NO. 70.—FOR READERS OF ALL AGES.—1D.

Week ending
October 7, 1916.

THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY.

1D

THE HOUSE IN THE HOLLOW.

A TALE OF NELSON LEE & HIS LADY ASSISTANT.

INCORPORATING THE "BOYS' REALM."

Something For You!

In the Current Issues of the

Sexton Blake Library

appear Two Thrilling Stories of

SEXTON BLAKE, the famous detective.

They are called

No. 17.—"Their Great Adventure";
No. 18.—"The Banker's Trust."

In the

Sexton Blake Library.

Price 3d. each. ***Out This Week!***

THE HOUSE IN THE HOLLOW.

A cleverly written Detective Story, introducing NELSON LEE & EILEEN DARE, the Girl Detective.

By the Author of "Nelson Lee's Lady Assistant," "The Mystery of the Turret," and other equally fine Stories.

THE PROLOGUE.

The Cablegram from Canada—The Quarrel—Stebbing's Villainy.

MR. RUDOLPH STEBBING lay back in his padded swivel chair and chewed his cigar savagely and nervously. Upon his desk before him lay a cablegram, and the wording of it was very obviously much to Mr. Stebbing's dislike.

After a few moments he rose to his feet and paced the room with nervous strides. Rudolph Stebbing was somewhat elderly, tall, and with slightly bent shoulders. He was clean-shaven, and wore pince-nez.

The apartment was lofty, roomy, and well furnished. For it was Stebbing's private office in New Court, Lincoln's Inn. By profession he was a solicitor, and his practice was select and exclusive. Perhaps he was not so honest as most solicitors, but he was well known and much sought after.

Rudolph Stebbing, in fact, was regarded as one of the best lawyers of the day, and his position was solid and secure. Yet his agitation at the present time was due to the fact that he was in dread of being exposed for fraud—that was the long and short of it.

There was nothing alarming, seemingly, in the wording of the cablegram. The message had been handed in at Montreal, Canada, and simply contained a definite piece of information:

"Stebbing, 8, New Court, Lincoln's Inn, London, E.C.

"Am sailing to-day for Liverpool in Pride of Britain. Will visit you immediately upon arrival. HARVEY."

There certainly did not seem to be much in the message to cause Rudolph Stebbing any perturbation. But, to tell the truth, the solicitor was not only alarmed, but positively terrified.

He paced his private office, and chewed the cigar until it was a mere rag. After some little time he became more composed, but his face had become haggard, and there was almost a hunted look in his eyes.

"The infernal fool!" Stebbing muttered fiercely. "What on earth has made him come to England so soon? I thought I was safe for six months at least. Thank Heaven, I have a week of grace—I may be able to arrange things."

But who was Harvey, and why should his departure for England cause Stebbing such anxiety? The facts in themselves were quite simple and plain, and the solicitor was only too well aware of their simplicity.

Clifford Harvey was a young Canadian, who had never visited the Old Country. Until recently he had been somewhat poor, and had worked in a large engineering factory in Montreal. He was an orphan, and had neither brothers, sisters, nor relatives. He had friends in Canada, of course, but none of them were intimate.

In England Clifford Harvey did not know a soul. Some little time before, Harvey's only relative, a bachelor uncle, had died after a long illness resulting from a long-standing complaint.

This poor gentleman, while having no home ties, was an extremely rich man. He had made a vast fortune in business, and had been retired some years, living frugally on his great income. Thus it had increased, and was an income fit for a prince.

Stebbing had been the dead man's solicitor, and had been appointed the sole trustee of his fortune. This was left entirely to young Clifford Harvey, who was of age, and legally entitled to do exactly what he wished with his great inheritance.

Acting upon instructions in the will, Stebbing had communicated with Clifford Harvey in Canada. Meanwhile, the fortune lay completely in the solicitor's care—for the uncle had trusted Stebbing implicitly. Unfortunately, his trust was honoured.

Stebbing had received a reply from Clifford Harvey, thanking him for the information, and regretting that he could not come to England until the end of the year, owing to a contract with a Montreal engineering firm. He requested Stebbing to let matters remain exactly as they were until the following January.

This reply had surprised the solicitor somewhat, and he knew that Harvey must be a singularly clear-headed young man—a man, moreover, who had a strict sense of honour. Knowing himself to be an extremely rich man, he was, nevertheless, keeping faith with the firm who employed him.

Most men in similar circumstances would undoubtedly have come to England at once, and would have readily paid for any breach of contract. Clifford Harvey, however, preferred to stand by his employers and wait. The truth was, Harvey had been engaged for some time in certain experiments, and he felt in honour bound to complete them.

And now, for some unknown reason, he was coming to England long before the end of the year. Even so, why should Rudolph Stebbing be so affected?

Why was the solicitor almost off his head with worry?

Simply because he only had a bare week to accomplish a task which was to have occupied six months.

Stebbing had been speculating heavily, and in vast sums. He was fairly wealthy himself, but he had dreams of greater and greater wealth. And the fact that Clifford Harvey's fortune was in his keeping had led him to gamble for his stakes—gamble in stocks and shares.

In short, the solicitor had speculated, not with his own money, but with Harvey's. He had done so in order to swell his own fortune. To give Stebbing his due, he had intended setting everything in order by the end of the year. And by that time he reckoned to have scooped in a high pile for himself.

And now the bombshell had exploded.

Harvey was on his way to England, and would arrive within a week!

To replace the deficiency was impossible in the limited time at his disposal.

The money which Stebbing had used could not be touched for at least two or three months, and to get hold of such a big sum within a week was impossible even to such an influential solicitor as Rudolph Stebbing.

He thought of explaining the whole matter frankly to Harvey upon the young man's arrival. But a few moments consideration warned him that such a course was not possible, for he had invested the money in his own name, and there were many other details which would positively prove that he had had dishonourable intentions.

"No, the only way is to arrange matters so that Harvey will be deceived," Stebbing told himself. "But, so far as I can see, he is a very clear-headed fellow, and I shall need all my wits about me to hoodwink him. Confound it all, I never dreamed of such a possibility as this! Why is he coming to England so early?"

But it was merely a waste of time for Stebbing to ask himself riddles. The fact remained that Clifford Harvey was coming, and that the solicitor would have all his work cut out to prepare everything for the young man's inspection. If he proved to be easy-going and simple, Stebbing would experience no difficulty.

There seemed a decided prospect, however, of Harvey being a smart, keen, young business man. In that case Stebbing would be treading on thin ice during the time of Harvey's visit.

An appointment with an influential client drove the matter from Stebbing's mind for the time being. And, later, when he arrived at his home, he was calmer in mind, and had already begun scheming and planning.

He assured himself that he would have everything so prepared that Harvey would suspect nothing. Stebbing was clever, and the more he thought about the coming interview the easier he felt.

During the days that followed the solicitor arranged various matters, and was quite ready to receive his unwelcome client the day before the Pride of Britain reached Liverpool. He was full of confidence now that his position was secure, and that Harvey would never suspect trickery.

Stebbing knew quite well, however, that if his scheming was found out, he would probably find himself in a criminal dock. For he had appropriated money—huge sums of money, to which he had absolutely no right.

All would depend upon that one interview.

The liner entered Liverpool Docks during the forenoon, so the young man from Canada was not able to arrive in London until the evening. But he was evidently very intent upon seeing Stebbing without delay, for, just before the luncheon hour, a telegram arrived at Stebbing's office saying that Harvey would be pleased to see the solicitor at seven o'clock exactly.

Stebbing was rather pleased that he would see the young Canadian at that hour, for the pair would have the office completely to themselves, and there would be no fear of any interruption.

New Court, Lincoln's Inn, was a very quiet spot during the evening. After the day's business was over there was scarcely a soul to be seen about the vicinity. Stebbing employed several clerks, but by seven o'clock the outer office would be empty and still.

Stebbing had told none of his staff of the coming interview, and he alone knew of the affairs of Clifford Harvey. Having unlawfully used Harvey's money, the solicitor had naturally kept the matter a dead secret. Not even his trusted chief clerk, Mr. Freeman, knew anything of the matter.

Seven strokes chimed out from the little clock on the mantelpiece, and even as Stebbing glanced at his watch to verify the time he heard a brisk

footstep in the passage. The next moment the door of his inner office opened and Clifford Harvey entered.

He was a tall young man—well-built, and splendidly proportioned. He was neither dark nor fair, and clean-shaven. His strong, determined-looking face was bronzed and healthy, and his eyes, although serious now, looked as though they could be merry and genial when occasion demanded.

Altogether, one's first impression of Clifford Harvey was that he was a straight, clean, healthy young Colonial. And it was an impression that would only strengthen by further acquaintance.

"I believe I am prompt to time, Mr. Stebbing," said Harvey smoothly. "I think I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Rudolph Stebbing? My name is Harvey, and I have just arrived in England from Montreal."

The solicitor waved his hand towards a chair.

"Exactly. I was expecting you, Mr. Harvey," he exclaimed. "I am Mr. Stebbing, and I am delighted to meet you, my dear young man. Allow me to congratulate you upon the singular stroke of good fortune which has fallen to your lot."

The visitor sat down and nodded.

"Yes, I guess I'm lucky," he agreed. "I never expected old Uncle Henry to leave his great fortune to me. Still, I've got over the joyful shock by now, and I'm right here on business. As you may be aware, Mr. Stebbing, I want you to explain the situation to me as clearly as you can. I want you to show me exactly how my money is invested, and I may as well tell you now that I'm a careful man. I like to know everything down to the very roots."

Stebbing coughed somewhat nervously.

"Exactly—exactly," he hastened to say. "But I did not think that you would care to go into all the close details regarding your fortune——"

"My dear sir, now I'm here, I want to know exactly how I stand," interjected Clifford Harvey briskly. "I guess you were just a little startled to receive my cablegram, eh?"

"Not exactly startled," said Stebbing guardedly. "Surprised, perhaps. Considering that you told me definitely in writing that you would not come to England until next January, I think I have some reason to be surprised. Perhaps you will be good enough to explain why you made such a big change?"

"Say, that can wait," was Harvey's reply. "You can bet your last dollar, Mr. Stebbing, that I had a pretty strong reason for coming to England so far in advance of my original fixed time."

Stebbing, who had previously been telling himself that he was as safe as houses, now began to feel decidedly ill at ease. Harvey had such a cold, cool way about him that Stebbing knew he was even more clear-headed than he had supposed. The young Colonial was absolutely keen and alive.

For the next half hour the solicitor was very busy explaining exactly how the great fortune was invested, precisely what the income was, and all matters concerning the huge inheritance. One or two items he passed over quickly, but Harvey was as sharp as a needle. He listened to Stebbing's discourses, he examined documents, but scarcely made any comment.

"I have explained the position in full;" said Stebbing at last. "Of course, Mr. Harvey, if you wish to invest any sums in other quarters you have only to instruct me, and I will see that your orders are carried out. I hope you are entirely satisfied?"

Clifford Harvey thoughtfully tapped a cigarette upon his thumb-nail.

"No," he replied smoothly, "I am not satisfied, Mr. Stebbing. To tell you the honest truth, I'm a whole-length away from being satisfied."

The solicitor started, and bent forward in his chair.

"My dear young sir," he protested quickly, "if there is anything further I can explain——"

"Say, cut that out, please," was Harvey's quiet interjection. "Soft talk cuts no ice with me, Mr. Stebbing. I believe in plain speaking, and I'm going to speak plainly now. You've been up to some shady business with my money, and you thought that by faking up a few papers you'd hoodwink me. Well, you haven't, and——"

"How dare you!" roared Stebbing furiously. "How dare you accuse me of dishonesty? By Heaven, sir, you had better be careful with your words!"

Harvey lay back, and lit his cigarette.

"No need to get excited," he observed, throwing the spent match out of the open window close beside him. "And I am going to choose just what words I like, Mr. Stebbing. You've been trying to swindle me—and you're not clever enough to do it!"

"Swindle—swindle!" shouted Stebbing, starting to his feet. "That—that is a nasty word, sir!"

"Precisely. But it is the correct word to use at the present moment," replied Harvey calmly. "It strikes me I came to England just at the right time. You may be a well-established solicitor, Mr. Stebbing, and you may be looked upon as an honest man—as honest as a lawyer can be, anyhow—but you are nothing less than a crooked criminal!"

Stebbing was nearly foaming at the mouth.

"You—you insulting young dog!" he raved, his fury almost beyond control, as he realised that his scheme had failed, and that exposure was probably to follow. "You dare to accuse me——"

"I accuse you of attempting to defraud me, Mr. Stebbing," said Clifford Harvey, with calm grimness. "And I may as well tell you now why I changed my plans and came to England so far in advance of my original time. I was warned by a certain stockbroker—I will not say whom—that you were meddling with my fortune. You may have executed your schemes cleverly, Stebbing, but there was a leakage somewhere. Probably the anonymous gentleman I have named owes you a grudge; at all events, he gave me the tip, and I figured that it would be a wise move on my part to come across to England and see for myself what was actually happening."

Stebbing gazed at his client as though dazed.

"Until I received that warning I guess I looked upon you as a real honest man," went on Harvey coldly. "I reckoned that my old Uncle Henry—who was a shrewd man—wouldn't have any truck with a scoundrel. Apparently my uncle was hoodwinked, just as you have attempted to hoodwink me. Under the circumstances, my employers in Montreal released me when I explained the situation. I was ready enough to stop until the end of the year, but I didn't want to arrive in England to find that my inheritance had been embezzled by a dishonest lawyer."

"You—you infernal young hound!"

"Words don't hurt me, Mr. Stebbing," said the young Canadian eagerly. "Maybe you are wondering why I sent you that cablegram, warning you of my departure? You are wondering why I didn't take you by surprise? Well, I wanted to find out what sort of a man you were—and, by Jupiter, I've done so! As I half suspected, you have done your best to fake up certain documents so that I should be fooled. But I was warned, and I——"

Rudolph Stebbing could stand no more. The man was simply livid with uncontrollable fury. The knowledge that his villainy had found him out, and that exposure would certainly follow, caused him to act madly.

And Harvey's very coolness only served to enrage the solicitor more.

With a savage curse Stebbing simply hurled himself at Clifford Harvey. The young man was unprepared for such an assault, or matters would certainly have gone very hard for Stebbing. But the attack was sudden and brutal.

Harvey half rose to his feet as he saw his companion rushing at him with clawing fingers. He had intended to be better prepared for the assault, but, as it turned out, the movement only made his position worse.

Stebbing charged like a mad bull, and before the other could even use one of his hands he was flying backwards. The chair became entangled with his legs, and Harvey made a vain attempt to save himself.

His back was towards the opened window, and as he staggered he thudded forcibly against the inner ledge. The position was an impossible one, and Harvey strove, for a fraction of a second, to keep his balance. But the effort was futile, and, with a hoarse cry of anger and alarm, he plunged backwards through the window, and fell to the hard cobblestones below.

The office was on the ground floor, but the window was rather high, the ledge being fully eight feet from the ground. Clifford Harvey fell solid on his back, and his head struck the stones with a sickening smash that caused Stebbing to shudder violently. There was no mistaking that ghastly sound.

"Great Heaven above!" gasped the solicitor hoarsely.

The whole dramatic incident had not occupied more than five seconds of time. Just that one furious charge, and Harvey was lying upon the stones below, still and silent. Stebbing had certainly not intended flinging the young man out of the window; that had been purely a matter of fate. But it was done now, and the deathless silence which followed caused Stebbing to stand there shivering as though with ague, with his face as pale as death, and his breath sounding harsh and laboured.

What had he done?

Stebbing hardly dared make an investigation. The horrible silence frightened him far more than an outburst of curses would have done. Was Clifford Harvey dead? Had that terrible fall cracked his skull?

Stebbing knew very well that the distance from the window-ledge to the ground was not very far. If Harvey had fallen face downwards he would probably not have been bruised. But he had landed a dead weight upon his back, and his head had received the full force of the violent fall.

So suddenly had it all happened that Rudolph Stebbing found it impossible to gain possession of his wits within the first minute. But a flood of thoughts surged through his brain.

The window looked out upon a quiet alley-way. It was not dark yet, although the shadows were gathering. The passage was not overlooked from any quarter, and a turn concealed the window of the private office from the outlet into New Court. In all probability nobody had seen the falling body.

Stebbing was frantic, and he knew that he must act at once. He rushed to the door, went into the passage, and entered the alley-way by means of another door. The next moment he was bending over Clifford Harvey. The young man was still, and his face was bloodless and almost waxen. And as Stebbing gazed with horror-struck eyes upon the cobbles he saw blood oozing from beneath the fallen man's head. In that second Stebbing lost his control completely.

"Help!" he shouted shrilly. "Help—help!"

Help came quickly, and in less than two minutes Stebbing was brokenly explaining to two constables—both well known to him—that his visitor had stumbled over a chair, and had accidentally fallen out of the window.

The police, having always regarded Stebbing as an absolute gentleman, did not doubt his explanation for a moment, and Clifford Harvey was very soon being conveyed in a police ambulance to the hospital. It was never dreamed that Rudolph Stebbing had foully assaulted the injured man.

But the solicitor knew only too well, after consideration, that Harvey would tell the truth as soon as he regained consciousness. For Stebbing was informed that the fractured skull would not be fatal.

In the excitement the solicitor had made no mention of Harvey's name. And at ten o'clock Stebbing received a telephone call requesting him to go at once to the hospital.

Perturbed and uneasy, the solicitor did so, and when he arrived one of the surgeons took him into a private room and explained that the patient had recovered full consciousness, and that his recovery was only a matter of time.

"Has—has he made any statement?" asked Stebbing huskily.

"In a way, yes," was the surgeon's reply. "But we are puzzled, Mr. Stebbing. The man does not seem to know his own name, and has no recollection of what took place. Prolonged questioning was not advisable, but, so far as we can discover, the young man's mind is an absolute blank."

Rudolph Stebbing started.

"You mean he has lost his memory?" he asked.

"Exactly. We have had many cases of a similar nature, spread over years, and this is nothing extraordinary," said the doctor quietly. "The skull was fractured so peculiarly that the result was half expected. Who was the young man, Mr. Stebbing, and where is his home? We shall want to send him away——"

The solicitor heard no more, or, at least, the surgeon's words made no impression upon his excited brain. For a cunning, evil thought had found a place in Stebbing's mind—a thought so audacious and daring that it almost took his breath away. But there was no time for consideration; he must act now, or never.

"I'm afraid I cannot help you much, Dr. Brownlow," said Stebbing, striving to keep his voice steady. "The young man's name is Thomas Kenley, and he was interviewing me for the purpose of obtaining a situation as my chauffeur. I do not know his address, but I am aware that he is an orphan, and a stranger in London."

"Dear me! That makes the situation rather awkward——"

"Not necessarily. When Kenley is well enough to be removed from the hospital, doctor, you may send him to my own residence," said Stebbing, with apparent generosity. "Since the poor young fellow has no home of his own, I shall be only too glad to do the best I can for him."

"You are very good, Mr. Stebbing," said Dr. Brownlow warmly. "Kenley will be able to leave the hospital in about a week, I should say. Meanwhile, perhaps, you will make all the necessary arrangements."

"Of course—of course."

During the week which followed Clifford Harvey recovered splendidly. But every remembrance of his past life was lost to him. He knew nothing—nothing beyond the fact that he had come to his senses in a hospital.

Stebbing's villainous scheme, so hastily formed, became clear and precise before the patient was removed from the hospital. By taking such a course Stebbing was not endangering his position. If Harvey recovered his memory he would, in any case, reveal the solicitor's scoundrelism; so the added fact that Stebbing had lied about his identity would not make much difference.

Stebbing was utterly ruined if the truth ever came out, and he plotted and schemed to keep Harvey's identity a dead secret. In the course of that

week Stebbing manufactured false evidence to support the statement. He arranged with a man whom he could trust to come forward and declare that a young man named Tom Kenley had been lodging in his house for several months. And clothing and personal belongings, supposed to have belonged to the imaginary Tom Kenley, were produced.

It was all splendidly planned, and no hitch occurred.

Clifford Harvey had vanished, and Tom Kenley had come into existence. So long as the young man remained in his present state Rudolph Stebbing would be safe. And the hospital doctors gravely assured Stebbing that there was very little prospect of the injured man ever recovering his memory.

Weeks followed, and Harvey recovered completely—completely but for the blank in his mind. He was obliged to believe all that was told him, and he did so without the least suspicion.

He gladly accepted the post as Stebbing's chauffeur, for he found he could drive a car magnificently. This directly supported Stebbing's statement that he had been applying for a situation at the time of the accident.

It was all superbly carried out. In spite of the seemingly impossible position, Stebbing was now absolutely secure. And there was something else—something which had entered the solicitor's cunning brain at the very outset.

There was Clifford Harvey's fortune!

Stebbing was sole trustee, and there was not a soul upon earth to raise any question or dispute. Those in Canada who had known Harvey thought that he had come to England to claim his inheritance. And they would learn nothing to the contrary. Failing to hear from Harvey would occasion no suspicion.

And by the late autumn events had settled down smoothly and easily. Tom Kenley was quite content with his lot, for he had no reason to be otherwise. And Rudolph Stebbing was receiving and using the large income from Clifford Harvey's fortune. It was an amazing state of affairs, and there was practically no prospect of the actual truth ever coming to light.

Yet some day—some day in the distant future—Stebbing's villainy was destined to find him out, and he would meet with the deserts he so richly deserved.

END OF THE PROLOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

The Smash in Holborn—Stebbing's Agitation—Danger!

EILEEN DARE laughed merrily.

"Why, Mr. Lee, I am in splendid health," she exclaimed. "You seem to think that my experience in that awful fire at Blackfriars should have broken me up and made me a confirmed invalid. But I've got over the shock completely, and I'm just my usual self again."

"By gum! You look it, miss!" exclaimed Nipper heartily.

Nelson Lee smiled, and made no comment while he sat in his desk chair looking at his fair visitor. Eileen Dare was a sweetly pretty girl, and, as Nipper had said, she certainly looked the very picture of health.

The day was fairly mild, and Eileen was wearing a light frock, which suited her wonderfully. She was a small girl, dainty, and altogether delightful. Her dark brown hair was curly and good to look upon. She had a clear complexion, and a skin as soft as the finest velvet. Her eyes were

brown, deep, pure, and wondrously expressive. And at the present moment they were twinkling with amusement.

She was sitting in an easy chair in Nelson Lee's consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road. The famous criminologist and his young assistant, Nipper, had been very pleased to welcome Miss Eileen Dare—for she was not only a friend, but an invaluable assistant.

Only a week or two before the girl had gone through a terrible adventure in a burning warehouse close by Blackfriars Bridge. She had been there in connection with an important criminal case, and the exposure of a scoundrel named Jonathan Bridger had resulted.

Eileen Dare had been mainly responsible for Bridger's downfall. For this dainty, sweetly pretty girl was waging a grim war against a certain number of men. Nelson Lee took charge in almost every case, and Eileen followed the great detective's instructions. But, often enough, Eileen Dare ventured on enterprises of her own conception—and her natural ability and shrewdness invariably resulted in complete triumph for the girl.

Months before, a body of City men—powerful, influential, and well known—had brought about the ruin, degradation, and death of Mr. Lawrence Dare, Eileen's father. These highly placed rogues, who privately called themselves "the combine," had killed Mr. Dare for one reason. They had appropriated the plans of a great invention, and were even now reaping and sharing the vast profits.

But Eileen Dare had sworn to her father, an hour before he died, that she would avenge him and bring ruin and disgrace to every man who had taken part in the vile plot.

And her vow had been no idle one. Already Eileen had kept her word with regard to several of her enemies. Sir Ambrose Shore, Martin Hallton, Basil Illingford, Jonathan Bridger—all had paid the penalty. But the combine was still powerful. The influential scoundrels were still bringing off coups and defrauding their fellow-men.

As a rule, they worked within the law; they planned and carried out schemes which left them immune from the police. But Eileen Dare, with Nelson Lee's aid, had detected the weak part of the armour, and had struck home.

There was no chief of this combine of rogues. It was not an organised society of crime; each man worked secretly, and each was well known and respected in his own particular profession. And at regular intervals they would join together in some scheme which would bring grist to the mill.

Eileen Dare was as keenly determined as ever to carry out her campaign to the bitter end. Perils and dangers only strengthened her resolve. There were others yet—many others. Roger Haverfield, a powerful steel manufacturer of Birmington, had been her chief enemy at the time of her father's death, but he was no worse than the others. All came under the same category—all were marked down.

In the last adventure Eileen had come near to entrapping Rudolph Stebbing, the famous solicitor, at the same time as Jonathan Bridger. But he was still free, and Eileen was particularly anxious to rid the world of the scoundrelly lawyer. For Stebbing was one of the baser members of the secret combine.

But Eileen had no particular plan to work by. She struck her blows when opportunity presented itself—and she struck effectively. Ford Abbercorn—Sydney Bradford—Melville J. Ross—Sir Caleb Hurst—several others—all were on the list. It was a grim enough task for a dainty young girl to undertake.

Indeed, it seemed an impossible task. But, impossible as it would have

been to most girls, it was not impossible to Eileen Dare. It must not be taken by this that Eileen was possessed of some marvellous power. On the contrary, she was just a sweet, delightful, free and easy girl.

But in that little head of hers was a wondrously keen and active brain. She was shrewd to a degree, and her astuteness had often enough caused even Nelson Lee himself to commend her highly.

And Eileen was possessed of detective ability and natural quickness of action which practically ensured success in everything she undertook. She could reason problems out almost as quickly as Nelson Lee himself. The great detective was the first to admit that she was a girl in a thousand, and that her help was extremely valuable at any time.

And now, this morning, she had called upon Nelson Lee to ask him if there was any prospect of her getting to work again. For the week or two of inactivity had sharpened her wits, and had made her eager for the fray again. Eileen certainly possessed the true detective instinct.

Lee had nothing to report, however. He was constantly on the look-out for any loophole, but, so far, he had detected none. But both he and Eileen were quite sure that it would not be long before another member of the combine came under the avenging sword.

"We must not be impatient, my dear Miss Eileen," said Nelson Lee, laying back in his chair and lighting a cigar. "Sooner or later a chance to strike will present itself, and then we shall all be busy enough. There are many of your enemies left to be dealt with, and they are absolutely beyond our reach until they choose to lay bare a vulnerable spot.

"Let's hope it won't be long, guv'nor," remarked Nipper hopefully. "As it happens, you were only saying this morning that you were thinking of taking a week or two in the country. I reckon it would be a heap better to work with Miss Eileen in one of her cases."

"Precisely," agreed Nelson Lee. "But we have to wait our time, Nipper."

"Nipper speaks as though I were the detective-in-chief, and that you were my assistants," laughed Eileen. "They are not really my cases at all. Sometimes I have brought certain information to you, Mr. Lee, but I generally take my instructions from you, and do exactly as you suggest."

Nelson Lee smiled.

"I think I remember one or two occasions when you brought off coups quite off your own bat," he said dryly. "I must admit, however, that you acquitted yourself very well on those occasions. I think—— Oh, but you are not going?"

For Eileen had jumped to her feet, and was picking up her gloves and bag.

"Yes, I must go now, Mr. Lee," she replied. "I really came out to do a little shopping, and Aunt Esther will be wondering what has become of me. You will let me go now, won't you?"

"I'm afraid it would be useless to try to stop you," smiled Lee. "You have a will of your own, Miss Eileen, and you generally make use of it."

The girl laughed merrily, and a few minutes later she bade her friends good-bye and took her departure. She little guessed then that she was even at that moment very near to the starting-point of another case.

Chance is a very curious phenomenon. If Eileen had been persuaded to stay in Nelson Lee's consulting-room she would not have witnessed a dramatic incident which occurred in Holborn shortly afterwards. And that incident was to be the beginning of a strange series of adventures.

Eileen walked down Gray's Inn Road, reached Holborn, and turned westward, for she wished to make some purchases in Oxford Street. She crossed

the busy thoroughfare, taking care to lift her dainty skirts a trifle, for the road was covered by a thick film of greasy mud.

The weather was fine now, but during the morning there had been a heavy downfall of rain. In consequence, the wet mud was now churned up into a sticky, treacherous, greasy substance, which the passing motor-buses and taxis flung up in spurts.

Eileen walked briskly, not because she was in a hurry, but because she preferred to do so. She scarcely noticed a large touring motor-car, which glided swiftly down towards the viaduct.

But the next moment she heard a sudden shout, followed by several piercing feminine screams, and a loud, grinding crash. The girl turned quickly, and her heart gave a little jump at what she saw.

The big touring car was completely upside down, smashed and wrecked, half upon the pavement, and half in the road. A bad accident had occurred, but the cause was very simple.

A boy on a tradesman's tricycle had come swiftly out of a side turning. The lad was reckless, and not to be trusted in traffic, or he would never have been so foolhardy. The driver of the motor-car, attempting to avoid a collision, swerved clean across the road, which happened to be clear.

The manœuvre, while averting the certain collision, caused an accident which was probably far more serious than the collision would have been. For the heavy landaulette skidded giddily in the treacherous grease.

It was all over in a moment. The chauffeur skilfully attempted to avert the disaster, but the wheels were locked by the brake, and the whole incident was over almost as soon as it had commenced.

The car hit the pavement, and turned completely over as though it were alive. It performed a giddy somersault, and crashed down with an appalling thud. The wind screen was smashed to atoms, and the mudguards and other appendages crumpled up in wreckage.

Eileen had seen nothing of the accident itself. But she was one of the nearest people to the spot, and she at once hurried forward, having an idea that her help would be required. For the girl was not squeamish, and if any first aid was necessary she was willing and ready to apply it.

She arrived by the side of the car just as one of the jammed doors burst open. A dishevelled figure, with a grazed forehead, stumbled out. It could be seen in a moment that the man was scarcely injured, but that he was badly scared.

He was tall, thin, with a small beard. His shoulders were bent, and his hair grey and somewhat scanty. A smashed pair of spectacles in his hand told how he had received the graze. He was elderly, well dressed, and obviously a gentleman.

But Eileen in that moment recognised him.

He was Mr. Rudolph Stebbing, the well-known solicitor, of New Court, Lincoln's Inn. He was Stebbing—one of Eileen's chief enemies. Of late years he had grown the small beard, and had become more bent, and had aged considerably.

Although he looked straight at Eileen he did not recognise her—notwithstanding the fact that he knew her well by sight. Knew, moreover, that she was the daughter of the man he and his associates had driven to death, and that she was determined to avenge her father.

Stebbing was so frightened and so completely dazed that he saw nothing upon scrambling into the road but the upper part of the body of his chauffeur, who was partially jammed between the car and the pavement.

That the man was injured was very apparent, for his head was bleeding,

and his face was as pale as chalk. Rudolph Stebbing fell on his knees beside the chauffeur, and grasped his shoulder frantically.

"Kenley—Kenley!" he croaked hoarsely. "Are you hurt, man—are you hurt?"

His voice seemed to waken the chauffeur somewhat, for he opened his eyes, and they seemed to be glassy and deathlike. He was struggling inwardly, just on the verge of insensibility.

Eileen could see all, for she was quite close by. And she saw Kenley speak. She did not hear the words, but the motion of his lips was clear, and Stebbing obviously heard what was said.

The effect upon the solicitor was extraordinary.

He uttered a choking cry, and then bit it back. He seemed to become haggard all in a moment, and an expression of terror and untold fear entered his watery eyes. With a low exclamation he gripped Kenley's shoulder and shook it fiercely.

"Stop, you fool!" he muttered fearfully. "Good heavens, what can it mean? I—I must be——"

He stopped short, and Eileen was unable to hear more. In any case, the crowd of morbid sightseers surged round the next moment, and hid the scene from the girl's vision.

Then the police arrived, and the crowd was pressed back. With difficulty the heavy car was lifted, and the injured man extricated. He was totally unconscious now—that shaking which Stebbing had administered had been the last straw. Kenley was to all appearances dead.

As quick as possible he was carried into a taxi, and the latter at once drove off. Stebbing ordered the driver to go to his private address—which was quite near by. For some reason the solicitor had been absolutely against the injured man being taken to hospital.

Eileen Dare heard the instructions, and she was very thoughtful. She could not forget the electrical effect which Kenley's muttered words had caused. What had the man said? Why had Stebbing been so obviously startled?

"There is something wrong!" Eileen told herself. "Stebbing was in mortal dread at that moment. It seemed as though the chauffeur was about to say something which would prove fatal for Stebbing. Yet there is more in it than that, I am positive. I have never seen such a look of fear and alarm in a man's face before."

Eileen was quite sure of herself. She felt within her that there was something deep and intricate connected with Rudolph Stebbing's sudden fright. And the fact that he had refused to let Kenley be taken to hospital was strangely significant to Eileen. She shrewdly suspected that Stebbing feared to let Kenley lie in such a public place as a hospital.

There was a reason—a grave reason—why the chauffeur had been hurried off to Stebbing's private residence. Eileen Dare was convinced of that. And she decided, then and there, to follow up the matter.

And what had happened?

A very ordinary and natural phenomenon, as a matter of fact.

After a lapse of seven years Clifford Harvey had recovered the memory he had lost on that night of his arrival from Canada! He was Tom Kenley no longer—but his own self again.

As often occurs in cases of lost memory, a blow had caused the blank; and a second blow had brought back the remembrance of the past years. On this occasion the young man was seriously injured. His skull was fractured gravely, and he had only retained consciousness for a few seconds.

But during that short interval he had said sufficient to tell Stebbing what had occurred. His chauffeur had spoken to him in the same manner

as he had done seven years before. And the words he had used were such that Stebbing instantly knew the actual truth. For Harvey had spoken as though he had just been knocked through the window of Stebbing's office. His mind, in fact, bridged the seven years as though they were but one second.

The recollection of that fateful night came back to Stebbing in a great flood, and he turned pale and terrified. It was this sudden effect which Eileen Dare had seen. Stebbing knew that he was not mistaken. Clifford Harvey had recovered his memory!

The situation was poignant with possibility.

If the injured man recovered his health the truth would be revealed. Rudolph Stebbing knew only too well that he himself would be degraded and ruined, for Harvey would certainly take action.

The solicitor's position was precarious, and at the moment he scarcely knew which way to turn. But he knew that it would be fatal to let Harvey be taken to a great hospital.

And so, twenty minutes later, the injured man was lain upon a bed within Stebbing's own house, and a doctor was almost immediately in attendance.

CHAPTER II.

A Week of Grace—Doctor Munro Taggert—The Nursing Home.

"YES, I'm afraid it is rather serious, Mr. Stebbing. The poor fellow's skull is fractured, and it will be weeks—months, perhaps, before he completely recovers. And even then I have grave fears."

It was the doctor who was speaking, and Stebbing listened as calmly as possible outwardly, but with grave apprehension within him. The doctor, whose name was Bryce, had just concluded his examination, and had left the patient to the care of the nurse. He and Stebbing were now in the latter's library.

"You have grave fears, you say?" said the solicitor. "Fears of what?"

"I hardly like to say," replied Dr. Bryce. "Mind you, I do not state this as a definite fact, and should not like to make a positive declaration without the support of another medical man. But, privately, Mr. Stebbing, I fear that when the man recovers, he will be—well, simple."

"Simple?" repeated Stebbing. "I don't think I understand."

"I mean that his mind will be affected," said Dr. Bryce quietly. "It is my belief that a portion of the fractured skull has come in contact with the brain, and has affected it. The result will not be insanity, but merely an affectation of the mind. Of course, I may be wrong; Kenley may recover completely. I sincerely hope so. At all events, he will certainly be in his right mind and will be in full possession of his wits. But, as I said, they will be dulled."

Stebbing shook his head.

"I sincerely hope you are wrong, doctor," he exclaimed. "And when—when do you suppose Kenley will recover consciousness? Immediately, within a few hours, or after the lapse——"

"He will certainly not recover consciousness until at least a week has passed," declared Dr. Bryce. "I state that definitely as a fact. The poor fellow will remain in a state of coma for several days. It may, indeed, be a fortnight before he recovers his senses. And after that it will be a slow business getting him back to health. As you know, two of his ribs are broken, and he was severely crushed. A sad affair, Mr. Stebbing."

"Very," agreed the solicitor, striving to conceal the satisfaction in his eyes. "Well, doctor, I suppose you will come round again during the evening?"

"Of course. I will be here at seven o'clock sharp."

A few minutes later the doctor left, and Stebbing returned to his library and paced up and down for some time, lost in thought. A length of sticking-plaster marred his features, and he held his left arm rather stiffly —for it had been bruised. Otherwise Stebbing had escaped unscathed.

"A week!" he muttered tensely. "A week—and then? Great Heaven, what will happen then? I am afraid to think of the possibilities. But I have a week of grace—I have several days in which to think of some means of escape. Thank goodness, the blow did not fall all in a moment."

Stebbing was undoubtedly perturbed. Not without reason, for he saw before him disgrace, ruin, and degradation. He knew quite well what would happen when Clifford Harvey recovered possession of his wits.

For seven years Stebbing had been using the income—a princely one—which was rightfully Harvey's. For seven years Stebbing had been unlawfully using money to which he had absolutely no right.

When the patient recovered consciousness he would not be Tom Kenley, but Clifford Harvey. And then, to use a common expression, the fat would be in the fire. For he would learn at once that for seven years he had been faithfully serving Stebbing as a common chauffeur.

What would any man do in such circumstances?

To awake from what was practically a seven years' sleep to find that he had been serving, as an ordinary servant, the scoundrel who had been defrauding him and making use of his fortune!

Stebbing was in mortal dread of the consequences. All those years ago he had adopted the deception in order to save himself from ruin. And he had appropriated Harvey's great fortune, and had used it as his own.

The time had passed, and Stebbing had almost forgotten that the fortune was not his, and that his chauffeur had ever been anything else but a chauffeur. He had regarded the possibility of Harvey recovering his memory as an absurd one. He had looked upon that matter as dead and buried.

And now, like a bomb-shell, the blow had fallen.

Of recent years Stebbing had become acquainted with Haverfield, Abbercorn, Bridger, and all the rest. He had become one of the combine, and had, indeed, taken part in the great warehouse fire which had resulted in Jonathan Bridger's downfall. In that affair Stebbing had played a personal part in "accidentally" starting a huge conflagration.

He had used an old motor-car, and his chauffeur, for that night, had been a man whom he could trust. Tom Kenley had been away that week on a rare holiday.

And Stebbing had revealed the secret of his great wealth to several members of the combine. They knew how matters stood, and had congratulated Stebbing upon his astuteness and his wonderful luck.

Now it seemed as though his luck was to turn upon him. What would be the end of it? It needed little imagination for Stebbing to guess. Harvey, upon recovery, would instantly have Stebbing arrested, and would bring the whole facts to light. Nothing would be able to prevent the truth coming out. Bribery would be impossible, for Harvey was a very rich man—at least, he should have been. And Stebbing had not squandered the fortune; it was still intact. But the scoundrelly solicitor had no desire to give it up after he had grown to regard it as his very own.

What was to be done? The first thought that crossed Stebbing's mind was to get hold of everything he could and make a bolt for it. But that

would be drastic, and would necessitate hiding from justice. He would be a hunted man for the rest of his life—a criminal, an outcast.

It would be far better to get over the difficulty in another way. Harvey was ill—seriously ill. What if he died before recovering consciousness? The more Stebbing thought, the more reckless he became. He was desperate, for the situation was terrible enough, in all conscience. His very fate hung in the balance.

And then he thought of—Dr. Munro Taggert.

This individual was a doctor with an extensive practice in the West End. He was a famous physician, and he was respected by all his patients. Yet, secretly, Dr. Taggert had many times performed undertakings which would not bear the light of day.

He had come in contact with Stebbing and several of his associates. And gradually, in the course of the last year or so, Dr. Taggert had become one of the infamous combine. He shared their undertakings, and shared the profits. On several occasions he had performed certain tasks which would have landed him in the criminal dock, could they have become known.

It was this man of whom Stebbing thought.

And before evening the solicitor had arranged a meeting at Taggert's house. Ford Abbercorn would be there, and so would Bradford, Ross, and Sir Caleb Hurst. It was to be a meeting of the combine. Not all would be present, but there would be sufficient to arrive at a definite decision.

In a crisis such as this Stebbing realised that he could not do better than to be frank with his criminal associates, and to seek their advice.

In the early evening the meeting took place. Dr. Taggert was a gaunt man, broad, tall, and with a bluff manner which instantly won its way into the hearts of his patients. For, in spite of his seeming roughness, Taggert was as gentle as a child, and his voice had a silky, smooth sound which was pleasant to listen to. But his eyes, although genial-looking, could become steely and infinitely cruel.

Stebbing explained what had occurred in quavering sentences. He told his companions of his danger; of what would happen at the end of a week—or, perhaps, even before then.

The solicitor's companions listened gravely and with many misgivings. They had scarcely got over the shock of losing such a powerful ally as Jonathan Bridger. They had no desire to see Rudolph Stebbing thrown into gaol as well.

"The position is serious, my dear Stebbing," said Dr. Munro Taggert gravely. "I am anxious to see this man Harvey for myself. I happen to know that Dr. Bryce is an exceptionally clever man. You may take it that he has made no mistake. Well, we have a week. What is to be done?"

"We must do something drastic," said Stebbing huskily. "Everything is at stake, Taggert—my fortune, my honour, my good name!"

Dr. Taggert laughed shortly.

"Between ourselves, your fortune, as you call it, is not yours at all," he remarked. "But, of course, Stebbing, you wish to retain possession of it. That is only natural. You can clear out of the country; but that means great inconvenience and nasty publicity. Moreover, you may be laid by the heels."

Mr. Stebbing shivered.

"Is there no other way?" he whispered. "Can't you suggest anything, Abbercorn? Or you, Ross? Or——"

"Wait a moment—wait a moment," interposed Taggert smoothly. "Let me finish my discourse first, my dear fellow. There are ways—several ways. Naturally, the surest way out of the difficulty is to cause Harvey's death

before he can recover. You thought of that, of course? I'm afraid it is impossible of accomplishment, at least, without grave risk. Dr. Bryce is a keen man, and he has said that there is no real danger. The only possibility is that Harvey will be somewhat weak-minded. That, I believe, is a wrong supposition—but it is just as well that Bryce expressed the opinion. If we engineered Harvey's death there would certainly be an inquiry, and inquiries are somewhat uncomfortable."

"Then—then——"

"Pray don't be in a hurry," said Dr. Taggert, waving his hand. "I am about to propose a scheme which will be just as effective as death—but quite safe. Oh, quite safe. Harvey will be taken immediately to a private nursing home of mine in the country—and I will take personal care of him. In this nursing home he will be looked after carefully and effectively!"

There was something very grim in the doctor's tones as he uttered the last words. His listeners supposed that he was, after all, suggesting to kill the patient. But Taggert very soon explained his real meaning.

And Stebbing was not only struck by the scheme, but absolutely delighted. A wave of relief swept over him as he listened to the scoundrelly doctor's proposal. It was all so beautifully simple—that was the wonder of it. And it would be equally as sure as death itself. And yet the risk of discovery would be nil.

Then and there all the arrangements were made. There was no time for delay, or for hesitation. If action was to be taken, it must be taken now—at once. And that very night Dr. Munro Taggert went round to Stebbing's house and held a consultation with Dr. Bryce.

The latter was not so famous as the West End physician, and he looked upon Taggert as a high authority. The latter declared, after his examination of the patient, that an immediate removal to the country was advisable.

It would be quite safe to move the unconscious man, provided special care was taken—and Taggert would make sure of that. But Dr. Bryce agreed that it would be as well to let the injured man have the benefit of fresh country air, and he handed the case over to his colleague with every confidence.

Thus the whole thing was done amicably and without a hitch. When the ultimate result was attained Dr. Bryce would be only too willing to substantiate his former statements, and to declare that everything humanly possible had been done.

The next day Clifford Harvey was removed from London to the country nursing home, which was situated in the heart of the Surrey hills, sufficiently far from the great metropolis to be isolated and alone, yet within easy distance.

Everything went off perfectly. Upon arrival there was a trained nurse ready to attend the patient, and he was placed in bed and made comfortable. The sick-room was a splendid apartment, and everything was in superb order. Dr. Bryce, who accompanied the party, was satisfied to the last degree, and he took his departure believing that everything was being done for the restoration of the injured man's health. Yet, innocently enough, the worthy doctor was leaving his patient in the hands of brutal criminals.

Stebbing was there, too, but he intended returning to London by a late train. He had his business to attend to, and he intended leaving the whole case in the capable hands of Dr. Taggert.

And then, on that very first night, one of those little incidents occurred

which altered everything—which provided a loophole for the hounds of justice to break through and lay bare the vile plot.

The incident, in itself, seemed to have no bearing upon the issues at stake. It was only later on that the real significance of the affair struck home. Certainly, neither Dr. Taggart nor Rudolph Stebbing realised the possibilities.

It occurred fairly early in the evening, before Stebbing left. The nurse had been sent down to the place by Taggert, and she was new to the building. As she was leaving the sick-room she caught her foot on a soft skin rug which lay just outside on the landing floor.

The stairs were quite close, and the nurse tripped badly, fell forward, and plunged headlong down the stairs. She flung out her hands to save herself, and managed to wedge her right hand between two of the banisters. Her fall was stopped, and she picked herself up with a dazed kind of air and with a terrible pain in her right wrist.

She was unhurt but for one thing. Her hand, being wedged between the banisters, had brought the full weight of her body upon her wrist. The result was disastrous. As was only to be expected, her wrist was sprained very seriously. Within a very short time it commenced to swell, and the agony increased.

She would be unable to use her right arm for at least ten days!

It was just one of those unfortunate little occurences which happen every day; but in this particular case the incident was to have far-reaching results. The nurse reported the injury to Dr. Taggert, and he made an examination.

"Tut-tut! This is very bad!" he exclaimed testily. "How on earth did you manage to do this, my good woman? Upon my soul, you have been disgracefully careless! You are useless—utterly useless. You can't use this arm for nearly a fortnight!"

And a nurse who couldn't use her right arm was worse than no nurse at all. Obviously, the woman would have to be replaced. But where could another nurse be obtained? She must necessarily be one who could be trusted.

Stebbing was angry, but he soon calmed the doctor.

"It is infernally unfortunate," said the solicitor; "but this woman is not the only one, Taggert. We must have somebody, of course, who will be safe. We must have a woman who will do precisely as she is told and ask no questions."

"One who will close her eyes to certain things," said Taggert pointedly.

"Exactly. Well, as it happens, I know of just such a woman," replied Stebbing. "She fears me for a certain reason, and she has already performed several services for me. She is a splendid worker, and will keep her mouth shut whatever she sees. I can guarantee that."

"But we want her at once—immediately," protested the doctor impatiently. "I know of a score of nurses myself, but not one is capable of dealing with a 'special' job such as this. Confound that fool of a woman for falling down——"

"My dear fellow, don't lose your temper!" interjected the other. "This woman I speak of—a widow named Mrs. Finch—is absolutely trustworthy. It is fairly early yet, and I shall arrive in London before nine-thirty. I will taxi straight over to Notting Hill and interview Mrs. Finch and arrange matters. She will travel down by an early train in the morning, and arrive here in the forenoon."

Dr. Taggert stroked his chin, and eyed Stebbing closely.

"Well, we must have somebody," he said. "Moreover, we must have a qualified nurse. Any ordinary woman is no good at all——"

"My dear man, do you take me for a fool?" interposed Stebbing testily. "I know as well as you do that we must have a qualified nurse, and I shouldn't have suggested Mrs. Finch unless I knew that she was one. She used to be at one of the biggest hospitals, as a matter of fact. I tell you I'll guarantee her to fill this position every bit as well as this woman here."

And so it was arranged. Mrs. Finch was to be sent down the first thing the following morning. The alteration was seemingly trivial, but it was to mean all the difference in the world to Clifford Harvey and his enemies.

CHAPTER III.

The Old Gipsy—The Shadower—Nelson Lee's Promise.

THE nursing-home was a big, rambling, old-fashioned house situated right at the foot of a deep little valley known as the Hollow. The spot was extremely lonely, for it was some little distance from the high road, and right in the heart of the Surrey hills.

Adjoining the house was a deserted brickyard. A single kiln, with a high chimney-shaft rising up like a gaunt sentinel, practically formed part of the old house. This had, at one time, been occupied by the owner of the brickyard.

Several years before, however, the place had been abandoned owing to the clay used for the bricks deteriorating in quality to such an extent that is was practically useless.

The house, accordingly, was now let separately, and the brick-kiln and the adjoining sheds and yards were deserted and empty. Dr. Taggert had shrewdly seen that the house would make a splendid nursing-home, and he had leased it and fitted it up as such.

The spot was quiet and peaceful, and the air pure. As a rule, in fact, the establishment was used legitimately; but, when occasion demanded, Dr. Taggert also had it in readiness for special cases such as this one in connection with Clifford Harvey.

There were several servants at the Hollow—as the place was usually termed—and they were all well paid by Taggert and were highly pleased with their situations. Needless to say, not one had any suspicion that anything ever went on that was not absolutely above-board. Only the one nurse herself was in the secret, and she only partially. In the event of a hitch even the nurse would be unable to make any definite statement which would do the doctor any harm.

Tradesmen came in the morning, and it was very seldom that the peace of the Hollow was disturbed in the afternoon or evening. Occasionally, however, a passing pedlar would give the establishment a call, seeing that the house was occupied.

On the evening of the new patient's arrival—some time before Stebbing left, in fact—an old gipsy woman hobbled round to the back entrance. She was a bent old creature with a wizened, yellow face, and white-grey hair. Her clothes were brown with age, and she carried a bundle and a knapsack upon her back. A stout old ashstick served to help her along the rough roads.

She tapped at the back door, and the latter was soon opened by a middle-aged woman who acted as a kind of housekeeper. She was a kindly soul, the housekeeper, and the house being rarely troubled by hawkers she did not immediately send the old gipsy away.

"Good-evening, ma'am. I've buttons, ribbons, laces, pins, and needles, and all sorts of handy things," said the old gipsy pleasantly. "Will you be wanting anything this evening? I've walked a long way——"

"Well, I do want some buttons, as it happens," said the housekeeper. "Let me see what you have."

And the knapsack was opened, and for the next few minutes certain business transactions were in progress. The housekeeper handed the old gipsy woman a few pence over and above the charge for her purchases, and the aged lady was highly pleased.

"Thank you, ma'am—thank you kindly!" she said gratefully. "There ain't many as generous as you. I mostly get quick orders to leave the grounds, and never a kindly word. You be very quiet down here."

"Bless you, yes!" replied the housekeeper, who was inclined to be chatty. "Sometimes we have four or five patients at once, but just now there's only one—a poor young gentleman who came down from London only this afternoon. Quite unconscious he is, the poor lad. I only hope he gets well."

"Then this ain't an ordinary private house?" asked the gipsy woman.

"Oh, no. This is Dr. Taggert's nursing-home," was the housekeeper's reply. "An' talking of nursing reminds me. Our nurse here—we've only got one, the doctor being present himself—had a bad fall not a half an hour ago!"

"There, there!" exclaimed the old lady. "Accidents will happen, won't they, ma'am? I do hope the poor girl didn't hurt herself."

"It's all them skin rugs!" said the housekeeper, shaking her head. "I never could abide skin rugs. They do get in your feet so. This nurse only came down to-day, you see, and I don't suppose she knowed the rug was there For myself, I'd never have the things in a house of mine; but the doctor——"

"Did the nurse trip?" asked the gipsy gently.

"That she did! She tripped over an' nigh fell from top to bottom of the stairs. And she sprained her wrist so bad that I'm thinkin' they'll need a new nurse here to-morrow. A woman's no good at that sort o' work unless she can use both her hands."

"Dear, dear! What a pity!" said the wrinkled old pedlar. "And isn't there anybody else in the house? Are there no other patients——"

"Only that one poor young gentleman," replied the housekeeper. "Mr. Henley I believe his name is—Henley or Keuley, or something of that nature. An' there's Mr. Stebbing down here, but he's going to-night. We shall be quiet here for quite a time. Would you care to have a drink of something before you go?"

"Just a little sip of water, if you please, ma'am."

The old gipsy, however, was provided with a glass of milk, and after drinking this she hobbled off down the gravel path to the rear gate. Dusk was drawing on now, and the evening was gloomy, with a threat of rain in the air. High hedges bordered the front of the house, and the old gipsy was concealed as soon as she reached the lane.

She walked on for a few paces, and then did a very curious thing. For some reason she forced her way through a narrow gap in the hedge on the opposite side of the lane practically facing the main gateway. Here, strangely enough, lay a lady's bicycle, almost concealed in the ditch.

The old gipsy seated herself beside the machine and found that she could watch the gateway through the undergrowth without being seen herself. And she was smiling now, and her deep-brown eyes were gleaming almost with a light of excitement.

"Splendid!" she murmured to herself. "I know I am on the right track. Something terrible is going on here, but I doubt if the servants are involved in the villainy. The doctor and the nurse alone know the true secret."

It was strange that the old gipsy would soliloquise in this way; but, considering that she was neither a gipsy nor old, it was not at all singular.

For, to tell the truth straight away, the bent old lady was none other than Eileen Dare, the girl detective.

Eileen had been busy, and she believed that she had obtained a concrete result. She had arrived at the Hollow for a definite reason, and she was feeling very grateful to the communicative housekeeper for supplying her so willingly with the facts she had been anxious to learn.

Eileen's starting point had been the accident in Holborn. She had decided at that time to follow Stebbing's movements closely, and to endeavour to learn the reason for the solicitor's astonishing terror and amazement.

Something had happened at the time of the accident which had completely unnerved Stebbing—which had caused him to go deathly pale with sheer fright. And Eileen, who was anxious to find a weak spot in Stebbing's armour, set about a certain task with the vague hope that she would hit upon something of importance.

The previous night, and on the morning of this day, she had watched Rudolph Stebbing's house closely and carefully. She had witnessed the arrival of Dr. Taggert, and she had been instantly struck by the significance of the doctor's presence.

Eileen knew quite well that Stebbing's chauffeur lay seriously injured within the house. She knew, also, that Dr. Munro Taggert was one of the men she had sworn to ruin. He was a member of the combine she was fighting so effectively.

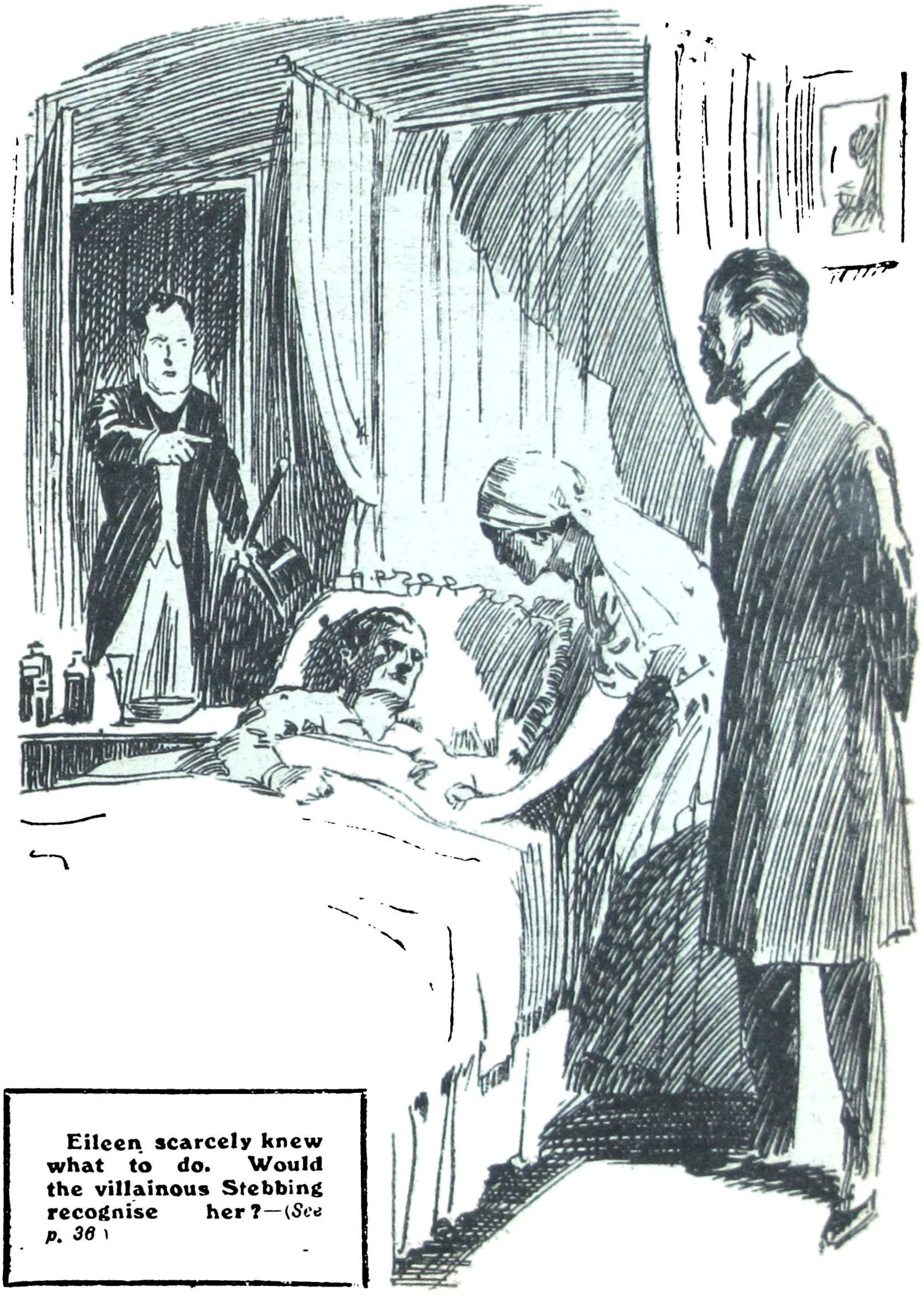
Why had he come to Stebbing's house? Eileen knew well enough that a local doctor had been called in, and it seemed significant to her that Taggert should be there also. In the back of her mind she thought perhaps that the injured man had revealed something in his semi-conscious state which made clear the fact that he knew some secret information which would ruin Stebbing if it became known.

This was a very shrewd guess of Eileen's, and amazingly near the truth. Yet it was no wild conjecture, but a natural deduction. And that very morning Taggert had called again, and shortly afterwards the injured man had been removed in a specially prepared motor-car.

It was a very simple matter for Eileen to find out the patient's destination, for that was no secret. And when the girl detective did obtain the knowledge she became more firmly determined than ever to press her investigations to the end. The injured man had been taken to Taggert's private nursing-home. Why? For what reason had he been transferred down to the Hollow? Eileen suspected at once that the alteration had been made so that absolute privacy would be obtained. In all probability some very sinister design was intended.

At all events, Eileen thought it worth her while to take a trip into Surrey. Accordingly, she had made her preparations, and had journeyed to the country station three miles from the Hollow. Here she hired a bicycle and rode out to the nursing-home. In concealment she disguised herself at leisure, and then made her visit in the character of the old gipsy. The information she had obtained fully rewarded her for her trouble.

"The injured man, Kenley, is the only patient in the nursing-home," she told herself. "The doctor is here personally, and intends to remain. Stebbing leaves to-night. Thus Kenley is at the mercy of the doctor and a single nurse. Eileen, I believe you are on the track of something big!"



Eileen scarcely knew what to do. Would the villainous Stebbing recognise her?—(*See p. 36*)

Yet the girl had arrived at her conclusions merely by a shrewd course of reasoning. She knew nothing definite so far. Vague suspicions were not enough, and she swore to herself that she would soon learn positive facts.

"The nurse—what was that about the nurse?" she mused, as she completed the removal of her disguise. "It seems that the woman sprained her wrist and is of no further use. That means, of course, that another nurse must be obtained. Oh," added the girl to herself, as a sudden thought struck her—"oh, I wonder if Stebbing is going to London to-night for the especial purpose of engaging a fresh nurse?"

It was a clear piece of reasoning, and Eileen was struck by the possibilities which presented themselves. And before she could think much further on the subject she heard the steady throb of a motor-car engine.

She knew at once that the car was stationary, and that it was standing outside the main door of the building. Stebbing, of course, was about to depart. In all probability the automobile was the doctor's, and the solicitor was merely to be taken to the station.

Five minutes later the car left the grounds of the house and disappeared down the narrow lane. Eileen without delay pushed her bicycle through the gap, and followed.

She knew, of course, that she could not possibly keep pace with the car. But she went straight to the station, and some little time before reaching it the car passed her on its homeward journey. She knew then that Stebbing had indeed been left at the station.

The girl had just sufficient time to take her machine back to the small cycle shop where she had obtained it, and to get to the station. As she took her ticket the London train steamed in, and she saw Stebbing getting into a first-class compartment.

It was not a long journey to town, and soon after nine the train ran into Victoria. Eileen was near the engine, and she very quickly passed the barrier. Here, heavily veiled, she waited, and had no difficulty in picking out Rudolph Stebbing's bent figure. Although wearing no actual disguise, she had no fear of being recognised.

A veil is a really splendid disguise for a woman, for it is impossible to clearly see the features through one. In this respect Eileen had a decided advantage over Nelson Lee.

Stebbing at once chartered a taxi, and drove off. At Victoria there is always a host of cabs waiting, and Eileen lost no time in jumping into one and instructing the driver to keep Stebbing's vehicle in sight.

The journey through London was devoid of interest. At the corner of a quiet street in the Notting Hill district Stebbing got out of his cab, paid his fare, and walked away. Eileen was already on foot, and she followed her quarry with no difficulty. For the solicitor had not the slightest suspicion that he was being so closely shadowed.

He entered the gateway of a small semi-detached villa, rang the bell, and was admitted at once. Eileen watched the house for half an hour, and became somewhat impatient. The street was dark and deserted, and high bushes grew in the short garden in front of the villa. Close behind these the girl kept her vigil, and wondered what was passing within.

And then, just as she was wondering if she could not do something further, the front door opened, and Stebbing came out. He was quite close to Eileen, but the bushes concealed her.

Stebbing was talking to somebody, and evidently giving his companion final instructions.

"Good night, Mrs. Finch," Eileen heard him say. "You understand thoroughly, don't you? Take the early train down, and be at the Hollow during the forenoon. The letter of introduction I have given you will make everything easy."

"I won't fail, Mr. Stebbing. You can rely upon me," said Mrs. Finch.

"Very well, I will. Good night, nurse."

And Stebbing raised his hat, and passed quickly down the path to the gate. Eileen walked along the pavement boldly, within full view of the solicitor. He guessed nothing, suspected nothing. He merely thought that she was an ordinary passer-by. Why, indeed, should he think otherwise? And the words he had said to Mrs. Finch were of no consequence. A dozen people could have heard them, for all he cared.

But to Eileen they meant quite a lot. Her keen guess had been right, then? Stebbing had, indeed, been arranging with a fresh nurse, and she was to start for the Hollow early the following morning.

Eileen was feeling highly elated, and she made no further attempt to follow Rudolph Stebbing. She had learned all that she required. And she journeyed as fast as possible to Gray's Inn Road.

For London the hour was still comparatively early, and both Nelson Lee and Nipper were at home. They had, as a matter of fact, just come in from a late dinner, and an hour or two at a music hall afterwards. Both Lee and Nipper were surprised to see Eileen; but they knew at once that she had news for them. The keen, eager light in her eyes told them that she was on the track.

The great detective listened carefully to his girl assistant's report. He was struck by the astuteness which Eileen had displayed, and when she had done he nodded his head slowly and approvingly.

"You have done splendidly," he commented. "Upon my word, Miss Eileen, you almost make me feel angry with myself. Nipper and I have been out, taking our pleasure, while you, a dainty slip of a girl, have been performing the hard work."

Eileen laughed.

"But there is other work to come," she said quietly. "I want you to work with me on this case, Mr. Lee. I firmly believe that the patient down at the Hollow is in some sort of peril, and it is really our duty to find out what is actually in the wind."

"I am as determined as you are," said Nelson Lee. The affair is well worth looking into, and I promise you that I shall not be inactive."

"What's the programme, guv'nor?" asked Nipper eagerly. "What about that nurse, Mrs. Finch?"

"I intend to look up her record closely during the next hour," said the detective grimly. "It may be necessary to visit certain hospitals, but I mean to find out precisely what sort of a woman she is."

"And then?" asked Eileen, her eyes shining.

"Well, after that we will set to work," was Nelson Lee's reply. "I give you my solemn promise, Miss Eileen, that no stone will be left unturned to get to the bottom of this business. I have an idea, too, that you will be able to strike home a very decisive blow at one or more of your enemies."

And, then and there, certain plans were made—plans which were destined to work out smoothly and inexorably. From that very moment the downfall of Rudolph Stebbing was assured.

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Finch Arrives—In the Small Hours—An Appalling Plot.

A FEW minutes before eleven o'clock the following morning Dr. Munro Taggert's motor-car entered the Hollow, and drove in at the gates of the nursing home. There was one person seated in the automobile in addition to the driver. It was Mrs. Finch, the new nurse.

She was short and stumpy, inclined to be somewhat stout. Her face was almost colourless, but this was not owing to ill health. The woman was naturally sallow, and her hair was pitch black and tinged with grey. Eileen Dare had seen this much in the subdued light from the hall gas of the villa in Notting Hill.

One of Mrs. Finch's legs was just a trifle shorter than the other, and she consequently walked with a slight limp. But this in no way inconvenienced her, for she had been born with the deformity, and it did not impede her activity in the least.

She was soon admitted into the house, and, after a few minutes' waiting in a dull, drab sitting-room, Dr. Munro Taggert strode in and looked the new nurse up and down critically. He was satisfied with his scrutiny, for the woman's hard, cold-looking face impressed the doctor as being that of a callous, unfeeling creature—and that was just the type of person that was wanted.

Taggert read a short letter from Stebbing, with which Mrs. Finch had been provided. It merely introduced the woman, and assured the doctor that he need have no fear of her failing to please.

"You are experienced, of course?" asked the doctor shortly.

"I think Mr. Stebbing told you my character, sir," said Mrs. Finch, in a flat, cold voice. "I have been told to obey all instructions, and to ask no questions. Mr. Stebbing was liberal with me, sir, and I know my business. You need not have any fear that I shall talk. I never talk unless I am spoken to—and then I only give short replies."

"H'm! That seems satisfactory, at all events!" remarked the doctor. "Well, Mrs. Finch, I think you will suit me excellently. Time, of course, will show. It all rests with yourself. The other nurse has gone—she was taken to the station by the car that brought you here. When will you be ready to commence your duties?"

"Within ten minutes, sir."

"Good. You had better go up to your room and get your things off," said Dr. Taggert. "After that come straight to the sick-room, where you will find me. I have certain instructions to give you, and it is necessary that we should be in private."

A slight smile appeared at the corners of Mrs. Finch's lips.

"I understand, sir," she replied unemotionally. "I shall not be longer than ten minutes."

She walked out of the room, leaving Dr. Munro Taggert nodding to himself with satisfaction. He was more than pleased with the nurse's demeanour. She seemed cold, calculating, and utterly devoid of human emotion. For the purpose in hand, no woman would have suited Taggert's purpose better.

In ten minutes, almost to the second, Mrs. Finch presented herself in the sick-room. She entered noiselessly, almost like a shadow. Dr. Taggert, who was near the patient's bed, knew nothing of the nurse's presence until she spoke.

"I am here as you ordered, sir," said Mrs. Finch.

"Upon my soul! You move quietly," exclaimed the doctor, turning

round. "I am glad of that, Mrs. Finch. It is a good point in a nurse. This is the patient; he is unconscious, and will probably remain so for several days. His skull was fractured and two ribs broken. Not necessarily fatal, but serious. In fact, he is in no danger at all, and will recover in due course."

The nurse, now attired in neat blue, moved silently across to the bed, and gazed down upon the pale face and bandaged head of Clifford Harvey. She regarded him critically, with an experienced eye.

"You have certain instructions for me, doctor?" she said shortly.

"Yes, I have." Doctor Taggert moved across to a small medicine cupboard, and took from it a little purple glass phial, and a small hypodermic syringe. "During the next two or three days, until the patient recovers consciousness, your work will be simple," he went on. "You are to inject a given proportion of this fluid into the patient's blood night and morning. His recovery depends upon it."

"Exactly," said Mrs. Finch calmly.

Dr. Munro Taggert looked at the woman sharply.

"You understand, eh?" he remarked. "Well, it is just as well that we should know one another. This stuff is harmless in a single dose, but a regular course of it will have a certain effect—which will be noticeable in due time."

"Mr. Stebbing was very frank with me," said the nurse composedly. "I am here to obey your orders, doctor, and I shall do so implicitly."

Taggert nodded. Then he proceeded to explain fully to the nurse how the doses should be proportioned, and gave many other instructions regarding the general treatment of the patient. He further explained that the other members of the household were all honest folk, and that they thought the nursing home to be a genuine high-class establishment.

As a rule, indeed, the Hollow was used for legitimate cases. Dr. Taggert was a famous physician, and many well-known people had been nursed to convalescence in the home. It was famous in certain quarters as being one of the loveliest spots in England for the restoration of health. Therefore, who would suspect that the Hollow was now being used for a base and dastardly purpose?

Only the doctor and the nurse knew what was happening. Even Dr. Bryce would suspect nothing when, later on, the patient's condition would be made known to him. In a way, he would agree that such a result had been feared.

The remainder of the day passed quietly and without incident. Mrs. Finch seemed to settle down the very instant she stepped inside the house. By night she was acquainted with everything, and the doctor was delighted. He felt that he would trust her implicitly; her manner and bearing gave him confidence. In fact, he was very pleased that the other nurse had gone, for Mrs. Finch was eminently more capable.

All the afternoon and evening the nurse had been off duty. For she was to be engaged upon night work. She had known all along that the post was that of a night nurse. Dr. Taggert himself would watch over the patient by day, and Mrs. Finch by night. It was, of course, impossible to leave the injured man alone for a period longer than a few minutes.

At ten o'clock the nurse presented herself in the sick-room for duty. Punctuality was one of her good qualities, and she was there prompt to the second. Taggert, who was feeling tired, rose from his chair and softly crossed the room.

"As you know, you are to make the first injection now," he said gently.

"I know that I can trust you, nurse, but I should like to see you perform the little operation. for the first time. with my own eyes."

The nurse did not reply, but at once proceeded to obey the order. It was very simple, and all over in less than a minute. Taggart had given this duty over to the nurse, because he foresaw that he would probably be called to London at certain intervals. And it was just as well that Mrs. Finch should commence now as afterwards.

"That is all—just that simple operation night and morning," said Taggert smoothly. "The drug, I believe, will cause the poor fellow to recover his senses fairly soon; but there will be another effect, too. We must watch for it, nurse—I do not think it will be long before the first signs are apparent."

There was something strangely significant and horrible in the doctor's tone. The nurse understood perfectly, and was not in the least affected. She knew what her duty was to be, and was ready to perform it.

"I'm going now," went on the doctor. "I leave the sick-room in your charge, nurse, until the morning. At the hour we arranged I will relieve you. Should you require me at any time during the night press this electric bell-push, and I will come at once."

"Very good, sir. Good-night!"

Taggert departed, and an hour later he was in bed and fast asleep. He would not rise until the early morning, when it was necessary to give the nurse relief. In any ordinary case Dr. Taggert would have engaged at least two nurses, one to relieve the other; but this affair was totally different. Everything depended upon secrecy, and it was not advisable to have too many people acquainted with the facts. The nurse who had injured her wrist had known nothing; Taggert had not explained the situation to her, and she had been under the impression that the case was merely an ordinary one. Mrs. Finch, the doctor knew, could be trusted. Stebbing would certainly not have engaged her had there been the least doubt, for the solicitor's very safety depended upon the nurse's trustworthiness.

Mrs. Finch watched over the patient carefully, but was quite satisfied that he would cause no trouble for two or three days. And as the hands of the clock on the mantelpiece pointed to one-thirty she behaved in a very curious manner.

The nurse removed the little purple phial from the medicine-case, tucked it into the pocket of her dress, and then took a long look at Clifford Harvey. After that she silently left the room and walked along the passage to Dr. Taggert's bedchamber.

For fully three minutes she stood perfectly still, listening. The house was as silent as the grave, and quite distinctly she could hear the sounds of the doctor's breathing. Satisfied that he was fast asleep, she went back to the sick-room, closed the door, and went to the French windows,

Opening these noiselessly she passed out on to the balcony, taking care to draw the windows to behind her. Her next action was astonishing enough. She went to the edge of the balcony and looked downwards.

Right beneath was a soft lawn, not many feet down, and the posts of the balcony were artistic and ornamentally carved. Slipping over the rail, Nurse Finch quickly and nimbly clambered down the post until she stood upon the lawn. Then, with a soft, deep breath, she ran lightly across the grass into the darkness.

During the afternoon she had taken a walk round the grounds, and she knew exactly where to go and how to avoid obstacles. In less than five minutes she was among the deserted sheds of the brick-yard which adjoined

the nursing-home. Everything was dark, quiet, and deserted. The Hollow seemed to be utterly and completely isolated from the rest of the world.

But this was evidently not so, for two dim figures suddenly made themselves apparent near one of the sheds, and the nurse moved across to them. In the gloom she could see that they were two tramps—raggedly clothed, ill-kempt, and dishevelled. One was roughly bearded, and the other clean-shaven, merely a youth.

"I am so glad you are here," murmured the nurse softly. "Oh, Mr. Lee, there is work for us to do at this house."

The strangers were, of course, Nelson Lee and Nipper, and they and the nurse moved into the empty shed and faced one another in the darkness.

"What's the news?" demanded Nipper eagerly. "What's been happening, Miss Eileen?"

For Nurse Finch was none other than Eileen Dare!

"Nothing much has happened so far, Nipper," replied the disguised girl detective. "But I am quite sure that a dastardly plot is afoot and that we shall have to be very much on the alert if we are to frustrate it."

"We are certainly on the alert," said Nelson Lee grimly. "And with you upon the spot, Miss Eileen, I do not think we need fear the subsequent result. But I am anxious to hear how you have got on to-day; how you were received, and what sort of a welcome Taggert gave you."

In quick, short sentences—for time was limited—Eileen explained to Lee what had taken place during the day, and she made it clear that Taggert was thoroughly satisfied and that he suspected nothing.

But how came it that the supposed Mrs. Finch was Eileen?

The impersonation, in fact, had really not been a difficult one. In many respects the deception was surprisingly easy to keep up. Acting upon Eileen's information, Nelson Lee had visited Nurse Finch at Notting Hill the morning after Rudolph Stebbing's visit. The famous detective had been accompanied by Eileen herself, and they had found Mrs. Finch preparing for her new duties.

Nelson Lee had been perfectly straightforward. He had told the woman in plain language that she was wanted for a criminal purpose, and that she was aware of the fact. The nurse hotly denied the charge at first, but later admitted that she suspected that all was not right. She had been paid very well, however, and had not been able to refuse, because Stebbing was aware of a minor crime she had committed some months before. She had, in fact, been compelled to undertake the task.

Nelson Lee told her that she would come to no harm—that she would be even better paid, in fact—if she obeyed his instructions to the letter. She was to allow Eileen Dare to take her place at the nursing home, and she was to take up her own residence with a certain woman, living at Peckham, whom Lee named. This latter person was the wife of a retired Scotland Yard man, and Lee knew that with her Mrs. Finch would be safe, and would be kept under observation.

The nurse had agreed to the detective's plan. Indeed, she could scarcely do anything else under the circumstances. And Eileen, supplied with all the information which Nurse Finch could impart, had travelled down to the Hollow in the woman's personality.

There had been no attempt at impersonation. Eileen merely took the woman's name and identity for the time being.

Both Nelson Lee and Nipper would have staked all on Eileen's ability to carry through the bluff.

None of the occupants of the Hollow, however, had ever seen Mrs. Finch, and the only real exceptional feature about her was that one of her legs was

a trifle shorter than the other, and that she was stoutish. Stebbing might have mentioned this to Taggert, and so Eileen affected the deformity and disguised herself so as to appear thick-set. Lee himself had transformed the girl's face, and he had done it so cleverly that she really seemed to be a woman of over forty.

Thus when Eileen arrived at the Hollow she was accepted by Dr. Munro Taggert as Nurse Finch without a single thought. If Stebbing himself had been present at the home the deception would have been impossible; but Stebbing had expressly told Mrs. Finch that he would not be down there, and that he would not come. The whole affair was to be left in the capable hands of Dr. Taggert.

Eileen had played her part magnificently, and Taggert trusted her and felt that he could have no better nurse for the special work in hand. Had he known the actual facts he would not have been peacefully sleeping as he was at the present moment.

"And so your instructions are simply these—you are to inject a certain proportion of this fluid into the patient's blood night and morning?" said Nelson Lee, fingering the phial which Eileen had handed him.

"That is so, Mr. Lee," replied the girl. "Do you know what it is? I believe it is some deadly poison, and that Dr. Taggert means to kill the poor fellow by degrees—finally declaring that the patient died."

Lee removed the stopper from the phial and sniffed keenly. Then he felt in one of his pockets and produced a small leather case. This contained chemicals and miniature testing apparatus. Shrewdly guessing something of the nature of what was to come, Lee had provided himself.

The famous criminologist was well up in all branches of science, and medicines and poisons were a special hobby with him. For fully five minutes he was busy at the back of the little shed, Nipper providing light from a small electric torch. When Lee handed the phial back to Eileen his face was grim and his eyes strangely cold and steely.

"Thank Heaven you took action, Miss Eileen," he said evenly. "The contents of that phial is one of the most deadly poisons known to science. I will be brief, and explain in a few words."

"Then—then the rotters do mean to kill that poor chap, guv'nor?" asked Nipper.

"No; that is just it," he replied. "Death is not sought after. This poison is to be injected in small quantities, and it will not be fatal in that way. But its effect will result in something far worse than death. While one injection will do no harm, twenty will cause hopeless insanity. More than that will convert the poor, injured man into a raging maniac—and that, it is obvious, is Dr. Taggert's intention. Death will not occur; but incurable insanity!"

Eileen took a deep breath.

"How horrible," she murmured, aghast. "Oh, how appalling. I realise now, Mr. Lee, that I was justified in taking the course I have. And, with Heaven's help, we will frustrate this vile and dreadful plot."

"Amen to that!" was Nelson Lee's fervent reply.

CHAPTER V.

Lee's Instructions—Consciousness—And Understanding.

NIPPER was inclined to be drastic. He suggested breaking into the house, hauling Dr. Taggert from his bed, and pulling him limb from limb. This course, however, did not strike Nelson Lee in a favourable light.

For one thing, whatever Dr. Taggert deserved, the British law would not countenance such a course as pulling him limb from limb; and for another, it would be far better to wait and learn the object of the devilish plot. At present both Nelson Lee and Eileen were unaware of the position, and they could not very well act until they knew why Taggert and Stebbing were perpetrating such roguery.

"No, Nipper, the law will deal with the doctor at the right time," said Nelson Lee smoothly. "For the present we must let things go on—apparently. If you will listen, Miss Eileen, I will give you your instructions."

"I am only too anxious to learn," was the girl's eager comment.

"You are to prevent any injection of this poison," continued Lee. "On no account must the patient receive another dose. Taggert, of course, will probably be present at certain times, and we must therefore provide a substitute. Not far from here we have a motor-bicycle concealed, and Nipper will travel to London at once—the journey is not so very far and the whole night is before him. In the morning, Miss Eileen, you will find the phial, precisely similar to the one you have, carefully wrapped and placed beneath the pillar of the balcony immediately under the sick-room window. It will be concealed in the bushes, and will contain a liquid which will look and smell similar to the poison. In reality, however, it will be a powerful antidote and restorative, and its injection will do much to bring back consciousness to the patient. Taggert will suspect nothing, and you will be able to apply the substitute under his very nose."

"Oh, how splendid," said Eileen—"how wonderful!"

"Not at all. It is merely a simple subterfuge. And, further, my dear young lady, Nipper and myself will take a short holiday," proceeded Lee. "We will take up our abode in a small cottage just on the top of the hill yonder. We shall thus be handy in case of emergency."

Nelson Lee explained exactly where the cottage was situated, and how it was to be reached. Then Eileen bade her friends good-bye, and returned to the house. She re-entered by the way she had come, and found everything as she had left it.

The girl was feeling elated now; so far her plans had worked as on oiled wheels. And Nelson Lee was busy on the case, too. Between them they would certainly be able to frustrate the evil designs of her enemies.

In the early morning, an hour before Taggert was due to appear, Eileen went down and searched among the bushes at the base of the balcony pillar. It was daylight now, but the morning was misty and chill.

A small cardboard box was there, cunningly concealed. Eileen knew at once that Nelson Lee had kept his word. It was the purple phial which the detective had promised to send. Nipper had evidently made good time to and from London. As a matter of fact, the phial had been there a full hour, for Nipper had had from two till six-thirty, and the distance was not very great.

Eileen went indoors, and within five minutes the substitute was in the medicine cupboard, and the original, containing the poison, carefully hidden away. Eileen had been unable to detect any difference in the two fluids, and she knew that Dr. Taggert would be deceived. A test, of course, would have revealed the truth, but there was no reason why Taggert should apply a test.

The dose was administered in due course, and Eileen very soon went to her room to rest. The doctor was very satisfied with the new nurse, and mentally praised Stebbing for his judgment.

The day passed uneventfully, as Eileen had anticipated it would. This

was not a case for drastic action, but one in which the mischief was to be done slowly and methodically. Therefore, Eileen had no fear of anything alarming taking place while she was sleeping.

But during the night which followed something occurred which was quite unexpected. At least, Eileen had not thought that it would come so soon. She was more than delighted, for the whole aspect of the case was changed, and she was permitted to know exactly how things stood.

In short, Clifford Harvey recovered consciousness.

It happened at about two o'clock, when Dr. Munro Taggert was asleep and when the whole household was in bed. A light breeze outside rustled through the autumn leaves, but the night was dark.

Eileen was reading by the light of a shaded lamp. She expected the night to pass without incident, but was quite ready for anything that might turn up. The dose of supposed poison had been administered in Dr. Taggert's presence before he had retired, and he fondly imagined that everything was going smoothly.

The patient, however, had been given something very different to poison although Eileen had not anticipated that he would recover his senses for at least three days. But even the most expert specialists cannot positively say when an unconscious man will come to himself.

Eileen was sitting reading, and she was somewhat surprised to hear a slight noise, as though the bed sheets had been moved. The girl turned quickly, and then jumped to her feet with a quick intake of breath.

Clifford Harvey was lying with his eyes wide open.

Eileen looked at the patient closely, bending over him. He had certainly recovered consciousness, but was he capable of speech? Eileen was surprised to see that he looked at her with reason in his eyes. And the proof of his being able to speak was forthcoming the next moment.

"Hallo! Who the dickens are you?" demanded Harvey, in a mere whisper. "What's wrong, eh? Am I in a hospital?"

Just those words told Eileen that the man she supposed to be Kenley, the chauffeur, was in full possession of his right wits, and apparently clear-headed. It often occurs that a man becomes clear-headed and keen immediately after recovering from a long spell of insensibility. Sometimes a patient will lie for hours and days in a semi-conscious state. Others become wide-awake in a moment. It was so with Clifford Harvey.

"Hush!" exclaimed Eileen, inwardly excited. "You must not speak, Mr. Kenley. Lie quiet, and I will fetch you a draught of——"

"Kenley?" repeated the patient weakly. "What's the idea? My name's Clifford Harvey, and I arrived from Canada yesterday. Yes, I suppose it was yesterday. That hound, Stebbing, flew at me and knocked me through the window——"

"Please do not talk!" insisted Eileen, who had begun to think that the patient's brain was indeed confused. Your name is Kenley, and you have not just arrived from Canada. You are Mr. Stebbing's chauffeur, and you met with an accident in Holborn, two or three days ago."

Harvey smiled wanly.

"I came across from Canada in the Pride of Britain, and I——"

"I beg of you not to talk; it will only do you harm," interrupted Eileen. "The Pride of Britain was torpedoed and sent to the bottom six months ago. Perhaps that will make you realise that you are——"

"Torpedoed? What do you mean? One would think we were in the midst of a war," said Harvey, his voice still a whisper.

Eileen Dare stopped.

"What year do you think this is?" she asked quickly.

"Why, 1909, of course!"

"Oh, I am beginning to understand!" whispered the girl, with a catch in her voice. "This year is seven years in advance of the year you mentioned. And I want you to tell me what occurred between you and Mr. Stebbing?"

Eileen was greatly excited, and she at once gave Harvey a strengthening draught, which he drank down with ease. The girl then tried his temperature, and felt his pulse. She was not an experienced nurse, but she knew that a little further talk would do him no harm. He complained of pains in his head and in his chest, but she soothed him and explained what his injuries were.

Then, in response to her inquiries, he related what had occurred in Stebbing's office seven years before. He thought that the incident had only recently occurred, and that he was now recovering from the shock of it. And he explained why he had come to England, and that he was a rich man, and that his great fortune lie in the keeping of Rudolph Stebbing.

And Eileen understood perfectly. The whole miserable plot became clear to her as Harvey proceeded. She knew that he must have lost his memory on that fateful night, and that Stebbing had taken advantage of the fact. The girl was positively convinced that the patient was speaking the absolute truth, and not raving. The facts of the case were as clear as daylight.

Stebbing, seeing his chance open, had deliberately concealed Harvey's real identity, and had made him believe that he was nothing but a poor chauffeur. Meanwhile, he had been using his victim's fortune for his own use—and had thought to do so for all time.

Then the accident in Holborn had occurred, and Stebbing must have become aware that Harvey had recovered his memory. It was for this reason that the solicitor had been so startled and terrified at the time of the accident.

Stebbing, too, knew well enough that when Harvey did recover consciousness, he would reveal the whole truth—and that would be fatal for Stebbing. To kill the young man was impossible, for Dr. Bryce had said that there was no danger of death. And so Harvey had been brought to this quiet country nursing home, and he was to be converted into a madman! By these satanic methods Rudolph Stebbing would retain his safety, and Harvey's fortune.

It was a foul plot, and Eileen mentally swore that Stebbing should be exposed. She thought quickly, and decided that it would be safe to tell Harvey how everything stood, and to put him on his guard. She explained that he had been living in a new identity for seven years—actually as Stebbing's chauffeur—and that he had been victimised by the solicitor.

Harvey was too weak to be very angry, but he was amazed and shocked. And he listened carefully when Eileen explained that she was there for the especial purpose of learning the truth and foiling the scoundrels who were responsible for the plot. She told him what his fate was to have been—it was better to be absolutely frank at the outset—and she advised him to act a part.

Since he had recovered consciousness it would be splendid to make Taggert think that the treatment was having effect. Therefore Harvey was to pretend to be dull-witted and half silly. He was to answer no questions except in a vague way, and to give the impression that he was already out of his mind. The doctor would then conclude that the poison was working effectively.

And every day he was to pretend to be a little more insane. It was the only way to ensure his ultimate recovery. Clifford Harvey, in spite of his weak condition, was fully capable of understanding, and he knew that the

girl was speaking the truth, and that she was his friend. His gratitude was great, and he readily consented to do everything which Eileen advised.

He knew only too well that but for her help he would have been entirely at the mercy of the scoundrels who had had him in their power. The whole grim business was as clear as crystal now, and Eileen Dare was satisfied and contented.

For she knew that he would sleep peacefully during the time that Taggert was in the sick-room. For the patient, knowing all, would act his part, and would not reveal what was really going on.

Every hour that passed, instead of bringing about Harvey's insanity, would bring nearer and nearer the downfall of Rudolph Stebbing.

CHAPTER VI.

Out for a Rambie—The Open Telegram—One Minute Too Late.

"I'M fed up!"

It was Nipper who was in that unfortunate state.

He made the remark aloud, and addressed it to the four winds. Possibly there were more than four, however, for Nipper was being blown about from every side. He was out on the hills, and the wind, which had been rising during the day, had now attained quite a respectable velocity. And it appeared to whisp round Nipper in violent eddies.

"I'm fed up—right to the top of my giddy collar!" went on Nipper, still confiding his woes to the blustery atmosphere. "When the dickens will the guv'nor and I be able to do something? It's a nice thing for us two to be hanging about doing nothing, while Miss Eileen performs all the work and takes all the risk!"

It certainly did not seem right to Nipper. But the peculiar nature of the case made it impossible for things to be otherwise. Lee and Nipper were practically on the spot ready to do anything that was required at a moment's notice.

It was the day following Eileen's conversation with Clifford Harvey. She knew that the great detective and Nipper had taken up their residence in an old empty cottage on the top of a neighbouring hill.

It was now evening, and Lee and Nipper had been in residence for nearly two days. They were both disguised, and were "roughing it" very thoroughly. But they did not mind in the least. The holiday, in fact, was something of a novelty.

For, so far, it had been a holiday. Eileen had not communicated with them, nor they with her, and they had simply waited and had spent their time in glorious inactivity. But Lee had expected something of that nature, and he was neither alarmed nor sorry. In due course there would be work to do, he knew, and for the present he was enjoying the complete idleness. He had been working hard of late, and a rest cure was just what he wanted.

Eileen had intended acquainting Nelson Lee with the new facts at the earliest possible moment. During a walk in the afternoon she had left a note in a little niche at the back of one of the brickyard sheds.

This spot had been arranged between them, and it was possible for Nipper to creep up from a neighbouring spinney and enter the partially ruined shed by a hole at the back without being observed from any part of the nursing home or grounds.

The lad had visited the shed, and had taken the note to his master about an hour before. It merely said that Eileen had something of great import-

ance to relate, that the patient had recovered consciousness, and that an astonishing development had taken place. Eileen wanted Nelson Lee to meet her in the old shed at one-thirty in the early hours. She would then relate exactly what had occurred, and would ask for the detective's advice.

And so, until well into the night, there was nothing to be done. Nipper, who fully intended to accompany his master, was anxious for the time to pass. When he went for a holiday, pure and simple, he was ready enough to enjoy himself as much as possible. But now, knowing that Eileen must necessarily be in peril, he was uneasy and anxious to get to work.

But what work was there to do?

The uncertainty of it all worried the lad, and he had gone out now for a ramble over the hills. He had worked his way round from the little cottage, and was now looking down into the Hollow.

The high wind was blowing the trees about boisterously, and brown leaves were flying in the wind. Not far from Nipper the winding lane from the village ran right down into the Hollow. The village was about three miles distant, and there was a station there.

Nipper walked along aimlessly, trying to think of some means whereby he and his master could help. He badly wanted to know, too, the reason for the villainy which was being perpetrated at the nursing home. It seemed, from Eileen's note, that she had been making some discoveries.

"Jolly rotten, I call it," grumbled Nipper to himself. "Why should that lovely girl be doing all the work and taking all the risk? Being constantly with a scoundrel like Doctor Taggart, too! But I suppose it's all for the best. Neither the guv'nor nor I could have taken on a job of that sort!"

He walked on, and very soon afterwards paused on a bank to gaze down upon the narrow lane. The surface was poor, and covered with sharp flints. But Nipper was not looking at the road exactly.

He was watching the movements of a cyclist. The distance was not far, and Nipper could see that the rider was a telegraph boy, and he was obviously bound for the nursing home. There was nothing particularly striking in this.

Nipper watched idly. He was an expert cyclist himself, and it was obvious to him that the telegraph boy was quite the opposite. He was descending the hill at far too great a speed, considering the nature of the road. Probably the lad thought that he was riding superbly. But bad riders never have good judgment, and this telegraph boy was foolishly reckless.

There was a corner to negotiate, and Nipper watched with a half grin on his face, and with a critical eye.

"He'll come a cropper in a minute!" Nipper murmured. "Unless he shoves his brakes on pretty quick he'll—— Whoa!"

The telegraph messenger, lacking judgment, had "shoved" his brakes on far too quickly. The result was disastrous. The back wheel became locked for a moment, and skidded upon the stony surface. A sharp flint caught it fairly and squarely, and Nipper, in spite of the wind, distinctly heard a quick report.

The back tyre had burst, and as the bicycle was rounding the bend it was impossible for the cyclist to retain his equilibrium. He came down with a crash, and the next moment Nipper saw something flutter away from him, float overhead, and settle into the grass of a meadow.

The wind caught it again, and it was driven away quickly, and finally came to rest in a little hollow space. Nipper guessed what had happened—and he guessed correctly. In the fall the telegraph boy's satchel had burst open, and the telegram had fallen out.

"I bet he'll have a blue fit when he can't find it," grinned Nipper to himself.

He saw the lad pick himself up, rub himself, and then become aware that his satchel was open. He looked round in all directions, and then commenced a thorough search. Nipper moved forward.

"Might as well help the kid!" he murmured. "Good thing I spotted where the wire went to."

He trotted down the hillside, broke through a hedge, and crossed the meadow in which the telegram lay. When he arrived at the spot he saw that the wind had done something else, too. It had unfastened the flap of the envelope, and this and the pinkish form were lying side by side, the latter fluttering madly, caught between two stalks of stiff grass.

Nipper picked it up, and was about to fold it in order to replace it in the envelope. He certainly had no wish to read a message which was not intended for his eyes. But he caught sight of one word which made him thrust all scruples aside. That word was "Stebbing."

"My hat! What can this be?" Nipper muttered keenly.

He immediately proceeded to find out, and opened the form and glanced at the words which were written upon it. They were twelve in number, without the name and address of Dr. Taggert, to whom the telegram was addressed. They ran:

"Am coming down. Will arrive evening train. Have car at station.—STEBBING."

Nipper whistled softly to himself. He was astonished and startled, but he kept his presence of mind. Very quickly he folded the telegram, slipped it into the envelope, and sealed the latter up. Apparently it had been very poorly stuck down, for there was still plenty of gum upon the flap.

Then Nipper turned and saw that the telegraph-boy was still searching among the hedges beside the lane. Nipper trotted forward, and presently raised his voice in a lusty hail.

"Hi, you!" he shouted. "Are you looking for this?"

He waved the buff envelope, and the boy's face at once expressed his relief. He thanked Nipper heartily, and said that he would have got into a fearful row if he had lost the wire. Then, leaving his machine where it was, he proceeded on foot the short distance to the house in the Hollow.

Nipper, meanwhile, hastened away as fast as his legs would carry him to the cottage at the top of the neighbouring hill. He arrived at last, in a breathless state, and found his master within, preparing tea.

Nelson Lee and Nipper were living the simple life, and the detective was enjoying the novelty of it. The cottage was quite isolated, and had been deserted for years. Hardly a soul, probably, knew that it was now temporarily occupied.

"Why, Nipper, you look excited over something——"

"What's to be done, guv'nor?" burst out Nipper. "Stebbing's coming?"

"Eh? Good gracious! Are you sure, young 'un?"

"Positive, sir!" exclaimed Nipper. "Stebbing's coming down to-night!"

And he explained the incident of the telegram. Lee listened, a teapot in one hand and the kettle in the other. The detective placed both down, and looked at Nipper with a grim expression on his strong face.

"This is rather startling, my lad," he said quietly. "Rudolph Stebbing coming to the Hollow! He positively told Mrs. Finch that he would not do so. Confound the man; this will upset everything."

Nipper was well aware of that, and he said so. For, of course, for Stebbing to visit the nursing home now would mean the complete exposure

of Eileen Dare's deception. She was there in the identity of Nurse Finch, and was known by that name. Stebbing would instantly see that she was not the woman he had engaged, for she was totally unlike Mrs. Finch in appearance.

For Stebbing to visit the home at such a time as the present would be disastrous. Why he was doing so Lee could not imagine. Probably it was nothing more than mere anxiety to know exactly how the case was going.

And this, indeed, was the actual truth. Stebbing found himself slack on that particular afternoon, and so he decided to take a run down to the Hollow to see how the patient was progressing under the "special" treatment.

The whole of Stebbing's future depended upon the doings at the Hollow, and it was only natural that he should be consumed with anxiety. And it was obvious to Nelson Lee why the preliminary telegram had been sent. The solicitor had no wish to walk from the station, and so he had requested Dr. Taggert to send the car to meet the train.

"There is only one afternoon train which stops at this station," exclaimed Nelson Lee keenly. "By James, she's due in less than half an hour. Under the existing circumstances, Nipper, there is only one course for us to take."

"What's that, guv'nor?"

"Surely you can reason the position out for yourself?" pursued Lee, reaching for his hat. "Miss Eileen has important news for us, which she intends to impart to-night. We don't know what that news is, but it may be absolutely vital. If Stebbing goes to the nursing home this evening we can guess what will happen. Eileen will be found out, and the girl will probably be placed in a position of grave peril."

"Great Scott!"

"Eileen must be saved from that at all cost," said the detective grimly. "Stebbing's visit just now is very unfortunate, and we shall therefore take steps to intercept him. On some pretext or other we will meet him at the station and prevent him going to the Hollow."

"But how the dickens can you do it, sir?"

"I don't know now. We will think of that going along," was Lee's crisp reply. "To-morrow, after we have heard Eileen's news, provided that the patient is sufficiently recovered, I will bring about a climax."

And without delay Nelson Lee and Nipper started off across the hills for the small local station. It was a fairly short cut that way, and they reckoned to arrive just in time.

To intercept Stebbing was the only course which could be adopted. The shadows had been gathering when Nipper had met the telegraph-boy. Now it was rapidly getting dark, and the gloom was already thick. In a very short time the blackness of night would settle down over the countryside.

But a grave crisis was destined to arise.

When Lee and Nipper arrived within sight of the station they saw the train just steaming out. They had done their very utmost, but they had not had sufficient time. Madly they raced the last hundred yards, turned into the village street—and were in time to see Dr. Taggert's motor-car, carrying Rudolph Stebbing, disappearing in the distance.

"Done!" gasped Nipper, in dire dismay.

It was, indeed, a blow. They could not possibly prevent Stebbing arriving at the nursing home now. But they could certainly follow him and arrive at the nursing home within half an hour. Eileen Dare would almost certainly be in peril, and it was necessary that they should be on the spot to protect her

CHAPTER VII.

The Exposure—On the Chimney Shaft—A Scoundrel's Doom.

DR. MUNRO TAGGERT was in the sick-room, and "Nurse Finch" was with him. They had just made the patient comfortable for the night. He had been raving a bit since Taggert had entered the room, but was now quiet. Both the doctor and Eileen were pleased. Taggert because he thought Harvey was already showing symptoms of insanity, and Eileen because she knew it to be merely acting.

The injured man, in fact, was doing wonderfully well, and the girl was delighted. Taggert, in spite of his cleverness, guessed nothing. It was now evening, and Eileen would very shortly lie down for a few hours before coming on duty for the night.

Taggert had read Stebbing's telegram, and had sent the car to meet the solicitor. The latter's visit did not trouble him at all. He would be rather glad, in fact, to see Stebbing. Purely by chance the doctor had not told Eileen that a visitor was expected.

They were both over by the bedside when the door softly opened and Rudolph Stebbing himself appeared. He had just arrived, and the housekeeper had told him that the doctor was in the sick-room. Accordingly, he had walked up and had entered. He now stood looking at the little scene with interest.

"Why, Stebbing, why didn't you wait for me below?" asked Dr. Taggert shortly.

Eileen looked up, absolutely startled. She scarcely knew what to do. Would the villainous Stebbing recognise her? She could only stare at the visitor in astonishment, and with her heart beating quickly and almost painfully.

"I thought I'd come up," said Stebbing pleasantly. "How's the patient? And, hallo, what's become of Nurse Finch? Have you two nurses——"

"Why, this is Nurse Finch," said Taggert sharply.

Eileen realised in a second that her position was precarious, and she decided to make a dash for it straight away. She had an idea at the back of her head to rush to Nelson Lee and tell him what had occurred.

But before she could reach the door Stebbing stepped before her and gripped her arm. Quietly and grimly the two men forced the girl out of the room—for Harvey was asleep, and knew nothing of what was occurring.

And within five minutes Dr. Taggert and Stebbing knew that there was something very wrong. In an adjoining room they forced Eileen into a chair and endeavoured to get her to speak. But she refused to say a word, and Taggert, furious and alarmed, discovered that she was disguised. Obeying an order which she could hardly refuse, Eileen removed her disguise and revealed her true identity.

"Eileen Dare!" grated Stebbing hoarsely. "By Heaven, you have been fooled, Taggert! Oh, you dunderhead, this will mean ruin——"

"Keep your tongue still!" rapped out Taggert savagely. "How was I to know? I had never seen the woman. But you need not be alarmed, Stebbing, she has done nothing. The patient is half mad already; and we shall certainly not allow the girl to leave this house!"

Truth to tell, both Stebbing and Taggert were too amazed and startled to think clearly. And Eileen, too, was startled. But she kept her wits about her, and remained silent and speechless. And within three minutes she found herself bundled into a small room on an upper floor and the door locked upon her. Her captors, she knew, were about to discuss her fate.

But the girl did not think of her own safety. She was alarmed for Harvey; afraid that Taggert would discover that he had been fooled all along. And there was Nelson Lee! The great detective was close handy. How could she let him know?

Unknown to the girl, a climax was very near at hand.

Her first thought was to escape. If she could only escape and hurry to Nelson Lee she was sure that the villains would be frustrated. The door was only fitted with an ordinary lock, but to attempt to break it down would only bring her captors to the spot.

"Oh, I must escape—I must!" she told herself tensely.

She opened the window softly and then her heart gave a jump. Right below her was a sloping roof—the roof of the back part of the house. She could easily reach it. But then her spirits drooped again. She could reach the roof, but the ground was still a long way off, and there was no way down.

Still, it would be as well to make the attempt. With fast-beating heart she lowered herself until she hung by her hands from the window-ledge. She alighted upon the roof softly, and worked her way along until she came to the extreme end. It was very gloomy, but she could just manage to see. The house here joined up with the old deserted brick-kiln. The towering shaft was before her, and she could reach it by crossing the roof of a long shed.

But there was no way down to the ground—no way at all. Her position was not improved. She could jump, of course, but that would only mean a fatal injury.

And then, as she looked at the shaft, a sudden inspiration came to her. The chimney, she knew, had a rusty iron ladder running from the roof of the shed right to the summit. It would be quite easy to climb the ladder and reach the top of the chimney, and from there, Eileen knew, Nelson Lee's cottage was within sight. He had told her that he could see, from the cottage door, the top of the old shaft, but nothing else.

It was a forlorn hope, but one that might prove successful. In a secret pocket was an electric torch she always carried, and she decided to climb the ladder and to signal into the darkness. If luck was with her Lee would see the signal, and would understand.

It was, after all, the only thing to be done. It was a chance, and Eileen grasped at it. With sure feet she crossed the ridge of the shed roof and grasped the iron rungs of the ladder. The great chimney towered above her, and the wind whistled and howled round the buildings.

For such an agile, athletic girl as Eileen the climb was nothing. She had nerves of steel, and was very soon perched upon the extreme parapet flashing away in the darkness with her electric torch.

She did not know that her efforts were useless, that Lee and Nipper were quite in another direction; but her action in climbing the shaft was to have quite an unexpected result.

Rudolph Stebbing, pacing the floor of the library, suddenly paused before the window and stared out. He and Taggert were discussing what should be done. And the pair, gazing from the window saw, high above them, a bright light flashing in and out. Within two minutes they realised the cause, and Dr. Taggert snapped his teeth furiously.

"The girl is up the shaft, signalling for assistance," he grated harshly. "From that room it was possible for her to reach the chimney. By Heaven, Stebbing, that girl is infernally clever!"

"What shall we do?" gasped Stobbing, shivering.

"Wait! Wait here until I return!" snapped the doctor, with his face set grimly and cruelly. And the next moment he had left the room without explaining his intention. Very quickly he went to the cupboard, took something in his hand, and hurried to the room in which Eileen had been in prison.

Dr. Taggert dropped on to the roof below the window, crossed it, and soon reached the iron ladder of the shaft. What he was doing was the outcome of fear. Under ordinary circumstances he would never have dared to attempt such a feat. But he was desperate, and desperation lent him strength and sureness.

Quickly he mounted the ladder, and Eileen, above, knew nothing of his presence. When he reached the spot ten feet from the top he fumbled for a moment and produced a strong pair of iron cutters. With these he severed two of the supports of the ladder. At this particular spot it was now weak and unsafe. Even a slight weight upon it would cause it to collapse.

The high wind, whistling round the shaft, drowned the loud snaps of the supports being severed. And then Taggert descended, knowing that when Eileen attempted to come down she would fall to her doom.

Four minutes later Taggert was back in the library. He had been able to reach the window-sill and had pulled himself up. He entered the library looking dishevelled and untidy, and he found that Stebbing was nearly mad with anxiety.

"The girl is still on the shaft!" exclaimed the doctor huskily. "I have——"

He was about to explain the dastardly action he had performed; but at that moment Clifford Harvey commenced crying out mournfully and madly. The patient was, in fact, keeping the deception up. But Taggert thought otherwise, and he quickly rushed away—intending to explain to Stebbing afterwards.

The latter, however, was wild with fear. The girl was still on the shaft. Curiously enough, the two evil minds had been working in the same direction, with but a slight variation. And Stebbing, his own plan in his mind, rushed away to the upper room. He intended putting it into execution without a second's delay.

Stebbing's scheme was to climb the shaft and hurl Eileen to her death. He was utterly in the last stage of terror, for he knew what exposure would mean. And it would be easy enough afterwards to declare that an accident had taken place.

When Taggert returned, after quietening the patient, he found Stebbing missing, and a terrible thought came into his head. Rushing upstairs he gazed from the window, and there, in the gloom, he saw Stebbing climbing the ladder.

"You fool!" roared Dr. Taggert. "Come down—come down!"

Both Stebbing and Eileen heard the frantic tones, and Eileen then became aware of the climber. But Stebbing was too mad now to heed anything, and he went up and up. And then, quite suddenly, the expected happened.

Quite plainly Dr. Taggert saw it all. Stebbing stepped upon a portion of the ladder, and it gave way beneath his weight. There was a horrible creak, a scream of terror, and then the solicitor went hurling downwards to his doom.

. . . . . .

As it happened, Lee and Nipper arrived almost at that moment. They found Stebbing upon the ground, fatally injured and dying rapidly. He knew it, and confessed all. Yet he did not incriminate any of his associates. Ten minutes later Rudolph Stebbing died, and none could say that he had not met with his just deserts.

His death had been brought about by his own confederate.

Eileen was soon rescued, and after that general explanations followed. And Dr. Taggert disappeared. He fled while he had the chance, and skulked away in hiding.

It was later proved that the injured man was indeed Clifford Harvey, and that Rudolph Stebbing was a base scoundrel. His affairs were investigated and everything was proved.

And so, after seven years, Clifford Harvey came into his own. He completely recovered, and was for ever grateful to Eileen Dare and Nelson Lee.

But the combine had suffered another stunning blow, and Eileen Dare had dealt with still another of her base enemies.

THE END.

THE ISLAND OF GOLD

A Story of Treasure Hunting in the Southern Seas

By FENTON ASH

You can begin this Story to-day!

ALEC MACKAY, *the hero of our story, with* CLIVE LOWTHER, *an old chum, and* BEN GROVE, *a hearty old "sea dog," are comrades in an expedition to the South Seas in search of a supposed treasure island.*

They meet with many adventures, but their original quest appears hopeless until, one day, Alec and Clive are lost in a rocky and cavernous part of the island. They sit down to talk matters over, but immediately become the targets of a troop of huge apes, who throw pebbles at them from the rocks above. Alec examines one of the stones and finds it to be one of those for which the party is searching! On their way back to the camp the chums espy two white men—strangers both—in chase of some blacks, at whom they are shooting. Alec and Clive follow and arrive at a strange camp, where they find numbers of black prisoners bound together in couples. The chums first bind and gag their gaoler, then—

(*Now read on.*)

A Terrible Journey.

CLIVE and Alec returned to work to cut them free, and this took some time, since they had to handle the poor creatures gently and tenderly.

One by one—or, rather, two by two—they removed their bonds, stopping now and again in their work of mercy to make sure that the man they had tied up was still secure and unable to play them some unexpected trick. When they thus glanced at him they found him regarding them with an expression which would have been diverting had not the state of the rescued captives been so pitiful.

He was eyeing their proceedings with looks of mingled anger and scorn. Evidently he had nothing but contempt for people who showed any feeling of kindness or compassion for black men.

As the prisoners were set free they were, as far as was possible, helped to their feet. But of the eight there, only four were unhurt; the others were all injured in some way or other, and all were stiff and sore from the callous manner in which they had been tied up.

Now, however, that the rescuers had attained their end, and the captives were free, some unforeseen difficulties presented themselves. In the first place, what were the two going to do with the poor creatures, and how were they going to make them understand what had happened, and what their rescuers wanted them to do? For, alas! it was now found that these natives did not speak English, and most certainly neither Clive nor Alec understood their language.

This, as Alec remarked, "looked like a teazer!" He stood and stared at them in some dismay, rubbing his hair perplexedly.

"What on earth are we going to do with them?" he asked of Clive helplessly.

"Why, take them with us—if we can," was the answer. "I feel sure the doctor will approve. He'll find something for them to do temporarily, and I daresay later on he'll find some way of sending them back to their homes."

"Yes—if we can! That's where the trouble comes in. How are we going to make 'em understand that we shall treat 'em kindly, and so on, and that they are to come with us and not to be afraid?"

"Oh," Clive returned lightly, "by signs!"

"Signs, eh? Well, what's the sign for 'Do you feel well enough to take a moonlight walk for a few miles with us to-night to our camp, where you will be kindly treated?'"

"I can't say. You're talking nonsense now, you know. You can't expect to be able to carry on a conversation of that sort in sign language; but it ought to be possible to manage enough for what we want. At least, in all the story-books I've ever read, the travellers never had any difficulty in making natives understand them by signs."

"In books!" Alec repeated testily. "They put any sort of tomfool nonsense in books. If you think you can manage it, you'd better set to work, and be quick about it, for I'm sugared if I know how to do it."

Clive laughed, and singling the one he thought was the most intelligent and likely-looking native of the bunch, he commenced his first lesson in the language of signs.

Unfortunately, his efforts did not turn out very successfully, and his attempts became so tedious that Alec lost interest in the proceedings, and turned his attention to looking round the camp.

The first thing he noticed was that the man he had tied up, and who was lying on the ground with his face that way, was palpably grinning with grim amusement at their difficulty, and the means Clive was adopting to get over it.

Alec promptly turned him over, so that he could not see what was going on, and then continued his round of inspection. The only thing he found that interested him was a case of spare ammunition. He made a mental note of this, and the fact suggested something else. He went back to the bound man and took all the cartridges out of his bandolier, searched his pockets, and took from one a revolver, which he unloaded. Then he went to the man's rifle, which was still lying on the ground, and unloaded it, putting away what he had found in his own pockets.

"There, my friend," he said to himself, mentally addressing the fellow on the ground. "I think I have drawn your teeth, and if you should get yourself free sooner than we desire, you won't be so ready to follow us, and try to shoot us in the back."

Then he went back to where Clive was trying to come to an understanding with the natives, and Alec saw by his gestures that he was getting pretty excited over it.

"Well, what do they say?" Alec inquired cheerfully. "Have they told you their names, and where they live, and the number of the street, and what they would like for breakfast to-morrow morning at our camp?—if we can reach it. It seems to me, we're running a pretty serious risk of getting captured ourselves, and taking their places here—or, at least, of having to fight for our lives. Some of this man's pals may return at any moment—they may creep up, unsuspected by us, and—well, you know what would happen. Has the sign business failed?"

"Yes," Clive admitted desperately. "I can't get 'em to understand a single thing. I can't even understand whether they understand. So what we're going to do I really don't know."

(Continued overleaf.)

"Well, I can tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to make for the camp, and they can come with us or go elsewhere, or stay on here—whichever they jolly well please," was Alec's practical solution of the problem. "We've set 'em free and given 'em their chance, so I think we have done all that can be expected of us in the circumstances. If they've got any commonsense, and they think they like our company, they'll follow us of their own accord. And if they don't, they can go their own road, so far as I am concerned. There's only one thing before we start—there's that case of ammunition you see there. I don't see why we should leave that to help these scoundrels to try to murder us—as they're sure to do if they can. We've got quite enough to do to carry our rifles and other things. I think if these Johnnies are coming with us they ought to carry that lot somehow between 'em."

"I must say I agree with you, old chap," Clive returned heartily. "Your advice is certainly practical. We'll act upon it, and start at once. The moon's higher now, and we ought to be able to see our way fairly well. As you say, it won't do to leave that case of cartridges behind. So we must carry it between us at first. Then, as you suggest, if they follow us, we can shove it on to them, and if they don't——"

"We'll chuck it into the first deep pool we come to, and get rid of it," said Alec; and that settled the matter.

"Right you are, old chap," Clive returned, and then the two prepared for a start.

A last look at the bound man, to make sure he was still quite secure, and would have to lie where he was till his friends returned to the camp and release him; a few words of advice and warning to him concerning his future behaviour, which he did not in the least take to heart, only replying with swearing and cursing; and then, taking up the case of ammunition between them, they set out on their way back to their own camp.

At once, without any invitation by either word, look, or sign, the blacks followed them, much as faithful dogs might have done.

They did more, indeed, for of their own initiative they took possession of the ammunition and carried it themselves.

Also the unwounded ones assisted their injured fellows between them and managed to keep them going. Thus the difficulties of the two rescuers solved themselves as it were, and, marching along, slowly but steadily, the whole party eventually reached the doctor's camp without mishap or molestation.

(Another thrilling instalment of this grand yarn next week.)

Printed and Published weekly by the Proprietors at the Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, England. Applications for Advertisement space should be addressed to the Manager, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. Communications for the Editor should be addressed—"The Editor," NELSON LEE LIBRARY, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C. Agents for Australia: Gordon & Gotch, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, and Wellington, N.Z.; South Africa; Central News Agency, Ltd., Cape Town and Johannesburg. Inland and Abroad, 7s. per annum.

No. 70.