

that was going out that very day.

"No," said Terhune decidedly, "it's very good of you, but I have never killed anything—except maybe some men!"

The fat landlord goggled.

"M-men!" he gasped. "You say you've killed men."

"Oh, yes, three or four," drawled the private detective. "You see, I've lived abroad a good deal, but it was always in self-defence. I should find it rather boring to wallow in the mud and shoot a few harmless ducks."

Windle gulped, and shortly afterwards asked to be excused.

"I wonder if he'll repeat that to Thacker?" thought Terhune, as he presently put on coat and hat for a walk round the town. He wanted to locate Nelson, Ted Usher's solicitor.

It was a crisp day, much drier than the previous mornings, and there was more movement and bustle in the town.

Quite a number of the bigger shopkeepers were putting new goods in their windows, and once again Terhune marvelled at the variety of their stock.

He would never have considered Holdenwall a good shopping centre, but it must be so in the season. One could obtain almost anything, and at bargain prices.

He did not wish to ask the way to the solicitor's office, but it was certainly not in one of the main streets.

He followed several byways and narrow passages before he saw a shabby little office with the name in faded gold lettering on the window.

L. Nelson was evidently an insurance agent and a house factor as well as a solicitor. He had one or two advertisements of houses to let in the window, and Terhune pretended to study these before opening the door and entering the musty office.

It was so dark in there that at first he did not notice the bald-headed little man sitting at the desk in the corner.

It was the glint of horn-rimmed spectacles that first attracted his attention. He coughed, and the man turned.

"I beg your pardon, but I'm rather deaf on that side," he hastened to say. "Can I do anything for you, sir?"

"I've come to see you about a client of yours. You

are Mr Nelson, I take it?"

He got an eager nod, and noticed that the skin across the other's face was the colour and tightness of old parchment.

"I have a message from a Mr Ted Usher, who has a small shop in Middle Street."

"Yes, yes, I know Ted Usher very well. What does he want with me? Is he trying to say he can't pay his insurance premiums again?"

"No, he is in trouble with the police. As a matter of fact, he is in the cells, and has been there for some days. Apparently it was some kind of mistake."

"He says that a sergeant and a constable came to his shop and declared he had defaulted on his last year's rates."

"When he was looking for

It was a fair-sized building, for in the summer there were thousands of visitors, but the place was almost empty when he walked in and made for the table where the telegram forms were piled.

Three girls and a lean, hungry-looking man regarded him intently from behind the grilles. He would have preferred to use the phone to London, but feared he might be overheard.

In small towns there was plenty of time for those at the exchanges to listen-in. A code telegram would be better.

He spent some time compiling it, and whilst he was doing this a prosperous-looking man with bulging jowls, and only one arm, came in to buy some stamps.

into an inner office and picked up the telephone.

"Give me Inspector Thacker," he told the exchange girl. "I expect he's in his office at the moment."

The call was put through promptly, and he lowered his voice.

"Thacker, he's been in here, not to telephone as you expected, but to send a wire. It's a peculiar wire. I'll read it to you."

"Wait a minute, let me get a pencil," said the long-nosed inspector at the other end. "Go ahead."

"It's addressed to Marshall, Connington Avenue, W.2, and it says—

'Am having quiet but interesting time in this old-world town. My only worry is about the chrysanthemums in glass-house. Could you give them immediate attention. Fear injury from frost. Would urgently like you to cover them. Regards, Terhune.'

"What do you make of it? Shall I send it?"

He could almost hear Thacker's brain working as he studied the words before him. Finally came the rasping voice of the inspector—

"No, hold it up. It's a code of some kind. He's asking someone called Marshall to come down urgently. He wants him to cover this affair personally."

"It sounds as though Marshall may come from New Scotland Yard. The interfering fellow is more dangerous than I thought. Something will have to be done about him."

"Hold up the telegram, and any others he may bring in. Listen to every phone call he makes."

"Okay, that will be done," agreed the postmaster, and rang off. The telegram which should have gone to Inspector Marshall's private address, went instead into Nathaniel Stott's pocket.

Knowing nothing of this, Terhune went on contentedly.

Striding down the steeply cobbled road, he suddenly came face to face with Nelson, the solicitor, who stepped out of a shop that was labelled—Undertakers and Funeral Directors.

The little man looked up at him in a startled manner, then recognised him and clutched his coat sleeve.

"Mr—Mr—er—I didn't get

Harry the Hornet says:—



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THE HORNET'S NEST, "THE HORNET,"
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Please state your two favourite stories—and the one you like least!

[Editor's Note:—Owing to lack of space, the reader's page may occasionally not appear—but the bicycle will still be awarded every two months.]

the receipt to prove this was not so, the constable deliberately pushed him so that he fell.

"He rose and hit the man, whereupon he was arrested, handcuffed, and taken to the jail. That is the story as I heard it, Mr Nelson, but I can't vouch for the details as I'm a stranger to the town. He wants to see you."

The little solicitor was already grabbing a bowler hat.

"Ted Usher in a cell! Preposterous! What are the police thinking about? What are they trying to do to him? I'll get him out of there in no time. I know he paid his rates, because I lent him the money."

He pushed Pau Terhune out of the office, pocketed the key, and hurried off towards the centre of the town without even asking how his caller came to know all this.

"He ought to be a good friend to have in need," thought Terhune, and he turned two

more corners before coming face to face with the Post Office.

The postmaster himself served the newcomer, and from their conversation Terhune gathered this was the Mayor, whose name was Jessop.

Several times the two men at the counter glanced sideways at him, and he felt sure they discussed him in low tones.

He took the telegraph form to the girl at the end desk, and asked how much it would be. She duly counted up the words, and he paid the exact amount.

As he was walking out of the Post Office he heard the postmaster say—

"A telegram, Miss Baker? Give it to me, and I'll see it's sent at once."

Terhune would not have been so pleased with himself if he had seen Postmaster Nathaniel Stott, in the back room of the office, studying the telegraph form just handed in.

Stott frowned over the wording for some time, then went