

BRILLIANT NEW ST. FRANK'S STORY
STARTS TO-DAY!

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THE
MAN
FROM
CHICAGO!

The Opening Chapters of E. S. Brooks' Latest St. Frank's Masterpiece—

WAKING UP ST. FRANK'S!



A New School Story of amazing adventures, side-splitting scenes and dramatic surprises, starring Handforth & Co., Reggie Pitt & Co., Archie Glenthorne, and many other favourite characters at St. Frank's.

CHAPTER 1. Not Cricket!

CRACK!

The ball was a loose one, and Handforth, swiping with more than usual aggressiveness, sent it soaring completely out of Little Side, well on its way towards the village.

"That'll show him," said Handforth truculently.

The champion slogger of the St. Frank's Remove glared down the pitch at the bowler. And from all round the playing field came the amused chuckles of the spectators. That was Edward Oswald Handforth's third boundary-hit in the over.

"I may be wrong," observed Archie Glenthorne, as he lounged in a deck-chair in the cool shade, "but it seems to me, Alf, old thing, that Handforth is frightfully infuriated. I mean to say, he's sloshing at the good old leather sphere as though he owed it a grudge."

"That's only his way," grinned Alf Brent, who was squatting on the grass nearby. "Still, Handy does seem to be a bit more fiery than usual."

It was really an important occasion, for the St. Frank's Junior Eleven was battling for cricket honours against Hal Brewster and his merry men of the River House School. And the River House School, being a near neighbour, the fixture was always something of a local derby.

As there was some little delay in recovering the ball, Handforth seized the opportunity to run across to Brewster himself, who was in the slips. The match had been in progress for about an hour, and three St. Frank's wickets had already fallen, and the score stood at 73.

"Just a minute, Brewster," said Handforth grimly.

The cheery River House captain looked at him in surprise.

"You sound warlike, Handy," he said. "What's wrong?"

"You know what's wrong as well as I do!" retorted Handforth, in a voice that was meant to be confidential, but which could be heard over half of the field. "What's the idea of including that cad, Wellborne, in your team?"

Hal Brewster flushed.

"Steady, Handforth. What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," interrupted the burly leader of Study D. "Wellborne may have fooled you, but he doesn't fool me. He always was a cad, and always will be. A leopard can't change his spots. He's not trying to take my wicket at all—he's aiming at my head."

"Don't be an ass, Handy!" protested Brewster, recovering some of his good humour. "Wellborne has been working hard lately, and he's one of the best bowlers in the River House Eleven. He's using strategy, that's all."

"Is that what you call it?" asked Handforth, with a sniff. "I call it maliciousness."

"My dear chap, he's only trying to make you sky the ball for a catch."

"Well, you'd better give him a word of warning, that's all," said Handforth darkly. "He's found a rough spot on the wicket, and he pitches the ball on to it every time. That sort of game is dangerous."

There was no opportunity for Brewster to continue the argument, for the ball had now been returned, and Handforth was obliged to go back to the wicket. But Hal did look a bit troubled as he noticed the cool, insolent grin on the aristocratic features of the Hon. Aubrey de Vere Wellborne.

It was quite true that Wellborne pitched the ball with uncanny accuracy on a bad patch, with the result that the leather shot up perilously. This time it went wide, and Handforth's swipe bore no fruit.

It was the end of the over, and Church, at the other end, played cautiously to Glynn's bowling until he nipped the sixth ball away for a single. As the field crossed over, Handforth was frowning.

He said, as he and the other batsman met half-way down the pitch. "Watch the ball for all you're worth."

There was a sensational justification of Handforth's suspicions with the very first ball of the over. It came down fast, pitched short, struck the loose patch, and rose dangerously. Church tried to get his bat up, but just failed. The ball struck him with a sickening thud on the side of the head, and he collapsed without a groan.

"What did I tell you?" roared Handforth furiously. "I knew what that cad was up to. By George! Is this what you chaps call cricket?"

While Reggie Pitt, Vivian Travers and a few others ran out from the pavilion, Hal Brewster and his men gathered round the fallen Church. Handforth was far too excited to even run to his chum's side,

anxious though he was. He dashed up to Wellborne, and swung him round.

"I don't knock chaps out with a cricket ball," he said deliberately. "I find that my fist is good enough."

Crash!

That punch contained all the force of Handforth's indignation, and the Hon. Aubrey tottered on his heels and crashed over backwards.

"Confound it, Handforth, you can't do that," shouted Hal Brewster, running up and clutching him by the arm.

"Can't do it!" roared Handforth. "I've done it."

"Yes, but you ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Hal angrily. "The whole thing was an accident——"

"Rot!" broke in Handforth. "Wellborne did it deliberately—as I told you at first. Get out of my way."

Biff! He did not wait for Brewster to reply, but struck out with all his impetuous truculence. The River House skipper went down with a roar of pain and anger.

Whether Wellborne had been deliberately trying to injure the St. Frank's batsmen—and this was probably a bee in Handforth's bonnet, born of his knowledge of Wellborne's caddish character—was never cleared up. The matter had become of trivial importance. For the sequel was alarming.

Hal Brewster, boiling with rage, leapt to his feet and promptly lashed out at Handforth. George Glynn and Dave Ascott, running up to the support of their leader made matters worse. For Handforth punched at them, and in a moment they were fighting desperately.

In those few tense seconds a complete change came over the placid, sunlit cricket field.

Until this incident there had been an air of lazy contentment in the atmosphere. It was a hot summer's afternoon, with a few fleecy clouds in the sapphire blue sky, and with a gentle zephyr-like breeze fanning the cheeks of the white clad cricketers.

All round lounged the spectators, some of them sprawling on the grass, some sitting in deck-chairs, some standing about, and many imbibing iced lemonades and ice-cream wafers. A more peaceful scene could scarcely have been imagined.

Then that dramatic change.

There had always been a feeling of keen rivalry between the St. Frank's juniors and the River House boys. The very sight of Handforth knocking Brewster down aroused the River House fellows to instant anger. If Glynn and Ascott had kept out of it the unfortunate incident might have been ended then and there.

But McClure and Jimmy Potts and Harry Gresham and Tregellis-West and a few other Removites dashed to the rescue of Handforth. By this time Church had been assisted dizzily to his feet, and he wasn't really badly hurt.

"Come on!" roared Handforth joyously. "Who cares about cricket, anyway? Down with the River House."

It was an inexcusable war cry, but Edward Oswald was ever ready to join in a scrap. Fighting was the only sport he really enjoyed. The River House boys were just as much to blame as he, for they had aggravated the whole situation by following his hot-headed example.

He was lashing out right and left, and although Brewster and Reggie Pitt, the respective skippers, did their utmost to restore peace, their efforts were futile. The umpires, after a feeble protest or two, stood looking on helplessly.

To make matters worse the spectators joined in. Round the field, the River House boys angrily blamed Handforth, and the St. Frank's fellows, equally as angrily, told them not to talk out of their hats. Then blows were exchanged, and like lightning the fight spread from the cricket field to the boundaries. Instead of a cricket match, it became a battle royal between the rival schools.

CHAPTER 2.

The Fat in the Fire!

"I ALWAYS think," said Sir John Brent, beaming out upon the fair countryside, "that there is something blissfully soothing in the sight of the English country on a summer's afternoon."

"I entirely agree with you, Sir John," said General Milton, sitting up with a start, and blinking. "Gad, yes. Wonderful."

He scarcely liked to admit that he'd been dozing, or that the English countryside had failed to arouse enthusiasm within his soldierly breast. The other occupant of the big limousine was Lord Walberry. The three St. Frank's Governors, having been to Bannington, the neighbouring town, in connection with a hospital fete, had come on to the school as a matter of course.

The car glided up the lane from Bellton, and Sir John, who was far more interested in the welfare of the school than his fellow governors, was eager to catch the first sight of the St. Frank's playing fields.

"There'll be cricket, I expect," he remarked. "I don't think there's a First Eleven match to-day, but the juniors——"

He broke off abruptly, for at that moment the car had turned a bend in the lane, and the fair expanse of the St. Frank's playing fields could clearly be seen across the neighbouring meadows. The school buildings, with the ivy-covered towers and the picturesque gables, had been in sight for some time.

"Dear me!" said Sir John wonderingly. "What on earth—— Really, this is most extraordinary."

He could see at a glance that Big Side was empty; but the Junior playing field was the scene of a most amazing conflict.

No man, in his right senses, could imagine that a cricket match was in progress.

Certainly, the figures on the field were mainly clothed in white, and they were undoubtedly cricketers. Incredible as it was, Sir John definitely came to the conclusion, within the space of ten seconds, that he was viewing a free fight. Even the spectators, round the boundaries, and in front of the pavilion, had bunched themselves together into oddly assorted groups, and were contributing their quota to the scene of battle.

"Great Heavens!" ejaculated Sir John aghast.

"Hallo! Anything wrong?" asked the general, startled in to full wakefulness.

"I can scarcely credit it!" gasped Sir John. "Look!"

"I fancied I saw something somewhat unusual just then," said Lord Walberry mildly.

All doubts were set at rest a minute later, for the car, gliding through the gateway into the picturesque old Triangle, drove straight through Big Arch, and so on across Inner Court, towards the Head's House. And from here, although the fight itself could not be seen, the sequel to it was much in evidence. Prefects, armed with canes were dashing all in one direction; masters, their gowns floating in the breeze, were legging it purposefully in the same quarter.

"Stop!" shouted Sir John, to the chauffeur. "Stop here."

He and his fellow Governors tumbled hurriedly out of the car. They could now hear the roar of battle, and General Milton, at least, appeared to be enjoying himself for the first time that afternoon. With his white moustache standing practically on end, he hurried to the nearest gateway which led to the playing fields.

"I cannot imagine what can have happened," panted Sir John worriedly.

The Governors arrived on Little Side at at most unfortunate moment. If they had deliberately planned to come to St. Frank's at the most inopportune moment of the whole year, they could not have been more successful.

For the rival juniors, now completely out of hand, had worked themselves up into such a pitch of excitement that cricket meant nothing, and masters and prefects even less. As for School Governors, nobody thought of them.

The St. Frank's contingent, being much the larger, was just now engaged in the cheerful task of chasing Brewster & Co. off the premises, and it was doubly unfortunate that the River House juniors, in their extremity, should dash blindly towards the spot where the Governors were hurrying upon the scene to sternly put an end to it. Sir John Brent, General Milton and Lord Walberry were caught in the full tide, as it were, and swamped.

"Stop!" thundered Sir John. "Boys! Good gracious! What is the meaning——"

That was as far as he got. General Milton and Lord Walberry, whose running days were long over, had no breath to speak at



The juniors stared at the burly young man carrying the cap and gown. Little did they dream that they were face to face with their new headmaster—
Fighting Kingswood!

all. They were all three bumped against, pushed over, and even trampled underfoot. Brewster & Co. did not know them, and the St. Frank's juniors did not even see them.

"Down with the River House!"

"Chase 'em right off the premises, you chaps."

"Buck up, Remove."

Shouting wildly, the St. Frank's cricketers swarmed over the fallen Governors, and passed on. But by this time Authority with a capital "A" had been aroused from the various pursuits of the summer's afternoon, and were getting into action.

Mr. Allington Wilkes, the Housemaster of the Ancient House was on the scene, supported by Mr. Pagett of the Fifth and Mr. Crowell of the Remove. Mr. Stokes of the West House had gathered a fairly large contingent of prefects, and he was hot on the track.

In fact, the fight came to a sudden and feeble finish.

The juniors, confronted suddenly by the enemy, realised, for the first time, the enormity of their offence. Their excitement died as suddenly as it had been born. Pitt and Grey and Handforth and the others knew, then, how foolish they had been; and Brewster & Co., bottling their own

feelings, came to the conclusion that the whole affair was a storm in a teacup.

The Governors, picking themselves up, could hardly be expected to take the view that the matter was trifling. Sir John had lost his hat, one side of his collar was sticking out, and his necktie was unfastened. Lord Walberry, who was something of a dandy usually, now looked like a scarecrow. And General Milton was no less battered.

"Good Heavens!" he breathed faintly. "They've half-killed me. I'm smothered in blood."

"An outrageous affair," said Sir John, with cold fury. "There shall be a reckoning for this—and at once. I shall take steps to find out the names of the ringleaders, and they shall be flogged."

Ample help was forthcoming. Form-masters and prefects assisted the battered Governors indoors. Housemasters and other prefects marshalled the juniors together and ordered them to go straight into their respective Houses and remain there until there could be an inquiry into the whole unfortunate incident.

"You chaps had better cut off to your own school," said Reggie Pitt, in a confidential whisper to Hal Brewster. "How the dickens did this silly business start, any-

way? We can't expect the Governors to look at the thing in the right spirit. Where's the harm in a scrap?"

"Governors?" repeated Brewster staring.

"Alas! Fair youth, didn't you know?" sighed Reggie. "Those three war-scarred specimens were our Governors. We're in for a beautiful picnic, I should think. In a nutshell, the fat is completely in the fire."

CHAPTER 3.

The Man for the Job!

AFTER Sir John Brent and his fellow Governors had paid a much needed visit to the bathrooms, and had reappeared looking more or less normal, they found Mr. Allington Wilkes awaiting them.

"Now sir," said General Milton aggressively, glaring at Mr. Wilkes, and tenderly dabbing his nose. "Perhaps you will be good enough to explain the appalling lack of discipline which appears to exist in this school?"

Mr. Wilkes did not lose his calmness, but his eyes hardened. The general's query was tantamount to a reprimand; for Mr. Wilkes occupied the position of acting headmaster, and he was in nominal charge of the school.

"If you will permit me, general," said Sir John, who had so far calmed down as to be coldly practical. "Mr. Wilkes will not deny that the scene we recently witnessed, and in which we unfortunately became involved, was lamentable from every point of view."

"Quite so," said Mr. Wilkes gently. "It was very unfortunate, indeed, that a game of cricket should be so marred—for I hold the opinion that cricket is the cleanest game in the world. The boys themselves, I can assure you, are very sick about the whole business——"

"Sick about it!" broke in the general hotly. "By gad, sir, you are taking this matter very calmly."

"If possible, I want to avoid a false sense of proportion," returned Mr. Wilkes. "The—er—fight was regrettable, but I beg of you, gentlemen, not to exaggerate the significance of it. I have no wish to disown responsibility, but the matter is one which can be dealt with promptly and justly."

"May I ask what your idea of justice is?" inquired Sir John bluntly.

"I have spoken with the boys concerned—boys of our own school, and boys of the River House School—and there is no doubt that the whole affair was just a hot-headed exhibition of school rivalry," replied Old Wilkey. "Certainly, the boys went too far. When I called for the names of the ringleaders, every boy answered. They all wished to share the punishment——"

"But this is nonsense," broke in the general. "You know perfectly well, Mr. Wilkes, that there must be ringleaders in

any such affair. What do you intend to do with these ringleaders? Expel them?"

Mr. Wilkes sighed.

"Do you think that the expulsion of half-a-dozen boys for a comparatively minor offence, would strengthen the discipline of the school?" he retorted. "No, sir, I have no intention of expelling any boy."

Sir John, who really liked Old Wilkey, looked uncomfortable.

"Mr. Wilkes, you will be good enough to leave us?" he said suddenly. "I desire to speak privately with my fellow Governors."

Mr. Wilkes bowed and retired.

"Weak as water," grunted Lord Walberry. "That's what's the matter with that fellow."

"Ever since Mr. Nelson Lee has been absent from the school things have been drifting, I am afraid," said Sir John Brent, in a troubled voice. "We felt that Mr. Wilkes, as Senior Housemaster, could take over temporary control. As a Housemaster he is entirely satisfactory—a fine scholar, a man with a human understanding of boys, and a great worker. But as headmaster—weak."

"We have evidence that the school needs a firm hand—and at once," went on Sir John. "Our only remedy is to change the headmaster. In this case it will be particularly easy, because there will not be the embarrassing business of dismissing anyone. Mr. Wilkes is really a Housemaster, and if we can appoint a stern disciplinarian, Mr. Wilkes will resume his old duties in the Ancient House, and there will be no ill feeling."

"Such strong men are difficult to find," said Lord Walberry. "In any case, it might be some months——"

"By gad!" ejaculated General Milton abruptly. "What about that fellow at Rydehouse? I was reading about him only last week. An extraordinary man. What do they call him? 'Fighting Kingswood,' don't they?"

Sir John Brent, with a new sparkle in his eyes, stroked his chin. Rydehouse College was one of the greatest public schools in the Midlands, and Mr. James Kingswood was a Housemaster there.

"It might be an idea," said Sir John slowly. "I've been very interested in Kingswood. An astonishing man, by all the reports; went straight to Rydehouse from Oxford, and he still holds the Amateur Heavyweight Championship of England."

"A fighter!" said General Milton stoutly. "And a fighter is what we need here, if these infernal boys are to be kept under control. Kingswood has been a tremendous success at Rydehouse. Why shouldn't we take a bold step and offer him the headmastership?"

In a calmer hour, the Governors might have pondered more deeply; but in their general indignation and alarm they favoured the scheme wholeheartedly. Sir John well knew that James Kingswood, owing to his

pugilistic and aggressive methods, had become known at the fighting schoolmaster."

"We need him now—this very week," said Sir John thoughtfully. "I am in agreement with you, gentlemen, that the sooner we can relieve Mr. Wilkes of his responsibilities, the better. I doubt if we can get Kingswood here until next term—"

"I'll tell you what," said the General eagerly. "Sir George Fulton is a personal friend of mine—he's Chairman of the Rydehouse Governors. That's why I know so much about this fighting man. I'm acquainted with Dr. Munroe, the headmaster, too. Let me ring him up."

"Now?" asked Sir John dubiously.

General Milton was essentially a man of action. He went straight to the telephone, and within ten minutes the call was through to Rydehouse, and the general was talking to the headmaster.

"I have no wish to stand in Kingswood's way, and I shall be only too happy to release him," said Dr. Munroe, after he had heard the general's fiery account of the trouble at St. Frank's. "In ordinary circumstances, Kingswood could not be expected to be appointed headmaster of such a school as St. Frank's for quite a few years. It is undoubtedly a wonderful opportunity for him."

"We need him at once—and that's the whole point, Doctor," said the general. "We are very grateful to you for your generous co-operation—Eh? Oh! Kingswood has just come in. Splendid. I'll ask Sir John to speak to him."

Sir John Brent took the telephone, rather scandalised at the precipitancy of all this. He heard a bluff, boisterous voice.

"Dr. Munroe has given me the good news, Sir John," came the voice. "Many thanks. Nothing I'd like better than to accept the appointment. When would you like me to come?"

"As soon as possible," replied Sir John. "Perhaps we could meet somewhere in London later in the week and you could then take up your duties here, say, at the beginning of next month."

"Why the delay, sir?" asked the boisterous voice. "You say you want me to come as soon as possible. I'll be with you this evening. Good-bye." And he rang off.

"Good gracious me!" said Sir John, mopping his brow. "You were perfectly right about that man, Milton! He's coming at once! Says he'll take up his duties in the morning. I've never been so astonished in my life."

CHAPTER 4.

The Fighting Head!

"LOOKS like big trouble, dear old fellows," said Vivian Travers soberly. "And all the fault of that cad, Wellborne," growled Handforth.

"Why blame Wellborne?" asked Church bitterly. "Why not blame yourself?"

The Removites were clustered disconsolately round the Ancient House doorway, in the evening sunshine. Tea was just over, but in view of the edict which had gone forth no junior boys were allowed out of their own Houses.

"That's a fine way to talk," said Handforth indignantly. "I swiped Wellborne because he cracked you over the head with that ball, Churchy, and all you can do is to blame me—"

"Oh, let's dry up about it," interrupted Gresham, with a weary sigh. "We all believe that Wellborne was at fault, but Church was hit by accident. You were to blame, Handy, for using your silly fists as you did."

While they were speaking they observed a light two-seater monoplane, with an enclosed cabin, gliding over the school buildings, with the engine throttled down. They now observed, with mild interest, that the machine was landing in the Half Mile Meadow, near by.

"Somebody for the school, I expect," said Potts listlessly.

Several of them raced away across the playing fields in the direction of its landing. As they arrived they saw a young man walk away from the plane.

He was a huge six-footer, broad and brawny in proportion to his height. He was clean shaven, and his rugged face was full of strength, his chin, almost square, jutted out like a rock. A pipe was clenched between his teeth, his soft hat was on the back of his head, and he carried a cap and gown.

"Anybody you want to see, specially, sir?" asked Handforth, running forward to meet the stranger.

"I want the Head's House, that's all," said the big man, in a booming voice.

"It's that building over there," said Handforth pointing.

"Good!" said the other. "What's your name, young 'un?"

"Handforth, sir."

"Form?"

"Remove, sir."

"Glad to meet you, Handforth—I'm Mr. Kingswood, your new headmaster."

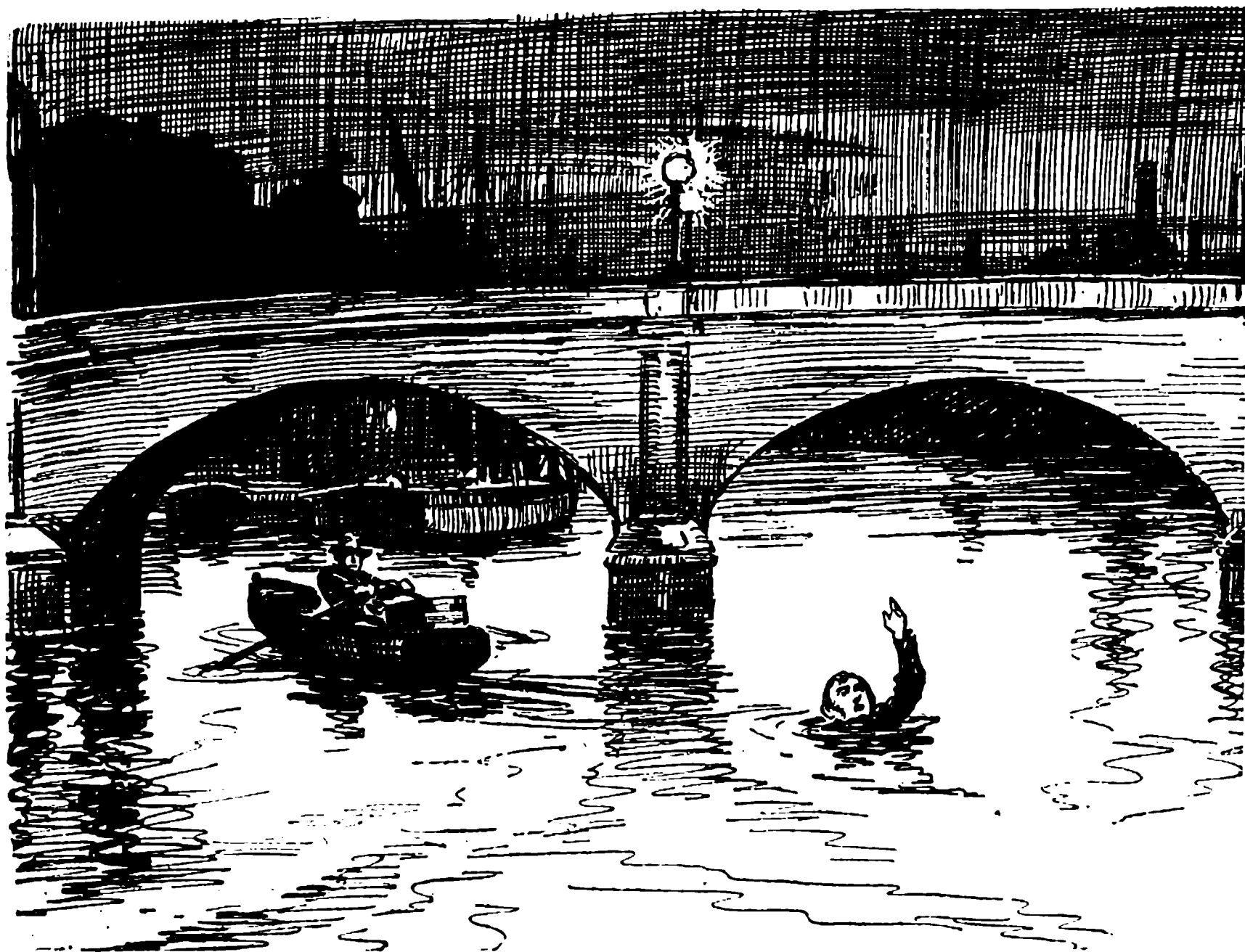
And the stranger strode on, leaving Handforth gasping. But only for a moment. Then he dashed helter-skelter back to bear the sensational tidings.

"Well, well," said Travers amusedly. "So that's the delightful little wheeze? Upon my Samson! And that Human Volcano is our new headmaster? Fighting Kingswood, amateur Boxing champion! Oh, my only sainted aunt! And the Governors have brought him here to lick us into shape."

(So Fighting Kingswood, the new headmaster of St. Frank's, makes his appearance in the school. He has come as a stern disciplinarian, and there are lively times in store for a good many fellows at St. Frank's. Don't miss next week's thrilling chapters.)

A Sensational Detective-Thriller Starring . . .

The MAN From



For years Edward Dalton, crook and gunman, plotted revenge. For years his bitter hatred towards another bit deep into his mind until he had only one thought, day and night—to “get” his enemy. The day and the opportunity came at last, and with diabolical ruthlessness he struck.

Here is a story of sensational adventure, deep mystery, and perilous thrills in which Nelson Lee, detective, Nipper, and Lord Dorrimore play heroic parts !

CHAPTER 1.

A Valuable Load!

TAMPALLO is a South American city with a future. It has also a very bustling present. It lies midway between Porto Vallo, the principal seaport of one of the biggest republics, and Montaneige, the capital.

It draws all its wealth from the fact that it is the great junction and clearing house for three systems of railways, which run like so many arteries out over the great

countries inland. For many years these railways were owned by rival companies, each bitterly antagonistic to its competitors, and the long fights, in courts and parliaments, over concessions and rights, had brought two of them to the verge of bankruptcy.

It was then that there arrived from England a tall, polished gentleman, shareholder in one of the concerns, who, working very quietly and thoroughly, gradually bought up interest after interest, until the day came when he was able to announce that he held the controlling interest in every line.

Nelson Lee, Nipper, and Lord Dorrimore, the Millionaire Adventurer!

CHICAGO!



Lord Ralph Amley was the name of the man, and within a year he had combined the three railways in such a way that from struggling with poverty they began to show dividends, and the building of fresh branches and additional stations went on apace.

The chairman of the combine had built for himself a beautiful home at Tampallo, and the town had good cause to congratulate itself on the fact. The British Government had recognised the value of this man, and had appointed him as their agent on many delicate matters.

Lord Ralph was what one might term the unofficial ambassador to that particular republic, and his hold over the Govern-

ment made him a powerful representative.

One bright morning he was seated in his large office that looked out over the great white square of Tampallo. Although he was head of the combine, and a rich man, Lord Ralph was never known to miss his office routine.

He sat now at his desk glancing at a pile of correspondence that lay in front of him. His fine face was lined and grave, and his hair was silver-grey. The eyes were deep and thoughtful, and in them the shadow of some melancholy seemed always to rest. The staff in the office knew and loved their head, as they called him, and his rare smile was worth trying to obtain

Presently a yellow form came under his fingers that seemed to have more than ordinary interest. He touched the bell at his desk, and a young man entered. It was Slater, Lord Ralph's private secretary.

"The bullion van has been sent down to Valo, I see," said Lord Ralph. "Have we had any notice concerning the arrival of the Warvale, yet?"

"A wireless message came yesterday, my lord," the secretary returned. "The Warvale expects to reach Valo on Thursday morning. Duncan thought it advisable to send down the bullion van at once."

"Just as well," said Lord Ralph. "There is special interest attached to the load that it will have to carry to Montaneige. I have been asked by the British Government to make all arrangements for its safety. I think I will trust the carrying out of my orders to you, Slater. It will be more or less a personal affair. The consignment is not by any means a bulky one, but it is extremely valuable. It is platinum—and a direct payment from our Government to the Republic. It is worth, I believe, over £100,000."

"No wonder they sent it in a cruiser," said Slater.

"There is a little secret history behind the deal," Lord Ralph continued, with a smile. "A certain foreign Power is anxious to get control over the Government electric works here. This consignment of platinum represents British efforts to forestall that desire. There is no reason why we should not succeed in keeping the other people out. It is a question of supply, and Seno Baffo is on our side."

Baffo was the President of the Republic, a capable man in his way, but there were undercurrents and influences always at work which made it necessary to keep a constant watch on the changing fortunes of the republic. Lord Ralph was silent for a moment.

"We are responsible for the platinum until it is actually handed over to the head of the electrical works at Montaneige," he went on. "The Government, of course, know that the platinum has been promised, but they are not to reveal its actual arrival until it is in their hands. Our rivals are moving heaven and earth to make Baffo sign a contract by which in return for supplies of platinum the republic will allow them to erect and run factories at Valo. It is the copper that they are after, and it would be smelting works that they would build. We must not allow that foreign Power to get its foot in here, Slater, and that is why you and I will have to see to it that no hitch takes place when the platinum is landed."

"I—I'll never take my eyes off it until it is handed over," Slater vowed.

The chairman looked up into the keen, healthy face, and smiled.

"It will not be very bulky," he observed. "Just an ordinary oak box that a couple of men can carry without difficulty. At the

present market price it is worth nearly eight times its weight in gold."

He looked at his watch, then rose to his feet.

"Come round and have dinner with me this evening," he said, "and we will make all our arrangements then."

Slater opened the door to allow the tall, slightly stooping figure to pass out of the office. Lord Ralph crossed the square and entered the Hotel London opposite, halting for a moment to chat with the manager. The chairman of the huge combine always made it a rule to lunch at the hotel, an example which most of the English business man in the city followed.

While Lord Ralph was talking to the manager, a car drove up to the door, and a tall bronzed man swung out from behind the steering-wheel. He entered the hotel, and behind him came a slim, very erect Chinese man-servant, without a scrap of expression on his Sphinx-like yellow face. They were both covered with dust, and had evidently travelled far. The tall white man crossed the lounge towards the booking office, then he chanced to look up and saw the handsome, silver-haired man eyeing him, a quiet smile on his lips.

"Well, Dorrimore! It is you, I suppose?"

The stranger came forward, quickly, holding out his hand.

"How do you do, sir?" he said, shaking hands with the chairman.

Lord Ralph's eye was twinkling.

"I had a letter from your people," he went on. "They said you'd come out to this quarter of the globe, and—and wanted me to keep an eye on you. That was six months ago, and this is the first time I've had the slightest chance of even looking at you. What have you been doing?"

CHAPTER 2.

The Plotters!

LORD DORRIMORE, the dare-devil young aristocrat who spent his time roaming the world in search of fun and adventure, chuckled.

"Oh, I've been leading a fairly tame life," he said. "I've been managing a ranch out at Santa Guala—right in the wilds, you know. It's been pretty good sport, but I—I got fed up with it."

"Meaning that you had a row, I suppose," said his lordship, dryly.

Dorrimore laughed. There was a great deal of truth in that quiet remark.

"Something of the sort," he returned. "But I also had another reason for coming to Tampallo. A friend of mine has been working for the Government of Chili, and he has just completed his job. He is coming down to Tampallo by train, and I'm going to run him along the coast in my car as far as Domingo." He looked up at Lord Ralph,

"I think you ought to meet him," he went on. "His name is Nelson Lee, and he is perhaps the greatest detective in the world."

The chairman of the company nodded his head.

"I have heard of him," he replied. "I would like to meet him, and I would also like to see a little more of you, Dorrimore. You must come up to my place. I can put you up there if you like."

Dorrimore shook his head.

"No, thank you," he returned. "That would mean 'keeping an eye on me,' I suppose? I'll be glad to drop in some time, though."

He swung across the lounge, and noted that the booking clerk was more than deferential to him when he asked for rooms. Anyone who could chat familiarly with the head of the railway combine was pretty sure to be well looked after in that hotel.

The car had been garaged at the back of the hotel, and Wung Foo, the Chinese servant, was not sorry to find himself in a place where all manners of food could be had for the asking. They had spent six months roughing it on a ranch—had been looking after the place in the absence of the real owner, and would still have been there had it not been for the little dust up that had taken place.

They had come in contact with two crooks, one named Dalton, who was trying to work a swindle. A fight had taken place, and Dalton had fallen on his own knife, badly wounding himself. He had sworn Dorrimore had tried to kill him.

Dorrimore could easily clear himself, but it would have taken time, and not wishing to hang about, he had packed up and beat it for another state, with his Chinese servant

He had made a beat straight across country, then had turned back slightly, heading for Tampallo. The car had been repainted, and a different number fixed on it, and Dorrimore felt fairly safe now.

Santa Guala was over four hundred miles away, and in another territory. A month had elapsed since the fight had occurred, and it was more than likely that his antagonist was out of hospital by now and probably out of the country as well.

Dorrimore, who had known Nelson Lee for some time, and, indeed had helped him on occasion in his work, had sent the famous detective a telegram, two weeks before. Nelson Lee had been busy, but had promised to see Dorrimore before he left South America, just for old times' sake.

As soon as Dorrimore found himself installed at the Hotel London he wired to Nelson Lee, stating that he would meet him at Tampallo; and having done that, the tall adventurer prepared to enjoy himself in the thriving town which seemed to be full of his own countrymen.

At five o'clock a messenger came to the hotel with a letter from Lord Ralph. It was an invitation to Dorrimore to come and dine that evening, and Wung Foo was

set to work to brush up the rather faded dress suit.

"We're getting civilised again, Wung Foo," his master observed, as he struggled with a stiff collar and a stud. "And I don't know that I like the process, exactly."

Wung Foo smiled blandly. Evening dress did not worry him.

Dorrimore left the Hotel London about half-past six, and Wung Foo, having nothing to do for the rest of the evening, went for a stroll through the crowded streets. He was passing a large verandah building when two men, seated at a small table, caught sight of his yellow, impassive face. It was just getting dusk then, and the elder of the two leaned forward and touched his companion on the arm.

"Are you satisfied now?"

The younger man nodded.

"Yes. That is the Chinaman, all right," he returned.

"And his master is here as well," the first man went on. "He arrived at the Hotel London this afternoon. It makes it awkward for us."

There was a moment's silence.

"We'll have to be careful. He may only be staying here for a day or so, but we must not let him catch sight of us or the game will be up before it has fairly begun," the elder man went on. "We're out for the biggest prize that has ever come our way. You and I have been together for six long years now. You were only a boy of fourteen when I took you away from school at Chicago. I had paid for your education, as you know, and I have educated you since then."

They smiled at each other.

"It has been an education, too!" Val Dalton returned, grimly.

The man known as Edward Dalton chuckled.

"Between us we have done very well," he added. "But this job that we are on now is in a class by itself. It means fortune, and, for you, revenge." His deep voice took a harsher note. "Revenge on the people who allowed your mother to die in a workhouse—to be buried in a pauper's grave—revenge on the class to which your father belongs—the wealthy governing class."

His listener looked at him.

"You have never told me who my father was," he said. "You promised to do that some day, Uncle Ted."

The eyes of the elder rogue glimmered.

"That day will come soon enough," he replied. "I have promised you revenge, and you shall have it. You and I are outlaws—never forget that. We live by our wits, and have lived well, so far. Have you ever wanted for anything?"

"No."

"I educated you, clothed you, fed you, and that education has gone on. In the old country I was known as a king crook; in Chicago, where I have lived for years,

I was a 'big noise,' and by heavens, Val, what you and I have done out here proves that you are quite fit to fill my shoes at any time."

They looked out at the thronged street. The well-fitting clothes and manners of the two men did not give any indication of the type of rogues they were. Tampallo did not know them, but there were many other towns not only in the great continent of South America, but in the States, that did. Edward Dalton and his young lieutenant were marked men in many of the small republics. From card-sharpping to highway robbery, every phase of unlawful life had been followed by them.

A thorough-paced rogue and criminal, the elder man had brought up the other into seeing with his eyes and acting as he acted.

"South America is getting too hot for us," Edward Dalton went on. "And this little business that we have in hand will just make a nice curtain for our movements here. You and I head for England, Val, and we'll take a tidy little fortune with us, if all goes well."

CHAPTER 3.

A Strange Influence!

LORD RALPH had just finished his lunch and he was back again in his office when one of his clerks brought him a card.

"Senor Enrico Valdor, Santa Guala," his lordship read.

The chairman of the big combine had made it a rule always to see a stranger who might visit him. He nodded to the clerk, and presently the door opened again and there stepped through the threshold a slim young man in quiet blue serge.

Lord Ralph had raised his eyes as the figure entered, and the golden sun from the window behind him fell full on the young face, with its well-shaped chin and deep blue eyes. The short crisp hair was of a light golden hue, and the forehead broad and deep.

The chairman of the company leaned forward, staring at the newcomer with steady, intent eyes. Over the lined face there swept a look of bewilderment, mingled with dismay.

"Lord Ralph Amley?"

The voice was clear and melodious. Lord Ralph saw the half-hesitating way that his visitor approached, and with an effort the chairman roused himself out of the fantastic vision that had come into his mind for a moment.

"Ye—yes. That is my name. Won't—you—won't you sit down, senor?"

Val Dalton seated himself. He had noted the strange look that had come into the other's eyes. To him that was another grim proof of the extraordinary powers of

his uncle and guide. Edward Dalton had warned Val of what might follow.

"Surely, you are English?"

Lord Ralph was holding himself in check, now. It was absurd, ridiculous, that the mere advent of this strange young man should set his nerves tingling and his pulses beating.

"I am half-English, I believe, my lord," Val began.

He told his story easily, just as it had been drilled into him. Brought to the ranch as a baby, treated like a son, educated by an English nurse, he had only just learned that the old senor who owned the ranch was not his father, was no relation. A friend had suggested that he ought to try and find out who and what he was, and had hinted that in Tampallo, a town full of Britishers, he might find someone able to help him. He had arrived that morning, and someone at the hotel had given him the name of his lordship.

"I don't want to trouble you, my lord," he added. "But I thought that you might be able to recommend a good firm in London with whom I might get into touch."

"You say that you were born in South America?"

"I think so."

"But you are not sure?"

"No."

The silver-haired man in the chair behind the desk was obviously ill at ease. His thin fingers drummed nervously on the desk in front of him. What was there in this young voice, these clear blue eyes, that made him feel distressed?

"Have you any papers concerning yourself?"

"I brought everything with me. They are now at the hotel," said Val Dalton.

Lord Ralph leaned back in his armchair.

"I—I am rather interested," he said, steadying his voice with an effort. "If you would let me see these papers I might be able to help you."

"I have an appointment this afternoon," the visitor went on, "but I shall be free about seven o'clock. If I could call at your house and leave the papers——"

Everything was working smoothly and well. His lordship rose to the bait just as Edward Dalton had prophesied.

"Come and dine with me," said Lord Ralph. "Make it eight o'clock. I shall be free for a few hours. We can look over the papers together."

Val rose to his feet at once.

"Thank you, my lord," he said.

He turned, and went across to the door at once. He did not see the arm that was suddenly outstretched towards him, and just as suddenly dropped.

"At eight o'clock, then," Lord Ralph called, and his visitor bowed as he went out.

Lord Ralph leaned back in his chair, and for a long, long moment forgot the present, and went back into the dark and turbulent

past. He had a skeleton in his private cupboard. He was piecing together again the one grim episode of his life—the tragedy of his earlier years, of which scarcely a soul knew, now.

He arose from his chair and went across to the window to look out over the sun-bathed square.

"But that was more than twenty years ago," he said, half to himself. "I had almost forgotten all about it, and now the sight of a young face brings it all back to me. It can only be a chance resemblance, but he certainly has the Claybrooke eyes and mouth. Perhaps some old ancestor of mine settled here ages ago. But it is certainly very interesting, and I will look into his papers. But I mustn't let these private matters interfere with my duties. The platinum arrives to-night!"

It was after eight o'clock before Val Dalton reached the big house on the hillside where his lordship lived. The house was rather isolated, standing in a well-kept garden, and screened by a high wall from the main road. As the young man entered the gates, there came to his ears a low hoot from a line of trees on the other side of the road, a signal which he understood, for he halted, and pretended to light a cigarette, allowing the flame of the match to illumine his face with its glare.

Another low note came to him, a proof that he had been recognised, then he hurried on up the wide drive and entered the house. Lord Ralph met him in the hall, and dismissed the apologies with a quiet smile.

"I have also had a lot of work to do to-day," he said, "and I find now that I will have to leave here earlier than I thought. I am going down to the railway about half past eleven. I could go with you as far as your hotel, if you liked."

The dinner was served, and afterwards the two men went into his lordship's study. Val Dalton suggested that they should open the long French window, and Lord Ralph remembered afterwards that his visitor manoeuvred so that the host should sit with his back to the window.

There was something in Val Dalton's manner that puzzled Lord Ralph. He seemed uneasy, restless, and answered the various questions put to him in a vague way. The papers which he produced were disappointing, and gave no real clue to his identity.

At about ten o'clock, Dalton suddenly rose to his feet. Through the window he had seen a flash of light appear for a moment, and the hour for which he had waited had arrived.

"It is very warm," he said, looking at his host. "I would like to go out on your verandah."

"By all means," Lord Ralph agreed. "It is much more pleasant out there."

He led the way through the window, and Val Dalton walked slowly along the

verandah with Lord Ralph by his side. They halted at the end of it, and stood for a moment gazing down on the lighted city below. In front of the verandah was a screen of small bushes, and Lord Ralph fancied he heard a rustle from them.

He leaned forward, turning his head slightly. As he did so, the man by his side suddenly closed with him, placing a wad of some soft material over his mouth. Taken by surprise though he was, the chairman of the railway made a grim fight for it. He was wedged against the rail of the verandah by his assailant, and as he drew breath he realised that the wad over his mouth was saturated with some drug.

There was a crash from the bushes, and a thick-set figure leaped up on the verandah, wrapping his arms round the struggling chairman, and pulling him back over the rail. One last effort was made, then Lord Ralph, drugged and helpless, collapsed into the arms of the man below.

"Right, Val!"

A hoarse voice sounded, and the young criminal snatched the drugged wad away and thrust it into his pocket. He was breathing heavily, and he caught at the rail of the verandah to steady himself for a moment.

"Hurry up!" the harsh voice urged. "You know what to do."

Val Dalton turned and sped back along the verandah, entering the study and crossing towards the door that led into the hall. Opposite him stood a stand on which hung his coat and soft hat. There was another coat and hat there, and he lifted them all from the stand. As he did so, a servant appeared from the back of the hall. The cool nerve of the young criminal did not desert him then.

"Lord Ralph and I are going into the town," he said. "He is waiting in the garden, and I am not sure whether this is the coat he wears."

The servant came forward and nodded his head.

"That is quite right, sir," he said, looking at the hat and cloak.

He held the door of the study open, allowing Val to pass through.

"His lordship said he would be late to-night," the man went on.

"Oh, yes, so I believe. He is walking with me as far as my hotel, and then he goes to the station, I think."

His quiet self-possession carried him through, and a moment later he was crossing the verandah and hurrying on through the garden, heading for the roadway.

CHAPTER 4.

Mysterious!

WHEN he emerged from the gates, Val Dalton caught sight of a hooded vehicle standing beside the trees opposite. As he appeared the quick purr of a motor engine sounded, and the vehicle began to move forward, slowly.

Val Dalton leaped into the road and darted towards the back of the motor van, into which he climbed with his heap of clothes. The van picked up speed and went off up the hill, climbing with a speed that indicated the power of the engine.

The first act in the great crime had been performed, and Dalton, his nerves tingling, clung to the canvas-covered hood of the vehicle for a moment, then a voice came to him.

"How did you get on?"

The younger crook explained what had happened with the servant, and a grim chuckle reached him. Edward Dalton was seated on the floor of the van, and by his side lay a limp, inanimate form.

"That's all right," he said. "You've done well. When we get to the top of the hill you can jump off and wait for us. Keep your eye on the road, although I don't think we will be troubled."

"What are you going to do with——" Val Dalton hesitated.

"Don't be afraid," came the sneering retort. "He will only be kept in a safe place, if that is what you mean. You'll have to get that white-livered sentiment out of your body one of these days."

The younger man leaned back and did not reply. The van reached the top of the hill and Val Dalton slipped out of it, to take to the trees and wait there, watching the road that ran down to Tampallo, while the hooded motor van went on.

The young criminal listened to the sound of the engine, and it seemed to him that it stopped rather suddenly, as though it had reached its destination somewhere on the plateau beyond the trees. A long wait followed, then once again the drum of the engine sounded, and presently the watcher saw the dark shadow of the van appear. It slowed down as it reached the trees, and the figure at the wheel leaned forward.

"Come along."

Edward Dalton was driving, and the younger man stepped into the roadway and swung up into the vacant seat beside the driver.

"We haven't much time to spare," the harsh voice whispered. "The bullion van is due now—it might be at the siding by this time."

The van tore forward and turned sharp to its left when it reached the town, following a narrow street, and finally halting before a low roofed hut that stood by itself on the edge of some waste-ground. Beyond the hut could be seen the dark outlines of the telegraph posts running beside the railway.

"Quick!" said Edward Dalton. "No time to waste now."

He slipped out of his seat and hurried into the hut, followed by his younger companion. When the door was closed and

locked Edward Dalton lit a lamp and stood it on a small table on which had been placed a box containing grease paints, a wig—a wig of silver-grey hair.

"Sit down in front of the light," the elder man said, and Val Dalton took his seat.

The eyes of his companion glimmered as they looked down at the tanned young face. His throaty chuckle rang through the hut as he set to work. There seemed to be some hidden joke in the matter, for Val Dalton heard him laugh and mutter to himself as the gradual transformation began. The silvery wig, a few lines round the wide blue eyes, a shadow or two beneath them; a wrinkle on the broad, high forehead, lines around the mouth, and a slight tinge of pallor on the thin young face.

Lord Ralph's coat, that Val Dalton had lifted from the hall-stand, was donned, and the soft hat drawn down over the wig. Then, with a quick movement, Edward Dalton thrust a mirror in front of his confederate.

"Who is that?" he asked.

The young man in the chair stared at his reflection in the glass, and a gasp of amazement broke from his lips. It was as though he were looking into the eyes of his late host; the face staring at him was line for line, feature for feature, that of Lord Ralph Amley.

"You—you're a wizard!" he broke out, in amazement.

Edward Dalton stepped aside and was looking down at his companion with hard eyes.

"It was not so difficult as it might have been," he said, slowly. "The background was there. I had only to fill in." He stopped and moved away as though afraid of having said too much. "Better get a move on," he added. "You know what to do. Don't lose your nerve, and the trick is done. I have made every arrangement and taken every precaution. Carry out your share now, and in half an hour we'll be heading for the coast with the biggest haul of booty that has ever been lifted in this country for twenty years."

A sudden step brought him to Val Dalton's side.

"Don't forget that this is where you start to have revenge," he added, swiftly. "We go straight to England, and when we are there I will find out more about you. We will be rich men, and able to carry out any vengeance that may come into our minds."

He saw the blue eyes light up fiercely.

He opened the door and pointed towards the telegraph poles.

"The siding is just about three hundred yards from here," he said. "Go along by the permanent way and wait until you hear my whistle, which will mean that the coast



With nerves and muscles tensed, the young bandit stole nearer to the siding. Quite clearly he could see the bullion van and the sentries on guard. If he could get past them the treasure in the van was his !

is clear. Then go straight in and do your bit."

Val walked out into the darkness, and his companion stood for a time looking after the tall, slender figure until it had vanished.

"Yes—you'll do, all right," the elder man muttered to himself. "You're the living image of Amley."

A sudden clang of metal drew his attention to the railway. Far down the line he saw the headlights of an engine appear. He looked at the engine for a moment, his brows drawn together, then recognising the squat funnel and lights, a quick smile crossed his lips.

"The bullion van," he muttered, on the alert at once.

He watched the engine and the dark van swing past and over the points that led to the siding, then, extinguishing the lamp. Edward Dalton hurried out of the hut and entered the van again, starting it up and heading for the line of sheds that marked the end of the siding.

He stopped the van some distance from the shed and went forward on foot. Rounding a corner he caught sight of another vehicle standing close to one of the gates. There was a lamp above the gateway, and Dalton saw two figures standing beneath it—two figures in uniform—the police escort for the Government van.

The watcher slipped through an opening in the sheds and waited for a moment. He could see the platform of the siding and he watched the engine and its single van come to a halt there. Dalton crept along beside the shed until he was as near to the platform as he dared to go. He saw the door of the bullion-van open and a man appeared, followed by two others carrying a square box between them. They crossed the platform and entered a small shed. As they vanished Dalton flung back his head and sent a low, clear whistle into the quiet night, then, turning round, he darted towards the gateway where the Government van was standing, and slipping behind a pile of boxes, he knelt down—and waited.

CHAPTER 5.

The Missing Bullion!

"WELL, here I am, Dorrimore," cried Nelson Lee, the world-famous detective, as he stepped from the train at Tampallo. "I promised to see you before leaving for England, and here I am. But I warn you I can't stop more than a few hours."

"You're wrong for once," replied Dorrimore, with a smile. "You are staying here for longer than you think."

"But I can't afford the time to hunt pleasure with you," said Nelson Lee, jocularly. "Our passages are booked on the liner—"

"All right, old son," retorted Lord Dorrimore. "We'll discuss that later. Where's your luggage? And didn't you have Nipper with you?"

The porter had brought out Nelson Lee's luggage—one suit-case.

"Yes, Nipper was with me. But he's taken the rest of our luggage straight on to Domeigo, and is waiting for me there. I called here to see you, as I had promised, but I don't expect to spend any time at Tampallo—simply can't, in fact."

Dorrimore instructed the porter to take the detective's case to the waiting car, and led Nelson Lee across the platform into the station-master's office.

"Has Lord Amley rung up?" he asked.

"He's on the 'phone now, senor," said the station-master.

Dorrimore crossed to the telephone and put the receiver to his ear.

"That you, Lord Ralph? Good! I've got him—Nelson Lee, I mean. He's with me now, and I'm bringing him straight along. It doesn't inconvenience him in the least, and he'll stay in Tampallo fifty years, if you want him to do so."

Dorrimore laughed as he replaced the receiver and looked at Nelson Lee. The detective shook his head at him.

"You're the limit, Dorrimore," he said. "What's the game?"

Dorrimore came forward, and he and Nelson Lee left the office together.

"You'll learn soon enough, old son," he said. "There is a case for you here, and it is just one of the dandiest mysteries that ever happened. You'll be full of it as soon as you hear the full details, and apart from all that you'll be doing your country a good turn at the same time. I knew that that was the sort of thing that would fetch you at any time, so that is why I butted you into it."

Nelson Lee found the car waiting outside. Wung Foo was there and beamed at the detective blandly. There was also another young fellow present.

"This is Slater," said Dorrimore, introducing the young secretary. "I'm giving him a lift to the office. He's one of the principal witnesses for the prosecution, so to speak. Come along."

It was only a short run to the offices of the railway company, and Nelson Lee and his companions were led at once into the private room where Lord Ralph awaited them.

A great change had come to the white-haired chairman. His face was hollow and drawn, and he seemed to have aged terribly. Dorrimore introduced Nelson Lee, and his lordship motioned to the detective to be seated.

"Have you given him any idea of what has happened?" he asked.

Dorrimore and Slater shook their heads.

"Then I think that you had better tell your story first, Slater," said his lordship. "Just give him word for word what happened so far as you were aware."

Slater bowed, then turned to Nelson Lee.

"Last Thursday I was sent to Porto Valo to receive from a cruiser a box containing a quantity of platinum valued at £100,000," he began. "The box was handed to me with all the seals intact, and I personally attend to its transfer from the cruiser to the bullion van. The two men who were with me, and myself, remained in the van during the journey from Valo to Tampallo, with the box under observation the whole time."

Nelson Lee was leaning back listening quietly. The young secretary told his story in a simple, straightforward way that pleased the detective.

"When we reached Tampallo, I saw to the transfer of the box from the train into the strong-room, and my two men were left on guard at the door. I received a message stating that the Government representatives were waiting at the gates, and I went down to speak to the men in charge of the party, a captain of the Republican Guard. He and I returned, accompanied by the two policemen who were with him. We entered the platform, and on reaching the strong room, found that—found that—" He hesitated for a moment, and Lord Ralph nodded towards him.

"Go on," he said. "Just state exactly what you thought."

"We found that Lord Ralph had appeared on the platform, and was waiting inside the strong-room. He had dismissed the two men who had returned to the bullion van. His lordship appeared at the door and beckoned to the captain of the Republican Guard who went up to him. They spoke for a few moment, then the two policemen followed his lordship into the strong-room, and came out with the box. It was examined on the platform, and all the seals were just as I had left them."

"The captain ordered his men to take the box down to the waiting Government van, and his lordship ordered me to go with them to Montancige to receive the official receipt. I went off as ordered, reached Montancige about two o'clock in the morning, got the receipt and caught the early train back to Tampallo. I took the receipt

up to Lord Ralph's house and left it on his desk in the study. It was then about eight o'clock in the morning, and his servant told me that his lordship had not returned home that night."

Again Slater came to a halt, glancing at his chief. The chairman made no sign, and the secretary went on again.

"I was rather tired, then, and I went back to my rooms and had a few hours sleep. It was about noon when I came down to the office here, to learn that the Government officials had just communicated with us, stating that the box had been opened, and that the contents were simply pieces of coal. I—I went up to his lordship's house to make a report, and found that he had just returned. He was in the study when I entered, and was holding the official receipt in his hand."

Lord Ralph turned to Nelson Lee.

"The truth of the matter is that I was never near the siding that night," he said, slowly. "Someone impersonated me—some cool rogue whom I rather fancy had made all his plans beforehand—a young man calling himself Senor Enrico Valdar."

"I've got something to say on that point presently," Dorrimore put in, grimly.

His lordship gave Nelson Lee a brief account of what had happened during the earlier part of the night.

"I do not know what happened to me after I was drugged," the chairman went on. "It was dawn when I came to my senses again, and found myself lying in a small hut. I had been bound hand and foot, and there was a gag forced between my teeth. After a struggle I succeeded in getting the gag out, and I shouted once or twice. A policeman heard me and released my bonds; and I then discovered that I had been carried into one of the outhouses behind the police barracks."

A grim look came into his eyes.

"I think that that fact in itself suggests the manner of men who handled the affair," he added. "I was only about fifty yards away from the courtyard where the police parade every morning when changing duties. The rascals had chosen their prison very subtly, for it is extremely doubtful whether the police would ever have dreamed of making a search so near to their own headquarters."

Nelson Lee nodded his head.

"There is certainly a touch of originality about that," he said.

"I came back to my house and found the official receipt on the desk, just as Slater had left it. For the moment my anxieties vanished, for I thought that the receipt proved that everything was all right. My servant told me that the young criminal who had passed himself off as Valdar, of Santa Guala, had taken my hat and coat with him, and there is no doubt but that he used them to make his masquerade more convincing. Anyhow, to cut a long story short, the platinum has been stolen—spirited away

from under the eyes of its guardians—and if you can solve the problem, Mr. Lee, it will be an achievement worthy of your great record."

Lord Ralph turned to Dorrimore.

"I have to thank Lord Dorrimore to what he has done," he added. "For it was his discoveries that first enlightened me to the true character of my visitor."

Dorrimore took up the running, then.

CHAPTER 6.

Clues!

"I FIRST met Edward Dalton and his nephew at Santa Guala," he explained. "Where I was running a ranch for Senor Enrico Valdar, and these two rogues turned up with a false tale of arranging to buy the place. Well, I fancy I have told you in my letters, Leo, how that fraud was discovered, and how I handled the elder of the two criminals and had to clear out in consequence. Well, I came here and waited to meet you, as arranged. But on my way to the station I met Slater, and what he told me sent me in to Lord Ralph. As soon as he mentioned the name of Senor Enrico Valdar, I guessed at once that it was my two enemies who had been at work, because the real Enrico Valdar had not yet arrived in this country."

He looked at Nelson Lee for a moment.

"Those two rogues must have armed themselves with some of the paper and cards from the ranch," he explained. "That would not have been difficult."

Lord Ralph smiled.

"They were very thorough," he said, with a grim tightening of his lips.

"You are sure that the box contained the platinum when it was handed over from the cruiser?" the detective began.

"The seals were intact," Slater said. "Of course, I did not open it to see. It had come all the way across the sea in the safe in the captain's cabin."

"Where is the box now?"

Lord Ralph arose to his feet.

"It was brought here this morning," he said. "I might say that the Republic officials are rather annoyed about it. They seem to think that the whole affair is an effort at trickery on—on our part. That is to say, they suggest that the platinum was never sent off at all, and the whole matter of the consignment was simply a ruse on the part of perfidious England to gain time."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You see, there are cross currents here, and our enemies already know what has happened," he added. "They are working the trick story for all it's worth. The Government factory has been waiting for the stuff, and there is, of course, a great deal of annoyance displayed."

He had reached the huge safe set in the wall, and he opened it now and drew out the iron-bound box. It was not by any

means a big one, and he swung it into the centre of the room, beckoning to Lee.

"Here it is, just as it was received by me," he said. "You will notice that the lid has been opened, but the contents have not been removed."

Nelson Lee knelt beside the box and began to examine it. The examination seemed to be quite cursory, and when he arose to his feet he was holding one of the lumps of coal.

"I think we can prove that perfidious England was not perfidious in this case," he said grimly. "This box was never made in England, and this coal never came from there."

His lordship leaned forward. Nelson Lee held up the piece of coal and pointed to the peculiar grey grain that ran through it.

"That is what is called 'brown coal,' or lignite," he said. "I have never heard of it existing in England, where only the true bituminous and anthracite is found. Your lordship must know what I mean. It is used here in factories and workshops, but not on the railways."

Lord Ralph's keen face was all attention now.

"You are right, and yet it never occurred to me," he said. "That fact in itself proves that the box must have been tampered with after it had landed in this country."

Nelson Lee's eyes were hiding the ghost of a smile. He glanced across at Slater and

saw the quick protest on that individual's lips.

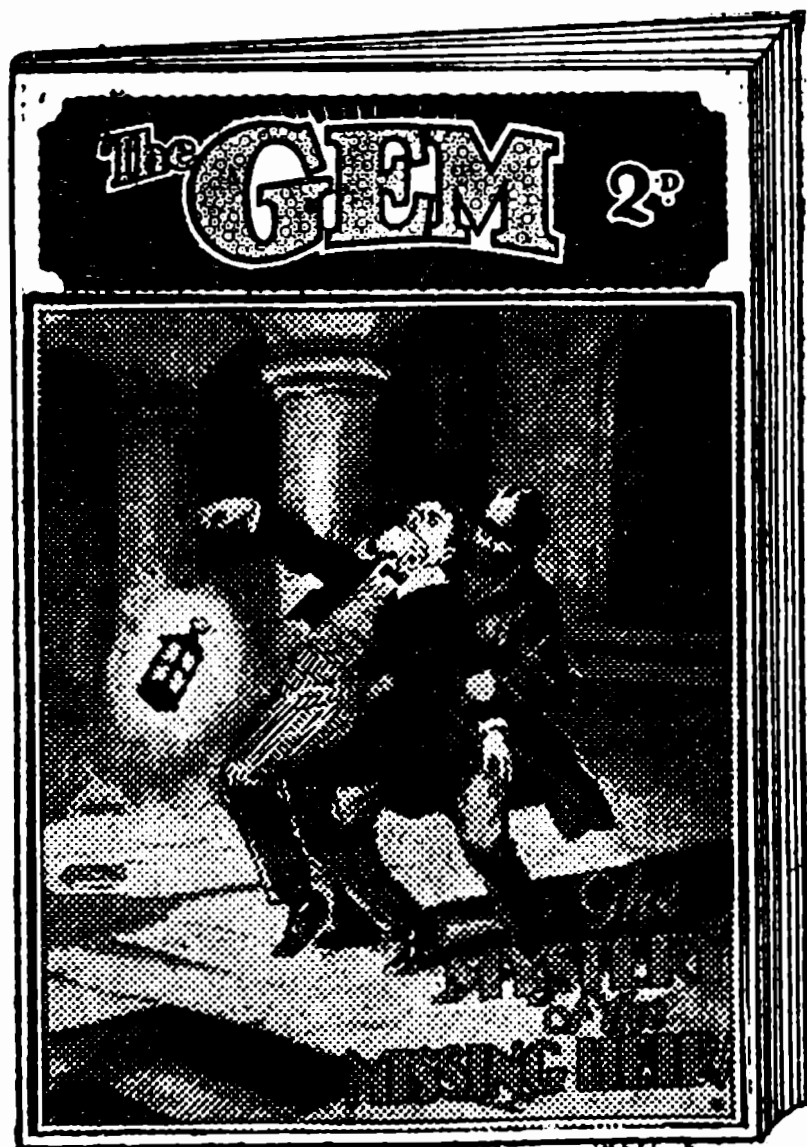
"I don't think that the original box was tampered with at all," was his quiet reply. "This box, my lord, is a copy; no doubt made exactly from the pattern of the original one. And no doubt the description must have been sent across to this country as soon as the other box was on board the cruiser. It suggests that there was a gang, or, at least, confederacy, at work."

He had been looking round the room, and presently he saw what he wanted—a stout steel bar standing in one corner. He tilted the box over and set to work on one of the iron bands. A few powerful efforts saw the band raised completely from the wood. Nelson Lee pointed to the smooth surface beneath the band. It was as white and unstained as the uncovered part.

"Had that box come from England it would have shown traces of rust under the iron band," he said. "The original must have been made at least two months ago, probably longer. This box has not been made longer than a week at the outside. Look at the iron and the screws. They are quite bright, and the holes made by the screws are not even tarnished. Even in this country a screw leaves its traces inside a month."

There were other points which Nelson Lee's quick eyes picked out. The wood, the method of dove-tailing, a dozen little

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points that only a trained brain would have alighted upon. But long before he finished his explanations, Lord Ralph and Slater displayed a keen relief.

"I will take this box to Montaneige to-day," his lordship said. "I am convinced that the officials think that I have lent myself to this business. The captain of the Republican Guard swears that it was I who spoke to him, and the two policemen have also sworn that they were led by me into the strong-room and told to lift the box from the floor and carry it out to the van."

"They have been questioned, I suppose?" Lee asked.

"Yes. I had the chief of police here yesterday with the two men."

"And there was only one box in the strong-room?"

"I thought of that," said his lordship slowly. "The strong-room is only about nine feet square, and was quite empty when Slater saw the box placed in it, and left his two men on guard."

"These two men are quite trustworthy, I suppose?"

"Absolutely," said Slater warmly. "They have been in the service of the company for years, and have handled a lot of valuables—from gold to precious stones."

Nelson Lee was silent for a moment.

"I will have a word with them later," he said.

Dorrimore smiled to himself.

"That settles it," he thought. "He's on the case, and I'm going to put my money on him! If it is humanly possible to get at the truth of this business, he's the man to do it!"

Yet that afternoon when he and Nelson Lee met at the hotel the detective had to admit that the case still baffled him. He had cross-questioned the two men who had been left in charge of the strong-room, and had also questioned the railway employee in charge of the siding platform. They had been unable to cast any light on the affair. The two guardians swore that they had not moved from the strong-room until ordered to do so by the man whom they still seemed inclined to believe was Lord Ralph. They had gone back into the bullion van, and at Lord Ralph's orders the driver of the engine had started away from the siding to take the van back to its place in the sheds.

The man in charge of the siding swore that he had never left the platform, and had never been more than a dozen yards away from the door of the strong-room while his lordship was inside. He had watched the two policemen enter the strong-room and come out with the box between them. He had heard his lordship order Slater to accompany the Republican Guard officer and the escort to Montaneige. Then, when the party had moved off, his lordship himself had locked the strong-room door, and had handed the key back to the railway employee, ordering him to leave it as usual at the office when he went off duty in the

morning, which order had been duly obeyed. The man vowed that his lordship had gone off along the railway line heading for Tampallo, and that was the last he saw of him.

"Where is the loophole?" said Nelson Lee slowly. "There must be one somewhere, and I mean to find it before I leave!"

CHAPTER 7.

Nipper With Nothing to Do!

DOMEIGO is a seaside resort, and its long stretch of silver sand, its pleasant, land-locked bay, and its tree-clad cliffs certainly make it an ideal place for the tired South American from the hot, arid plains to come to for a holiday. There is always a breeze at Domeigo, a fact duly advertised on the posters, and the sea is blue and fresh and health-giving.

Yet, despite all these attractions, there was one solitary individual in Domeigo who found the place anything but pleasant. It was exactly two o'clock on Saturday afternoon, and Nipper, who was living at the Riviera Hotel, had received a laconic wire from Nelson Lee:

"Held up at Tampallo. Dorrimore and I will try and join you as soon as possible. Get all luggage together and wait for us."

It was that last sentence which troubled Nipper, for most of the luggage was at the railway ready labelled for the homeward voyage. From Domeigo a fast tug went out to meet the great liners homeward bound, and Nelson Lee and Nipper had already booked their places in the boat next due to leave, the Rio Castle. It was due to reach Domeigo on the following Monday. But Nipper had carried out Nelson Lee's instructions, and their pile of luggage was now stored at the hotel.

"It looks as though we were going to miss the Rio," Nipper declared. "And that will mean at least another week in this rotten country. I've had enough of it, and thought the gov'nor had, too. What the deuce has Dorrimore been up to?"

He knew that Dorrimore was at the bottom of the new scheme in some way or other, for Nelson Lee had been looking forward to the homeward trip just as eagerly as Nipper.

"It must have been something pretty big to have held him up at all," Nipper thought.

Mooning about on the beach was not the pastime that the energetic youngster cared for, but there seemed to him to be nothing better to do. He moved away from the seawall, however, for the army of beggars and musicians had just commenced to make their usual raid on the wealthy pleasure-seekers, and Nipper was in no mood to listen to their whining pleas.

He started off along the beach, and presently found himself climbing a winding path

that led up into the woods. Half-way up the path he reached a tiny plateau in which a little chalet stood. There was a sign outside stating that refreshments could be obtained, and, what was more to the point, that "English was spoken" there.

Nipper climbed the broad wooden steps, and took his seat at a small table. A slim, dark-eyed girl came out to attend to him, and Nipper, who had been rubbing up his Spanish during his stay in South America, spoke to the girl in her native tongue. He ordered tea, and made a careful selection of cakes from the menu.

The girl seemed to accept his Spanish as being the native brand, and lingered beside the table, chatting to him. A voice from the house drew her away at last, and presently Nipper heard footfalls behind him, and three men emerged from the back of the veranda, and went towards one of the tables. Nipper glanced at them, a look that was returned with interest by the short, thick-set man who seemed to be leader of the trio.

The young detective, in his spotless white suit, with the broad red cummerbund and wide sombrero, was typical of the native youth. Nipper's lean young face and black eyes also helped to hide his real nationality, and the sun had burnt his fair skin into the true mahogany shade of the South American.

There was a clatter of teacups, and the slender waitress appeared. She went up to the table and began to arrange it. Nipper was leaning back in his chair, looking out across the blue bay, when an unmistakably English voice sounded.

"Is he a native of these parts?"

"Oh, yes, senor," replied the girl. "It is not difficult to see that."

Nipper knew that they were discussing him, and for a moment he felt annoyed; but he made no sort of sign, and heard a laugh sound in a younger voice.

"I think we are safe enough," it said. "If he were English he would not dress up in that rotten style."

Again Nipper kept his temper. The reason that he had donned the typical dress lay in the fact that the rest of his clothes had been packed for going on board ship.

The waitress had retired now, and the three men drew up to the table.

"We must get away to-night," the voice of the leader sounded. "You had plenty of time to get a full store aboard, captain, and if you haven't—well, that's your own look-out. We won't trouble you to take us to England. The run to Jamaica is good enough. We can pick up one of the mail-boats there, but we've got to start at once. The sooner we get out of this country the better we shall like it. What do you say, Val?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm ready to go now," he returned.

"Where is the Viroflamme?" the leader asked.

The captain pointed out to the left towards the cliffs.

"You can see her from the end of this road," he explained. "She is lying about half a mile from the shore. I've had steam up since last night." He leaned forward. "One of my men is living in a hut below the cliffs," he went on. "Only a bathing hut, really, but I took it for a month—thought it might come in handy. You could get your traps along there at any time, and my man could look after them for you. I left a ship's lamp in the hut, and when you are ready just light it and wave it in front of the hut until you get an answer from me. I'll send a boat for you at once, then."

"You won't have to wait very long," the leader put in. "Keep a look-out for us as soon as it is dusk."

There was a scraping of chairs, and the men arose. They had only just sipped at the tea, and to Nipper it was obvious that the meeting had been a pre-arranged one. He watched the three figures pass across the veranda and go down the steps and then along the little plateau. The captain went off to the left up the path, while the other two turned and went down, following the track Nipper had used from the beach.

A moment later the waitress appeared and hurried to the table with a little cry of dismay. Nipper swung round and looked at her. He saw her pick up one of the greasy South American dollar bills, and he smiled at her.

"Thought they had gone without paying, senorita?"

Nipper had forgotten himself for the moment, and spoke in English. The girl's eyes opened wide.

"Oh, then you do speak English?"

"I am English," he said. "Those fellows would be mad if they knew. Who are they, anyhow?"

She shook her head.

"I only know the captain," she replied. "He has been coming here very often, asking for letters. His ship is in the bay. To-day he told me that friends were coming, and he waited for them this afternoon. They only just arrived ahead of you, senor."

"I don't suppose you know where they came from?"

"No, senor; but a letter came this morning for the captain—from Tampallo."

Of course, it might only have been a mere coincidence, yet it was strange that Nipper also should have received a message from the same town over two hundred miles away, and something urgent was keeping Nelson Lee at Tampallo.

Ten minutes later Nipper found himself standing on the top of the cliffs, deliberating what to do. He had followed the route taken by the captain, and from where he stood he could see the squat sturdy lines of a small tramp steamer riding at anchor in the tiny bay below.

The cliff shelves gradually, and Nipper followed the winding footpath that led down

to the beach. To the left he made out the square hut nestling under a great boulder. There was no sign of the captain nor of any other living person on the beach, but as he looked again at the steamer he saw that a small skiff had just drawn up under its broad beam, and he saw a figure climb the companion ladder and disappear.

"The captain is on board," the lad muttered with a grim smile. "Now, I wonder what I ought to do?"

There was really very little difficulty in deciding that point, if it were viewed by an ordinary mortal. Nipper had nothing whatever to do with the matter, and his obvious move was to go back to his hotel and not attempt to interfere in what did not concern him. But he felt that it did concern him.

"They have got into trouble and are anxious to clear out," thought Nipper. "If I could only get on to Tampallo I might be able to find out what it was. But I haven't time to do that and watch them at the same time."

He looked down at the hut again, and into his alert mind there came a scheme—a mad scheme. Nipper made a quick descent, and keeping the hut between him and the vessel he reached the little shelter and entered it.

CHAPTER 8.

A Dare-devil Move!

THE hut was sparsely furnished. A couple of chairs and a table, a rough mattress with a heap of rugs and a few cooking utensils. On a hook behind the door hung the ship's lamp, and on the other side of the hut was a narrow door, which proved to be the entrance to a little cupboard in which coke fuelling had been stacked.

"Not a bad sort of hiding-place," thought Nipper. "It's not likely they'll be wanting a fire as they're anxious to be off."

He made a quick search, but found nothing to interest him. He was standing in the centre of the hut when he heard the murmur of voices, and a leap saw him inside the little cupboard, with the narrow door pulled to, leaving just a small gap through which he could see the interior of the hut.

He was only just in the nick of time, for a moment later the door of the hut opened and someone entered, lifting the lamp and lighting it. The youngster peered out through the gap and saw the figure of a seaman in a blue jersey and dungarees. He was holding the lamp above his head, and a couple of men came into the hut carrying a small iron-bound box.

They were the thick-set leader and his young companion. They placed the box on the table and stood aside. The other men entered carrying suit-cases, which they deposited on the floor of the hut. From the way in which the men were breathing

Nipper judged that the burdens had been carried some distance. The sailor with the lantern eyed the collection of packages a moment.

"I guess it's going to be a tight fit to get all them things in the skiff," he said.

"We have another trunk to come," laughed the leader. "If it cannot be done in one trip we shall have to make two trips of it."

He nodded towards the men who had carried the cases.

"Go back and bring the other," he said, in Spanish, and the men turned and went towards the door of the hut, then the leader looked at the seaman.

"You'd better go with them," he said. "It is getting rather dark now, and the lantern might help them a bit."

He produced a stump of candle and lit it, placing it on the table. The sailor and the two natives left the hut, then the younger man crossed to one of the chairs and seated himself.

"We're getting through all right," he said, lighting a cigarette, and glancing at his leader, who nodded.

"We have taken no risks," the other replied. "There is only one thing that troubles me. There has been no official report of—of our little affair yet. I cannot understand that."

"You made inquiries?"

"Yes. I got on to a friend at Tampallo, by 'phone. He says that no public report had been made, yet, although his spies have told him that the trick had been carried out all right. It seems to me that Lord Ralph is making the Government officials keep quiet for the time being. But there was one item of information that I did not like at all. That fellow Dorrimore is still in Tampallo, and was with his lordship on Friday. Then he went to the station to meet a friend—an Englishman—and Slater, his lordship's secretary, went with him. Then they all visited Lord Ralph."

The younger man drew a sharp breath.

"That sounds like trouble," he said. "Dorrimore knows all about us—knows that the real Enrico Valdar of Santa Guala could not have been in Tampallo—"

"Yes," agreed Edward Dalton. "There is no doubt that he has told Lord Ralph that much. But it does not make much difference. We have a good start, and a day's delay means a lot. By the time they have traced us here—if they are clever enough to do that—we shall be on our way to England. And the sea is a very difficult road to search."

He was standing beside the table, and he put his hand on the small iron-bound box.

"We hold the full trumps so long as we have this," he said. "And it will be a bold man who takes it from us."

The listener in the little fuel cupboard felt a thrill run through his veins. He had heard every word of the conversation, and

although he had no idea what the box contained he was convinced that it was valuable. And he guessed in a flash who it was Dorrimore had met at the station and taken to see this Lord Ralph.

"That's what's happened to the guv'nor," the youngster decided, with a grim smile. "By James, this is a bit of luck! I've walked smack into the case that the guv'nor is investigating at Tampallo. I wish to goodness there was some way of letting him know."

He leaned back in his hiding-place, his brain hard at work. If these men got away that night it would be next to impossible for anyone to catch them again. The Viro-flamme would steam into the trackless Atlantic and vanish. The rogues might change their plans a dozen times once they were on board. Nipper had heard the captain state that he had enough coal to take them wherever they wanted to go. If he could only check their going—make them waste time—but how?

He had moved away from the narrow door, and suddenly became aware that there was a current of air striking against the back of his neck. Nipper turned round and stretched out his hand. His fingers touched the back of the narrow cupboard, and he found that there was a sliding panel there, through which the fuel was placed in the cupboard from the outside.

"Why the dickens didn't I think of that before?" he muttered, moving forward cautiously.

He found the grooves of the panel and began to draw it upward. A gap of fifteen to twenty inches was revealed—a narrow opening—but wide enough to allow Nipper's young shoulders to slip through. He wedged the panel up with a piece of fuelling, then returned to the inner door again. Edward Dalton was seated on the table, while Val had risen to his feet and gone to the door.

"They're taking a deuce of a time," the younger man said, over his shoulder. "That last trunk was rather heavy. I think we ought to go along and give them a hand."

Edward Dalton apparently agreed for he followed Val out of the hut, locking the door behind them.

"Not taking any chances," thought Nipper, with a grin.

He waited for a moment, listening intently, then, rising to his feet, stepped out into the room. His mind was made up, and he never even stopped to think of what might happen to him. He was alone, single-handed, against a gang of ruffians who would not hesitate at murder. But he had to delay their departure somehow.

"You're dashed heavy," he muttered, as he tried the weight of the iron-bound box. "But—I think I can manage you."

He little dreamed that he was carrying a small fortune as he lifted the box in his young arms. Nipper was really as strong as a young bull, and he managed to carry the box across the room and into the fuel



Val drew the heavy bullion box from its hiding-place and wrenched at the cords with feverish haste. So intent was he that he did not see the figure that crept up behind him with upraised club.

cupboard. Then, squeezing himself through the panel, he dragged the box after him, and, after a struggle, managed to get his shoulder underneath it and rise to his feet.

It was one of the finest deeds of his career. His young limbs trembled beneath the weight, and he felt the sharp edge of the box cutting deep into his shoulder; but he stuck to his burden, and went on, through the darkness, across the beach, heading away from the track to Domingo, until he found himself in among the huge boulders which marked the end of the little bay.

Wet with sweat, and hardly able to drag one limb behind the other, Nipper came to a halt at last. The box was lowered into a gap between the boulders, and the youngster—more dead than alive—flung himself down beside it, fighting for breath.



CHAPTER 9.

In His Enemy's Hands!

NIPPER lay on the sand for the best part of ten minutes, beat to the wide, as he termed it, then a hoarse shouting from far down the beach gave him the alarm. The rascals had discovered what had happened. Nipper managed to lift himself into a sitting position, and he stared through the darkness towards the hut. He saw a yellow light appear and swing to and fro. The youngster turned his eyes seawards and caught the answering flash from the tramp.

Leaning against the boulder, Nipper watched the grim drama. First the boat came from the tramp, then went scurrying back again, and later three well-manned

boats came down to the beach. Figure after figure leaped out, and Nipper could see the thick-set form of the leader as he marshalled the crew of the *Viroflamme*. Now and again the hoarse voice came to him, and he smiled to himself at the anger in the notes.

More lights appeared, and at last there was a string of men, with lanterns and pocket torches at intervals of a few yards, strung out all along the width of the beach. When the line was complete, Nipper saw them commence to move—in his direction. He had singled out Edward Dalton, and watching the thick-set figure he realised what had made the leader take the right track. Behind the hut was a stretch of sand, and on the soft material Nipper had left his deep tracks as he moved off with his weighty burden.

Fortunately for him the sand ended about half-way along the beach, and the rest of the ground was of gravel, intermingled with boulders. Nipper was well up among the huge rocks, and he knew that the search would have to develop into a slow, boulder by boulder one before his hiding-place was discovered. He leaned back watching the lights as they came on. He knew that every moment saw his strength returning to him, and there was yet time enough for him to start to hide. He looked round into the crevice in which he had dropped the box, and shook his head.

"Can't take you with me this time," he decided. "They're bound to find you, I'm afraid—but, by James, I've given them a rare old scare, and have put back their start for at least three or four hours, anyhow."

He heaved a sigh.

"If only I could get into touch with the gov'nor," he added, "but it can't be done, and I've had a good shot at stopping 'em."

In the near future he was to realise that his effort had had greater effect than he imagined. Nearer and nearer drew the wavering line. They were in amongst the boulders now, and the pace had slackened to a crawl, for every dark rock had to be searched, every hollow examined. Nipper could see the faces of the searchers as they moved to and fro, and picked out the features of the captain, and the younger man as well as the leader.

At last the moment came when it seemed advisable to make a move for saving himself. Nipper had noticed that a long, razor-like ledge of rock ran down from the edge of the boulder-strewn beach right into the sea. He had mentally decided that this would be his safest line of retreat. Had he ventured to go on over the boulders, to attempt to scale the cliffs, he might have been seen by some of the men, and one or two of them might be armed.

It was much safer to take to the sea, although it meant a long swim. He rose to his feet, stretched himself, then removed his shoes, tying the laces together and slip-

ping them over his neck. In a moment he had gained the ledge, and crouching behind it began to work his way along until he found himself wading into the warm waves. The sharp ridge of rock seemed to run out for a great distance, for Nipper found himself swimming at last with the great barrier still between him and the beach.

He must have swum out to sea for the best part of half a mile before he cleared the reef; then when he did so he found himself in a current that swept him away with it. His grim struggle with the box of platinum had taken a great deal of strength, and he was not fit now to fight against the strong pull of the waters. He allowed himself to be carried onward, then suddenly he saw a shaft of light striking across the smooth sea. He began to tread water for a moment and looked in the direction of the light, and a gasp of surprise came from his lips. Ahead of him lay the bulky hull of the tramp.

He had been carried down by the current to where the *Viroflamme* lay at anchor in the deep water, and the trend of the current was still towards the vessel. Chance had played a curious trick on the youngster, and his indomitable spirit quickly saw a method of taking advantage of that fact.

He was almost exhausted, and it was very doubtful whether he would have been able to swim ashore, even if the current allowed him to do so. Here, however, was a means of escape, and also, perhaps, of furthering his scheme. A few strokes carried him to the right, and he allowed himself to be swung along until he was under the bows of the tramp. He began to swim then, keeping to the port side, where he had seen the companion ladder. In a few seconds he reached the flight of wooden steps, and he drew himself up and slung there for a moment, while he took a quick survey of his surroundings.

Shorewards he could see the lighted hut, and following the beach he picked up the lights carried by the search-party. They had all grouped themselves around a certain spot, where the boulders lay, like so many fireflies, and Nipper, making a quick calculation of the distance, realised what the scene meant. The box had been found, and the searchers were gathered round it.

"It will be at least another hour before you get aboard," the youngster muttered. "And by that time I ought to have had a real good look round. If I could only get into the engine-room, and do something there, I might register a victory after all, and stop this ship leaving here for days."

He began to climb the companion, and on reaching the grating at the top, dropped on his hands and knees. He crept on board, keeping a sharp look out, and at last he caught sight of the solitary figure of a sailor standing in the bows, watching the shore.

"Judging from the size of the search-party the captain must have taken pretty well all his crew with him," Nipper decided. "And that is all the better for me."

He rose to his feet, and watching his chance ran across the deck towards an open galley below the bridge. But before he could gain cover the sentry turned and caught sight of the running figure.

"Say—What the thunder—"

He rushed at the youngster, and Nipper didn't stand an earthly chance against his burly opponent. A great hammer fist shot out and caught the young detective on the side of the head.

Nipper was sent over with a crash, and his slim figure measured its length on the deck, his head crashing against the hard bulkhead.

A thousand stars seemed to dance in front of his eyes, and he remembered no more for the moment.

CHAPTER 10.

Walking the Plank!

"THERE may be nothing in it, Mr. Lee," said Slater, Lord Ralph's secretary. "But I thought it worth while coming round to see you, and I have brought the driver with me."

It was almost eleven o'clock on the Saturday evening, and Dorrimore, who was tired out with his long day's work, had gone to his room in the hotel an hour ago. Nelson Lee had sat up to have a final pipe, and Slater had been ushered into the room by a waiter.

The secretary's report was to the effect that one of their engine-drivers, who was on the Tampallo-Domiego line, had stated that he had seen a motor-van hood lying beside the roadway just outside Domiego. It had already been discovered that a hooded van had been seen in the vicinity of the siding after the Government motor-lorry had gone off.

"Domiego is certainly a very likely place for the robbers to head for," said Nelson Lee. "And anyhow it might be worth while going there, for my assistant is there now with all my kit."

He went down into the lounge with Slater, where he found the engine-driver waiting, and questioned him thoroughly. Judging from the time it was first noticed it would appear that the hood might have come from the van that had been seen near the strong-room of the railway siding in Tampallo.

"It's the first direct clue to the direction in which the thieves have flown," said Nelson Lee. "Obviously I must go to Domiego without delay. It will be quicker by car, I suppose."

"No," said Slater. "This is not England, and not even Europe. The road is difficult and dangerous by day. At night it is doubtful if you could travel at speed. I have

spoken to Lord Ralph, and have his written permission to let you travel on a light engine should you wish it."

"I do wish it," said Nelson Lee, making up his mind. "I must get to Domiego without delay. The thieves may board a vessel there and slip through our fingers for good and all."

Armed with credentials signed by Lord Ralph himself Nelson Lee was driven in record time through the night to Domiego, where he arrived soon after two in the morning. He reached the Barcelona, acting now under the advice from Slater. The Barcelona was a small hotel standing on the broad road behind the beach. A night porter answered his ring, and Nelson Lee fired off a few hurried questions.

Lord Ralph's letters of introduction proved an open sesame in that part of the world. The Barcelona was on ground belonging to the railway combine, and being the only hotel of any size in Domiego rejoicing in a garage, anyone with a motor of any sort would naturally put up there.

Nelson Lee was lucky that night. The porter told him all he wanted to know. Two men with a van had arrived there that afternoon. They must have come through some sort of storm, for the hood had been torn from the vehicle. The van was even then in the garage behind the hotel, but the men had gone, taking with them their baggage, some of which had been sent on from Tampallo three days ago. It just happened that the night porter had been on duty when the luggage was removed, and he was able to indicate to Nelson Lee what had happened.

The luggage had been carried along the beach by the cart-road that wound round the other bay. He had been told that the visitors were going on board a tramp vessel that had lain at anchor in the smaller bay for over a week.

"When did they go?" asked Nelson Lee.

"The last trunk was removed about ten o'clock, senor," came the disconcerting reply.

Four hours and a half had elapsed, and it seemed a certainty that the men had got away by now.

"Which is the road to the other bay?"

The porter came out to the door of the hotel and pointed to the sea.

"You cannot go by the road now, senor," he returned. "It is high tide, and the road is under water."

"I must get there!" the detective replied, grimly.

The railway official who had travelled with Nelson Lee had evidently been warned as to the importance of this stranger, for he came forward and whispered something to the porter, and the man's attitude changed.

"There is an electric launch that the senor could use if he knows how to run it," he said. "It is all ready, and belongs to the hotel."

"Excellent! Where is it?"

Ten minutes later Nelson Lee found himself seated in a roomy launch, a half-decked,

seaworthy craft that seemed to be built for speed.

"I will leave a deposit——"

The railways official smiled, and shook his head.

"That will not be necessary, senor," he returned. "The Barcelona is built on ground belonging to the railway company, and you are our chairman's friend. That is quite enough."

Nelson Lee switched on the current, and the powerful propeller began to turn. The launch glided away into the dark sea, and Nelson Lee, following the instructions given to him by the porter, began to steer towards the headland that guarded the smaller bay. He rounded it at last, and entered the other bay. A breath of satisfaction broke from his lips. Ahead of him he saw the lights of a steamer.

"In time, after all!" he muttered.

The launch ran without a sound, the faint beat of the propeller only causing a slight vibration in the solid hull. It drew near to the steamer, then Nelson Lee noticed that the black hull was turning slowly, until the bows were heading seaward. At the same time there came to his ears the clank of the anchor chain as it was raised.

"She's off!" he thought.

He altered his course slightly, and the launch went pounding along at right angles to the course of the Viroflamme. It was very dark out there in the landlocked bay, and Nelson Lee was keeping his eyes fixed on the hull of the tramp. Suddenly a great shaft of light appeared amidships on the seaward side of the vessel. It lit up the space as clearly as though it were day, and the detective, watching intently, saw a strange scene.

The light was streaming through a wide black gap in one of the alleyways, and through it there was thrust a broad plank. Behind the plank Nelson Lee could distinguish a number of figures, and presently one slim shape was thrust forward on the plank.

The launch was now moving at full speed, and was within three hundred yards of the Viroflamme, but the tramp had also gathered speed, and the smoke pouring from her stack hinted that she would soon outpace the launch.

"He—he's blindfolded!"

Beneath the fierce light of the electric arc-lamp Nelson Lee had caught sight of the figure on the plank. A white handkerchief was tied over the eyes, and the hands were strapped to the sides, while round the body was arranged a lifebelt.

"What on earth does it mean?"

He had not long to wait. From the group behind the plank someone reached out and gave a thrust to the figure on the plank. It turned its head as if to speak to the group of men behind, then swinging round again, the slim figure began to walk out on the plank!

Out and out, until at last it was clear of the gap, with only the weight of the plank to

support it above the sea. Another step and yet another. The plank began to tilt. Then, gathering itself together, the slim figure leapt clear into the air, and went down feet first into the waves!

A gasp of horror broke from Nelson Lee's lips, and he rose to his feet to mark the spot where the body had taken the water. The great light from the Viroflamme vanished, and Nelson Lee heard the clang of iron doors as they were closed over the gap, then the tramp steamer swung a point eastward again, and the little launch began to dance and curvet in its wake.

Nelson Lee checked the speed of the launch to a crawl. He had already taken the bearings of the spot where the blindfolded figure had vanished, and now he was leaning over the side staring ahead of him. He saw it at last—a round black object just above the surface of the waves. The launch glided on until it was close to the floating head and shoulders, then Nelson Lee, leaning forward, thrust his arm beneath the swimmer.

"All right," he said. "I've got you."

There was a gasp, a splutter, then—

"Guv'nor!" cried the voice of Nipper.

Nelson Lee almost allowed the lad to slip away from his hold, then he grabbed at him again, and a mighty lift saw him dragged into the little space behind the half deck. Nelson Lee tore the bandage from his eyes, and so, for a long moment the two sat in the bottom of the launch, and stared at each other through the darkness. Nipper was about to laugh, a half hysterical desire, then he remembered that that might be dangerous. The Viroflamme was not yet out of earshot, and he knew now the desperate type of rogue who was on board there.

"If you'll loosen my hands, guv'nor, I'll get rid of this straight waistcoat," he said, and Nelson Lee cut the cords.

NIPPER was rubbing his lacerated wrists. He was still deep in the amazement of this wonderful meeting, and for a time he was silent and tongue-tied.

"Well," exclaimed Nelson Lee at last. "This is the limit! How the dickens did you get on that ship?"

Nipper drew a deep breath, then began his story, how he had overheard the men talking at the teashop, all that had taken place in the hut, how he had tried to help by delaying the ship, only to be collared by the sailor guard.

"And, guv'nor," he concluded, "when the others came aboard there was a fine old row. I just refused to say a thing. The captain recognised me as the chap who was at the teashop, and I was put down for a spy, at once. The thick-set man would have killed me there and then, but the young fellow wouldn't stand for it, and in the end I had a lifebelt round my waist—just to give me a dog's chance. Even then, that thick-set chap meant me to fall off the plank hit the side of the ship and get mixed up with

the propellers, but I guessed his game, and jumped clear. That's how it happened, guv'nor," he said, "but I didn't expect to be picked up by you."

Nelson Lee had listened in silence to the story, and his eyes, travelling across the dark seas, picked up the hull of the Viroflamme racing away into the darkness.

"You have had a lucky escape, old man," he said, "and I think it was due to that younger man, whoever he is!"

"So do I, guv'nor," Nipper agreed. "He went below, or he would not have even allowed the others to tie my hands when I went over."

The launch had been drifting with the tide, and its bows turned towards Domingo now. Nelson Lee switched on the power again, and the drone of the propeller began anew.

"They have got away with their booty," he said, "and I don't think we have much chance of getting at them for the moment. This Edward Dalton is evidently a clever rogue, and he won't take any chances. He pretended to give you a chance with that lifebelt and bandage, but, in reality you hadn't the ghost of one. The tide would have carried you out to sea, and you would have drifted on helpless until the end. There was diabolical cunning behind that, Nipper, and it makes me all the more determined to get even with the man."

Nipper was chafing his bruised wrists.

"I've got to pay him out as well, guv'nor," he returned.

The launch was racing bravely towards the town, and presently it cleared the headland and turned shorewards.

"In one way what has happened is satisfactory," said Nelson Lee. "It settles our movements for the time being. We would only waste time stopping here, Nipper. Our next move is to get the first boat home."

Nipper grinned in the darkness.

"Then, by James, I haven't done so badly," was his inward comment. "For we'll fill those berths we booked after all. I'm just hungry for a sight of old London town, and a shake of the paw from that old slacker, Wolf. Yes, it was worth doing, after all."

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CHAPTER 11.

Buyer and Seller!

NELSON LEE had ways and means of finding out what was going on in the underworld, amongst the habitual criminals and receivers, and when it was rumoured that someone was trying to get rid of a lot of platinum he busied himself tracing the rumours to their source, with a view to getting a sight of the man who was so anxious to sell.

His inquiries took him at last to the Rat-Pit, otherwise known as the Targoff Social Club, in the East End. Its usual assortment of guests had gathered in the rather gaudy chamber behind the discreet

doorway, when a man in quiet blue serge entered and took his seat at one of the tables.

The Targoff numbered its members by the hundreds, and many of them were known to vanish for a year or two at a stretch; but as the entrance fee was also the only subscription that a man needed to pay to make him a life-member, it was not always easy to know when a newcomer was a stranger or otherwise.

The manager always sat behind a little desk at the doorway, and if he passed a man as being entitled to enter, there was no need for anyone else to trouble on that score. Nelson Lee had given the name of a man who the police had made use of, and as 'Thomas Ratcliffe, Lee had been allowed to sign the book and pass into the famous, or infamous, room.

Outwardly there did not seem to be much wrong with the place. The room was dotted with small tables, at which a number of men were seated, some having supper, others playing cards. On a small platform at one end a tired-looking pianist was drumming out a music-hall ditty. Nelson Lee seated himself near the platform. There was a door on the left, through which he had seen a member stroll just as he entered.

His first glance round had been sufficient to tell him that no one answering the description of either of the two Dalton's was there. A waiter came forward and took his order, and Nelson Lee leaned back in his chair. From where he sat he could watch the main entrance to the big dining-room, and also the other exit beside the platform.

Presently Lee began to pick out the various types of faces in the room, and at last his interest centred on a man who was seated alone at a table opposite. A cup of coffee stood at his elbow, and he was smoking a cigar. His eyes, restless always, turned at every movement to the door. Nelson Lee took stock of the man slowly, and he noticed that the man's fingers were stained brown, from tip to knuckles.

"Probably a chemist of some sort," Lee thought. "Might be a photographer, but I hardly think so. That stain suggests more than a casual use of nitrate."

A waiter passed the man, who asked him a question; and although Nelson Lee could hear the words, a certain thick guttural note in the tones gave him a clue to the speaker's nationality.

"I wonder if you and I are waiting for the same men?" was the quick thought that flashed into the detective's brain.

The answer soon came. The main door was opened, and there entered a thick-set figure at whom Nelson Lee had only to glance once. Nipper and Dorrimore had both given Nelson Lee very accurate and careful descriptions of the two rogues, and the dark brows and grim features of Edward Dalton were not easy to mistake.

He was alone, and he halted as he entered the room, as though he was unaccustomed to the place. Beneath his thin overcoat Lee saw that he was in a dinner jacket and white shirt. A waiter came forward, and Dalton spoke to him. The waiter turned and indicated the man with the stained fingers. Nelson Lee, bending over his plate, smiled grimly to himself.

He watched the meeting between the two men. It was fairly well acted, and might have deceived a casual witness into believing that they were old acquaintances. But Nelson Lee noticed the swift, measuring glance that was exchanged between the two, and his shrewd brain hit on the meaning of that.

"Buyer and seller meet," he thought.

A few moments later the two men passed him and vanished behind the door next to the platform. Nelson Lee waited for a moment, then signalled to the waiter.

"I think I'll go into the card-room," he said. "I will have coffee later on."

He left the table and went through the doorway beside the piano platform, finding himself in a narrow corridor that ended in a flight of stairs. There were several rooms on each side of the corridor, and Nelson Lee looked into each as he passed. They were all empty, just as he had expected. Most of them were bedrooms, for the Targoff was also a residential club.

Upstairs, Nelson Lee found himself on a landing with a door on each side of him, and one straight in front. He halted for a moment, and listened. The murmuring of a deep guttural voice helped him to make his choice. The two men had entered the room in front, and Nelson Lee turned and entered the one on the right.

It was fitted up as a card-room, but Nelson Lee only glanced at the green-baized table as he passed across towards the window. Opening it, he looked out, and in the darkness he saw a broad ledge running along from his window towards the end of the house. He knew that around the corner there would be another window that would allow him to glance into the room occupied by the two men. Far below he could see the dingy backyard packed with empty cases. It was a good forty feet drop, and he shook his head as he slipped out through the window.

"I must not take any chances," he decided.

He closed the window behind him, and then pressing close to the wall, he began to move along the ledge. The house was a very old one, and the ledge was made of solid granite, a good twelve inches wide. It gave him a very fair foothold, and he reached the corner swiftly, and halted there for a moment to take his bearings. Ahead of him a shaft of light was streaming out from a window. It smote a track through the darkness, and alighted on the slanting roof of the house next to it. Nelson Lee measured the distance between the two

houses, and judged it to be about sixteen feet.

He moved on along the ledge and reached the lighted window. There was plenty of room for him to kneel down and creep the last yard. Nelson Lee halted beneath the window ledge, then raised his head cautiously and looked into the room. Dalton and the man with the stained fingers were seated opposite each other at the small table. The elder rogue was listening to the other man. It seemed to the detective that there was a storm brewing, judging from the expression on the sinister features of the rogue.

On the table lay a sheet of paper and a scrap of grey metal, a thin wedge of platinum. Once the stranger placed his finger on the stuff as though to emphasise some remark.

"Haggling!" the detective muttered grimly.

Suddenly he heard the voice of Dalton raised in anger. It came to him through the closed window.

"My price has been set, and I don't intend to alter it," the harsh tones cried. "Take it or leave it—just as you please."

He pushed back his chair and had risen to his feet, his face dark with anger. Nelson Lee saw the other man lean forward, and he evidently made some hot reply. What it was Lee never knew, but with a sudden bound Dalton had leaped across the room, and in another moment his hands were at the stranger's throat, and they reeled across the table together. The table, a fragile affair, gave way beneath them, and the crash of their fall came clearly to Nelson Lee's ears.

The detective drew away from the window and straightened himself up. A glance into the room revealed the fact that Dalton had pinned his man to the floor, and was holding him there, his fingers tight around the thick throat. Lee heard the bang of a door, followed by a rush of feet, and knew what was going to happen. The noise of the fight had been overheard, and half of the inmates of the club and staff were rushing to the scene.

He drew back from the window and waited. A loud knocking sounded, followed by a crash, as the door of the room was forced open. Another cautious glance proved that the room was full of excited men. Dalton and his companion had been dragged apart, and they were being forced out of the chamber struggling like wild beasts to get at each other again.

Nelson Lee watched the excited throng press out through the doorway again, and a grim smile crossed his lips. Watching his chance the detective waited until the last man had vanished, then reaching out he lifted the lower half of the window and leaped lightly into the room. He darted to where the table lay in a heap on the floor and made a quick search. The scrap of platinum and a couple of sheets of paper

were discovered and crammed hastily into the detective's pockets. Then he arose and turned towards the door. As he did so he heard the staircase creak, and the harsh voice of Edward Dalton.

"It's the papers," it said. "I'll have to get them—"

Nelson Lee waited to hear no more. With a swing he had turned, and a leap saw him out of the opened window. As his figure vanished the door was flung open again, and Dalton and his late adversary, followed by the bull-necked man, who was really the proprietor of the Rat-Pit, came into the room.

"I'll swear I heard someone—the window—quick!"

Edward Dalton rushed across the room and leaned out of the window. For a moment his eyes, unaccustomed to the darkness, were blinded, then he picked out the shape of the detective flat against the wall, moving away towards the corner of the house. An oath broke from the man's lips, and he slipped his hand into his pocket, whipping out a revolver. As he drew back the trigger the click came to Nelson Lee's ears.

"Don't shoot, man!" the proprietor shouted as he leaped towards Dalton and tried to clutch his arm. But already the rogue had levelled his weapon, and—crack! The shot rang out, and a puff of blue smoke came back into the window hiding the scene for a moment.

"You fool! You'll bring all the police in the district down on us, now!" the bull-necked man declared, his face black with anger.

Dalton was leaning out through the smoke and his eyes were fixed on the ledge. As the smoke cleared he saw that the ledge was no longer occupied, and a savage smile crossed his lips as he turned towards the room again.

"What's below here?" he asked.

"The entrance to the backyard," the proprietor said. "But if your man has gone down there it won't be safe for you to try and find him. The police will be here before you can get—"

"Will they? We'll see about that. He's got the platinum and my papers, and dead or alive, I'll take them back from him!"

In another moment Dalton had swung himself out of the window, and the proprietor and the man with the stained fingers saw him suddenly reach out for the rainpipe that ran down over the edge of the ledge. The thick-set figure swung clear, and Dalton began to lower himself swiftly, passing down the wall with the agility of a monkey. The ledge hid him from view for a moment, and the two watchers drew back from the window. From somewhere near there came the blast of a police whistle. Nelson Lee had not ventured into the Rat-Pit recklessly, but had arranged to have a party of police within call!



Nelson Lee urged his boat nearer to the steamer. Now he could see the plank that had been thrust out. Suddenly the figure of a boy, bound and blindfolded, was pushed forward. Then, with unfaltering steps, the slim figure began to walk the plank ! It was Nipper !

"There it is!" the Rat-Pit owner gasped. "The police! They'll be here in a moment!"

He closed the window with a bang, and darted across the room, followed by the other man, very crestfallen and sheepish. The police whistle was answered by another, and yet another, until it became apparent that they were all converging on the cul-de-sac in which the club stood.

Edward Dalton heard those warning signals, and knew only too well what they meant, although he had not heard them for years. The flagstoned passage into which he had dropped was not much more than twelve feet broad, and he turned and began to search along it. It was not until he found himself in the backyard beyond the house that he realised the truth—his victim had somehow or other escaped him. There was no trace to be found of the man in the passage.

CHAPTER 12.

Forging the Links!

A CURSE came from the rogue's lips when he realised his mistake, and he turned to hurry down the passage again, when suddenly from in front of him came a flash from a policeman's torch. He saw the uniformed figure behind the glare as it came slowly forward. Whipping round, the rogue darted into the yard and looked about him. He saw the windows of the club, but he knew it would be madness to attempt escape in that direction. Behind the yard stood a wall a good twelve feet high.

Dalton rushed towards it, found an empty packing-case that gave him a foothold, and from it, with a cat-like spring, the criminal reached the top of the wall, and peered down on the other side, to find himself looking into the black waters of the canal. Close to the wall was a long string of barges,

moored to each other. Dalton glanced back over his shoulder, and saw that the policeman was now in the yard—and there were two more with him!

It made longer odds than the desperado cared to tackle, and laying himself flat on the wall, the thick-set man swung over until he was hanging by his arms, then, pushing off slightly, he allowed himself to slide down into the greasy sluggish waters.

He had hardly vanished before there dropped into the yard, from the house on the right, a dishevelled, gasping figure, which darted up to the policeman with the torch.

"He's got away!" cried Nelson Lee. "Over the wall—the canal! Quick, I saw him!"

Nelson Lee's escape had been brought about by his studying the position beforehand. He had heard the click of the trigger, and had leaped for the house opposite just as the revolver cracked. The bullet tore a hole through his sleeve as he shot out across the gap, to land in a heap on the roof.

He had scrambled over the tiles and had found a skylight, through which he descended to a window on the first floor, from which it had been easy to leap down into the yard.

"It is Mr. Lee, I suppose?" the constable asked.

"Yes, come along!"

They pelted across the yard and shinned up the wall. The policeman levelled his light on the water below, and swept it slowly down the line of barges. There was no sign of Dalton.

"I'm afraid he has——"

"Listen!"

Nelson Lee caught the man by the sleeve, and they leaned forward. From the right there came the faint sound of a splash, such as a swimmer's right arm might make as it moved through the water.

"You take charge of this," said Nelson Lee, and slipped out of his coat. "There's something in the pocket that is very important. I'm going to have a shot at——"

He stood up, and with one bound launched himself into the canal. In another moment he had risen to the surface, and swimming down to the right as fast as he could go. On the opposite side was a row of lamps shining above the railings that divided the canal from the narrow street that ran beside it. Nelson Lee, swimming strongly, suddenly caught sight of the head and shoulders of a man moving ahead of him. The swimmer was making for the opposite side, and Nelson Lee spurred to reach him.

He saw the swimmer gain a flight of steps and scramble up them, then another mighty effort landed the detective at the steps, and he leaped ashore, rushing up the stone steps, and gripped at the wet arm of his quarry.

"I—I ain't done anything, mister!"

The wet figure swung round, and Nelson Lee found himself looking into a pinched and wizened face, a very different type of countenance to what he had expected. For

a moment the detective was silent with annoyance, then he shook the thin arm.

"What's the game—quick!"

His captive, a thin, weebegone creature, trembled.

"You chucked me off the barge, didn't yer?" he said. "I wasn't doing no harm, mister."

Nelson Lee released his hold, and looked back up the canal. The string of barges was a good fifty yards away, and he realised that he had been tricked by the astute rogue. Dalton had climbed on one of the barges, and found this vagrant there, and had thrown him into the canal—a brutal ruse that had succeeded only too well in leading the detective astray.

He turned and eyed the dripping figure in front of him, then suddenly Nelson Lee slipped his hand into his wet pocket and drew out a few shillings.

"Go and get your supper and dry your clothes," he said. "It wasn't your fault, as you say."

The eager way in which the thin fingers close over the coins and the stammered thanks that followed Lee as he turned to walk back up the narrow street beside the canal told him that at least one individual had cause to be thankful that night, which was more than the detective could be. Yet, that night adventure was to prove the turning point of the case, for two hours later, Nelson Lee, Nipper and Lord Dorrimore, in the chambers in the Gray's Inn Road, were deep in a new problem which a few lines of writing on one of the sheets of paper that Nelson Lee had obtained, had opened up to them.

"Battersea Parochial Cemetery, hours 9 to 4. Number 104, left corner, nearest the roadway."

Then, lower down in the same handwriting:

"Route: Harrow Road, Great North Road. Branch off at cross-roads above Balford, first to left. Eldesley."

And again, underneath that:

"Miss Hannah Chard, Fir Cottage."

Three distinct notes jotted down, evidently, to be handed to someone for reference. What did they mean?

"The parochial cemetery is where they bury the paupers, gov'nor," said Nipper slowly. "What the deuce has that got to do with—with platinum, and—and this desperate game?"

"I know Eldesley," Lord Dorrimore put in. "As a matter of fact, it belongs to Lord Ralph Amley. It is part of the Claybrooke estate. A handful of houses, and a big mansion on the hill about sums it up."

Nelson Lee had changed, and was leaning back in his chair, pipe in mouth, his eyes fixed on the table in front of him.

"The pauper's graveyard, and Eldesley and Miss Hannah Chard," he said. "Doesn't seem to be much association between the ideas, does there? Yet all the same they follow each other as though they were

in sequence. We may find that they are links in a chain that will help us to get at these rogues."

CHAPTER 13.

A Capture!

THE landlord of the Greyhound, the only inn that the tiny village of Eldesley could boast of, stood in front of his guests and answered the quiet questions put to him. Nelson Lee and Dorrimore had travelled down to the village by car, arriving about three o'clock in the afternoon. They had halted at the inn, and had ordered a meal, telling their host that they would probably stay there the night. The landlord was able to give them some news.

"They say that Lord Ralph has reached England," he remarked, "and is expected at the big house to-night."

But it was not Lord Ralph that these two men had come down to Eldesley to discuss, and presently Nelson Lee changed the conversation.

"Much traffic through here?" he asked.

"Fairish, sir," said the landlord. "Trippers in sharries, and sightsee-ers in big cars, and all that. But mostly they go right through and don't spend a penny. Still, we did have a car that stopped in the village a few days ago. There's a bit of a joke attached to that, though. Three gents called on old Hannah Chard, up at Fir Cottage. She went away with them for the day, to London—some private business, or other. Reckoned she was having a good time, but it was first time she'd ever been in a car and she came back by train. Got the wind up or something."

Nelson Lee plied him with a few more discreet questions, and established one fact. The day Hannah Chard went to London was the day that a quiet, elderly woman was taking samples of platinum to a reputable assayer to have it valued. When the landlord had left the room Nelson Lee glanced across to Dorrimore.

"We'll search Fir Cottage afterwards," he said, quietly.

It was getting dusk by the time that Nelson Lee strolled out of the inn. Dorrimore had gone round to the garage to look after his car, and the detective had arranged to meet him later in the evening.

Following the escape of the elder Dalton from the Rat-Pit, a temporary halt had come in the case. Nelson Lee had searched all London, but had found no trace of the rogue. Every possible hiding-place had been searched, but no traces had been found of either of the two robbers.

Nipper had been set to watch the man with the stained fingers, who had been located at one of the smaller hotels in the West-End. Nipper had taken a room in the same hotel, and Nelson Lee knew well enough that the youngster would never allow his quarry to get far away.

A week had passed, and Nipper could only report that his man was simply hanging on, daily expecting a message, for he was constantly making inquiries at the booking-office. Nelson Lee realised that the incident at the Rat-Pit had alarmed the rascals, and they were lying low somewhere. For over a week Nelson Lee worked in London, then decided that Eldesley might be worth visiting. He had already made sure that there was a Hannah Chard living at a Fir Cottage there.

It was about seven o'clock when Nelson Lee found himself outside the little cottage. He had made inquiries and had found that it was some distance from the village. The cottage stood by itself in a thick plantation of fir-trees, and on the left arose the high wall that marked the boundaries of the Eldesley Hall grounds.

There was a light in one of the latticed windows, and after hesitating for a moment Nelson Lee opened the little gate, and stepping softly up the narrow path, reached the window. The blind was drawn, but he caught a glimpse of the interior through a gap in it.

It was an old-fashioned kitchen, with a bricked fireplace and burnished copper ornaments hanging on the walls. In front of the fire was a table covered with a spotless cloth, and it had been set for two people.

Nelson Lee heard the click of a latch, and he turned and stepped back to the path. He was only just in time, for as he reached the porch a woman's figure came round the angle of the garden. Nelson Lee pretended not to see her and knocked on the door.

"All right, sir, there be no one in there just now."

It was a gentle voice that sounded, and Lee turned round. The old dame was carrying a garden basket, and she passed him and opened the door. The light from the lamp in the kitchen fell on her homely, healthy face.

She was very old, was Hannah Chard, but the hue of health still lay on the ruddy cheeks, and her eyes were clear and honest as they turned towards Nelson Lee.

"What can I do for you, sir?" she asked.

Nelson Lee's clean-cut face stood out in the light, and Hannah Chard dropped him an old-fashioned curtsy as she spoke.

"I am looking for a house or cottage in this neighbourhood," said Lee. "And someone said that you occasionally let your cottage for a month or so during the summer."

Hannah Chard hesitated a moment. It was true that she did sometimes let her cottage for a few months.

"I don't think I could manage to let you have it just at once, sir," she said. "Were you in a hurry?"

"Oh, no. Next month will suit me nicely."

The old dame's face cleared.

"Well, that might be managed, sir," she said. "There be a gentleman lodging with me just now, but he won't be staying very long."

She hesitated again.

"You would like to look over the place, I suppose," she went on. "But it be rather late. If you could come back again to-morrow——"

A door opened behind her, and Nelson Lee heard the creak of the old stairs. Someone was coming down from the rooms above, and the heavy footfalls were very slow and deliberate, as though the individual was descending in the darkness, and was not quite sure of the steps.

"If you could come back to-morrow, sir," Hannah Chard, repeated, raising her voice slightly.

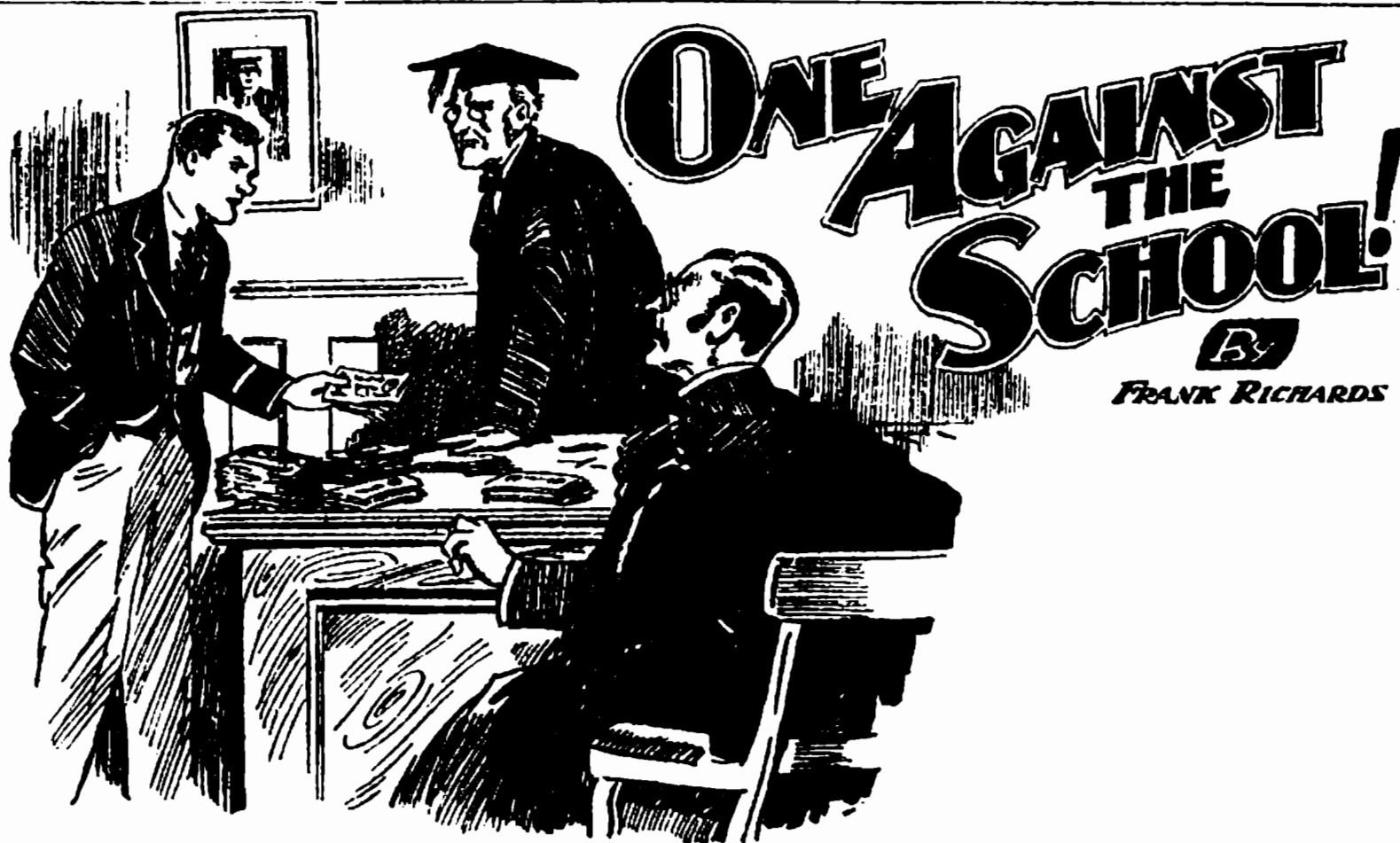
The footsteps came to a halt at once, warned by the sound of voices. It was clear that the old lady had her wits about her.

"Very well. I will come back to-morrow."

Nelson Lee raised his hat and went off down the path. He knew that Hannah was watching him as he turned into the dark road, and he went on for the best part of two hundred yards before he risked a look round. The door was closed by that time, and Nelson Lee stepped into the hedge on the right and waited for a moment. It was a tall, leafy hedge and screened his figure completely.

He stood there tense and still, and presently he heard what he had half expected to hear—a rustle in the grass on the other side of the hedge. Someone was following the road, keeping to the hedge. Leo waited until the rustling sound had moved ahead of him, then dropping on his knees, the detective wormed his way through the hedge, and dropped into the dry ditch on the other side.

He caught sight of a figure moving along about twenty yards ahead through the knee-



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deep grass. It stopped, listened for a moment, then went on again. Obviously someone wanted to know who had called at the cottage.

The detective began to move along the dry ditch, and the end of the grim little episode came when the man ahead, reaching a gate that opened out on to the road, came to a halt there. Nelson Lee saw the thick-set shoulders lean forward, and the square head turn to the right and left. The man was searching for him, trying to catch the sound of his feet on the road. Noiselessly Nelson Lee stole forward until he was within five yards of the gate. Then, with one swift bound, he was out of his hiding-place, and had reached the man's side.

An electric torch had been lifted from Lee's pocket, and just for a second its light shone full on the face of Edward Dalton. An oath sounded, and the thick-set ruffian lashed out with his fist, knocking the torch out of Nelson Lee's hand. But that brief vision had been quite sufficient, and Lee was in on his man with a bound, and his arms locked themselves around the tough figure.

CHAPTER 14.

Called Off the Case!

DALTON, taken by surprise, was sent reeling back against the gate, and a wild struggle began, a struggle that was fought to the end in grim silence. The detective had pinned his man's arms down, and nothing that the rogue could do would break that mighty hold. To and fro they swayed over the wet grass, two strong men testing each other's strength by every means in their power. The heavy breathing was the only sound that broke the silence.

Nelson Lee had collared his man fairly low, and that in itself was an advantage. He could hear Dalton grinding his teeth as he fought savagely to free an arm; and once, in the struggle, Lee felt the hard barrel of a revolver in the other man's pocket. He knew that the desperado would use the weapon if he got a chance, and the detective laid himself out to prevent his adversary from breaking the hold.

They floundered into the hedge together, and swayed back again, neither of them able to throw the other to the ground. If Nelson Lee had been able to shift his hold even for a moment he could have used one of the many ju-jitsu locks that he practised, but in this case the slightest slackening of his grip would have been fatal. As he fought, Dalton was trying to get one hand into the pocket where the revolver lay ready for use. One shot from it would settle the fight.

Two savage efforts saw Nelson Lee forced downward, then suddenly there came an unexpected interruption. Quick footfalls on

the hard road was followed by the appearance of a tall figure sprinting down beside the hedge. Lord Dorrimore had come out to search for his companion, and had been directed to Hannah Chard's cottage. He had followed the road and had heard the crash as the combatants swayed into the gate and broke the half-rotten top-most bar, and he guessed that help was needed by someone.

He was only just able to pick out the two figures locked in the grim embrace. A bound saw the lithe figure over the gate, and the next moment Dalton felt two mighty hands fall on his shoulders, and he was jerked away into the air, and came down on the trampled turf with a thud that knocked the wind out of his body.

"Got him!" said Dorrimore, kneeling over his man.

Nelson Lee was by his side in a flash. There was a metallic tinkle, and over the thick wrists of Edward Dalton the handcuffs were locked. The touch of the cold steel brought the rascal to his senses, and with a fierce effort he raised himself to his feet. The detective reached out and drew the revolver from the man's pocket.

"It's a fair capture, my friend," Lee said. "I suppose you recognise that?"

The prisoner was silent for a moment.

"You have a warrant?" he asked eventually.

"Yes."

"What is the charge?"

The voice was very quiet, dangerously so. "You are accused of being implicated in the theft of a consignment of platinum, in South America—at Tampallo."

Dalton laughed suddenly.

"Well, I'm ready to go with you, my friend, whoever you are," he said, peering through the darkness at Nelson Lee. "I don't know you, but our acquaintance will ripen later. You had the advantage of me just now, and you have a tidy pair of arms. Not many men could have held me as you did, and you wouldn't have been able to put that lock on if I hadn't been ready for you."

"Perhaps not," said Nelson Lee dryly.

Dorrimore had stepped up to the gate, and he opened it. Lee and his prisoner walked out into the road.

"I know where the police-station is," the handcuffed man observed. "Perhaps I had better act as a guide."

"He's a cool sort," muttered Dorrimore, under his breath.

They went down the road for about a hundred yards, then suddenly the prisoner stopped, and from his lips there shrilled out two quick, piercing whistles. Like a flash the meaning of them dawned on Nelson Lee. The man had been playing a part; he had wasted as much time as he could, and had drawn them farther and farther away from the cottage before he sent the warning calls out into the still night.

"Keep an eye on him, Dorrimore!" Lee Lee cried. "I'm going back!"

He turned and sprinted off down the road as hard as he could pelt, heading for the little cottage in among the fir trees. As he reached it he saw the figure of Hannah Chard appear in the doorway. Nelson Lee was through the gate in a moment, and had reached the old dame, who set herself in the centre of the doorway.

"You be a spy!" she cried, her ruddy face pale with indignation. "I ain't going to let 'ee come in here!"

"You are hiding a criminal, madam!" said Lee sternly. "It is your duty, as a lawful citizen, to help me!"

"I don't believe a word of it," came the quavering reply. "I've heard all about it, and what you've done. I be only an old woman, but I ain't afraid of you, mister."

She certainly was not afraid, and for the moment Lee was at a loss. It would have been easy enough to have tackled a man, but this old creature was quite a different proposition. But while he hesitated there came to his ears a familiar sound—the quick beat of a motor. It came from the far end of the plantation, and Lee turned swiftly. As he did so, Hannah Chard, reaching out, caught at his coat.

"I won't let you go!" she cried, tightening her old fingers over the material. There was no time to waste, and Lee did a well-known schoolboy trick. He slipped out of the coat, leaving the empty garment in the old dame's hand, and went off down the path at a run, cleared the gate with a single bound. Hannah's voice lifted into a cry of warning as the lithe figure turned and darted down beside the trees. Nelson Lee could hear the drumming of the car and he headed for the spot, running as hard as he could go.

But he was a second too late. The dark vehicle, not a light showing, shot out into the road a few yards ahead of him. He made a frantic dive, hoping to get his fingers on the rear hood, but he missed by inches, and went sprawling in the road, while the car, gathering speed, careered off up the road, and disappeared round the bend.

Nelson Lee made his way down the road again, passing the cottage without troubling to enter. He had a few words to say to Hannah Chard, but they could wait. At the bend below the field he found Lord Dorrimore and the prisoner. A jeering laugh came from the handcuffed man as Lee appeared, a laugh that had also a note of relief in it.

"You didn't manage to pull off the double, then," came the harsh voice. "That was rather a pity."

Nelson Lee smiled grimly.

"You may keep your sympathy," he returned slowly. "You will probably require it all for yourself later on."

Dalton thrust his heavy face forward.

"Listen to me," he said. "I'm going to give you a bit of information that may surprise you. You think that you've got me

good and fast, but I tell you that I will be free by to-morrow morning, and I won't have to break out of gaol, either. The door will be opened for me, and I'll walk out just as freely as you might do."

The statement made Nelson Lee smile.

"That is what I call bluff," he said, "and it won't work with me."

They headed for the village then, and, reaching the police station, Lee handed his prisoner over to the sergeant, at the same time revealing his identity.

"This man is dangerous," he said, "and I warn you to keep a sharp eye on him. He may probably attempt to escape if he sees the remotest chance."

"I'll sit up all night to watch him, Mr. Lee," was the reply.

Even then Nelson Lee was by no means satisfied, and after supper, when Dorrimore had gone to his room in the hotel, he decided to sit up all night as well, and make sure that Edward Dalton did not slip through his fingers. That surprising statement that he would be free in the morning wanted a lot of explaining.

BUT nothing happened, and quite early Nelson Lee went to the hotel for a good wash, and his breakfast. Knowing that the constable on day duty had arrived to watch over Dalton he was anxious no longer, and did not hurry himself. But after breakfast the inspector sent a note, asking him to go to the station, and there, in the office, he found Edward Dalton sitting, grinning at him.

"I have just received a message from Lord Ralph Amley, Mr. Lee," said the inspector. "It—it concerns you, sir. Read it."

Nelson Lee took the letter and unfolded it. It was headed Eldesley Hall, and dated the previous evening. There was no mistaking the firm handwriting.

"Will you kindly inform Mr. Nelson Lee, of Gray's Inn Road, London, that the case which I placed in his hands has now been satisfactorily settled, and that no charge must be made against any individual concerning it?"

"Yours sincerely,
"AMLEY."

Lord Amley's signature was written along the bottom of the sheet, and to Nelson Lee the letter was one of the greatest surprises of his career. It meant that he was asked to withdraw from the case; it implied that the affair was settled, and yet—

"Are you convinced this is genuine?" he asked.

"Positive, sir," said the inspector. "His lordship's butler brought it down personally. I'm afraid there is nothing to be done but to let this man go."

That was only too correct, and with a jeering laugh, Dalton stood up and the handcuffs were taken from him.

Nelson Lee wasted no time. He 'phoned to Eldesley Hall only to be informed that Lord Ralph had left for London by car about an hour ago, but he had left a message if Nelson Lee rang up. The message was to the effect that the letter was perfectly authentic, and stated his lordship's exact wishes on the subject.

That settled it so far as Dalton was concerned. Nelson Lee left the police station, and Dorrimore, walking by the side of his old friend, found it difficult to speak. It

"That is more than I can say at the moment," Lee returned. "All I do know is that his lordship's action has cut the ground clean away from me, and I have no right to do anything in the matter now."

A sudden gleam came into his eyes.

"But I am not so sure that I will back down," he said. "What has happened only serves to whet my appetite. This development may lead to a bigger event, Dorrimore, and if his lordship won't allow me to work



The light from Nipper's torch stabbed the darkness of the tunnel. And there before Lee and his assistant was Lord Dorrimore, fighting madly to hold off the attack of the two rogues!

was only on rare occasions that Nelson Lee revealed any signs of annoyance or chagrin, but there was no doubt about his feelings now.

"That rogue has beaten us," he said, at last. "Goodness knows how he worked it, but there is not the slightest doubt that he was able to get at his lordship in some way or other."

"I cannot make head or tail of it, old man," Dorrimore returned. "We know that that fellow and his confederate have got the platinum—are trying to sell the stuff, and yet Lord Ralph tells you to back out, and practically sets the thief free. What does it mean?"

for him there is nothing to prevent me from working on my own."

"I'd give a great deal to get my own back with that sneering blackguard," said Dorrimore. "And I fancy you feel the same."

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"I never allow a man to influence me by his sneers," he said, in his quiet tone. "It is just the nature of the beast, Dorrimore. But it is in my mind to try and find out why Lord Ralph has so suddenly changed his mind. Only one thing can justify that, and that is the discovery and recovery of the consignment of platinum. If he has got that, then, of course, the case is finished.

But until you and I can set eyes on that box and its precious contents I am going to work just as hard as ever to try and trace it."

"And I'm with you—up to the neck," said Dorrimore. "If we could only get the smallest hint of where the stuff is—if that young beggar, Nipper has done something—well, we'll have to wait and see, I suppose."

They returned to the Gray's Inn Road, but there was no news from Nipper. Dorrimore sent Wung Foo to find out, and he stayed away a day and a night, and half the next day, finally arriving with Nipper, blandly triumphant.

"What's the news?" asked Nelson Lee, quickly, guessing that something had happened.

"Well, guv'nor, the message Francis had been waiting for so long came just after Wung Foo got into touch with me. Francis is the name of the man with the stained fingers, you know. He motored out of London and along the Great North Road, finally pulling up outside a cottage in a quiet part. He met Edward Dalton there. We—that is, Wung Foo, and I—watched and waited until after dusk, then we risked it. I got inside and listened to their talk. I found out they've got the platinum at Markley's Wharf, and what's more, I got the receipt for the goods, and all we've got to do is to walk in and claim the stuff. I got the paper off the table when Francis and Dalton were out of the room. It was burglary in a way, but I reckon it's worth while."

"I agree with you," said Nelson Lee, grimly. "But Dalton will miss the receipt and will try to get the stuff out of the warehouse before we can find it. We must act on this at once, Dorrimore."

CHAPTER 15.

Treachery!

IT was full-tide at Battersea when a skiff in which two men were seated drifted lazily under the bridge and went on down towards the row of wharfs on the left. They passed a diver's barge, then a fire-launch, and finally came to a halt at a range of posts that marked the channel of a flight of steps. They were close to a wharf over which hung a huge sign. It was too dark to read the name on the sign, but Nipper and Dorrimore were satisfied that they had reached their destination, Markley's Wharf and stores.

Dorrimore reached out and attached the painter of the skiff to one of the posts allowing the boat to float on the tide. He could see the narrow wharf and the goods-store behind it, and once he caught sight of a man in the lighted doorway of the warehouse. It was then about eleven o'clock,

and as a neighbouring clock chimed Nipper rose to his feet and stretched himself.

"They ought not to be long, now," he said, glancing at the deserted wharf. "And it's about time the signal——"

"There it is," Dorrimore said, as a clear white light suddenly appeared in the goods-yards beyond the wharf. It sent three flashes towards them, and Nipper, lifting his pocket torch, sent a quick gleam in reply.

"Now for it," Dorrimore muttered, as he loosened the painter and slipped into the centre seat, lifting the oars into their places.

A dozen strokes and the skiff was against the wharf. A flight of wooden steps were discovered. Dorrimore tied up the skiff again, and he and Nipper climbed the steps and went across the wharf towards the goods-shed. They reached the door and pushed it open, to find themselves in a small office. A gas jet was burning brightly, but there was no one in the room, but another door opposite them indicated where Nelson Lee and the night-watchman had vanished.

"So far, so good," whispered Dorrimore. "Come along, youngster, we've got to find a handy hiding-place, and Lee has given us our chance."

He slipped across the offices and entered the dark shed. It was filled with lines of cases and bales, and in the far end Dorrimore and Nipper saw a light moving, and two shadowy figures behind it. Nipper and his companion hid behind a heap of bales.

"It doesn't seem as though the watchman has much idea where that iron-bound box was put," Dorrimore muttered, craning his neck to watch the movements of Nelson Lee and the employee of the store.

A few minutes passed, then suddenly Nipper touched Dorrimore on the arm.

"Only just in time," he whispered. "Look—the office!"

Through the glass panels Dorrimore saw the thick-set figure of Edward Dalton come into the light. There was no one with him, and after waiting for a moment the rogue came to the inner door and peered down the long store. It happened that at that very moment Nelson Lee and the watchman emerged from a row of cases, and the light from the lantern fell full on the detective's face. It was only a momentary glimpse that Edward Dalton got of his enemy, but it was quite enough for the clever scoundrel. Nipper and Dorrimore saw him withdraw his head swiftly and close the inner door.

"Jove, old man," Dorrimore whispered, in a tense voice. "That looks as though our little trap isn't going to work, after all. I'll swear that rascal recognised your guv'nor. Look, he's clearing out of the office. We'd better follow."

It had been Nelson Lee's idea to claim possession of the platinum, and in the event of a fight Dorrimore and Nipper were there to help him to get the stuff away, even if they had to tackle the night-watchman of

the store. And the river was their best way of escape, for Dalton and his confederates would not be able to follow them.

Once in possession of the iron-bound box Nelson Lee, in his turn, would be able to laugh at the strange conduct of Lord Ralph. But to Dorrimore it was obvious that Dalton had realised the possibility of a trap as soon as he had recognised Nelson Lee.

"Come on, youngster," he whispered. "We must find out what the chap is going to do."

The two figures glided from their hiding-place and across the little office, noiselessly, and Dorrimore went to the front door. As he gained it he heard a sharp rendering sound, the splintering of a wooden panel. It came from the other side of the goods-yard, and opening the door Dorrimore leaped out.

As he did so a figure leaped at him from the darkness, and a closed fist crashed against his face. Dorrimore reeled back, recovered his balance, and closed with his man. One swing saw his rival lifted clean off his feet, and with a heave of his shoulder Dorrimore cast his opponent headlong to the ground. A shout of warning went up as the tall adventurer freed himself, and another figure came pelting across from the gates.

Nipper had slipped past Dorrimore, and his adversary, and was heading for the store opposite, in which a light was gleaming. He had caught sight of Edward Dalton's thick-set figure as it leaped into the other doorway, and a quick inspiration told Nipper what the action meant.

The leader knew that it was in the other shed that his precious box was stored, had no doubt seen it placed there, and knew where to lay his hands on it. That explained at once the rapid retreat he had made. His object was to regain possession of the platinum while Nelson Lee and the watchman were continuing their useless search.

The cry of warning that sounded seemed to bring a swarm of men into the yard. Nipper saw three figures follow each other through the gates, and he realised that Edward Dalton had taken no chances this time, and had brought with him a gang of roughs.

In a moment Dorrimore was surrounded by a mob, and the young detective saw the tall athletic figure strike out to right and left, trying to clear a path towards the other shed. Nipper was now close to the wrecked door, and as he reached it Dalton came lumbering through the doorway, with the iron-bound box on his shoulder.

Nipper went headlong for the fellow, but as he reached him another form appeared behind Dalton, and leaped at Nipper. It was Val, and his arms closed round Nipper dragging him away against the wall.

"A skiff—at the wharf—you can see it from here," he called, as Dalton came to a halt for a moment.

Dorrimore and the gang of roughs were between him and the gates, and the wharf was only the clear means of escape. Whipping round, Edward Dalton staggered forward, gaining the wharf and reaching the flight of wooden steps. In another moment he had deposited the iron-bound box in the bottom of the skiff, and had leaped into the craft. A cry from behind made him turn his head for a moment. Val Dalton had succeeded in hurling Nipper aside, and was now sprinting across the yards towards the steps of the wharf.

"Wait for me!" he called.

From the big shed Dalton saw two figures emerge through the lighted doorway, and he recognised the leading one at once. Nelson Lee swung round and came straight across the yard, heading for the wharf. Val Dalton was ten yards ahead of the detective, and a half-dozen strides saw him reach the top of the wooden stairs.

"Just a second more!" he gasped.

Nelson Lee was close up to him, and Edward Dalton, casting one swift glance towards them, suddenly stooped forward and slashed at the painter of the skiff; then picking up an oar he wedged it against the bottom step and leaned the full weight of his body against it, just as Val made his leap.

The young man saw what was going to happen, and a cry of utter dismay broke from his lips.

"You—you traitor!"

The skiff shot away into the darkness, and Val Dalton went down into the stream with a splash and a cry. In the hour of stress his rascally guide and mentor had deserted him, leaving him to drown.

CHAPTER 16.

Val's Story!

THE cold water closed about Val Dalton's head, and the terror that comes to the man who cannot swim struck like an icy hand at his heart. He heard the rush of the waters in his ears, and a mad struggle saw him climb to the surface for a moment, with whirling arms and kicking legs.

He had been carried away from the wharf, and a good twenty yards separated it from him, and as he looked at it for a moment he saw a figure poising on the edge.

"Help! I—I can't swim!"

The young clear voice was silenced as the tide sucked him under once more. Into the depths he went, and the whirling eddies ringed out over the spot.

Splash!

A taut figure arched out from the edge of the wharf, taking a beautiful header to slip into the water as clean as a knife, and go on like a great black arrow straight, for where the despairing cry had sounded.

Val Dalton, his despair closing down on him, the heavy waters surging overhead, suddenly felt a hand grip his clustering black hair. An instinct had made the drowning man try to hold his breath as long as possible, and it was that fact that saved him now. He was drawn up to the surface until the river fell away from his eyes, and he saw the stars again. He began to struggle, but a strong hand caught at him.

"Keep perfectly quiet, and I can save you—you understand?"

A gasping word came from Val Dalton's lips, and he ceased his struggles. The hand was slipped below his shoulders, and he found himself turned on his back with someone swimming below him. He was dragged forward through the water yard by yard, half dazed and helpless, until he found himself in a circle of light thrown by a torch. A man's figure was leaning forward out of the boat, and eager hands were stretched out.

"All right. Take him first," said a voice.

Val remembered that, although all the rest was a blank.

"Take him first."

These words were in his ears when he came back to life to find himself muffled up in a warm blanket in a white room which he presently knew to be a ward. At a table was seated a woman's figure, and Val called to her at last.

The nurse came forward swiftly, and bent over the man.

"Better now, eh?"

"Yes, thanks."

Something warm and comforting was tilted between his lips and he drank it greedily.

"Where am I, please?"

The nurse mentioned the name of the hospital.

"What time is it?"

"Six a.m.," she said. "If you go to sleep now you will be able to wake up soon and have a good breakfast."

The young criminal leaned back and closed his eyes, but sleep would not come to him.

"Nurse!"

"Not asleep yet?"

"No, I—I cannot sleep. I want to know the name of the man who saved me, please?"

"It was a Mr. Nelson Lee. It was very lucky for you that he saw you fall from the pier. Battersea is a very dangerous place for strangers at night."

Nelson Lee! The name of the man whom Edward Dalton had mentioned that evening as being the detective who had called at Hannah Chard's cottage, who had arrested the elder man, and had come so near to catching Val himself!

"He must have known who I was," Val Dalton muttered. "And yet he saved my life, when the man I thought was my friend had left me to drown!"

The thought made him writhe. The treachery, the utter selfishness, of Edward Dalton revealed itself only too clearly. In

the hour of trial he had thought only of himself and his precious booty.

This treachery on the part of Edward Dalton worried Val. All his life he had been under the domination of the elder man, and had believed all he was told. But now, for the first time, he saw clearly the true character of the man with whom he had lived so long. His own identity had for long been a puzzle which Edward Dalton had refused to solve. The mystery deepened at Tampallo, when Val saw how like he was to Lord Ralph Amley. Edward Dalton deliberately made use of that likeness to steal the consignment of platinum, and urged Val on by talking to him of vengeance upon the man who had caused Val's mother to die in a workhouse, leaving the son—Val himself—to be brought up by Edward Dalton.

But things had not gone smoothly, and when the net which Nelson Lee was casting began to gather round the two criminals. Edward Dalton took Val to Eldesley, and there they lived in the cottage of old Hannah Chard. It was a safe sanctuary, for the old dame had been nurse to the Amley family, and it was that fact which had made her receive Val and play the part she had.

Edward Dalton pretended to tell the truth. He told Val that he was the son of Lord Ralph Amley. He told Val, and Hannah Chard, that Val's mother was his sister, that Lord Ralph had treated her so cruelly that she had been forced to leave him, and that his lordship had refused to provide for her, that she now rested in a pauper's grave, while the child had been left to shift for himself.

Both Val and old Hannah Chard believed him, and foreseeing that Nelson Lee might get a stranglehold upon him, Edward Dalton had planned things cleverly, and when the elder man had been arrested, Val had played his part so well that Nelson Lee found himself beaten and puzzled for once.

Now, however, Val began to doubt. He had been face to face with Lord Ralph more than once, and somehow things didn't seem to fit in. Then, when it had been necessary to go to the wharf and seize the platinum before Nelson Lee obtained by means of the receipt which Nipper had taken, when the gang of roughs had been held at bay by Lord Dorrimore, when it was a matter of getting away quickly, Edward Dalton, for all his fine talk of sacrifice for his sister's boy, had put the booty before Val's life.

"If he was a traitor to me, then there is just a chance of his having tricked me before," the musing man thought.

Finally Val dozed off into a fitful slumber, and when he awakened again it was to find the sun pouring into the little ward, and a man seated by his cot looking at him.

"You are Nelson Lee?"

"Yes."

The recumbent figure stretched out his hand.

"You saved my life."

Nelson Lee took the outstretched palm.

"I saw how your companion had deserted you," he said grimly. "I have always known that there is no honour among—thieves, but I never saw such a gross betrayal as that one."

The listener set his teeth.

"He didn't care if I drowned," he said. "I was never taught to swim. He knew that well enough. I have been with him all my life."

Nelson Lee was studying the face against the pillow. In its way it was a noble one. A white, broad brow, two wide eyes and a way of looking direct at anyone—an engaging countenance and certainly not that of a soul born to crime.

"You might have chosen a better companion."

"I had no choice," replied Val. "He was—is my uncle. He paid for my education and brought me up."

"Brought you up—to follow the path of crime?"

"I did as he did. Now and again we disagreed, but I do not deny that I was usually a willing helper. I am a criminal—an outcast—and yet you went out of your way to save my life. I—I do not yet understand why you did that."

"I wanted to learn the truth," replied Nelson Lee. "I felt that you were not born to be a criminal. In any case, I always try to save lives in peril, if I can. It seems that you have never had a chance, but have been forced to become a criminal. Surely you cannot prefer such a life?"

"No!" cried Val. "I hate it! But it had to be. I swore to be revenged upon the man who sent my mother to a pauper's grave, and left me to be brought up on the charity of others."

CHAPTER 17.

A Tale of Vengeance!

NELSON LEE eyed him intently. He had not been wasting time, and his investigations had taken him to the Battersea Parochial Cemetery.

"Was the theft of the platinum a matter of revenge as well as profit?" he asked.

"Yes," cried Val. "The final revenge that should crush the man I have been brought up to hate!"

"I see," said Nelson Lee quietly. "I take it that Edward Dalton was—is—your mother's brother."

"Of course."

"But Dalton is not his real name. When he had to leave New York in a hurry, chased out by the police—that was over ten years ago—he was known as Edward Varley. And I have seen the name Varley on a tiny tombstone in the Battersea Parochial Cemetery."

Val stared at the detective.

"My mother's grave!" he said, hoarsely.

"Exactly," Nelson Lee went on. "But in that case Varley would be her maiden name, yet she was married. Do you know who is your father?"

Val hesitated, then turned his head away sadly.

"I can't—I ought not—to tell you."

"Perhaps there is no need to tell me," said the detective. "I have found out much, and the rest I can guess. You bear the evidence in your face. Who else could have impersonated Lord Ralph Amley so well as to fool everyone at Tampallo? Who, but his own son?"

Val turned and gazed at Nelson Lee with burning eyes.

"Then, you know?" he cried. "Well, I won't deny it. I am the son of Lord Ralph Amley, who treated my mother so badly that she had to leave him—the man who allowed his wife to go to a pauper's grave, and his son to be brought up in a thieves' kitchen—"

"I don't believe it!" snapped Nelson Lee. "Lord Ralph would never be responsible for such things."

"But, it must be true!" cried Val. "When you arrested my uncle at Eldesley I went to the big house and saw my father. I made myself known to him. I proved I was his son, and I blamed him for my mother's end, and my own unhappy career of crime. He tried to make out that my mother was a criminal, that she had fooled him, that he had, despite that, sent her money regularly. But I gave him the number of her grave in the pauper's cemetery. He could not gainsay that, and argued no more. Then I made it clear that if he did not withdraw the charge against my uncle I, his own son, would stand beside him in the dock—the final stain on the name of the Claybrookes. And he couldn't face it. He had my uncle released, as you know."

Nelson Lee waited while the young man composed himself after his vehement outburst.

"Listen to me, now," he said, gently. "You have met Lord Ralph several times. Are you convinced, in your own heart, that he is the sort of man who could have treated his wife and his son, as you have been led to believe he treated you and your mother? Answer me that."

Val dropped his eyes and shook his head.

"Frankly—no," he said, hesitantly. "It's that that puzzles me."

"Supposing I were to tell you," continued Nelson Lee. "That Lord Ralph is longing, pining for his son to return to him? Supposing I could prove that Edward Dalton, or Varley, has consistently lied to you on this matter. Would you then go to Lord Ralph, beg his pardon, and accept the fatherly love he is prepared to—"

Val buried his face in the pillow and spoke in muffled tones.

"If only it could be!" he moaned. "If only—but it's hopeless. I've never had a chance. I'm a criminal, now. It's too late. I hate my life—I hate myself—too late!"

"It is never too late," said Nelson Lee,

quietly. "I am now in possession of more facts than I had hoped to obtain. If you will be patient for a day or two, the seemingly impossible may yet happen. As soon as I am certain of the true story I will let you know."

He took his leave then, for he had a lot to do. He had listened to the young man's story, and he set himself to probe into it. Lord Ralph Amley was located at his club, and was persuaded to put more facts, and many old documents at the disposal of the detective. Nelson Lee had searched the musty old records at the Battersea Infirmary, and had traced the movements of Hester Varley, or Dalton, from the time she left her husband, of her own accord, to the time she was buried in the pauper's cemetery.

The evidence was damaging indeed. Hester Varley had been a criminal before she had married Lord Ralph Amley. He had believed her to be a pretty, pure, good woman, and did not discover the truth until it was too late. Then he had done all he could to alter her ways, and to prevent her from disgracing the name of his ancient family.

In the end, he was forced to obtain a separation, making the woman a generous allowance, while he looked after Val, the only child of the marriage. But Val had been spirited away—kidnapped—and after that Hester could not be found either. She had vowed vengeance on Lord Amley, and this was her way of doing it. His lordship still sent money to Edward Varley, her brother, who declared that he sent it to his sister. But Lord Amley was afraid to set the police on the track, for they threatened to kill Val should that happen.

Hester Varley had planned revenge. She had hoped to become, when his lordship succeeded his father, the Duchess of Claybrooke, but the separation had prevented that. She had wanted to keep her rogue of a brother, but Lord Amley refused to let her squander his money. And this was her revenge. Despite the generous allowance Lord Amley made her, when she was stricken with an incurable disease she concealed her true identity, was taken into the Infirmary where she died, and was buried in a pauper's grave, while Edward Varley, or Dalton, took the young Val to America to make a criminal of him, thus completing the shame and disgrace that would besmirch the honour of Lord Amley.

All this was clear and proved by Nelson Lee when he finally called on Lord Ralph.

"Hester Varley was a curse to you living—and dead she still desired to strike at you," he said.

"And she has succeeded," Lord Ralph returned in a hoarse voice. "I have lived through an agony, Lee. When that son of mine stood in front of me and told me of his dread past, glorying in its villainy, so it seemed to me, I felt crushed and helpless. He was just a younger edition of me, in looks, and it was that that hurt—that one

of my race should glory in crime—it has haunted me."

"It will not haunt you any longer," Lee returned. "This afternoon you will meet your son, and he will hear the full story."

"And then?"

"And then, if he is what I think him to be, that scoundrel, Edward Varley, may rue the coward trick that he played when he left his pupil to drown like a rat."

"You mean to—to follow that man?"

Lord Ralph was half afraid of the prospect.

Nelson Lee leaned across the table.

"Give me just twenty-four hours," he said.

"Dorrimore is now on the track of Edward Dalton, and I expect a report by night. I feel sure that Val would not suffer in a court of law. But I do not intend to let Edward Dalton escape unpunished."

Nelson Lee's voice had taken a ring, and Lord Ralph looked at the set, inflexible face.

"I leave it in your hands, Lee," he said.

"You are right—that ruffian must be punished."

"And now I will bring you back your son."

CHAPTER 18.

A Chance to Make Good!

TO make good the past and to show his father and Nelson Lee that he was sincere in his wish to run straight—that was the one thought in Val's mind as he hurried away from Lord Ralph's house.

A dramatic meeting between father and son had taken place, a reconciliation, and now Val, instead of sitting by and waiting for Nelson Lee to find the rogues who had been the cause of his misfortunes, was setting out on the perilous task himself.

He was to bring Varley to justice and recover the bullion box or—die in the attempt.

From Lord Ralph's house Val was heading straight for the one place which he knew Edward Dalton would have to seek sooner or later. Not many Londoners know of the range of vaults that run under a great stretch of railway line on the south side of the river. Many of these vaults can only be reached by following a tunnelled way that burrows down below the level of the shabby houses. They are used for many purposes, and a strange and busy rabbit warren it is, with the constant rumbling of trains overhead, and the dank, heavy smell of the river always clinging to it.

It was into one of these dark places that Val Dalton turned after alighting from the taxi that had carried him to the side street beyond the station. He had been down there once before—he and his uncle, in search of the man Francis, the man with the stained fingers. They had found Francis in one of the round-roofed vaults, a place apparently given over to the storage of chemicals in bulk, for the front part of the vault was piled with straw-wrapped, squat-

shaped flagons, and row upon row of huge tin cases, while the tang of chemicals hung over the place. But behind the heaps of cases was an inner apartment, in which were electric furnaces, retorts, and a small distilling plant—the complete apparatus of an analytical chemist.

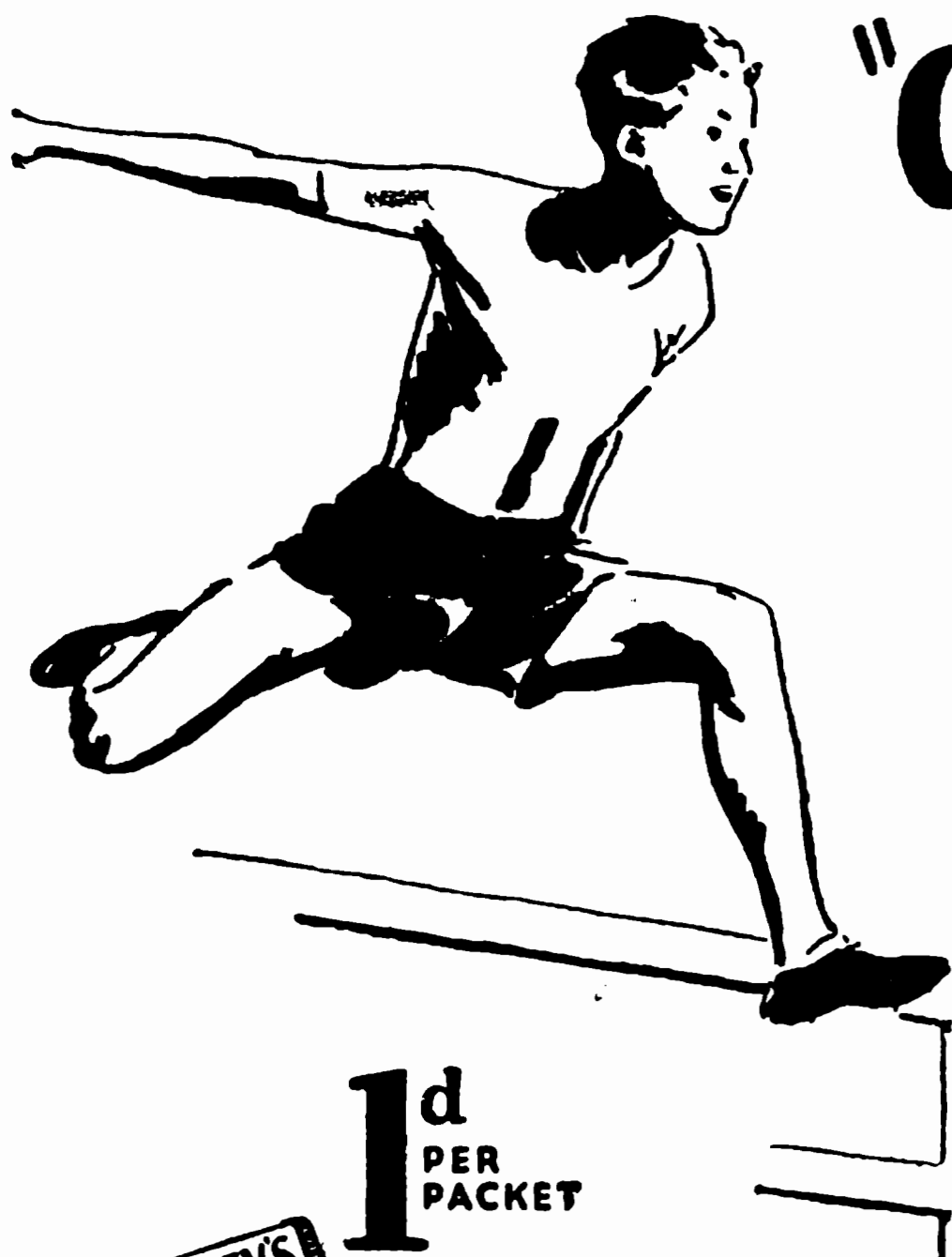
There was no light in the tunnel-like passage as Val went along it, and he had to stoop now and again to flash a small pocket torch at the huge doorways as he passed. It was No. 146 he sought, and he found it at last, stepping up to the small wicket door and listening there for a moment. There was no sound, but, on peering through the wide keyhole, Val saw a thin beam of light shining from behind the rows of tin cases. There was someone in the back part of the long vault.

CHAPTER 19.

In Merciless Hands!

WITH a quick breath Val arose upright again, and caught at the latch of the door. It gave at his touch, and in another moment he had glided into the vault, closing the door again. There was a faint click as it closed, and Val dipped noiselessly behind the tall flagons. Varley and Francis came down through the little passage heading for the door.

"I'll be back as soon as I fix up with——" Val did not catch the name. "He will cash the cheque of yours for me to-morrow morning. I need the money badly, and you are getting the stuff at your own price after all. But it does not go out of here until that cheque is cashed. Understand?"



"Come on Hope!"

Hope looks like making it in record time . . . stout fellow, Hope. (Captain of the soccer team, too. And that team's *fit* . . . from strenuous training.)

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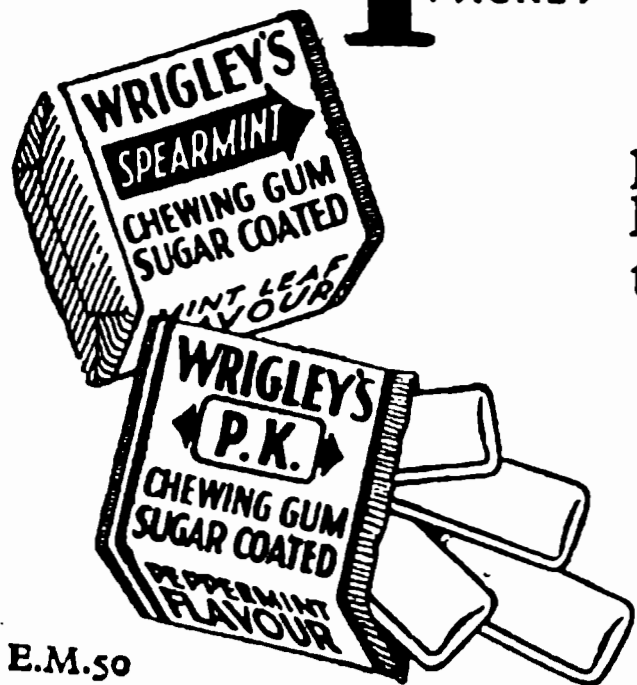
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MEANS BETTER CHEWING GUM



The thin laugh of Francis reached the listener, then the small door was opened and the two men vanished for a moment. That was Val's opportunity. He rose from his cramped hiding-place, and leaped into the passage, darting behind the heavy curtain that screened the inner apartment. In the back wall were a range of cupboards, and Val went up to them, opening the one on the right. There was just room for him to stand upright inside, and he drew the door to and waited there.

Footfalls sounded, and watching through the gap, Val saw Francis come back into the cleared space, his hands behind his back, a dry smile on his face. It was plain that Francis had got the best of the bargain, after all. There had been a lot of haggling, but Nelson Lee was so close on the heels of Edward Dalton that he was anxious to be rid of the platinum to Francis, who was working for a syndicate of international receivers of stolen goods.

Francis stooped down and drew aside a cloth that lay over a table. From beneath the table the chemist pulled out the iron-bound box. The watcher fixed his eyes on the square object for which he had risked so much. Francis was getting everything ready to carry his treasure trove away with him on the following morning, and Val realised that he had come only just in time.

Behind the curtain the young man had noted Francis' coat hanging on a peg. He knew that Francis carried a revolver in one of the deep side-pockets, and that the gun was always loaded. He made his plans and waited. Francis dragged the box to one side and lifted a couple of sacks to cast them over it. His back was turned for a moment, and Val, opening the door of the cupboard, stepped out noiselessly. On tiptoe the youngster drew nearer and nearer to the coat.

He was within a yard of it when Francis straightened and turned round. The chemist caught sight of the slim figure, and he fell back a pace, while a hoarse cry broke from his lips. The delay was fatal, for in another instant Val had reached the coat, and a swift movement saw him dive his hand into the folds and pull out the revolver.

"Stand where you are," he rapped, whipping round and levelling the weapon.

His voice broke the spell, and Francis with an inarticulate cry, glared at the keen young face, then very slowly the hands, with their stained fingers, went above the head.

"What's the game?" he gasped. "I thought—I heard that you were drowned. Your partner——"

"Left me to drown." Val interrupted curtly. "You know that as well as I do. We won't discuss it now. He rounded on me and I am going to do the same with him. I have come for the platinum."

"You can't have it," he returned. "I have bought it. Your partner holds my cheque."

"You can stop payment of the cheque to-

morrow morning. Edward Dalton has gone to the Rat-Pit, and I know he's coming back again. You can tell him what happened—for you will be here when he comes."

On the floor lay a length of rope which Francis had left there. Val stepped to it, and keeping his eyes always on his man, picked up the rope then went up to Francis.

"Turn round," he said. "And put your hands behind your back."

Francis turned, and his hands dropped behind his back. Val formed a loop, and slipped it over the wrists, drawing it tight. In a few seconds the chemist's hands were pinioned to his side, then Val speedily completed his work. Francis found himself seated in a chair, bound hand and foot, and Val smiled grimly as he stepped back.

"I won't trouble to gag you," he said. "You are safe enough without that."

"You'll pay for this, you hound," came the fierce whisper. "I shan't lose anything by it, but you'll have to deal with your late partner, and you know the sort of man he is."

"Yes, I do know. A liar and a rogue—and my message to him is that I have found out the truth he kept from me for so long."

Val had raised his voice slightly as he spoke the fierce words, and the clear, passionate tone rang through the vault. A thick-set figure that had been hurrying down the line of vaults halted at the door just as the voice sounded. Edward Varley, or Dalton, came to a halt, and listened, crouching beside the door.

He had gone to the Rat-Pit, but had caught sight of Lord Dorrimore, whom Nelson Lee had sent there to watch out for the rogue. Dalton had, as he thought, given him the slip, and had come back to the vaults, that being the safest place he knew within easy reach. Now, having heard, and guessed what was afoot, a murderous light came into his eyes, and from an inside pocket he drew a short, heavy club.

Francis, seated against the wall, saw the curtain suddenly move aside, and the figure of the ruffian appear. Varley gave the chemist a quick warning gesture. Francis leaned forward, eyes blazing, lips apart.

A wrench saw the box drawn forward, and Val stooped lower to grip at the looped cord. One, two quick steps were taken by the crouching scoundrel, then, suddenly and fiercely, Varley swung back his arm and leaped at his quarry.

Thud! The leaded club came down with stunning force, and Val, with a smothered groan, collapsed over the treasure that had been so nearly his. A cry that was half a shriek, broke from the lips of the pinioned man.

"Got him—got him!" Francis yelled aloud, straining at his bonds, as Varley, the club still held ready, stooped over the huddled figure on the floor.

Dazed and helpless Val made an effort to rise, but Varley caught at him and pinned him down across the box. The chemist, fighting with his bonds, succeeded in wrenching one hand free at last, and a moment later he had writhed out of the cord and had joined Varley. Val had managed to grip at the hand which held the club, and had forced the murderous attacker to drop the weapon; but the fight was an unequal one, and the coming of Francis soon brought it to an end. Quickly and deftly the chemist pinioned the young limbs, a gag was thrust into Val's mouth, and he was forced down in the chair, while Francis laughed grimly at the quick change.

"Your turn, now, you cub," he said.

Edward Varley had risen to his feet, and he was standing beside the curtain listening. Francis looked across at him.

"What's the matter?" he asked, a note of alarm in his voice.

"Tees!" he returned, shortly. "I gave him the slip—at least, I thought so. He spotted me in the Rat-Pit. I know a taxi followed mine. I can't be sure. But we'll have to get out of this, at once." He strode towards the iron-bound box. "Lend me a hand with this. If they're not here to-night they'll be here to-morrow."

Francis didn't like the idea of leaving his den, but there was nothing else for it. The two men vanished, and Val was left in dark-

CHAPTER 20.

In at the Finish!

|| In response to a frantic telephone call from Lord Dorrimore, Nelson Lee and Nipper found themselves proceeding along the tunnel-like passage that led to the vault. It was pitch dark inside when they came to the vault itself, and Nipper felt for his pocket torch, but Nelson Lee touched him on the arm.

There came to Nipper's ears the sound of footfalls echoing from the vaulted roof in front. Someone stumbled, and he heard an oath, followed by a faint thud.

"Be careful, you fool!" a voice said.

"It's the weight of this box," another returned. "And it's as dark as pitch. Better use your torch and let us see where we're going."

Nelson Lee and Nipper pressed themselves flat against the wall. There was a moment's pause, then suddenly a white light shot out across the darkness, revealing the sloping surface of the wide tunnel. Behind Nelson Lee saw the dim outlines of two men, with a square box swinging between them.

"Varley, guv'nor," Nipper whispered, with a quick catch of his breath.

Varley and Francis had hurried down the long line of vaults as fast as they could go.

Suddenly a tall figure leaped out of the darkness behind Varley and his companion, and came charging up the slope, heading straight for the two men. His quick footfalls gave the alarm, and the two men carrying

the box dropped it and turned, flashing the light down the slope.

"Dorrimore!" Nelson Lee muttered. "I wondered where he'd got to!"

He heard an oath break from Varley's lips, and the ruffian dipped his hand into his hip pocket.

"Quick, guv'nor!" Nipper breathed.

In an instant he had levelled his pocket torch, and had switched it on. A blaze of light shot down the shaft, revealing the tense figure of Varley. The rogue had already poised his weapon. Nelson Lee raised his arm and took quick aim.

Crack! The report of the detective's weapon echoed and re-echoed through the vaulted passage, followed by a scream of pain. Varley staggered back, claspings a numbed hand. Lee's aim had been a deadly one, and he had sent the revolver spinning from Varley's grip. The man Francis spun round and looked up the slope. He saw the two figures standing in the centre of the passage, and he leaped towards Varley.

"We cannot get through that way!" he cried. "There is only one man the other way. Quick—we must get back!"

He seized the box and began to drag it down the slope. Varley leaped after him, and Dorrimore rushing forward, was met by the two men. Francis dropped the box, and with a cat-like spring launched himself at the throat of the tall adventurer. Dorrimore hit out at the man as he closed, and his blow went home, but it did not check the furious leap. He was hurled back against the wall, with Francis clinging to his throat, snarling with fury and fear.

The chemist had proved himself the braver rascal for the moment, but Varley saw his chance then, and, swerving to the wall, he whipped out the deadly club. Francis was lifted off his feet as Dorrimore swung back, but for a moment his head came into striking distance and Varley lashed out.

But the blow never fell. A shot rang out from Lee's gun, and Varley reeled, clutching his shoulder, to drop senseless on the cobbles.

The next moment Nelson Lee and Nipper were on the scene and the other crook was quickly captured.

At their feet lay the iron-bound box that had played such a prominent part in the recent stirring events, and which had brought about such an amazing climax to a ruthless plot.

Little remains of the case to be told. Val was found after a careful search of the tunnels, none the worse for his adventure, and returned to his father. And when the happy reunion took place Nelson Lee remarked that "it was worth all the hectic times they had been through just to see the happiness of those two."

And he was right.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's Powerful Detective-Thriller. "The Fortune Trail!" which deals with the adventures of Nelson Lee and Nipper in England and far-off Alaska.)

My dear Chums,
—Of course, you've read "Waking Up St. Frank's," the opening chapters of our great school story which appears in this first part of this week's issue. Well, what do you think of it?

For some weeks I have pressed home the point that, in my opinion, it is

one of the finest if not the finest story of St. Frank's we have ever had. And I feel sure you will all share that opinion. At all events, I shall be pleased to hear your views.

You have met Fighting Kingswood, new headmaster of St. Frank's, in the first chapters of the story, so you can gauge to some extent the amazing character of the man.

Fighting Kingswood is out to reform St. Frank's. Don't be misled by the word reform. In this case it simply means that he intends to wake up certain sections of the school which, in his opinion, have fallen into slack ways. The slackers need pep, and plenty of it in frequent doses. Healthy rivalry among them is conspicuous by its absence—keenness at games absolutely not there. Very well, thinks the mighty Kingswood, rolling up his sleeves. I'll soon alter that, and forthwith proceeds to show St. Frank's just where it gets off.

In just what form his campaign is shaped I am leaving it for you to find out as you read the story. But let me whisper this—you're hooked for a first-class entertainment and batch of thrills.

Just a word about next week's Grand Detective-Thriller. This story deals with an



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amazing task that is set a young man, a task that means treading a perilous trail from London to far-off Alaska and back, and fighting the sinister forces of a ruthless rival. Nelson Lee, the famous detective and his assistant, Nipper, are well in the limelight playing strenuous

and heroic parts in partnership with the young adventurer, and the thrills come thick and fast. You will all vote this story a winner.

Here are a few more jokes which have won handsome prizes for NELSON LEE readers.

Slow Waiter: "Your coffee, sir, special from South America."

Diner (sarcastically): "Oh, so that's where you've been."

(Miss M. Pike, 20, Woodhall Road, Stoney-croft, Liverpool—a penknife.)

Grandmother: "My dear boy, you've grown to be the living image of your father. You have his eyes, his nose, and his mouth—"

Jimmy (gloomily): "Yes. And I've got his old trousers, too."

(L. Connell, 11, Raymond Street, W. Preston, Victoria, Australia—a grand prize.)

Possible Employer: "But you're asking rather high wage seeing that you know no about the work."

Applicant: "But, you see, not knowing work it makes it so much harder for me."

(Chua Tong Hooi, 16, Stewart Lane, Penang, S.S., Malaya—a grand prize.)

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