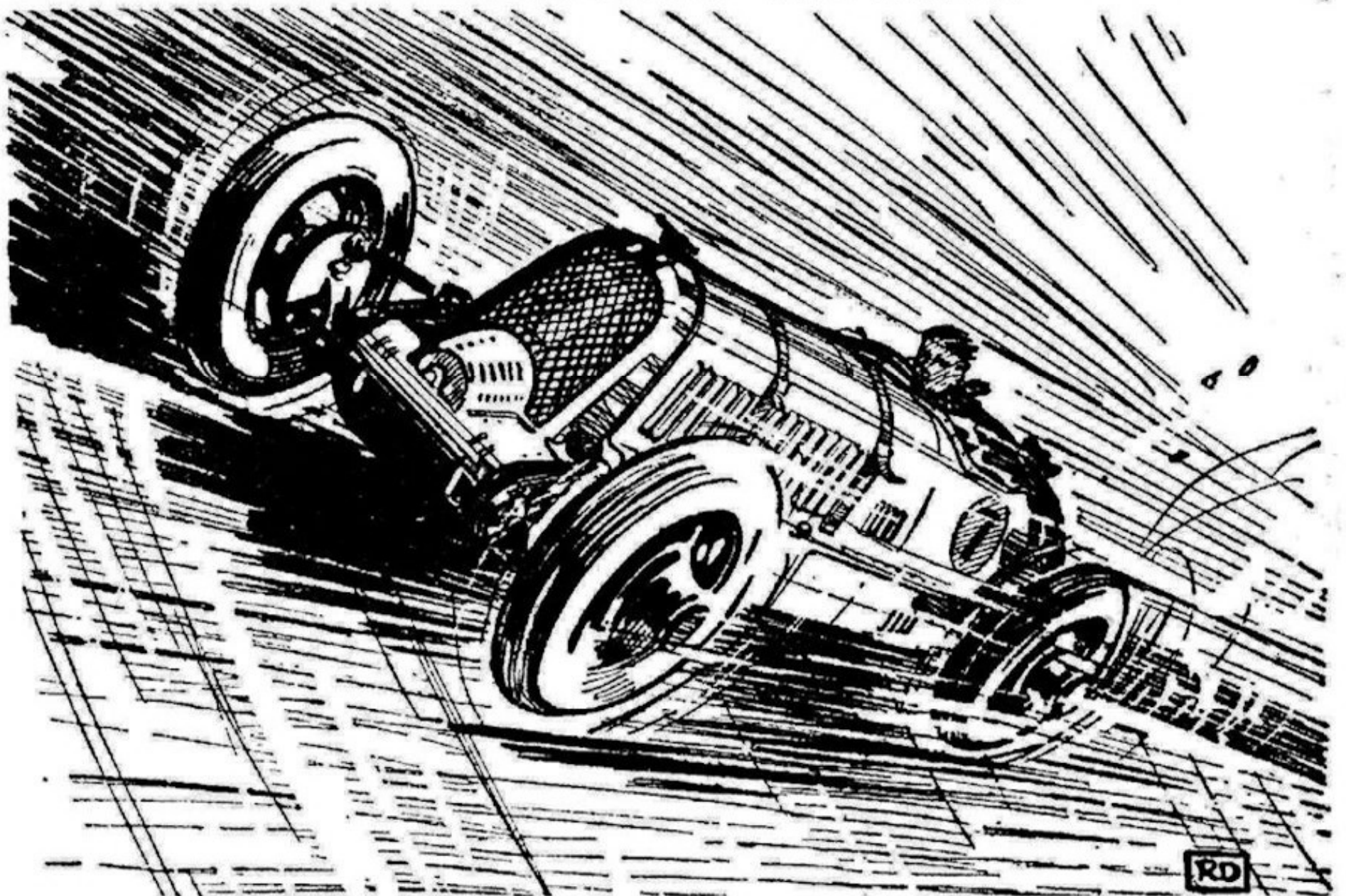
THE END.

(It's a temporary good-bye to The Night Hawk and young Snub Hawkins—but next week you'll be saying "hallo" to two new pals in Loopy Lane, the Cowboy Kid, and his pet tiger, Sheba. This grand new series of yarns is the "goods." Thrilling and exciting? You bet!)

ANOTHER EXCITING INSTALMENT OF OUR ROUSING MOTOR-RACING SERIAL!

THE IRON SPEEDMAN!

By ALFRED EDGAR



Stargie's Threat!

JIM also saw Sniff Dix, and followed Joe out of the car.

Danger affects fellows in different ways. A narrow escape will leave some with nerves all to pieces and limbs trembling; on others it has just the opposite effect. To Jim and Joe, sight of their enemy acted like a stimulant, and they went up the hill in a series of giant, distance-eating strides.

Sniff saw them gaining, and he turned down-hill, intending to strike across the meadow and escape that way. Both boys raced to head him off, parting as they ran. Sniff saw Jim cutting across his track, and the tester dived towards Joe.

Joe was not so big as his chum, and Sniff reckoned he could bowl him over and get away. Sniff made a mistake.

Joe did not slacken his pace, but continued to run at Sniff full pelt. He ducked Sniff's punch, and then drove his own fist squarely under the fellow's jaw. Sniff slipped, tilted sideways, then went crashing down the hill, with Joe after him.

When Sniff got to his feet, Joe was on him again. He tore into him like a puma ripping at its prey. Sniff went back into the

bushes, with fists seeming to hit him everywhere at once.

He was tottering on his heels when Joe suddenly drew off, crouched, and then came in with a swinging right which held all the power of his muscular body and all his plunging weight.

His knuckles cracked at the side of Sniff's chin. Sniff went backwards. His shoes slipped on damp earth—then he hit the green-covered pond with the flat of his back and disappeared.

"Good man!" Jim panted as he came up.

"If he gets out, I'll knock the swab back again!" Joe gasped.

They saw Sniff's head break the surface. He was in the middle of the pond, clearing

tadpoles from his hair and weeds from his eyes, while his legs were sunk almost to the knees in muck that was as oozy as a feather bed, and nothing like so pleasant.

Spectators who had been waiting at the hairpin bend came rushing up. They grouped around the rim of the pond, waiting for Sniff to come out. When they heard from Joe what had occurred, they told Sniff what would happen to him when he did emerge from the pond—so Sniff judged it best to remain where he was.

"They'll drag him dead from under a busted car!" That's what Stargie says—and he's talking about young Jim Ross!

"Let him cool off! Come and look at the car." Jim caught Joe's arm and dragged him away to where the machine stood.

Its dash through the hedge had decorated its front axle and radiator with greenery, and one front tyre had burst. But that, so far as they could see, was the total of the damage. That it should have escaped was due to the fact that it had struck only a comparatively soft hedge.

Willing helpers examined the lorry. There was nothing on it to show to whom it belonged, and Jim said grimly:

"Then we'll bag it for the garage, Joe. If the rightful owner likes to come along and claim it, he can have it."

"And we'll ask some awkward questions about why it nearly killed us," Joe told him. "I reckon that lorry's as good as ours for keeps!"

The damaged car was hitched up behind the big vehicle, and not until it moved off did the vigilant watchers around the pond leave Sniff Dix and make their way towards the village. Sniff remained in the pond, and stayed there for some time after the last of them had gone, fearful that they might be hiding up in the bushes and waiting to trap him.

Finally, he emerged cautiously. He was soaked to the skin, and extremely smelly. With mud and weeds dropping off at every step, he moved slowly across the meadow, then went by lonely footpaths to where a car waited for him half a mile away. At the wheel was Lon Stargie.

The Ace speedman's narrowed eyes widened as he saw the apparition which approached. He got out of the car and stood staring blankly as he gasped:

"What happened? Did you get him?"

"No!" Sniff snarled. "I—I slipped into a pond and—"

"What about the car?" Stargie stepped towards him, then recoiled, a handkerchief pressed across his nose. "Did it come off?"

"No," said Sniff again. "I sent the lorry down the hill, and they ought to have been smashed to smithereens. Only young Ross has got the devil's own luck. Just before he hit the lorry he got into a skid and went clean through the hedge and saved himself. The car ain't hardly dented."

"Skidded through the hedge? Drove

through it, more likely!" Stargie snarled. "That boy's clever!"

He stared unseeingly at Sniff, and into the speedman's dark eyes there came, deep down, a haunting expression of fear.

"And that car's fast—it's a miracle!" Dix said. "He—"

"I watched him drive it on the first two circuits," Stargie said. "He handles it wonderfully—he's got me beat, if he rides in Ireland!"

"He'll race there—they start for Ireland to-morrow," Sniff told him, as he stood with the water dripping from him, unlucky creatures from the pool still wriggling in his hair and clothing.

"If he does race, then he's for it!" Lon Stargie glared suddenly. "It's either him or me—I'm not going to be haunted by him any longer!" His face was working as he spoke, and his muscular hands contracted while his lips and fingers trembled.

Sniff Dix looked at him, startled, and a little scared. The speedman's face was ablaze with passion as he went on:

"I nearly got him at Brooklands—I'll make sure of him in that Irish Grand Prix. I'll send him the same way as his father went! They'll drag him out—dead—from under a busted car! That's what I'll do to him, Dix!" His blazing eyes riveted on the soaked tester. "I'll pile him beside the road, with his car upside down and burning—and him in the middle of it!"

Ready for the Grand Prix!

LON STARGIE'S face worked savagely as he uttered the threat, glaring at the soaked, mud-streaked figure of "Sniff" Dix. The Ace mechanic grinned.

"I hope I'm there to see it!" he said feelingly.

"You will be, because you'll ride in that race as my mechanic," Stargie snarled. "And it'll be the last race that young Ross will ever drive in!"

The speedman's features were distorted with passion, and his words spat from between gritted teeth. His venom was such that even Sniff quailed a little and gasped:

"I hope it is! He'd ha' been smashed up now, if I'd had any luck!"

"That boy's clever; he put it across you," Stargie growled. "But I'll get him yet!" He stepped back into his car, to gesticulate

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

JIM ROSS, iron-nerved, daring, is a born racing driver. His brother, STEVE ROSS, has just completed building a special racing car known as the Ross Eight, and they take it down to Brooklands for a big race. They are accompanied by JOE COOPER, Jim's chum, who acts as mechanic. Jim realises that his most dangerous rival is LON STARGIE, the crack speedman of Ace Motors. Stargie is unscrupulous, too—as Jim discovers to his cost during the race. Jim is winning, and then the Ace speedman deliberately makes him crash. After the race Jim vows he will get his own back against Stargie in the Irish Grand Prix. The Ross Eight having been wrecked, Mr. Ryan, owner of the Ryan Engineering Company, builds another car for the brothers. Jim and Joe take it out for a practice spin, unaware of the fact that Stargie has arranged for a five-ton lorry to crash into them. They just avoid disaster by driving through a hedge. Joe then spots Sniff Dix, Stargie's mechanic, running away, and he gives chase.

(Now read on.)

as Sniff started to follow. "You're not coming with me in that state. You walk back to the works!"

Before the mechanic could protest, the crack driver of Ace cars had sent his machine forward, leaving Sniff where he stood with mud still dropping from him, with water running down his legs and with lank fronds of green, slimy pond-weed clinging to his hair and clothes.

Sniff began to walk. As the sun grew warmer his clothes dried on him. They had plenty of time to dry, because it was ten miles from that point to the Ace works. Every little while he tried to persuade a lorry driver, passing along the Great North Road, to give him a lift.

Some did stop. But they immediately drove on again after getting one whiff of Sniff! The pond had been very far from sweet.

So he tramped on, and while he tramped his ire rose higher and higher against Jim and Joe. By the time he did reach his destination he was ready to back Lon Stargie to the limit in an effort to get the better of the boys who had thwarted them both for so long.

But the chums knew nothing of this. The Ross-Ryan racer was examined, and such damage as it had sustained in avoiding the five-ton lorry with which Sniff had tried to wreck it, was speedily repaired. And, on the morrow, the whole of Woodburn village turned out to give the car and its team a send-off.

The racer was taken on a lorry to Liverpool, Steve driving it, and two mechanics, whom Mr. Ryan provided, travelled with him. Jim and Joe rode in state in Mr. Ryan's own car, and that little party of half a dozen made up the team.

Woodburn's brass band played them out of the village as far as the new by-pass, which ran near. Everyone was there, from the village policeman down to a couple of stray black pigs. There were villagers who had known Jim all his life, and hadn't thought twice about him until this moment when he was making a fight for fame.

Small children threw daisy-chains into the car as it finally went away; some of the girls pitched handfuls of confetti, and an excited yokel chucked a turnip which would have brained Joe if it had hit him. As it was, it bounced off the side of the car and hit one of the black pigs.

Eventually, they landed at Belfast, and ran the car out to the course, which was close outside a town called Dunoon. Before it was dark, Jim and Joe rode around the circuit in Mr. Ryan's super-sports car.

The triangular circuit was just seven miles round, with a two-mile straight where the grand-stands stood by Dunoon. It had one perfectly vicious hairpin bend which came at the bottom of a long, snaking slope and formed a very real danger-point.

Jim studied the corners as well as he was able, because he was due to take the car out the next morning on the first of the three practice bouts before the race.

"This ought to be easy, after the work we did on the roads around the village!" Joe told him. "The track is about six times as wide, and you used to snort round worse hairpins than the one here!"

"I know," Jim answered. "But I was by myself then. It's a bit different when there's a lot more cars on the road. However, I ought to make a show."

Steve and the two mechanics worked nearly all night on the car, bringing it to perfection, overhauling all their kit and arranging everything for the morning.

While they worked, they could hear the noise of other cars in camps not so far away. Their own camp was under canvas—just two tents and a marquee—in a field outside the town. Some of the racing teams were in barns and sheds, and many of them were working on their machines all through the darkness.

When dawn broke, strange sounds shattered the soft, early-morning air of Dunoon, and the clean streets of the Irish town grew full of traffic.

Twenty thousand people rose with the first flush of daylight and hurried to the Irish Grand Prix circuit, anxious to get the first glimpse of the speedirons which were to do battle in four days' time.

A crowd gathered at the entrance to the field which formed the Ross-Ryan camp, craning as they saw the low-built, green car started up outside the marquee, its engine booming, blued smoke gouting from its wide-open exhaust.

They watched Jim Ross appear, clad in white racing overalls, and they saw Joe join him. Both looked fatter than usual, because each wore broad rubber body-pads which would protect their ribs when the car leaped from bumps on the road, and hammered them against the sides of the cockpit or the hard leather squabs behind.

Jim was standing by the side of his car, fastening the cuffs of his overalls, when there came a sullen roar from the near-by road. Three Ace cars ripped into sight, travelling fast as they ran down to the starting point for practice.

The young speedman had a glimpse of Lon Stargie at the wheel of the leading Ace. Sniff Dix at his side, both looking towards the little camp and the lone racer that was to challenge them.

"There they go!" Joe came up, yelling the words through the crash of the racing exhausts. "Let's get our machine out, Jim—we're going to travel so fast that those two blighters will catch cold trying to keep up!"

Stargie's Fear!

WITH Joe in the mechanic's seat, Jim rolled the Ross-Ryan Eight down the broad road towards the starting point. To the left showed the grey roofs and tinted walls, the church spires and chimneys of Dunoon.

His view of the town was half hidden by the grand-stands which were being built be-

side the road, and on which an army of workmen were labouring, their hammers thudding as they strove to get them finished for the race.

Opposite, more men were putting up the replenishment pits, and ahead of the car was a long line of machines waiting the signal to get away. These cars were to be sent off for practice at half-minute intervals, and officials were now waiting word that the seven-mile course had been closed to all traffic and cleared of everything on it.

Jim, when he was halted by an official, found the three Ace cars in front of him and, as he stopped, he saw Lon Stargie get out, pace the road a few moments, then stand glaring back at Jim.

"He's got his eye on us!" Joe grunted.

"So's Sniff!" Jim nodded to where the rival mechanic was alighting. "Let's get out. We shan't go off yet."

Both climbed from the car. Jim forgot Stargie as he walked around it, looking at the tyres and making certain that everything was as it should be. He almost started when he turned, and found Stargie regarding him.

The man's hard face was almost expressionless, except for his eyes. They were gleaming behind his narrowed lids, but they widened when Jim faced him, nodded and said coolly:

"Morning! Didn't expect to see us here, eh?"

Stargie did not answer, and Jim glanced at Joe as his chum stepped forward, to rip:

"We know Sniff Dix tried to crash us with a five-ton truck the other day—and we know who put him up to it!"

Stargie did not even look at him, he was still staring at Jim. His gaze ranged from

Jim's rope-soiled white racing shoes to his peaked crash-helmet, and now his expression changed faintly.

His eyes widened. For a moment he seemed to be looking at Jim, and yet not looking at him, almost as though in the boy he saw someone else. Stargie's lips parted, and deep down in his eyes Jim saw that hint of fear he had observed before.

"You had a go at me at Brooklands," Jim said. "It was no accident which sent me off the track—and you know it! You——"

"What are you talking about!" Stargie's voice came now, quick and tense, but the hand with which he gesticulated seemed to quiver. "That was your own fault!"

"Was it?" Jim growled, and Stargie stepped closer to him, then seemed to draw back.

There was real fear in his expression now, and his tone was harsh, almost cracked as he went on:

"I warned you. You were trying to be clever with me at Brooklands!"

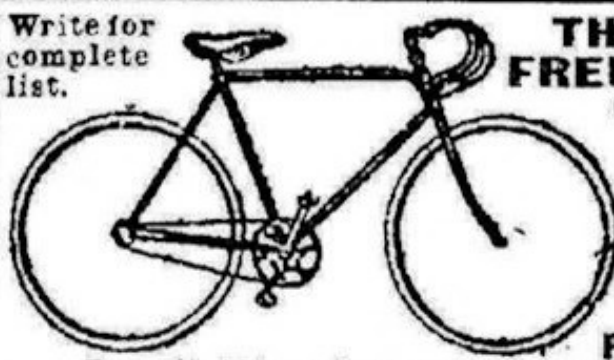
"You ran him off the track!" Joe cut in vigorously.

"I'll have no mercy on you now!" Stargie was still glaring at Jim, but his voice remained low. "It's you or me, this race!"

He came still closer, his eyes blazing, his clenched fists half raised. And Jim, looking at the speedman, felt a thrill pass through him as he realised that Stargie meant what he said!

(All the thrills of the Irish Grand Prix in next week's stirring instalment with Jim and Stargie fighting a neck-and-neck race for victory! Don't miss reading these enthralling chapters on any account, chums!)

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