

NO. 17.—MAGNIFICENT DETECTIVE TALE.—1^D

NELSON LEE

LIBRARY

1^D

Monsieur,
You are in Paris on a fool's
errand. Take my advice & return
to London. If you do not, you
may feel the fangs of

The Black Wolf.

THE BLACK WOLF

NO. 1 OF A NEW SERIES

BY THE AUTHOR OF YVONNE, WU LING, ETC.

Week ending October 2, 1915.

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The Black Wolf

*A New Series of Tales Dealing with Nelson Lee's
Adventures with the Mysterious "Black Wolf."*

By the Author of "Yvonne," "Wu-Ling," "The Spendthrift," etc.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

The author wishes to say that the strange and startling experiences which Nelson Lee and Nipper had with that mysterious individual known as the "Black Wolf," took place at a period of time preceding the present Great War, and that only now has it been possible to gain access to the notes which were made by Nelson Lee and Nipper on the cases and to gain the necessary permission for the publication of them.

The author has endeavoured to weld these notes into a coherent whole, and hopes the series dealt with under the category will do justice to the startling adventures which followed on the entry of Nelson Lee into the world-wide chase for the "Black Wolf."

CHAPTER I.

Nelson Lee has a Visitor—Some Strange Facts are Laid Before the Great Criminologist—Something About the Black Wolf!

WITH the howl of the wind and the driving of heavy rain there came to Nelson Lee a visitor one night in September. For the better part of the day, which had been as stormy and inclement as the evening, Nelson Lee and Nipper had been indoors toiling over that "wet day job," the writing up of the notes of the cases which had come under their care during the past month.

They were still at work in the consulting-room—Nelson Lee at the desk, reading out from a small red leather notebook to Nipper, who was writing down from the dictation in a large journal—when there was a knock at the door, and it opened to admit Mrs. Jones, the housekeeper.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," she announced.

Nelson Lee looked up and nodded his head in an absent way.

"Show him in, please, Mrs. Jones."

The door closed after the housekeeper, but was opened a moment later to admit a man wearing a long mackintosh from which rivulets of rain still dripped. He carried his hat in his hand, thus revealing a well-shaped head and small, perfectly-formed features. He wore a dapper moustache, and the barest hint of an imperial on his chin. His hair was brown, as was his moustache, and his eyes were pale blue.

While by no means of nondescript appearance, one would scarcely have thought that the man who had just come on the wings of the storm was the heart and brain of the Paris Detective Service—Monsieur Jules Fabert.

Chief of the Paris Detective Beaureau, and Chevalier of the Legion of Honour!

Nelson Lee's look of abstraction passed from him like lightning, and he was on his feet in an instant.

"Monsieur Fabert!" he exclaimed, in a tone of surprise. "This is, indeed, a pleasant surprise. Permit me to relieve you of your wet coat. Come here by the fire. It is a bad night, and you seem to have been out in the worst of the storm."

Monsieur Fabert bowed and took the hand which Lee extended. Then he suffered the detective to relieve him of his coat and hat, and sank into the big easy chair by the fire with a sigh of enjoyment.

"Your room is, indeed, a haven after the storm," he said, in almost unaccented English. "Ah! Thank you, monsieur, I shall smoke with pleasure." This as Nelson Lee passed him a box of cigars.

"And a whisky hot?" said Lee. "Nipper, make a couple of hot whiskys—put some lemon in monsieur's, my lad. We must guard against a cold."

Nipper sprang to his feet, and leaving the room, hurried away to do his master's bidding. When the lad had gone, Nelson Lee drew up a chair beside his visitor, and lighting a cigarette, settled back.

"I had no idea you were in London, Monsieur Fabert," he said. "Are you over for long?"

Fabert shook his head.

"I hope not, monsieur. I arrived in London less than an hour ago, and it is my hope to leave again by an early morning train. I left Paris in secret, monsieur. I am supposed to be at my home in Chantilly. I came to London to see you, Nelson Lee. It was my fortune that I found you at home, for I dared not send you word that I was coming."

Nelson Lee glanced at his visitor with a look of surprise.

"Your business with me must be of a very secret nature then, monsieur?"

Fabert nodded his head.

"It is," he said in a low tone. "It is so secret that I have spoken of it to no one—not even to my own confidential assistant. Nelson Lee. I have come from Paris to seek your aid. I am determined to lay one man by the heels, but, alas! so far I am forced to confess that I have failed. He is like a hundred men, and yet like no man at all. He is here, there, everywhere, and yet he cannot be located. I speak, monsieur, of that mysterious person, whom, for a better name, men called the "Black Wolf."

Nelson Lee sat up suddenly.

"Do you mean to tell me, Monsieur Fabert, that the Black Wolf is operating in Paris?"

"In Paris, monsieur, in Nice, Cannes, in Monte Carlo, in Biarritz—where not! He is like what you British call the will-o'-the-wisp. He is a cloud, an ethereal being who comes, who strikes, who disappears. But find him I will, and when I do, monsieur, he will find that Jules Fabert is not the nonentity he thinks.

"He has flouted me, monsieur, as I have never been flouted. Only a week ago he robs the Banque de Normandie of half a million francs, monsieur. And the day after I receive this insulting letter at my office."

As he spoke Fabert thrust his hand into his pocket, and drawing out a large leather pocket-book, took out a thin sheet of folded paper. He passed it over to Nelson Lee, who spread it out and saw that it was covered with very fine and beautifully formed writing. He read it with keen interest.

"Monsieur," it went in French,—“It is the little foolish dog who barks at the moon. Likewise, monsieur, it is the black wolf who leaps for the grapes and plucks them.

"You, monsieur, are the foolish little dog—I, monsieur, am the black wolf. The grapes which I plucked from the Banque de Normandie, monsieur, were luscious beyond compare. And you, monsieur, still bark at the moon.

THE BLACK WOLF."

Nelson Lee folded up the paper when he had read the contents, and handed it back to Fabert with a smile.

"The Black Wolf seems possessed of a certain grain of humour, monsieur," he remarked. "It is insulting, if you will, but also it is a distinct challenge. I have heard a little of this Black Wolf, Monsieur Fabert. I have heard that he has operated in New York, in Montreal, Rio Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Melbourne, Sydney, Cairo, St. Petersburg, Berlin, and Vienna. So far he seems to have avoided London. I have heard, too, that he speaks English with an American accent, American with an English accent, French as a Russian speaks it, Russian as a German speaks it, and German as a Turk essays that most horrible of languages.

"How this impression has been gained, when no one seems to be able to say they have held direct converse with him, I cannot say. I have heard that he gained possession of some of the finest jewels in New York. From the reports in the New York papers, he preyed heavily on some of the better known of the Wall Street gamblers. It was a sort of dog eat dog business according to the New York Press.

"In South America, certain of the coffee and diamond millionaires were his especial prey. In Australia he filched from mining and sheep magnates. In other cities from men and women prominent chiefly on account of their wealth. And now you tell me he is in Paris. I should like to hear more, monsieur."

At that moment Nipper re-entered the room, bearing a tray on which were placed two steaming glasses of whisky, one of which contained lemon.

Lee and Monsieur Fabert sipped the hot drink with enjoyment, then, when the glow of the spirit was driving the chill from the blood of the Parisian, he set down his glass and resumed his cigar.

"It is true all that you say, monsieur," he said thoughtfully. "The Black Wolf has operated in all the cities you mention, and in many more. It is true, too, that he is now in Paris, and already, monsieur, he has made many daring hauls. Listen, while I tell you of some.

"Three months ago I first became aware that the Black Wolf had come to Paris. In broad day a messenger was driving in a taxi-cab from the Banque de Nord to the Banque P—. This messenger had a bag containing a million francs, monsieur, and was armed. Between the Place de l'Opera and the Place de la Concorde he was robbed.

"His own tale is most confused. He remembers the cab turning into the Rue de la Paix, but he seems to recollect nothing more of the journey until he noticed they were driving along the Rue de Rivoli, just opposite the English bookshop there. He thought he must have drowsed off. The cab continued on to the Banque P—, which, as you know, is in the Champs Elysees, and there the messenger descended. He paid off the cab and entered the bank.

"At the counter he opened the bag to take out the million francs which he was transferring, when to his consternation, he saw that the bag was empty. But no—not quite empty, for in the bottom, monsieur, was a small slip of paper.

"In a fever of anxiety, monsieur, he took out this slip of paper and read the three words which he saw were written there. They were, monsieur, 'The Black Wolf.' That was all. He collapsed there, monsieur, and that was the first indication we had that the Black Wolf had come to Paris.

"His second appearance was heralded by the robbery of a gaming place in Montmartre, monsieur. How that was worked it has been impossible to find out. At one moment there were several playing at the table, and at what seemed the next they were all gazing at each other stupidly, for every franc had been taken from the rooms.

"Only when someone thought to look at his watch did he discover that nearly a quarter of an hour had elapsed. It appears that he had consulted his watch just before the money was taken.

"So it has gone on, monsieur. From the banks, from the gaming houses, from the great restaurants, from the clubs, hotels, and private houses, has the Black Wolf robbed freely. And this letter, monsieur, is the crowning insult of all.

"I have had my best men on the case; I have spent sleepless nights over the matter but all to no purpose. I come to you, monsieur, to beg your assistance, for I freely confess that I have failed. Will you come to Paris and help me to run this 'Black Wolf' to earth. Will you help me to do more than bark at the moon, monsieur?"

Nelson Lee smoked thoughtfully for a few moments without replying. What he had just heard had interested him keenly. It had never been his fortune to get up against this mysterious Black Wolf, but from the police of almost every great city of the world he had heard much about the man who seemed to be able to bring off such daring coups and to go unseen and undetected.

Undoubtedly the Black Wolf was a mysterious and fascinating figure, and if time permitted, he would like nothing better than to run him to earth. It took him just four minutes to decide that he would go to Paris, and do what he could. So, turning to Monsieur Jules Fabert, of the Paris police, he held out his hand.

"Monsieur," he said softly, "I will go with you. Shall we leave by the first train in the morning?"

The volatile Frenchman gripped Lee's hand, while tears of gratitude gathered in his blue eyes. The next morning early, Nelson Lee, Nipper, and Monsieur Fabert joined the continental train at Charing Cross.

CHAPTER II.

Nelson Lee's Fair Companion—Overboard!—The Bunch of White Violets.

FOR those whose time is valuable, and who dislike the sea portion of the London-Paris journey, the Dover-Calais route is undoubtedly the best. From London to Dover the train service is excellent, the boats plying across the Channel are roomy and comfortable, and the railway journey from Calais to the Gare du Nord is not unpleasant.

It was this route which was chosen by Nelson Lee and Monsieur Fabert on the morning following their conversation in the consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road. They were fortunate in securing a compartment to themselves, and on the way to Dover devoted themselves to the perusal of the morning papers.

At Dover they joined the crush on the pier, and when a porter had taken charge of their luggage they made their way up the gangway to the deck of the Channel Queen, which well-apportioned steamer was to take them across to Calais.

With the foresight of experienced travellers, Lee, Nipper, and Fabert sought first a comfortable spot on the upper deck—for it was a fine day—and,

getting hold of a deck-hand, had him bring three comfortable deck-chairs. Then, leaving their bags in the chairs in order that they might not be claimed by others, they descended to the deck below, and, moving along to the restaurant, joined the first rush for the breakfast-tables.

They managed to get separated, however, and securing a seat at one table Nelson Lee gazed about for his two companions, only to find that they had sat down at another.

He waved a hand to them, then turned to scan the menu before him. He ordered a light meal, and, while waiting for it, gazed about him at the motley collection of travellers who were on their way across.

He was occupied in this diversion when he heard a slight thud close beside him, and a moment later a muttered remark of annoyance in French. He turned to see what had happened, and there just at his feet was a small gold purse.

Bending down, Nelson Lee recovered it; then, straightening up, again made to hand it to the owner. But even as he did so he almost gasped with amazement at the vision of radiant beauty which faced him. Mechanically he handed the purse to her, receiving her thanks, but all the time he was filled with keen appreciation of her loveliness.

She was sitting in the seat next to him, and from the height of her head in comparison to the level of his eyes he knew she was petite. Her features were small and beautifully formed. Her eyes were deep liquid brown, soft as woodland pools; her nose was deliciously small and straight, and her lips were like twin bows of blood-red coral.

Her skin gleamed softly white, and beneath the dark masses of her hair Lee could just catch sight of two exquisitely formed ears. She was wearing a travelling costume of dark blue serge cut, Lee knew, by a master.

On her head, at a smart angle, was a small travelling-touque with a black veil wrapped about it. A fawn-coloured travelling-coat had been thrown back from her shoulders, and from the pockets Lee could see a pair of travelling-gloves peeping. A jewelled clasp nestled in the white material at her throat, but her fingers were guiltless of rings, the only ornament of that description which Lee could see being a beautiful wrist-watch.

It was plain to him that the fair being on his left was not only an experienced traveller, but that she must be possessed of considerable wealth. Even while he took in the details of her person he became aware that she was thanking him for recovering her purse.

"Thank you, monsieur," she was saying, and Lee's artistic appreciation grew as he heard the soft drawl of her voice—"thank you, monsieur! That is the third time I have dropped my purse this morning. It is a bad omen, I am afraid."

"I should call the third time a good omen for me," returned Lee, with daring gallantry. "It has given me the pleasure of speaking to you, mademoiselle."

"She speaks like an American of the Southern States," he thought to himself. "I will speak of them to her."

At that moment his order and hers arrived simultaneously, and, under the necessity to help her to the condiments, Lee was granted a further opportunity of speaking to her. By the time they were half through breakfast they were chatting away like old friends. Nelson Lee found that his fair companion had apparently been to every place worth going to. She spoke of South America, the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia as though it were an everyday affair to get aboard a boat and go globe trotting. But though he tried several times to discover exactly where she came from, she baffled his inquiries with a charming and vexing silence.

When they had finished breakfast Nelson Lee gave her his arm out of the

saloon, for the boat was rolling heavily, and, assisting her along to the companionway, steadied her up to the top deck.

There, somewhat to his surprise, he found that her own deck-chair was removed only a short distance from his own, and when her permission had been given, moved his over close to hers.

He wrapped her about with rugs, then, sitting down beside her, lit a cigarette at her request.

A few moments later, when Monsieur Fabert and Nipper appeared on deck, they saw to their surprise that Nelson Lee was absorbed in his fair companion. They hid their smiles as they sank into their own chairs, and for the next half-hour Lee ignored them utterly. He was enjoying himself hugely, for the more he knew of his companion the more interested in her did he become.

They were a little over halfway across the Channel when Lee rose, and, excusing himself, went below to the bar. He paused for a moment beside Fabert's chair as he passed, but the Frenchman had his eyes closed and was busy fighting down the qualms of *mal de mer*.

Knowing that the very mention of a whisky and soda would upset him, Nelson Lee passed on and went down the companionway. He was gone less than ten minutes in all, and, coming back along the deck, was making for the companionway in order to rejoin his fair companion when, just as he set his foot on the first step, he heard a piercing scream from behind.

Rushing to the side he saw the cause of it. A woman had screamed as a body had hurtled over from the top deck into the water.

In a moment all was commotion. There were screams from the women and the rush of some of the crew as they made to lower a boat. Bobbing up and down, now on the crest of a wave, now in the bottom of the trough, Nelson Lee saw a head.

Without hesitating a moment he sprang to the rail, and, raising his hands above his head, dived overboard. When he came to the surface again, and was blowing the water from his mouth and nostrils, he raised himself up as high as possible in the water, and, when he rode to the crest of a wave, caught sight of the head which was his objective.

Striking out at a strong pace he made for the spot. For a time he lost sight of it, but as he drew nearer he saw that it was a woman, and that she was making an effort to keep afloat.

Nelson Lee redoubled his efforts; then, as he came down with the curl of the wave to the spot where she struggled, he saw to his amazement that it was the beautiful girl to whom he had been talking on the top deck.

"Hold hard!" he shouted, as he came on. "I will be with you in a moment."

A minute later his arm was under her, and paddling strongly with one arm he was supporting her.

"Don't struggle," he said. "I can support you all right until the boat comes."

"I am not afraid," she replied gaspingly. "It was brave of you to come over after me. I could have kept afloat myself; but I have hurt my arm, I am afraid."

"How on earth did it happen?" asked Lee, as he strained his eyes for a sight of the boat.

"I scarcely know," she rejoined. "I was leaning against the rail when suddenly it gave way, and the next thing I knew I was in the water with the boat leaving me behind. With my injured arm and sodden clothes I am afraid I should have gone down if you hadn't come."

"Well, the boat won't be long now," responded Lee hopefully; though, truth to tell, he was finding the girl a heavy burden in her water-soaked

clothes. "They are coming directly towards us now, and should be here in two or three minutes. Hold up a little longer, and we shall soon have you aboard, when you can get into dry things."

Neither of them attempted to talk any more just then, for they were both beginning to feel the strain of their position keenly. Nelson Lee, while a powerful swimmer, was, it must be remembered, clad in heavy clothes, and, with the Channel in a choppy state, it can readily be seen how exhausting was his position.

As each wave crested beneath them they could get a fleeting glimpse of the boat which was coming to their rescue, and now they could also make out the bulk of the Channel Queen as she swung round in their direction.

The second officer of the steamer was in charge of the rescue boat, and as he caught sight of the two figures in the water he urged his men to still greater efforts.

To Leo it seemed an eternity between the moments when he could catch a glimpse of them, and he began to realise that unless they arrived very soon, he would be forced to go under with his burden, for let her drop from his grasp he would not.

Glancing at her, he saw that her eyes were closed, and as the long lashes swept her spray-drenched cheek he realised to the full just how lovely and how sweetly girlish she was.

If he had only known what a tremendous bearing that same girl was to have on his immediate future, if he had only known the truth of her, what would he have done? Not even he himself could have told.

Fighting hard to keep afloat, and to clear the tops of the curling waves, Nelson Lee set his teeth and hung on for dear life. He was aware of the boat coming down the slope of a wave towards him, then he vaguely knew that men were shouting to him.

He had a dim recollection of the intolerable burden being taken from his arms, then he slipped off with a sigh of languorous relief into a bottomless pit of blackness.

When he came to himself again he was lying on a bunk in one of the state-rooms of the steamer with a steward, the ship's doctor, Nipper, and Monsieur Fabert bending over him.

"Hallo!" he said weakly. "It was stupid of me to go under, but I think I must have swallowed a good deal of water."

Monsieur Fabert fairly danced up and down for joy.

"Monsieur Lee," he cried, seizing Lee's hand, "allow me to congratulate you on your magnificent act. It was—ah, how shall I say it?—colossal! I salute you, my friend."

Nelson Lee returned the warm pressure of the other's hand, then, gripping Nipper's in a grip of silent understanding, he struggled to a sitting posture. At the same moment the captain entered.

"I have found out from your friends your name, Mr. Lee," he said, shaking hands with Lee. "I can scarcely express my gratitude to you for what you have done. In due course the directors of the company will thank you personally; but, in the meantime, I know that they would wish me to do all I can to make you comfortable. Will you remain here until you feel better?"

Nelson Leo got to his feet with a laugh.

"Nonsense!" he said. "It was lucky I happened to be near at hand when the thing happened. I am perfectly all right now, thanks to the doctor, whom I see has put some dry clothing on me. But tell me, how is the young lady? Did she suffer any ill effects?"

The captain shook his head.

"She changed immediately she came aboard, Mr. Lee. She said she felt splendidly and would not stay. She has gone to Paris, but before she went ashore she left this for you."

As he spoke the captain took a letter from his pocket and handed it to Lee. Monsieur Fabert considerably walked to the door and engaged the captain and doctor in conversation, while Nelson Lee read the daintily-perfumed note which had been left for him.

It was very short, but very grateful.

"Monsieur," it ran—"How can I ever thank you for what you have done for me? It was very gallant and very brave of you, and I shall always carry the gratitude for it in my heart. It is not likely that I shall ever have the opportunity of showing how grateful I really am, but one day Fate may permit me to do so. *Quien sabe?*"

"Once more, monsieur, my thanks and sincere hopes that you have suffered no ill effects from your long immersion. I am quite recovered, thanks to you! *Au revoir, monsieur, and believe me very grateful.*"

That was all. There was no signature and no hint of an address by which Nelson Lee might know who his fair companion might be, or where she was bound.

It was rather annoying, to say the least, but with a philosophic grant, Nelson Lee put the letter in his pocket and started for the door. As he reached it he noticed that they were lying close beside the pier at Calais.

"Hallo!" he said. "I hadn't noticed that we had docked!"

"We docked half an hour ago," replied the captain. "The Paris train has just gone on."

"But that will not affect us," put in Monsieur Fabert. "I have already arranged for a special."

"The—er—the young lady went by the other train, you said?" remarked Lee to the captain.

With a humorous twinkle in his eyes the captain informed Lee that he himself had seen her off by it.

"Do you know her?" went on Lee.

The captain shook his head.

"I am sorry to say I do not know her name, although she has travelled back and forth across the Channel with me several times, Mr. Lee."

Nelson Lee shrugged.

"No matter," he said laconically. "And now, Monsieur Fabert, if you are quite ready we shall be getting along, I think."

Porters had already taken their luggage ashore, so bidding good-bye to the captain and the doctor, they went up the gangway and along to the waiting special.

Just as they were about to go aboard, Monsieur Fabert thrust his hand into his pocket to take out his watch, but a moment later Lee saw a look of profound amazement cross the Frenchman's face as his hand came away with the end of the chain only.

"My watch—my beautiful watch, is gone!" he cried excitedly.

Frantically he felt in the pocket again, and this time his fingers emerged grasping a folded slip of paper.

Spreading it out, he read what was written on it, then with a cry of rage he danced up and down, shouting:

"The fiend—the fiend! Lee, regard this abominable thing! My watch—

the watch of the chief of the Paris police has been taken from his pocket, and by the Black Wolf!"

With an exclamation of astonishment, Nelson Lee took the piece of paper from the fingers of the excited Frenchman, and, holding it up, read what was written. Scarcely had he read more than one line when he saw that it was only ridiculous doggerel. This is how it ran:

"The little French poodle who barked at the moon,
Went over to London, returned very soon.
To catch the Black Wolf who plucked all the fruit,
Was this poodle's ambition—not vulgar loot.
He sought the great mastiff of British renown,
The man Nelson Lee, out of old London town.
But alas! and alack! their hopes were in vain,
The Black Wolf was gone, but will return again.
THE BLACK WOLF."

Nelson Lee read the doggerel over twice, then with a smile he handed it back to Fabert.

"It seems that your journey to London to seek me was not as secret as you thought, monsieur," he said dryly. "The Black Wolf at least knew of your journey."

"But how—how?" cried the puzzled Frenchman. "My watch was in my pocket when I went on board the steamer at Dover! Of that I am certain, for I looked at it on board. Now it is gone, and in its place I find this idiotic note from the Black Wolf, which means that the Black Wolf was on that boat with us, and is even now on his way to Paris."

Nelson Lee nodded thoughtfully.

"On the face of it that seems probable," he said. "Is it possible for you to have this special overtake the other train, or to have all the passengers of the other train scrutinised as they get out at the Gare du Nord?"

Fabert turned without replying and raced for the stationmaster's office. Nelson Lee paced up and down the platform until he returned breathless, but with a look of satisfaction on his face.

"I have fixed it," he said, as he came up. "The other train will be delayed outside Paris, and the line kept free for us to pass them. We shall arrive at the Gare du Nord before them, and will ourselves inspect the passengers as they leave the train. It is something after all to be the chief of the Paris police. Allons! The engineer has orders to make the best time he can. If our luck is with us we shall intercept the Black Wolf at the Gare du Nord."

Leaping aboard the train they took their seats, and a moment later it pulled out of the station. They tore along on the way to Paris at a terrific pace, with the coach swaying from side to side at a dangerous angle, and threatening each moment to leave the rails.

Mile after mile was ticked off, until at last the houses and sheds of outer Paris appeared. Then, as they raced through a station without stopping, Nelson Lee glanced out of the window and saw a long express train pulled up on a side track to permit them to pass.

It was the express from Calais to Paris, and if their suspicions were correct then that same train must shelter the Black Wolf.

At last they panted into the Gare du Nord, and scarcely had he set foot on the platform than Monsieur Fabert had started into motion all the intricate police machinery which he directed. And no police in the world are more thorough than the police of Paris.

In less than ten minutes every exit in the station was guarded by the sharpest men of the station force, while Fabert, Lee, Nipper, and half a dozen picked men walked down the platform at which the Calais train must come in.

Not long after it rolled along, panting and groaning and creaking, and to the accompaniment of the cries of the porters, the mingled orders of the passengers given in French, English, and a hotch-potch of both, the frantic inquiries for "Cooks' Homme," the rattle of the trucks on their way to the long dreary customs-room, and the puff, puff of the engine, the weary travellers poured along the platform.

But not one person, man, woman, or child was there who passed the barrier without first being subjected to a keen and searching scrutiny by the police. On they went to the customs-room and the taxi-rank, little realising that their every feature had been closely studied until the last straggler had passed the barrier.

Then the police officials gathered round their chief. But thrash out the matter as they might, there had not been a single individual whom they could even suspect as being the Black Wolf.

If he were on the train and had passed the barrier, then he had managed to do so in a disguise which they had found it impossible to probe. So with a muttered imprecation, Monsieur Fabert led the way outside, followed by Lee and Nipper.

Yet even as they climbed into the magnificent Leon Bollee car which had come for the chief, Nelson Lee was puzzling over the fact that the fair creature whom he had rescued from the channel, and whom the captain of the Channel Queen had seen aboard that same train, had not detrained at Paris. He had watched as closely for her as he had watched for the Black Wolf.

Before driving to police headquarters with Monsieur Fabert, the car made its way to the Champs Elysees, and drew up before the Carlton Hotel, where Nelson Lee invariably stopped.

While the chief waited, Lee hurried into the hotel to engage rooms for himself and Nipper, directing that his luggage be sent up at once. He himself went up to direct its disposal, and as he crossed the sitting-room of the suite a page entered with a great bunch of white violets.

He handed them to Nelson Lee, and glancing hastily at the card which was attached to them, Nelson Lee read:

"The Black Wolf welcomes you to Paris."

Scarcely able to believe his eyes, Nelson Lee left the room and hurried down to the office. After some difficulty he managed to find the clerk who had received the flowers, but all attempts to gain any information on the subject failed.

The only thing he could discover was that only a few minutes before he himself had arrived at the hotel, a servant in black livery had entered and laid the white violets on the desk.

He had left at once, and on the paper which protected the violets they had seen Nelson Lee's name. Knowing him well as an old customer, they had thought he had purchased the flowers himself and had sent them on to be in his room when he himself arrived. The card which Lee had read was, of course, hidden by the protecting paper.

That was every atom of information he could discover, so placing the card in his pocket, he sent the flowers back to his room with instructions that they be put in water without delay. Then he made his way to the street where the chief and Nipper still waited for him. He was puzzled, was Nelson Lee, puzzled as he had rarely been in all his long career.

CHAPTER III.

The Black Wolf—The Black Wolf Plans a Coup—The House with the Five Gables—The Baronne Martigny Gives a Ball—Mademoiselle Milton Again.

PARIS in September is only excelled by Paris in May. Undoubtedly there is in the atmosphere of Paris a something electric which warms the blood of the Parisian like wine, instilling in him a vivacious enjoyment of life and the gooduses thereof which at times makes him appear to the more phlegmatic Briton needlessly volatile.

Yet he who can go through the cycle of the seasons in the French capital without feeling the sparkle of the wine of life in his veins is indeed hopeless. And in September, as in May, the good Parisian takes the air in the lovely Bois—that gloriously-wooded park than which no city in the world boasts a finer.

In early morning, while the night life of the city is drawing to a close, and just before the busy life of day has awakened, while the east is suffused by the crimson mantle of dawn, and the deer emerge timidly into the silent lanes and avenues which wind throughout the park, while the rattle of the market carts is still in the distance, then it is a realisation of long to be remembered joy to stand beneath a tall tree, at the top of which nestles a grey mass of mistletoe, and to gaze out across the dew-laden park.

In the afternoon, when the good Parisian takes his airing, it is full of life and colour—sauntering lovers, hurrying toilers, and brooding seekers after peace. If Hyde Park is the lung of London, then the Bois is the heart of Paris, for at some time or other every Parisian comes to the green retreat with his hopes, his loves, his sorrows, and his joys.

Nor was the Black Wolf exempt from the appeal of the place. There, although the good Parisians did not know it, the Black Wolf was to be seen every fine afternoon.

Punctually at the hour of four he strolled into the Bois from the gate which opens from the Avenue de Bois, and pacing leisurely down the main artery of the park, sauntered on until he came to the Cascade.

There he was accustomed to occupy the same table on the occasions when he came, and had one joined him at the table, one would have noticed that it commanded the finest view possible from that woodland restaurant.

But there was never anyone with the Black Wolf. He worked alone and took his pleasures alone, for he believed that therein, and therein only, lay safety.

And he was right. If one examines the criminal history of the past, one will invariably find that in some way the capture of a criminal has been due to some sort of connection he has had with others.

By working alone the Black Wolf had no confidants, and therefore no betrayers. This, more than anything else, is why he roamed the world at his list, working coolly and methodically, and snapping his fingers at the police at every city which had ever been honoured by his presence. Yet the attentive waiter at the Cascade, the equally solicitous maitre d'hotel at the Cafe de Paris, and La Grande Vatel, the bowing directors of the night cafes of Montmartre, and the croupiers at the several gaming places in the city, never for a moment dreamed that the wealthy and dapper Comte de Monte Bello was the mysterious individual whom men called the "Black Wolf."

Always habited in the latest creations of the boulevards, the Comte de Monte Bello was indeed one to set the hearts of the fair Parisians aflutter. Small, slim, and exceedingly dapper, he made his way along with a supple

grace which struck the souls of the clumsier and more awkward boulevardieres with envy.

On the afternoon when we first see him in the Bois, he had strolled up the Avenue de Bois at precisely four o'clock. He was dressed with immaculate detail. A tight-fitting morning-coat, edged with narrow black braid, set off his slight and almost girlish figure to perfection. Striped trousers of a quiet but elegant pattern fell in straight lines to his feet, which were encased in narrow patent shoes, topped with a delicate shade of fawn. His waistcoat was of the same shade, and the low-cut collar revealed a soft shirt of pleated white silk. A grey tie, in which nestled a handsome pearl, was tied with negligent elegance round an immaculate collar, and on the top of his small, dark, well-shaped head sat the latest creation in silk hat. Pearl-grey gloves encased his hands, and in the right he swung a thin Malacca stick, topped with gold, and which bore an engraved crest. Truly the Comte de Monte Bello had a "presence," and knew how to give it a proper setting.

He sauntered along the main artery of the park, entirely unresponsive to the rouguish looks of the demoiselles who flitted past him, until he came to the Cascade.

There he sought his usual table, and ordering tea à l'Anglaise, removed his silk hat and sank down into a chair.

On this particular afternoon the Cascade was not overcrowded, and beyond a few occupied tables on the other side of the room, the Black Wolf had the place almost to himself.

He gazed idly out at the beautiful view before him until his tea was brought, then leisurely he set himself to consume it.

When he had finished he drew out a small gold cigarette-case, surmounted by the same crest which his stick carried, and taking out a Russian cigarette, fixed it into a thin amber cigarette-holder.

With the same elegant manner he replaced the cigarette-case, took out a small gold matchbox, lit a cigarette with almost feminine daintiness, and drew an appreciative puff.

"So much for that," he mused lazily. "A moderate walk on a brilliant afternoon, a good tea well served, and a choice Pavovsky to top it off—what more could one desire to fill in the time until the hour of the aperitif? But, mon ami, le loup noir (my friend, the Black Wolf), you grow idle these days. I fear me you grow surfeited with the luxury of Paris, and the ease with which the dear stupid old Monsieur Fabert is hoodwinked. Sacre! What did he say when he reached for his watch and found it gone? It must have been droll indeed! And the lean-jawed Briton whom he brought with him from London—I wonder what he thought when Monsieur Fabert drew out not his watch, but a paper bearing foolish doggerel. C'est drôle, n'est pas, mon ami, le loup noir? (It is funny, is it not, my friend, the Black Wolf?)

"But to-night the Black Wolf secures the Martigny pearl collar. A hundred and seventy-nine pearls of the purest lustre. Well, I know that collar, my dear Baronne Martigny. Its history is in the 'dictionary' of the Black Wolf. Louis Seize gave it to the then baronne, and Louis Seize dragged it from the clutches of he who was its rightful owner.

"The then baronne was a court intriguer, and the collar was a reward for her treachery. By her words three innocent men went to their deaths, and henceforth the baronne flaunted the price of her treachery. In those days when Louis reigned, the collar had but one hundred and nine pearls, but seventy have been added by the husband of the present baronne. And how did you get them, my dear Baron Martigny? You got them, methinks, in as evil a way as your famous ancestor got them—by treachery and lying.

It is accursed to the Martigny's, is the pearl collar, and methinks, my friends, that it will better grace the property of the Black Wolf. To-night I get it. Let me see! I shall stroll to the Cafe de la Paix for my aperitif. I shall reach there at six and leave at six thirty. I shall dress for dinner at seven, and motor to the Grand Vatel at eight. At eight fifteen Daniel shall bring me my cocktail, and at eight thirty he shall serve me a delicate hors d'œuvre. By nine I shall have finished dinner, and shall smoke over my coffee until nine thirty. I shall then motor through to St. Didier, where I shall throw at the American bowls for half an hour. It is indeed a splendid way of keeping fit—the American bowls. By ten fifteen I shall get away and motor back to Ciro's, where I shall idle until eleven. Then on to change again, and I should reach the baronne's by midnight. A half an hour after midnight the Martigny pearl collar will be in my possession, and by one o'clock I should be home again. After that methinks I shall be ready for my couch.

"Yes, mon ami, it is a good plan, but there yet remains one thing to do. You have welcomed the British mastiff to Paris—you must also send word to him and to Monsieur Fabert that to-night between midnight and half-past twelve you will secure the Martigny collar of pearls. It will be droll. So, mon ami, it is time to start the programme!"

With an introspective smile upon his lips the Black Wolf rose, and, paying his score, sauntered out from the restaurant. Just as he emerged, a handsome black limousine drew up at the step, and a footman leaped down to open the door for the comte.

It was a regular thing for the car to pick him up after he had had his tea. Through an ivory-mounted speaking-tube the comte gave his order, only when they were almost out of the Bois and gliding down the crowded Avenue de Bois the car turned into the Champs Elysees and sped down the hill towards the Place de la Concorde.

Past the stately Hotel de Crillon it went until it reached the Rue Royal; then turning the corner by the pillared Madeleine it worked its way down the Capucines until it came to the Cafe de la Paix, which busy place fronts, as all the world knows, on the wide Place de l'Opera.

When the comte had emerged from the car, the footman got back to his place, and the car drew out into the rank in the centre of the Boulevard to await the pleasure of its owner.

To his favourite table at the corner the comte made his way, and ordering an aperitif, leaned back and idly surveyed the incessant stream of pedestrians which flowed and eddied past the corner.

True to his schedule he rose from his place at exactly six thirty, and re-entering the limousine gave the laconic order "Home." The car sped across the Place de l'Opera, and turning down past one side of the great opera, drove on to where the Cecil sits; thence it gained the corner where is reared that colossal department store known as the Galeries Lafayette, and so on up towards the Gare St. Lazare.

But it did not turn up past the station. Instead it kept on to the right of the quaint old church, and climbing the hill until it came to the Rue St. Georges, turned to the right.

Picking up the Rue Pigalle, it sped past the small hotels of Montmartre until it reached the Place Pigalle, on which fronts the famous night cafes l'Abbaye Thelme, le Rat Mort and Pigalle.

To the left now the great car turned down the Boulevard Clichy, until it passed the Moulin Rouge. There it turned to the right, and finally brought up before a high wall into which had been let great black gates almost Moorish in their shape.

A single hoot of the siren caused the gates to swing wide, and a second

later the car drove into a courtyard, enclosed on three sides by buildings, and hidden from the view of the passer-by in the street by the high wall and massive gates. A wide portico projected from the building on the right, and before this the car drew up.

Stepping out, the comte turned to the footman who was holding the door.

"You will wait here for a few minutes. Ninette will bring you down two notes. One will be addressed to Monsieur Fabert, to whom you once before took a letter, and the other to one Monsieur Nelson Lee at the Hotel Carlton in the Champs Elysees. You will go in the car and deliver both of them. Then return here for me. I dine to-night at Le Grand Vatel."

The footman bowed, and, climbing back to his place, gave the chauffeur his instructions just as the door of the house opened to admit the comte. A wooden-faced servant stood by the door, and, pausing on his way in, the comte inquired if there were any messages.

"There is nothing, monsieur, except a letter for Mademoiselle Miton. It was brought by Louis from the house in Chantilly."

"Ah, that is well!" muttered the comte. "I expected that earlier. It will be the invitation of Mademoiselle Miton to the ball which is being given by the Baronne Martigny to-night. I must see that mademoiselle attends."

Humming a light refrain, the comte permitted the servant to relieve him of his hat, stick and gloves; then passing along the rather gloomy but beautifully-furnished hall, he opened a door at the far end and entered a magnificent library.

On a wide desk of ebony lay a letter, which the comte picked up. It was addressed to Mademoiselle Miton, and without the slightest hesitation the comte broke the seal and took out the sheet of paper it contained.

Then walking with it to the window, which, by the way, looked out on a quiet garden, he proceeded to read it. And as he stood by the window in careless negligence of attitude, one had a perfect picture of the Black Wolf as he was.

Now that his hat was removed and he had the setting of his own private room, one could see in finer detail the different qualities of his features. His head was small, as has been said, but now silhouetted against the dying light of the day it could be seen exactly how shapely it was. His hair was dark, and had it not been clipped short would have been wavy. His eyes were deep and shadowy, and as a fleeting spear of light from the west picked them out, they looked exceedingly attractive. His nose was straight and well shaped; his mouth small, but almost womanly in its soft lines; his chin slightly cleft and firm. It was the face of a Sybarite, if you will; but it was also the face of the thinker and the intellectual. It was the face of the Black Wolf.

The letter addressed to Mademoiselle Miton which he had opened and which was, as he had anticipated, an invitation to the ball to be given that evening by the Baronne Martigny, he tossed back on the desk; then leaving the room he ascended the broad staircase to the floor above. Here, as below, the house showed every evidence of wealth and good taste, and the room which he entered was a masterpiece of comfort and luxury. Firstly came a large sitting-room furnished almost entirely in carved ebony. Paintings of an ascetic nature adorned the walls, and three of the four walls of the room were lined with great ebony bookcases filled with rare editions.

The carpet on the floor was thick and soft, deadening the tread as one crossed the room. Easy chairs abounded, and a large ebony desk, the mate of the one in the library below, stood almost in the centre of the room. On this desk stood a handsome electric table-lamp, whose light was softened by a shade of soft barbaric orange. Decorating the walls were trophies and

weapons from the savage islands of the Far East and the South Sea. It was the quintessence of luxury was that sitting-room.

From this room the comte made his way through a doorway into the adjoining room, which proved to be a large bed-room furnished in the same magnificent style as the sitting-room. Then came a small and beautifully-apportioned dressing-room, from which opened a bath-room which was all white tiles, white enamel and nickel.

The lair of the Black Wolf was a lair indeed. If Monsieur Fabert had only known of this luxurious retreat in the quiet backwater of Montmartre!

Slowly and leisurely the Black Wolf dressed for dinner. From bath to white tie he worked methodically, until when he emerged once more into the sitting-room, he was a study of black and white perfection.

Glancing at the clock he saw that it was exactly ten minutes to eight, so lighting another of his favourite Russian cigarettes, the Black Wolf picked up his opera-hat, cloak, and white gloves, which in some mysterious fashion had been laid out ready for him while he bathed, and humming the air which he seemed to favour that day, left the room and descended to the floor below.

There a footman came forward, and to him the comte said:

"I shall return between eleven and half-past. I have left a memorandum of instructions for Ninette. Tell her to see that everything is laid out ready for me."

The footman bowed, and, opening the door, stood aside for the comte to go out. The big limousine, with its black-liveried attendants, was already waiting at the step, and, getting in, the comte said: "Le Grand Vatel."

Then away it sped between the great guteposts, and as the gates slammed after it, it sped towards the Place Clichy on its way to the Rue St. Honore.

And so did the Comte de Monte Bello carry out the programme of the evening as he had arranged it. He left the Grand Vatel at exactly nine-thirty. By ten o'clock he was bowling in the American bowling-alley at St. Didier, and by ten-thirty he was idling at a table in Ciro's, listening to the music and sipping a mild absinthe frappe.

At eleven sharp he left Ciro's, and once more entering the limousine was driven rapidly to Montmartre. When he was once more in his sitting-room the comte carefully locked the door after him and made for the bed-room.

The door closed after him then, and for thirty-five minutes the ebony clock in the sitting-room ticked on methodically before the door opened again.

Then had one happened to be in the sitting-room as the door of the bed-room opened one would have received a startling surprise, for where the dapper Comte de Monte Bello had entered the bed-room, there now emerged a beautiful girl in an exquisitely-cut evening-dress and with a coronet of diamonds nestling in the great coils of her ebony hair.

Yet a closer examination of the girl's features would have caused one to remark that they were singularly like unto the features of the Comte de Monte Bello in form; and yet had Nelson Lee been the one to stand in that sitting-room, he would have recognised the girl as the charming travelling companion he had met on board the Channel boat, and whom he had been so fortunate as to rescue from the sea.

As for the Comte de Monte Bello, he seemed to have disappeared entirely.

Mademoiselle Miton! Who in the smart world of Paris had not heard that name? Mademoiselle Miton was the rage of the town, and because her life and doings were wrapped in a good deal of mystery, she was therefore all the more sought after.

Mademoiselle Miton, who appeared at the Carlton and the Ritz in the most ravishing of gowns; Mademoiselle Miton, who had caused half the

youths of the town to sigh disconsolately: Mademoiselle Miton, who was accepted in the smartest homes of the new society, and welcomed across the river in the faded and stately homes of the old nobility; Mademoiselle Miton, who never went anywhere without the guardianship of her faithful duenna, Ninette. Who she was, what she was—all was pure conjecture, but never for a single moment was there a breath whispered against her fair name.

She had been pronounced *comme il faut* by the powers that be, and pleasure-loving, beauty-loving Paris had accepted her and acclaimed her.

It was rumoured that she was very wealthy indeed. Many a painted dowager regarded the fair demoiselle and her wealth with interest, for if she had only half what it was rumoured she had, it would serve to bolster up many a fading fortune.

But so far Mademoiselle Miton had revealed no interest in any particular scion of the French nobility. She was charming and gracious to all, but decidedly so to none.

Therefore, it was but natural that the baronne, who was noted for the ultra smartness of her balls, should invite the fair demoiselle; and so it was that the invitation had gone forth to the secluded and beautiful old home in Chantilly, where under the guardianship of her duenna, Mademoiselle Miton lived.

Yet here she was calmly emerging from the rooms into which only a short half an hour before the Comte de Monte Bello had gone. It was strange to be sure. But before Paris, and incidentally the world at large, was finished with the Black Wolf there would be many more strange things linked up with the name of the Comte de Monte Bello and that of Mademoiselle Miton.

Touching a little silver bell on the desk, the girl stood waiting until a door on the opposite side of the sitting-room opened and a middle-aged French woman of very pleasant countenance entered. She was clad in modest black, and wore a shawl, which was not quite the habit of the servant, and yet was not the attire of the lady.

It was Ninette, the girl's duenna.

"La, la, la, Ninette!" cried the girl, smiling. "You look as fair as a rose to-night!"

Ninette smiled faintly.

"It is only the young and fair like you who retain the fresh blush of the bloom."

The girl kissed her on the cheek and stroked her white hair tenderly.

"If I can but be as sweet as you when I am your age, Ninette, I shall be happy. But come, chérie, it is time to be going! I want to be at the baronne's by midnight."

Obediently the duenna accompanied the girl to the door, and together they descended to the floor below. There a cloak was brought by the same footman who had opened the door to the Comte de Monte Bello, and as he threw it over her shoulders he displayed not the slightest surprise at seeing a young and charming girl in the place.

It was evidently not the first time she had been there. Opening the door he stood aside while the girl and her duenna passed out to the waiting car, and like the footman inside, the two men on the seat showed no surprise at seeing the two women.

The footman leaped down off the box and opened the door of the limousine, guarding their skirts as they entered. Then up to his place again, and off went the car to Passy, where the Martigny place was situated.

By way of the Etoile and the Avenue Victor Hugo the car went, after passing through the Boulevards and up the Champs Elysees, and finally, far out on the bank of the Seine, drew up before the gates of a magnificent mansion whose five gables pierced the night sky like the stately minarets of Cairo.

Two servants threw open the gates, and after passing up a tree-bordered drive, they finally stopped before a wide portico from which shone a brilliant light.

From within the house came the sounds of music and laughter, and through the open door into the hall could occasionally be seen the passing figures of beautifully-gowned women, chatting gaily with their more soberly-clad escorts.

The ball was in full swing, and entering the house with her duenna, Mademoiselle Miton passed along to the cloak-room to leave her things, while the black car drew off to the waiting rank of motors.

When they had left their things at the cloak-room, Mademoiselle Miton and the duenna emerged and made their way to the main salon, where the baronne was receiving her guests.

Just as they entered the salon, a large clock near at hand chimed the hour of midnight. It was peculiar, considering what the Comte de Monte Bello had said about arriving at the baronne's at midnight.

Yet so far there seemed to be no sign of him. At the upper end of the salon the baronne was receiving, and after making her obeisance there, Mademoiselle Miton joined her duenna and made her way down the length of the salon towards the smaller salon beyond.

It was beyond this again that the ballroom was situated, and it was her intention to reach that room in order to watch the dancing. But already several of the gilded youth had espied her entrance, and from half a dozen parts of the salon they were hurrying towards her in order to claim a dance.

Ahead of them all, however, was one man, who could not by the greatest stretch of imagination be classed with them. He was tall and spare of build, lean-limbed and lean-jawed. His evening clothes fitted him faultlessly, and he carried himself with an air of distinction which could not have been achieved by the younger men.

It was Nelson Lee, the great British criminologist, and on seeing the girl whom he had met crossing the Channel come into the room, he had started towards her immediately she had left the baronne.

Nelson Lee did not attempt to deny to himself that the girl interested him exceedingly, and now that he had seen her so soon again, when he had given up hopes of discovering her, had pleased him mightily.

It would add materially to the zest of the evening, for though a human mathematical machine, as far as his work was considered, Nelson Lee was no misanthrope or misogynist. He was virile and healthy, and took a keen interest in the study of life.

Nor did Mademoiselle Miton seem disposed to avoid him. She smiled, and held out her hand.

"It is indeed a pleasure to see you here, sir," she said softly. "I am afraid you must have thought me very ungrateful to run away in Calais without thanking you personally for saving my life, but my only excuse is that it was necessary for me to reach Paris as quickly as possible."

"You thanked me far more warmly than I deserved, mademoiselle," replied Lee, taking her hand and smiling down upon her. "I was fortunate

enough to be near the rail when you went over. But I was disappointed that you left me neither your name nor address. May I not know both?"

The girl laughed.

"Why, monsieur, if my poor name is of interest to you I shall tell it you with pleasure. Shall we make a bargain? I will introduce myself quite formally to you if you will do likewise."

Nelson Lee bowed low.

"Mademoiselle, permit me to introduce to you Mr. Nelson Lee of London," he said solemnly.

The girl made a low curtsy.

"Monsieur, I am delighted to meet you," she said gravely. "Permit me to introduce you to Mademoiselle Miton of Chantilly."

Nelson Lee's eyes showed the faintest tinge of surprise for a moment, for he was sufficiently au fait with the doings of Paris society to have heard of the beautiful Mademoiselle Miton.

Bowing formally, he said:

"I am charmed, mademoiselle, to meet you!"

Then they both laughed, and as several youths came up, Nelson Lee held out his arm and coolly led her away, leaving the disconcerted youths to stare at their retreating backs.

"You have met the baronne before?" asked the girl, as they went along.

"Never," replied Lee. "I was invited to come through the kindness of a friend. I have only met her to-night."

"She is very lovely, don't you think?"

"Yes. In an age of beautiful women, she is beautiful," he said. "I also find her quite charming."

"Charm should go with beauty," replied the girl. "She also is an artist. She knows what to wear and how to wear it."

"I am not conversant with the finer points of women's dress," said Lee, with a smile, "but I am quite prepared to accept your statement as truth."

"The baronne also seems to have some very fine jewellery," remarked the girl carelessly. "Have you noticed the pearl collar she is wearing to-night? It is supposed to be very famous, I believe."

"I heard of it before, but to-night is the first time I have been privileged to see it," said Lee. "It is very lovely."

But he did not add that the friend who had brought him to the ball was none other than Monsieur Fabert, the Paris chief of police, and that the chief reason for their being there was a note which each of them had received from the Black Wolf.

Ten minutes past twelve, and in his note the Black Wolf had boasted that he would relieve the baronne of her pearls before half-past twelve.

Yet at the moment Nelson Lee was not thinking of the pearls. Rather was he thinking of a certain bunch of white violets which he had found waiting for him at the Carlton when he arrived.

It had been utterly impossible for him to even guess who had sent them, for he had come to Paris in a most unexpected manner, and beyond Monsieur Fabert and Nipper, as far as he knew, no one else was aware of his coming. He knew that neither of them had sent the violets.

Then from whom had they come? It did not tend to clear up the mystery when, on looking at the corsage of his fair companion, he saw nestling there a small bunch of white violets.

Certainly it would have been a gracious act on the part of Mademoiselle Miton to send a bunch of white violets to her rescuer, but then she could

hardly have guessed to which hotel Nelson Lee would go on reaching Paris; and besides, hadn't she only a few moments before professed herself ignorant of his name? It was a trifle odd, to say the least.

By the time Nelson Lee had reached this point in his thoughts they had reached the lower end of the main salon, and looking through the adjoining one, could just see the dancers in the ball-room beyond.

Nelson Lee was just on the point of conducting his companion through to the ball-room, for he knew Monsieur Fabert would be somewhere about that room since they had arranged to keep a close eye on the baronne and her pearls, though not to make their guardianship a noticeable affair.

At the door, however, the girl turned back on the pretext of looking for her duenna. Standing by the door she gazed back along the salon, and Nelson Lee could not help but notice how really lovely she was in all the flush of her girlish beauty.

At the same moment the baronne, accompanied by one or two friends, started down the room, laughing and chatting gaily.

She beckoned to Mademoiselle Miton and Nelson Lee as she approached, and they, seeing that she wished them to join her, moved along to meet her. They met just by a small alcove near the door, and after the baronne had introduced Nelson Lee to those who were with her—they all seemed on familiar terms with Mademoiselle Miton—they stood chatting for a little.

Now in order to fully understand what happened a few minutes later it will be necessary to give a brief description of the room in which they stood. The salon in question was an apartment fully forty feet long by thirty broad. It was sparingly furnished on this occasion, and to relieve the severity of its outline, an alcove had been let in here and there.

There was a wide door at either end, one which led in from the main hall, and the other which led to the adjoining salon. To the right of where Nelson Lee stood there were five large windows, reaching almost from floor to ceiling, and which he noticed were partially open this evening.

Directly to his left, and perhaps ten feet distant from where they stood, was the large doorway leading to the other salon. Immediately behind them was the small alcove, empty at the moment, he was almost certain.

In the main salon there were few people now, since the baronne had left the spot where she had been receiving, and most of the guests had gone on to the supper-room or the ball-room.

In their own party there were six people in all—Lee, Mademoiselle Miton, the baronne, two other ladies, and one other gentleman. At the upper end of the room was the great clock, and casually Nelson Lee noticed that the hands stood at exactly twenty-two minutes past twelve.

Then, even as the baronne was in the act of making a remark, Nelson Lee seemed to feel a curious numbness steal over him.

He could see all those in the party, or at least he thought he could. Somewhat puzzled by the feeling, and attributing it to a spell of faintness, he attempted to draw a deep breath to relieve the pressure.

It seemed to him that the feeling remained with him for only a few moments, then it passed as suddenly as it had come, and his vision cleared once more.

Yet even as he raised his eyes, he saw, to his intense surprise, that the hands of the clock stood at twenty-eight minutes past twelve, and the next second the room was awakened by a frantic cry from the baronne.

"My collar! My beautiful collar!" she cried hysterically. "It is gone—gone!"

Then she swooned where she stood, just as Mademoiselle Miton and another woman caught her in their arms.

CHAPTER IV.

Nelson Lee is Baffled—The Fangs of the Black Wolf.

ON the face of it, the robbery of the baronne's pearl collar was too preposterous for belief. At one moment, as it seemed, she had been standing chatting with friends, and the next she had cried out that her collar was gone.

How had it happened? In that great lighted room, with so many people about, how had such a daring thing been brought about? For that the Black Wolf had made good his boast, Nelson Lee did not doubt for a single moment. Yet just then there was little time for him to think of that phase of the affair.

At the moment when the baronne had been borne off in a dead faint, the room became a scene of disorder and confusion. Those who were already in it rushed to the spot, and from the adjoining salon and the ball-room dozens of guests poured in, demanding to know what had happened.

In a few moments they were all in possession of the fact that the baronne had been robbed of the famous Martigny pearl collar; and in the telling, it was also soon added that she had been violently set upon.

Monsieur Fabert was one of the first on the scene. Rushing up to Lee, he drew him to one side.

"What do you know of it?" he asked excitedly.

Nelson Lee shook his head.

"You will scarcely believe it, Monsieur Fabert, but I know nothing, even though I was talking to the baronne while it happened. One moment it was on her neck and the next it was gone, and I didn't see it taken. It is the most mysterious thing which has ever occurred in my presence. I—I cannot give an opinion on it yet; but, if possible, I think the doors should be closed and those guests who were in her immediate vicinity searched."

"It is too late now!" almost groaned the chief. "The crowd has mixed up too much. If anyone near her took it, they will have had plenty of time to pass it on to another. It is absolutely beyond me, Lee! It is the Black Wolf, I am certain. Yet how has he managed it? Though I and my men have been on the alert every instant this evening to locate anyone who was at all suspicious, we have seen no one whom by any chance could be the Black Wolf. Every guest who entered the house to-night was properly identified and vouched for."

Nelson Lee grew thoughtful.

"On the face of it, it would seem that one of those who surrounded her when it happened must be the thief," he said musingly. "As far as that goes, I am as open to suspicion as any of the others, and I must confess that of the few about her I can fix on not one whom I can suspect. There was the baronne, myself, Mademoiselle Miton, another gentleman, whom the baronne introduced as Monsieur Fiquelmont——"

"He was one of my men," put in the chief quickly.

"Then that lets him out," said Lee. "Who else was there? Ah—yes, two other ladies! I do not see any of them now, but—yes, there is Monsieur Fiquelmont. Let us call him aside and ask him what he thinks of it."

As the man referred to went past, Lee beckoned to him, and he came up to them. He flashed a look of understanding at his chief as he did so, then turned to Nelson Lee.

"What do you think of the theft, Monsieur Fiquelmont?" asked Lee. "Monsieur Fabert and I have just been discussing it, and I told him you were there when it happened."

The Frenchman shrugged his head.

"I do not know what to think, Monsieur Lee," he said slowly. "As a matter of fact, at the precise moment when the theft must have occurred I was not feeling well. I experienced a feeling of faintness, and while I was struggling to overcome it the collar was taken. It is most annoying, but I really saw nothing at all."

Nelson Lee could hardly refrain from a start of surprise as the other told of experiencing a feeling of faintness. He recalled his own sensations at that moment, and as he saw one of the ladies passing who had been talking to the baronne, he left the two gentlemen with whom he was speaking and hurried across to her.

"Madame," he said earnestly, "will you answer me a question, please?"

"Certainly, Monsieur Lee," she replied graciously.

"At the precise moment when the baronne lost her collar, madame, did you see anything out of the ordinary?"

"I saw nothing of it at all, monsieur," replied the lady promptly. "I was not feeling well at the moment, and my eyes were closed. When I opened them it was to hear the baronne cry out."

Nelson Lee set his jaw grimly. So another of the party had felt the sensation of faintness. There was something odd about that which caused Nelson Lee to ponder. Then, at the upper end of the salon, he saw Mademoiselle Miton. She was coming down the room in the company of her duenna, and, seeing Lee, she came towards him.

"I came to bid you good-night, monsieur," she said. "I am going home now."

"How is the baronne now?" asked Lee.

"I have just left her, monsieur," replied the girl. "She has recovered from her faintness and is feeling better, though greatly upset over her loss. Tell me, Monsieur Lee, how can it have happened? Did you see anything? Myself I did not, for at the moment when it occurred there seemed to be a feeling of faintness——"

Nelson Lee held up his hand.

"We seem to have all felt it, mademoiselle," he put in. "I saw nothing, for I felt very faint indeed. I must confess that I do not understand the affair at all."

"And yet, if anyone could, it should be you," said the girl, with a smile. "I have heard how wonderful you are, monsieur, in the detection of crime."

Nelson Lee looked straight into her eyes.

"I may have had some small success in that way, mademoiselle," he said; "but we are all doomed to failure at times."

"Why don't you set yourself to track down the one who took the baronne's collar?" she said, smiling back at him. "It would be interesting to solve such a problem, I should think."

"Perhaps I may. Who knows?" responded Lee. "But, mademoiselle, although you gave me your name to-night you have not given me your address. May I crave it of you?"

"I shall give it to you with pleasure, monsieur. I did not know that you were remaining in Paris. It is 92, Rue de Presle, Chantilly, and if you would like to come and see me you may do so."

"I shall be delighted," murmured Nelson Lee, as he bent over her hand. Then, with a gay good-night, Mademoiselle Miton left him, and, joining her waiting duenna, left the salon.

A good many of the guests were preparing to leave now, for the robbery had broken up the spirit of the ball, and with the baronne removed from the scene, there was scarcely any excuse in remaining when she was so upset.

Nelson Lee, however, did not leave at once. Monsieur Fabert had dis-

appeared, no doubt having already started to do all that was possible to start an investigation of the affair.

Just as Nelson Lee was walking across the salon towards the spot where the robbery had taken place, he saw Nipper appear from the direction of the ballroom.

"I was in the supper-room, guv'nor," he hastened to say, "and I only just now heard what had occurred. It looks as though the Black Wolf had me to good his words."

Nelson Lee frowned.

"It seems so," he replied shortly. "Now, my lad, stand just here by this alcove. Face the clock at the upper end of the room. Tell me, what time do you make it?"

"It looks like seven minutes to one, guv'nor."

"That is what I make it, too, my lad," muttered Lee. Then he sank into deep thought.

"I could almost swear that the feeling of faintness which passed over me lasted for only a few moments," he murmured at last. "Yet, if I am to believe my own eyes, it seems that I have absolutely lost count of something like six minutes. I remember most distinctly looking up at the clock just before I felt dizzy, and I remember noting, at the time, that it was twenty-two minutes past midnight. It is not likely I would make a mistake on that score, since it was decidedly to my interest to note the passage of time from midnight until half-past twelve.

"Then, immediately I felt better, the baronne cried out, and I remember that it was exactly twenty-eight minutes after midnight. What does it mean? What became of those six minutes? Did the dizziness or faintness which seems to have assailed most of the others last the same length of time with them? Did they, too, lose count of something like six minutes?"

"My sight is all right, for Nipper makes the time the same as I do; and, therefore, it couldn't have been an optical illusion on my part. I must confess that it is all most mysterious. If I am to believe anything at all, it seems that, after all, the Black Wolf carried out his boast. But how, how? That is the mystery. The collar did not unclasp itself from the neck of the baronne.

"During that six minutes while I must have been struggling with the feeling of faintness, the Black Wolf himself must have been in this room. How did he approach us and depart without being seen? I must discover some of those who stood near, and find out if any of them saw a man approach us at that time. Also, I must discover the names and addresses of all those who were talking to the baronne when the theft occurred, and see if there is any light to be gained there. Fabert seems to be at work getting detailed information, and most likely he will be able to answer those very questions.

"At any rate, his man, Fiquelmont, will know all those who were there. The Black Wolf! It is plain to me now, my mysterious friend, why you have set the police of seven cities by the ears. But, as sure as my name is Nelson Lee, I swear that I will stay on your track until I run you to earth!"

Just as Nelson Lee registered this vow, he saw Monsieur Fabert enter the salon and signal to him. Making a gesture for Nipper to come along, Lee walked up to where the chief of police stood.

"I have got all the information we can gain here, Monsieur Lee," said the chief in a low tone. "Will you come along to my house and go over it with me? I have asked Fiquelmont to come along, too, and together you can go over every detail of the minutes during which you were standing with the baronne when the theft occurred."

Nelson Lee signified his willingness to do so, and they passed out to the portico where the big Leon Bollee car was waiting for them. An attendant

brought their hats and coats, and on descending the steps they discovered that Fiquelmont was already in the car.

They were whisked along at top speed to the private house of Monsieur Fabert, and there, in the privacy of that gentleman's study, they went over and over the details of the evening, dissecting every small point as only such trained minds as theirs could dissect them.

But when, at three o'clock in the morning, Nelson Lee and Nipper rose to go on to their hotel, Lee had to confess to himself that they were as much in the dark as ever.

On entering his sitting-room at the Carlton, he received the second shock that night, for lying on the table was a letter addressed to him. Tearing it open, he spread out the single sheet of paper which it contained and read the contents, which were as follows:

"Monsieur,—You are in Paris on a fool's errand. Take my advice and return to London. If you do not, you may feel the fangs of the Black Wolf."

Nelson Lee folded up the threatening letter with a shrug, but just as he was about to return it to its envelope he sniffed. There seemed something elusively familiar about the faint perfume which the paper gave off, but though he racked his brains half the night to try and remember of what it reminded him, he failed to link up the connection.

CHAPTER V.

Another Note—Nipper is Kidnapped

SOME men do their best thinking while lying in bed at night before sleep claims them, the minds of some are more prone to reason things out when they first awaken in the morning, while again others must needs shut themselves off alone during the quiet hours of the day in order to determine their course of action with regard to any particularly knotty problem.

While it was a fact that when Nelson Lee had a baffling problem to work out he was best fitted for the task when sitting in the big easy-chair in the consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road, with a pipe between his teeth, it is nevertheless true that often he had received light on some of his most abstruse problems while he shaved.

It is part of the psychology of the man who shaves himself that while the little shiny blade removes the hirsute growth of twenty-four hours his mind unconsciously turns to that which he must face during the day to come.

A great composer once said that his best song was composed while he shaved, and, likewise, a present day novelist of the first rank got the idea for his most successful book while he removed the growth of a day from his chin.

So it was with Nelson Lee on the morning after the ball given by the Baronne Martigny. While he shaved the next morning his mind ran on the events of the preceding night. Nor did they stop, but went back to the very first moment when Monsieur Fabert had come into the consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road to seek his assistance in tracking down the Black Wolf.

Curiously enough, Nelson Lee found it impossible to quite separate from his line of thought the charming girl whom he had first met in the restaurant on board the cross-Channel boat and whom afterwards he had been fortunate enough to save from the deep.

Mademoiselle Miton! How often he had heard of her. And now he had met the famous beauty, and, it must be confessed, rather mysterious young woman. He remembered again the note of thanks she had written before leaving Calais for Paris, and, following that, he recalled how, when he and Monsieur Fabert had watched the passengers descend from the Calais boat-train, there was no sign of her among them.

He could only conclude that she had detrained at some place on the way. Then he recalled the lovely bunch of white flowers which had been sent to his hotel. That was one of the strangest things which had ever happened to him, and now he had received another mysterious thing in the shape of a note of warning from the Black Wolf.

Nelson Lee was well convinced in his own mind that the Black Wolf and no other had been responsible for the theft of the Martigny pearls the night before. But how, how how? That was a point which Nelson Lee found hard to explain. That it had all occurred during those fatal six minutes he was also sure. And by now he was quite prepared to believe that the simultaneous fit of faintness which had assailed all those who were standing talking to the baronne was by no means due simply to an over-heated condition of the salon, but was the outcome of a deliberate action on the part of either the Black Wolf or one of his confederates.

If it was not the Black Wolf, then who could have been the confederate? Could it be possible that there was one of the six in the party which was gathered round the baronne who could have done such a thing? Or was there, after all, someone concealed behind the curtains in the alcove in front of which they had stood while chatting?

Nelson Lee was ready to acknowledge that he had only glanced casually into the alcove when he had passed the opening, and that it might have been possible for one to conceal oneself behind the curtains there. But in that case, supposing someone had done so, how did they know, how could they possibly guess, that the baronne and her party would step close to that particular alcove?

They couldn't possibly do so. It was unthinkable. Unless, of course, someone in the party engineered things so that they were bound to pause there, which again presupposed the existence of a confederate in the party itself.

Then, if that were so, who of that party could have been the confederate of the Black Wolf—the Black Wolf, whose boast was that he always worked alone?

The baronne herself was beyond suspicion in the matter. She would scarcely plot to steal her own pearls. The only other man in the party, besides Lee, was Monsieur Fiquelmont—one of Monsieur Fabert's most trusted men.

He, too, was beyond suspicion. Then there were two women who were close friends of the baronne, and while it was ridiculous to suppose that either of them could conceal the identity of the Black Wolf, they could be noted for further investigation.

There was left Mademoiselle Miton. Lee almost smiled as he thought of her. There was little of the Black Wolf, which rumour described, about her. She was young and girlish and wealthy, and never stirred abroad without her duenna. Never a breath of scandal had ever been whispered about her.

Therefore, it could not be supposed that she was the confederate of the Black Wolf. Also had she not said that she, too, had experienced the feeling of faintness?

Still, no matter how he thought over the different points of the case, one thing was certain; it all brought him back to that one place that

there must have been a confederate, or the Black Wolf himself, in the party if he had not been concealed in the alcove near at hand.

Lee quite realised that the Black Wolf might have gone into the alcove simply on the chance that the opportunity he sought might come if he waited long enough. But against that was his definite boast that he would steal the Martigny pearls between midnight and half-past twelve, and he had done as he had boasted.

With a puzzled frown on his brow Nelson Lee descended to breakfast, where he found Nipper already seated at the table. By Lee's place were two letters, which, after ordering his breakfast, he tore open.

One was from Monsieur Fabert, asking him to come on to police headquarters as soon as possible. The other was written on the same paper as the note he had received on his return to the hotel the night before, and Lee noticed that it, too, must have been left by hand, for it was unstamped.

It was brief and to the point.

"Monsieur," it ran,—“It seems that so far this morning you have made no preparations to leave Paris. This is the last warning the Black Wolf gives you. If you are not driving to the Gare du Nord by ten o'clock this morning, beware, for the Black Wolf will show his fangs.”

“THE BLACK WOLF.”

Nelson Lee tossed the letter across to Nipper.

“Our mysterious friend is persistent, my lad,” he said coolly. “He seems determined that we shall leave Paris when he wills.”

Nipper read the note and handed it back with a grin.

“What will you do, guv'nor?” he asked.

Nelson Lee shrugged.

“First, I shall endeavour to make a good breakfast,” he replied. “Then—well, then, my lad, we shall go on to the office of Monsieur Fabert. I am afraid it will be impossible to meet the wishes of the Black Wolf.”

Nelson Lee certainly fulfilled the first part of that which he intended to do, for he made a most excellent breakfast. After the meal, he and Nipper strolled out into the lobby of the hotel and stood chatting while a boy fetched their hats.

Now those who know Paris in general, and the Champs Elysees in particular, will know that the Carlton sits well up the avenue towards the Etoile. They will know, too, if they are acquainted with that extremely delightful hotel, that out in front, beyond the wide footpath, is a taxi stand, from which the uniformed commissionaire whistles up a cab at the behest of any guest.

Standing just without the circular swing door, Nelson Lee signed to the man to call up a taxi, and, in conformance with the usual rule, it was the first on the rank that should have come.

But had Nelson Lee not been busy at that moment answering a question which the reception-clerk who had followed him was asking, he might have seen that it was the third taxi on the rank which came in response to the call.

Nipper saw it, but thought nothing of it—then. It drew up in front of the door, a rather better taxi than one is usually fortunate enough to get in the French capital; and with a word of thanks to the commissionaire, Nelson Lee and Nipper entered.

Then, in French, Nelson Lee ordered the man to drive to the office of Monsieur Fabert, which was just off the Rue de Rivoli, but added that on the way he wished to stop for a moment at the English book-shop in the Rue de Rivoli, in order to get some of the latest London papers.

The man nodded, and a moment later they were speeding down the Champs Elysees. Passing the Rond Point they kept on to the Place de la Concorde, where the taxi circled Cleopatra's Needle, and passing the lovely fountains, drove on towards the English book-shop.

There it drew up, and, opening the door, Nelson Lee stepped out, slamming the door after him. He spent only a few minutes in the book-shop, for he was served at once on entering, and with a couple of London newspapers under his arm, emerged from the shop.

He noted at once that the taxi was not drawn up at the kerb where he had left it, but thinking that an agente de ville had requested it to pull over to the rank on the other side of the street, he stepped to the kerb and endeavoured to distinguish it from the rank of waiting taxis on the other side.

At that moment the commissionaire of the English book-shop came up to him and said:

"Can I call you a taxi, sir?" Nelson Lee shook his head.

"No, thank you. I came in one which was to wait for me, but I can't seem to see it now."

The commissionaire scratched his chin.

"Do you come in the red one which was here a few moments ago, sir?"

"Yes," replied Lee.

"Well, sir, it drove off just a little while ago. It only waited for a few moments."

"But the flag was down, and I had not paid him," remarked Lee in surprise. "Besides, I left a companion in the taxi waiting for me."

"There was a young gentleman in it," said the commissionaire. "I thought he must have told the man to drive on."

Nelson Lee tapped his leg with his stick.

"This is most annoying," he muttered to himself. "What on earth has possessed Nipper to tell the man to drive on when he knew that I would only be a moment, and that we were to go on at once to see Monsieur Fabert? He had nothing to do in this locality that I know of. It is a most unaccountable thing."

At that moment he was aware that a man had shuffled past him, and that, as he had done so, he had lurched heavily against him.

With a sharp look at the fellow, Nelson Lee thrust his hand into his pocket, thinking that perhaps the fellow was a pickpocket. His fingers came into contact with an envelope which he drew out with some surprise.

It was a note addressed to him and the envelope was the same as those previously used by the Black Wolf.

With a strange feeling of dread tearing at him, Nelson Lee hastily tore open the envelope, and taking out the single sheet of paper it contained, read the contents.

"Monsieur," it ran,— "You were warned. The Black Wolf has already taken the cub out of the British lion. The lion himself will next feel the fangs of
THE BLACK WOLF."

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CHAPTER VI.

The Mysterious Coffin—Bound for London

WHEN Nelson Lee had entered the English book-shop in the Rue de Rivoli, Nipper had leant back in the cab and had utilised the time of waiting by gazing idly at the passing stream of traffic which was coming up from the direction of the Louvre towards the Place de la Concorde.

He, too, was puzzling over the events of the previous evening, trying to figure out how the Black Wolf had managed to bring off the coup. He himself had been in the supper-room when the theft had occurred, for it had been part of the plan made by Nelson Lee and Monsieur Fabert that they were to spread out among the different rooms in order to try and locate the Black Wolf in case he succeeded in getting into the ball.

In pursuance of this plan Nipper had gone on to the supper-room, since the choice of room had been left to him, and he had considered it good business to go on duty in the neighbourhood of the supper-room.

To put it bluntly, the lad was joyously demolishing a mountainous ice at the precise moment when the theft had occurred. Monsieur Fabert, it will be remembered, was in the ball-room while Nelson Lee was gravitating between the main salon and the smaller one adjoining, with Monsieur Fiquelmont in attendance upon the person of the baronne.

In this way it had been hoped to effectually counter any move the Black Wolf might make. How it failed has been seen.

Idly Nipper watched a huge black limousine come up the Rue de Rivoli. He had first seen it some distance down at a spot almost opposite Rumpelmeyers and the Hotel Maurice. It had come along at a moderate pace, and as it drew nearer the lad had begun to take in the details of the magnificent car with the eye of an expert, for he was well informed upon motors.

Then, even as he gazed through the window of the taxi at it, it suddenly faded from his view and a terrible feeling of faintness swept over him. He struggled against it for what seemed only a few minutes, then his senses yielded and everything became black.

The traffic, the black car, even the taxi were all swept away in a black billow, and he sank back in the corner of the cab insensible. Then, had he been conscious, he would have seen that the taxi immediately drew away from the kerb, and, turning sharply, set off up the Rue de Rivoli after the big black car which had so interested the lad.

From the Place de la Concorde the black limousine turned into the Champs Elysees and continued on until it came to the Rue la Boetie. There it turned to the right and sped on at a rapid pace, until, by several turnings, it came out opposite the Gare St. Lazarre.

From the Gare St. Lazarre it picked out the way to the Rue Pigalle and Montemarte, and finally reaching the Clichy, turned down to the right and drew up before the great high gates which cut off the secluded residence of the Comte de Monte Bello from the outside world.

The gates opened immediately, and the black car drove in, followed by the red taxi. As soon as they were both in the courtyard of the place, the gates closed, and from the limousine there emerged the faultlessly-clad figure of the comte.

He was dressed in a well-fitting suit of blue, and wore on his head a light grey fedora. An amber cigarette-holder, containing one of his inevitable Russian cigarettes, protruded at a jaunty angle from between his well-moulded lips, and a thin stick hung negligently from his arm.

Walking along to the taxi, he threw open the door, and stood gazing in upon the huddled figure of the unconscious lad.

"A good piece of work—a very good piece of work!" he murmured softly. "It was done beautifully. Then aloud he said: "Jacques—Paul! Come here at once!"

The footman and the chauffeur of the black car hurried up at his command, and, pointing to the unconscious figure of Nipper, the comte said curtly:

"Carry him to the library! Deal with him gently."

The two men dragged Nipper from the cab, and, carrying him between them, made their way to the portico.

The front door opened as soon as they were on the steps, and, while a footman inside held it open, they entered with their burden, carrying the lad down the hall to the room at the far end.

The comte followed them, and when they had laid Nipper on a couch, he said:

"Take the taxi into the garage, mes infants, and see that it is painted black at once! Then varnish it with the quick-drying varnish, and see that it is got away from here without delay."

Howing, the two servants hurried from the room, and, on reaching the courtyard again, motioned to the driver of the taxi to follow them. On the opposite side of the courtyard a wide door was opened for them, and the taxi drove into a large and well-fitted garage.

There it drew up, and, slipping on long white socks, the footman and the chauffeur set to work to paint over the red to a black.

While they were so occupied, the Comte de Monte Bello stood regarding the lad who lay on the couch.

"The lion's whelp!" he murmured softly. "It was a good capture, and I fancy, my friend Nelson Lee, you are by now somewhat puzzled to guess what has become of your companion. If my man gave you the note, as directed, you will only know that once more the Black Wolf has struck. It will be a warning to you that when the Black Wolf speaks it is for you to obey or disobey at your peril! And now I must attend to this lad."

Laying aside his hat and stick, the comte stepped to a bell-cord which hung close to the desk, and, pressing the button, stood by the desk until there was a knock at the door.

In response to his command, it opened, to admit the footman who was usually on duty at the front door.

"Have my orders been carried out?" asked the comte. "Has the box been secured?"

"But, yes, monsieur le comte," replied the footman. "The box was delivered here less than an hour ago. It now awaits your pleasure."

"Have it brought in here," said the comte curtly. "Then call Marcel, for I shall need him."

The footman bowed and retired, closing the door after him.

For a few minutes the comte smoked thoughtfully until there was another knock at the door, and it opened to reveal the footman and another man standing outside in the hall, with a long, narrow box on the floor beside them.

In response to a gesture from the comte, they lifted it up and carried it into the room, laying it on the floor beside the couch. The footman then retired, leaving the other, a short, black-moustached Frenchman with the look of the Apache about him, to await his master's pleasure.

"Remove the lid, Marcel!" ordered the comte.

The fellow bent, and, taking a small but strong instrument from his pocket, withdrew the nails which held the lid of the box in place.

As he lifted the lid itself and laid it aside the comte stepped forward, and a smile lit up his face as he gazed upon that which the box contained. What there was about it to amuse him so it is difficult to understand, for that which the box contained was a coffin!

Bending leisurely, the comte grasped one of the handles at the end and, with Marcel lifting the other end, they hoisted it from the covering case in which it had come, and set it on a black rug in the centre of the room.

Then the comte straightened up, and regarded it with a critical eye.

"It is a nice coffin—a very nice coffin," he said. "In it our young friend will rest most comfortably, I think."

As a bit of workmanship, it certainly was a very handsome affair. Of black wood, and polished as choice ebony, it was mounted in dull silver, and lined with pure white satin. It had been carefully shaped to the lines of a human body, but one thing about it was slightly different from the ordinary run of coffins.

Inside there projected from each side, at just about the spot where the arms would be folded across the body, two large stain-covered "arms," which undoubtedly had been specially provided at the order of the comte, and the use of which would soon be seen.

Stepping across to the desk, the comte took from his pocket a bunch of keys, and, opening a drawer in the desk, fumbled about for a few moments.

Standing close by him, one might have heard a soft click follow, and immediately after, one section of the bookcase near the door swung bodily forward. It revealed a panelled wall behind it, and to that spot the comte strode.

He there pressed a small screw set in the back of the bookcase, which had swung forward, and, following that movement, a bookcase on the opposite side of the room swung forward, while that near the door moved back to its place against the wall.

Walking over to the panelled wall, which the swinging forward of the second bookcase had revealed, the comte pressed another screw in the back of this case, thus causing a small oaken panel in the wall to open, revealing a square hole beyond.

Thrusting in his hand, the comte took out a small green bottle and a hypodermic syringe. The neck of the bottle was closed—not by a stopper of cork or glass, but by some black material of about the same consistency.

The comte took the hypodermic needle, and, thrusting the point through this stopping material, drew back the plunger. The hypodermic syringe filled up to a tiny line near the top, and then the comte desisted.

Withdrawing the needle from the stopper, he replaced the bottle in the hole, and, with the hypodermic in his hand, walked across to the couch on which Nipper lay.

Pulling up the sleeve of the lad's coat, he pushed the shirt back and, plunging the needle into Nipper's arm, pressed hard. The contents of the hypodermic shot into the lad's arm, and, dropping the sleeve, the comte strode across to the hole in the wall, and thrust the hypodermic needle in beside the bottle.

Then he returned to the desk, and, fumbling about in the drawer again, caused the panel to close and the bookcase to swing back into place. That done, he lit another cigarette and, puffing slowly, spoke to Marcel.

"You will now place the bird in the nest, Marcel," he said. "He will sleep the sleep of forgetfulness now."

Marcel bent, and, picking up Nipper bodily, placed him carefully in the coffin. When he had secured the lad in position, he seized hold of the satin-covered "arms," and, drawing them out, allowed them to meet across the lad's body.

In this position, they formed a strong, padded brace, which made it impossible for the lad's attitude to change, no matter how the coffin might be twisted or turned.

When the comte was satisfied, he directed Marcel to screw on the ebony cover of the coffin, and then they lifted the affair into the covering box.

When that was finished and the inside braces screwed into position, the outer cover was nailed on, and the whole affair was ready for whatever purpose the comte intended it.

"That will do, Marcel!" he said curtly. "When you go out, send Jacques and Paul to me."

Bowing awkwardly, Marcel left the room, and, coolly sitting on the edge of the box which held the coffin in which Nipper's body lay, the comte awaited the coming of his henchmen. As they entered, he looked up and said:

"Well, mes infants, have you carried out my orders?"

It was Jacques, the footman, who answered:

"But, yes, monsieur le comte. The taxicab has been painted and varnished black, and already has departed. It is now as if the red cab had never existed."

"That is well, mes infants," responded the comte. "Now I have another work for you to do. You will take this box to the Gare du Nord. At the Gare du Nord you will be met by one who is dressed in the garb of an English tourist. He will take from you this box. Then you will return here, for he has his instructions what to do. You understand?"

"Perfectly, monsieur. The box shall be taken at once."

Getting up from it, the comte stood by while the two men carried the box out of the room; then, when the door had closed after them, he drew out a thin gold watch and glanced at the time.

"Sacré! It is past eleven already!" he murmured. "Monsieur Lee, you have consumed too much of the Black Wolf's time this morning! I shall just have time for a cocktail at Ciro's before lunch, and to-day I shall lunch at the Carlton. It will be droll to watch the British mastiff."

Slipping his watch back into his pocket, the comte left the room, and, putting on his hat, made his way through the courtyard to the street. In the Clichy he hailed a passing taxi, and, giving the driver the order to drive to Ciro's, climbed in and leaned back, puffing with evident enjoyment at his eternal Russian cigarette.

While the Black Wolf was thus disporting himself, his two faithful henchmen had lost no time in taking the box containing the coffin to the Gare du Nord, as their master had ordered. From the garage they had driven a large covered car, built much after the fashion of an ambulance, and, discarding their black livery for rougher garments, had placed the box inside the van.

Climbing into the seat, Paul, the chauffeur, had started off at once, and, pausing only long enough for Jacques to close the iron gates after them, they had driven to the Gare du Nord.

As they reached the great station, which is the station for the Calais train and the Calais-Dover route to England, they had driven on to the entrance off the inner yard and there had drawn up.

Scarcely had they done so when a man clad in a knickerbocker suit approached the van, and, pausing close beside it, said:

"You come with a box for the Englishman?"

Paul nodded his head, and replied in excellent English:

"But, yes, sir. Where shall we leave it?"

"I have already made arrangements for its disposition," replied the other. "Hold here for a few minutes, and I will have it removed."

He hurried away, to return a few minutes later with a station official and four porters. One of the men opened the rear door of the van, and the four porters lifted out the box.

It was evident that the man clad in the knickers had already arranged for the box, as he had said, for, after a cursory inspection of the outside, the station official made some cabalistic signs on the cover.

Then the man who was clad so blatantly as an English tourist made a sign to the four porters, who carried the box within the station.

When they had gone, the tourist turned to the two servants of the Comte de Monte Bello, and said in a low tone:

"You will inform the master that all arrangements are completed as he ordered. I leave for London within an hour, taking with me the body of my brother, who died in Paris. All papers have been made out, and all formalities complied with. Everything should go through without a hitch. I shall wire as soon as I get to London."

With that he hurried away in the direction taken by the four porters, who had carried off the box, and Paul, turning the van, drove back in the direction of Montmartre.

Truly the Black Wolf had shown his fangs!

CHAPTER VII.

Nelson Lee Draws a Blank—A Frail Clue.

IT would be a difficult matter to plumb the depth of the feeling of chagrin which filled Nelson Lee on reading the note which had been thrust into his pocket by the fellow who had brushed against him while he stood at the edge of the kerb in front of the English bookshop in the Rue de Rivoli.

He had scarcely grasped the meaning of the contents when he realised to the full how completely he had been played with by the Black Wolf. Nor did it ease his mind to know that the Black Wolf was probably at that very moment chuckling over the ease with which he had fooled the British mastiff.

Then as he stood there at the edge of the kerb in the city of Paris with the soft breath of the flowers in the Tuilleries reaching him on the wings of the morning breeze, Nelson Lee suddenly connected up two loose threads which had bothered him to no small extent.

What it was that enabled him to make the connection, or how it came to him he did not know. Probably it was some subconscious association of ideas born by the breath of the flowers in the gardens of the Tuilleries.

At any rate he knew in a single flash of what the subtle scent of the paper used by the Black Wolf reminded him. It reminded him of the sweet odour of the white violets which some unknown person had sent to his hotel the day of his arrival, and, by going a step further, it reminded him of the scent of the bunch of white violets which Mademoiselle Miton had worn in her bodice at the Martigny ball the night before.

Scarcely had the thought come to him when Nelson Lee turned quickly to seek the man who had brushed against him. He was nowhere to be seen, and although he hurried to the corner and gazed this way and that, he could not locate the fellow.

The reason was because the fellow had jumped into a taxi which was waiting round the corner, and even as Nelson Lee read the note which had been thrust into his pocket, had been driven away at a rapid pace.

When he found that the fellow had quite disappeared, and knowing how useless it was to try to find him then, Nelson Lee turned back to the commissionaire, who was watching him somewhat curiously.

The man was a Briton, as was evidenced by his bearing and the British service ribbons which decorated his coat.

"You said the red taxi which brought me drove away a few moments before I came out?" said Lee, interrogatively.

The commissionaire nodded.

"Yes, sir; it did."

"Did you notice which way it went?" asked Lee.

"It turned sharp about, sir, and drove off towards the Place de la Concorde."

Nelson Lee tapped his leg with the stick in an irritated way.

"I am certain Nipper would not have driven off without first telling me," he said to himself. "But at the same time it is a contingency which must be considered. From what the commissionaire tells me, it seems certain that the lad was in the cab when it drove off. Is it possible that he has returned to the Carlton for something? I do not think so, but I can at least inquire."

Deciding quickly what he should do, he indicated to the commissionaire that he would have a taxi after all, and jumping into the one which drove up, told the man to drive to the Carlton as quickly as possible.

It is only a short run from the Rue de Rivoli to the Carlton, and when the cab drew into the door Nelson Lee beckoned to the commissionaire, who made to open the door. It was the same man who had closed the door after them when he and Nipper had driven off in the red taxi.

"I wish to know if the young man who went away in the cab with me a little time ago has returned?" said Nelson Lee curtly.

The man shook his head.

"No, monsieur; I have not seen him."

"Has the taxi which we took returned to this rank?" went on Lee.

Again the man shook his head.

"No, monsieur; I have not seen it since."

"Do you know the driver?"

"No, monsieur; he was a stranger to me. I never before saw him or his taxi."

Lee turned his head and gazed out across the wide footpath to the line of cabs on the rank.

"Will you ask those men if any of them know the cab and the driver?" said Lee. "You can tell them that if any of them can give me any information about it there is a louis for him."

"I shall inquire at once, monsieur," replied the commissionaire.

He hurried out to the cab-rank, and while he waited, Lee lit a cigarette and watched him go from cab to cab.

It was nearly ten minutes later when he returned.

"They know nothing, monsieur," said the commissionaire, as he came up. "I have asked them all, and one man whom I know—he is at the very end of the rank, monsieur—was in the front of the rank when I whistled for a cab for you. I remember myself, monsieur, that it was the red taxi—the third on the rank—which drove up. I thought the other two had given way for some reason, but only now Pinchot, the man to whom I have just spoken, tells me that when my whistle went he of the red taxi called out that you had already engaged him. For that reason, monsieur, they permitted him to take the call."

Nelson Lee frowned thoughtfully, and seeing that there was nothing more to be got out of the commissionaire, gave him a couple of louis—one for himself and one for the driver—and ordered his man to drive him back to the Rue de Rivoli.

"If I have not found out much, I have at least discovered enough to make me certain that the red taxi was on that rank waiting for me and Nipper to come out. Which means that it was already arranged that we should

take it to whatever address we intended going to. But what I cannot understand is why it drove off with Nipper in it, and how it could have done so without the lad making an effort to leave the cab. He certainly would have done so unless there was something of a strong nature to prevent him. And what could that have been?

"There is some mysterious work going on over here in Paris. Everything which Fabert has told me points to the one source—the Black Wolf. For instance, to take the case of the robbery of the bank messenger who was driving from the Banque de Normandie to the Banque P—— in the Champs Elysses. Why," muttered Lee quickly, "that also took place somewhere in the vicinity of the English bookshop. It also had to do with a taxi-cab. Then the robbery last night at the Martigny's. That was quite as mysterious as these other affairs. But what common peculiarity had they all? They had this—they all occurred when there were plenty of people about.

"Now how could that have been? Does the Black Wolf deliberately plan things to take place under such conditions in order to more baffle pursuit? It seems so. And yet not even that enables me to probe the meaning of what has happened this morning. The Black Wolf boasts of what he will do and then succeeds in doing it. He boasts that unless we drove straight to the Gare du Nord when we left the hotel this morning that we should feel his teeth. Well, I must confess that he has fulfilled his promise.

"The lion's whelp! That means Nipper. He has struck at me through the lad, and threatens to strike me next. I wonder why he did not do so to begin with. Probably he wished to show me that it is only a matter of choice with him when and where he strikes.

"Well, my friend, the Black Wolf, you may strike at me as much as you will, but you will not drive fear into my heart, nor will you cause me to desist in my work until I have run you to earth. He who laughs last laughs best. It yet remains to be seen who will have the last laugh. And now here I am at the bureau of the chief. I hope I shall find him in."

As the cab drew up Nelson Lee got out, and paying off the man, entered the courtyard which was given over to the detective force of Paris.

Sending up his name to the chief, Nelson Lee waited in a stone-paved room until an agent de ville returned to inform him that Monsieur Fabert would see him at once. Lee was taken along to a large bureau or office, where the chief sat dictating to a secretary. On Lee's entry he rose, and dismissing the secretary, advanced with outstretched hand.

"Well, my friend," he said, "how did you sleep after the events of last night?"

Nelson Lee shook hands and took the chair which the chief indicated.

"I slept all right, Monsieur Fabert," he said slowly; "but I must confess that our friend the Black Wolf seems always on the alert."

"How now?" asked the chief, in surprise.

For answer, Lee pulled out the three letters he had received—one on his arrival at the hotel the night before, another at the breakfast table that morning, and the third as he stood before the English bookshop in the Rue de Rivoli.

"Do me the favour to read those," he said, as he passed them over.

Monsieur Fabert read them one by one without any remark; then he handed them back.

"Well, monsieur," he said finally, "what now?"

"Only this," replied Lee. "The Black Wolf, as you see, warned me to leave Paris by the first letter. In the second he repeated the warning, and took the trouble to tell me at what hour I should depart. Then he struck,

and, as you will soon discover, struck with effect. The third letter was another warning, handed to me after he struck. Listen, monsieur, and I will tell you what has occurred."

Briefly Nelson Lee related how Nipper had so mysteriously disappeared. When he had finished, the chief of the Paris police frowned heavily.

"So the Black Wolf has struck at you," he mused. "Lee, that man must be run to earth. His robbery of the bank messenger was bad enough—his jeers at me were worse, but this latest robbery and his bold flouting of you are too much! Am I correct in thinking that he will fail to drive you out of the city?"

Nelson Lee's lip curled.

"Drive me out of Paris!" he said, in low, tense tones. "Monsieur Fabert, do you not know me better than that?"

"I believed I did, monsieur," replied the Frenchman, "but from what we already know it seems that the Black Wolf is making a definite set at you. There is danger—great danger for you in your pursuit of the Black Wolf! Think carefully before you decide to risk too much. I, Jules Fabert, would never forgive myself if anything happened to you in Paris!"

Nelson Lee lit a fresh cigarette.

"I accept full responsibility for myself," he said curtly. "If anything happens to me, then it must! But I shall remain on the trail of the Black Wolf until—until at least I know more than I do."

"But what plan do you suggest, monsieur?" went on the Frenchman. "I have racked my brains until I am weary. I have sent my best men scurrying hither and thither, but without result. The Black Wolf emerged from his lair last night and showed his teeth. He has retired to it safely, and now howls in derision at us. What can we do? We must do something!"

"I, too, have been racking my brains," said Nelson Lee. "I am not at all satisfied that the Black Wolf has shown his teeth without leaving a mark by which he may possibly be traced, Monsieur Fabert. It has always been the claim of my system that no man, no matter how clever he might be, can plan and carry out a crime without leaving a clue of some sort by which he can be traced. And I consider it more difficult still for a man to conceive and carry out a series of crimes, such as the Black Wolf has done, without leaving even more clues, even though he may work alone, and even though he may operate in different cities. Undoubtedly, by changing his scene of operations as often as he has done, the Black Wolf has added much to his safety; but there must be something—some tiny thread somewhere, which, when we can once pounce upon it, will enable us to follow it along until we come to the main thread of the case, and once we reach that we shall be on more certain ground."

"Then, monsieur, do you mean to say that you feel there is some such clue existing?" asked the chief.

Nelson Lee shrugged.

"Something has come to me, it is true, monsieur. Whether or not it is the tiny thread which we seek, I cannot yet say; but it is the only thing which offers, and that being so I shall follow it up. It may lead me—I should not be surprised if it did lead me to nothing. If so, then we can only begin again."

"And can you tell me what that tiny thread is?" inquired the chief.

Nelson Lee shook his head with a smile.

"If you will permit me to keep it to myself until I am more certain of its value, or lack of value, I shall be obliged," he said. "It is so very, very small, and is based on such a feeble train of psychological thought

development that I almost fear to follow it up. Still, I must do so, and now if there is nothing further to discuss I shall go along. But before I do so, I wish, monsieur, that you would put all your machinery in motion to discover the whereabouts of that red taxi which has disappeared with my assistant. I am greatly worried over the affair. It is of a brilliant red, though I have not the number. I may say that I have already made inquiries at the rank from which we took it, and, as I have explained, discovered only sufficient to assure me that it was there specially to pick us up. It was cleverly done, and I should have been more cautious. But brilliant red taxis cannot be very plentiful in Paris, and the search should not be so difficult."

Monsieur Fabert brought his clenched fist down on the desk.

"Monsieur Lee," he said, "within half an hour every detective in Paris, every agent de ville, every man over whom I have authority, will be searching for that red taxi-cab. Rest assured, if it is in the city it shall be found! Moreover, I shall have a special watch kept at every gate of the city, and at all the railway stations in case a red cab should drive up. By to-night I ought to have some information on the subject."

But little did he dream as he made the statement that already the brilliant red coat of the taxi-cab to which Lee had referred was a deep black, and that it was already plying for trade in the ordinary way. Such was the Black Wolf's idea of killing suspicion.

Lee thanked the chief, and picking up his hat, made to go. The chief saw him to the door.

"It would give me great pleasure if you would lunch with me, monsieur," he said, as they shook hands.

Nelson Lee smiled his regrets.

"I am sorry, monsieur, but I shall return to the hotel and lunch there. Then I must change, for I have a call to make. I intend taking tea this afternoon with Mademoiselle Miton if I can catch her at home. I shall telephone her when I get back to the hotel."

And as Nelson Lee went out Monsieur Fabert wondered how the British mastiff was to prosecute his search for the Black Wolf by going out to take tea with Mademoiselle Miton at Chantilly.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Meeting at the Carlton—Nelson Lee's Resolve—The End.

THE Hotel Carlton in Paris is perhaps more popular for lunch than for dinner. Whether that be so or not, it is certainly hard to gather together a more distinguished array of gourmets than one will find there any day between the hours of one and two.

From all over the world they come, and in the basement grill-room between these hours, one will find all the study in nationalities and physiognomy that one can possibly conceive.

Nelson Lee, as a constant guest of the Carlton when in Paris, was nearly always to be found in the grill-room at luncheon time, for to one whose study was primarily the psychology of man, it was a never ending source of interest.

But on the day when he left Monsieur Fabert and drove through to the Carlton intending to lunch, then to change and go on to Mademoiselle Miton's for tea, he was far from taking a careless interest in his fellow men.

His mind was completely absorbed in the problem which had racked his mind for the past hours, and to add to his worry was the thought that Kipper had fallen into the hands of the Black Wolf.

Lee sat at his favourite table close to the door which leads into the magnificent Carlton bar, and from that position he had a clear view of the whole room. Straight across from him was a slight dapper man, whose face was vaguely familiar, but who, though he regarded him with some attention, he could not place definitely.

Well as he knew his Paris, Nelson Lee did not know that the man who had attracted his attention was the Comte de Monte Bello, the owner of a name well known in the more Bohemian circles of the city.

He, on his part, regarded Lee with frank interest, and as fate would have it, they paid their score and left the grill-room at almost the same moment.

Now when one leaves the Carlton grill-room and goes out by way of the bar, one sees far to the left of the bar a small room in which there is a telephone. If one wishes to telephone from there, Allan, the obliging man who dispenses the drinks over the bar, will get the number; and it was only natural that Nelson Lee should start for that 'phone when he was to ring up Mademoiselle Miton.

Nelson Lee paused at the bar only long enough to order a cognac of a vintage which he favoured, then asking Allan to get him the number he desired, he walked on to the telephone-room, not realising that the Comte de Monte Bello was close behind him.

It was only a few minutes before the barman got through to the number Lee had called, and Nelson Lee, taking the receiver, inquired if Mademoiselle Miton was at home.

A woman's voice—it was Ninette, though Lee did not know that—answered that mademoiselle was out at present, so Nelson Lee contented himself with leaving word that Monsieur Lee would call between four and five o'clock that afternoon. Lee then returned to the bar, and for the first time saw Comte de Monte Bello standing there drinking a liqueur.

Just as Nelson Lee approached the bar he heard a light thud close to his feet, and, glancing down, saw a small, gold cigarette-case lying on the floor. At the same moment there was a muttered exclamation of annoyance from the comte, and he bent down to retrieve the case just as Lee picked it up and with a bow handed it back.

"Thank you, monsieur!" said the comte, with a smile. "That is the third time I have dropped my case to-day. It is a bad omen, I am afraid."

Nelson Lee stood rigid. There was something startlingly familiar about those words just used by the comte; and then as he wondered where he had heard them before, he suddenly remembered the occasion on board the cross-Channel boat when Mademoiselle Miton had dropped her purse in the restaurant.

She had used almost exactly the same phrase. Was it only a strange coincidence? He glanced at the comte with level gaze, but that exquisite was toying carelessly with his liqueur glass.

"It will give me great pleasure if monsieur will do me the honour to drink with me," he said, glancing at Lee with a smile.

Nelson Lee bowed.

"With pleasure, monsieur," he said. Then to the barman: "The same, please."

For the space of twenty minutes or so Lee stood talking to the comte; then the latter, with a graceful bow, took his departure, leaving Nelson Lee gazing after him with a deep look of puzzlement in his eyes.

"There is a difference—a marked difference," he mused; "but there is still enough similarity for me to think the Comte de Monte Bello might be

the blood-brother of Mademoiselle Miton. And that phrase! It was truly a coincidence."

Still pondering on the strangeness of it all, Nelson Lee felt in his pocket for his cigarette-case, and drawing it out saw that he had also brought out a folded slip of paper.

Wonderingly he unfolded the sheet and glanced at the few lines of writing which it contained.

"Monsieur," he read.—"This is the third and last warning. The cub has already been attended to. For strong reasons, the Black Wolf does not wish to strike the lion. Will you take the warning in time and go at once?"
"LE LOUP NOIR."

It was written on exactly the same quality of thick white paper on which the others had been written, and from it there came the faint elusive odour of white violets.

What did it mean?

Thrusting the note into his pocket and lighting a cigarette, Nelson Lee walked across to the centre of the bar and sank into one of the great club easy-chairs. Leaning back, he closed his eyes, and for a solid hour pondered in this latest startling manifestation of the Black Wolf. Yet though he went over with the utmost minuteness every moment of the time he had spent since leaving Monsieur Fabert that morning, he could not for the life of him put his finger on any one moment when it might have been possible for any agent of the Black Wolf to have slipped that note into his pocket.

It was after three when he finally rose to change, and still he was in a fog of doubt. On reaching the lobby he paused at the desk, but there was no word from Nipper; so entering the lift, he ascended to his room.

At ten minutes to four Nelson Lee descended again to the lobby, and there another note was handed to him. It, like the others, was from the Black Wolf, and read simply:

"Don't do it.—LE LOUP NOIR."

Nelson Lee stuffed it into his pocket with an exclamation of anger. This sort of thing was getting on his nerves. The bombardment of notes was like so many arrows from the dark, and at all times he preferred fighting in the open.

Striding to the door he signed to the commissionaire to order a taxi, and climbing in, gave the address of Mademoiselle Miton's house in Chantilly.

It was a long drive through to that charming suburb of Paris, but at exactly six minutes to five the cab drew up before high white gates which opened to a fine driveway.

At the end of the drive was a large old-fashioned house, and telling the man to wait, Nelson Lee opened the gate and strode up the drive. His ring at the door was answered by Ninette, and on his inquiring if Mademoiselle Miton were at home, he was ushered into a beautifully-furnished room, where Ninette asked him to wait.

He was there scarcely five minutes when the door opened and Mademoiselle Miton came in, with a smile of welcome on her face and her hand outstretched.

Nelson Lee fairly gasped at the beautiful picture she made. Clad completely in a costume of white, with her dark hair piled high, she made a picture to delight the eye of the most exacting, and Nelson Lee was no mean judge of woman's beauty.

As she swept across towards him, he saw with a thrill that she wore white violets at her waist, and then a moment later he had the proof he desired. The odour exhaled from the dainty white blossoms was exactly the same as that exhaled from the notepaper of the Black Wolf!

He had proved that connection, if nothing else.

Mademoiselle Miton was vivacious to a degree as she seated herself at the ten-table, and though Nelson Lee was keeping up his end of the conversation in a spirited manner, he was, nevertheless, marshalling for the first time the points and queries of the case, for had he not an actual connection to go upon which hitherto had not been in his possession.

And strangely enough, it was not the Black Wolf whom he used as the starting point, but instead the lovely girl who sat so close to him, breathing out the odour of white violets and charming him with her gracious manner.

For point one was this: Who was Mademoiselle Miton? Point two: Mademoiselle Miton appeared to strongly favour white violets.

Nelson Lee had been fortunate enough to rescue her from the Channel, thus causing her to feel a natural gratitude towards her rescuer. On Nelson Lee's arrival at the Hotel Carlton, he had found waiting for him a large bunch of white violets, though he did not know then that they were looked upon with favour by mademoiselle. In fact, he did not then know even her name.

Query: Had the white violets left at the hotel any connection with Mademoiselle Miton?

Query: If there were any connection, then how could Mademoiselle Miton have possibly known that he would stay at the Carlton?

Point three: Mademoiselle Miton had been at the ball given by the Baronne Martigny. She had also worn white violets on that occasion. She had also been in the circle surrounding the baronne when the latter's pearl dog-collar had been so mysteriously stolen.

She also claimed to have felt the faintness which had assailed the others in the party.

On returning to his hotel from the conference with Monsieur Fabert and Monsieur Fiquelmont, Nelson Lee had found a note awaiting him from the Black Wolf. And that note had exhaled an odour which he found familiar.

Later, he had discovered it to be the odour of white violets.

Query: Was it only coincidence that the Black Wolf and Mademoiselle Miton favoured the same scent? Then, after the stirring events of that day, Nelson Lee had met at the Carlton a man whom he discovered to be one Comte de Monte Bello. In the comte Nelson Lee had seen a vague likeness to Mademoiselle Miton.

Now that he was sitting opposite her he could see that the likeness was even more pronounced than he had thought back at the Carlton. He had met the comte through the latter dropping his cigarette-case. And when he had handed it back to the comte the latter had made use of a phrase almost exactly similar to the one used by Mademoiselle Miton on board the Channel boat.

Therein there was another coincidence connecting Mademoiselle Miton with one whom Lee had come into contact with during the past day or two.

Point: Mademoiselle Miton affected white violets, and the Black Wolf used that same scent on his notepaper.

Point: Mademoiselle Miton had used a phrase on board the Channel boat almost exactly similar to one used that day by the Comte de Monte Bello.

Point: Mademoiselle Miton and the Comte de Monte Bello were strangely alike in form and feature when one mentally divested them of the respective adornments of the different sexes.

Point: Some mysterious individual had sent white violets to the Carlton

for Nelson Lee before he had arrived at the hotel, and when, as far as he knew, none but Nipper and Monsieur Fabert had known of his intention to go to that hotel.

Point: The Black Wolf had also operated at the ball the night before.

Query: Was there any possible connection between the Black Wolf and Mademoiselle Miton?

Query: Was there any possible connection between the Comte de Monte Bello and Mademoiselle Miton?

To go a step further. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that there might be some possible connection on those two points, then was it possible that there might be some connection between the Black Wolf and the Comte de Monte Bello?

Query: Who was the Black Wolf?

Query: Who was Mademoiselle Miton?

Query: Who was the Comte de Monte Bello?

Important point: During the hour he had sat in the chair in the bar at the Carlton, Nelson Lee had, it will be remembered, gone over every item of the day's doings from the moment he had left Monsieur Fabert, and on no single occasion but one could he possibly conceive of a moment when anyone could have been close enough to him to slip that note from the Black Wolf into the waistcoat pocket where he carried his cigarette-case.

And he was positive when he had drawn out his cigarette-case at the luncheon-table just before going into the bar to telephone to Mademoiselle Miton that the note had not been in his pocket.

Then who could have put it there? Was it possible that the Comte de Monte Bello had done so?

Point: Assuming that this might be so, then came an important query: Did this establish a definite connection between the Black Wolf and the Comte de Monte Bello?

Query: If so, then, taking the previous assumptions he had made, did it not form a complete triangle of connection with Mademoiselle Miton at one point, the Comte de Monte Bello at another, and the Black Wolf at a third?

Ergo, to prove that these three were connected, then one must first establish a common basis on which their interests would meet.

Could Nelson Lee do so? It remained to be seen.

Now all the time Nelson Lee was racking his brains over this problem he had been keeping up a running fire of conversation with Mademoiselle Miton. So far, he had not made any attempt to drink his tea, but as he reached the point where he formed the imaginary triangle of connection between the three individuals who had secured his keen interest, he lifted his cup, and smiling over the top at mademoiselle, proceeded to drink the fragrant brew she had poured out.

He remembered distinctly placing the cup to his lips, he remembered that it was a little too hot to drink with comfort, he remembered taking a deep gulp—then, as the hot tea coursed down his throat, the thin cup crashed to the floor, shattering into a thousand pieces, while Nelson Lee lurched forward heavily, and fell prone on his face at the feet of Mademoiselle Miton.

The next moment Mademoiselle Miton was on her feet, and, hurrying across to the door, pressed a button. The door opened almost at once, and into that room in Mademoiselle Miton's house in Chantilly there came Mareel, of the Apache-like countenance, he who had placed the form of Nipper in the coffin at Comte de Monte Bello's house in Montmartre.

Nelson Lee woke with a sense of suffocation and an agonising ache in every joint of his body. He noticed dreamily that he was in utter Stygian

darkness, and in an effort to ease his cramped position endeavoured to rise. His head came into violent contact with something just over it, and thrusting up his hand gingerly he felt about him.

Whatever it was it was hard and unyielding, and as his mind grew clearer, he discovered that he was hemmed in closely on all sides. With this realisation he struggled frantically to free himself, only to discover that above, beneath, on all sides, he was a prisoner in a narrow compass, and then the next moment the cold beads of sweat broke out on his forehead as it came upon him that he was in a coffin.

Letting his head drop back, Nelson Lee endeavoured to send his mind back to the last moments of consciousness. With a struggle to keep his thoughts coherent, he finally recalled his visit to the house in Chantilly and his conversation with Mademoiselle Miton.

After that he remembered lifting up the cup of tea to drink it, and then everything was a blank.

"Drugged!" he muttered. "Drugged, and put into a coffin! Where in Heaven's name am I? And what is their purpose with me? Am I buried? Am I supposed to be dead? Have I been buried alive? My heavens! If that is so, I shall die here like a rat in a trap!"

Just as this thought came to him, he became aware of a faint tap, tapping. He listened closely, then, as he became certain that it was just over his head, he raised his foot and kicked violently on the cover of the coffin.

A rapid tapping answered him, and, listening closely, he could hear it growing more distinct each moment. There was the sound of rending over his head, and through the top of the coffin a few chinks of light came.

Then the lid itself was ripped off bodily, and a moment later as the lid was torn away, Nelson Lee was dragged out of the coffin by Nipper, and went staggering weakly across his own consulting-room in Gray's Inn Road.

He dropped into the big chair by the fireplace and stared in dumbfounded amazement at Nipper, who was clashing his wrists violently.

"What does it mean, Nipper?" he asked hoarsely.

"Wait a bit, guv'nor, until you feel a little better," replied the lad. "Mrs. Jones is bringing you a drink, and when you have had that I will tell you everything."

The door opened just then to admit the housekeeper bearing a large glass in which she had beaten up an egg in brandy and milk.

Nelson Lee drank it thirstily, and seeing that Mrs. Jones was disposed to talk, waived her away.

"I will talk to you later," he said. "Now, Nipper, tell me what it all means?"

"I can't tell you much, guv'nor," said Nipper, "but I will tell you all I know. To do that I shall have to go back to the moment when you left me at the English bookshop in the Rue de Rivoli."

Then Nipper told of how he had apparently fainted in the taxi.

"I went right under, guv'nor," he said, when he had described his struggle to remain conscious, "and I don't know any more of what happened until I came to in this very consulting-room. I arrived here in a coffin just as you did, and Mrs. Jones opened the affair and got me out. Before the box which held me arrived here, she received a telegram. Here it is!"

As he spoke, Nipper took a telegram from his pocket and handed it to Lee.

The latter read the few words it contained:

"To Mrs. Jones," it ran, and then came the address in Gray's Inn Road—
"On arrival of large box to-day, open it immediately and take out contents.
Do not fail to do this. (Signed) NELSON LEE."

The office from which it was sent was one near Piccadilly Circus.

"That is all I know about what happened to me, gov'nor," went on Nipper. "The box came along here, and Mrs. Jones opened it. She nearly fainted when she saw it contained a coffin, and I guessed if I hadn't become conscious just about then and kicked on the top, she would have left it as it was. But she got the lid off, and I was free. Then this morning another telegram came. Here it is. It said simply: 'Lee, Gray's Inn Road. Another box arrives to-day. Open at once.—THE BLACK WOLF.' Then this box arrived, gov'nor, and somehow I knew you must be inside it. I lost no time in opening it."

Nelson Lee laid down the telegram.

"When was it you arrived here, Nipper?"

"Yesterday morning, gov'nor."

"Then that means I have been in this coffin for something like a day and a half," muttered Lee. "The Black Wolf certainly showed his fangs, but as sure as my name is Nelson Lee, I will run him to earth!"

As he spoke he got to his feet and staggered across to the desk. There, on the very top of a large pile of letters, was an envelope which he recognised at once. It was of the thick white description affected by the Black Wolf.

Tearing it open, Nelson Lee read the contents hurriedly.

"Monsieur," it said—"You were warned repeatedly, and should have known that the Black Wolf would brook no interference from you. Take heed from this and do not again cross the trail of the Black Wolf. I leave Paris to-night, and trust I shall never again have to show my fangs to one to whom I am really grateful.—LE LOUP NOIR."

"'To one to whom I am really grateful,'" muttered Lee, as he folded up the letter. "What does he mean by that? It seems, Monsieur Black Wolf, that you have taken the first trick in this game, but there are other cards in the pack, and before you finish with me you will find that I am still a player. Run you to earth I will, if I have to devote my life to the task! My only hope is that the second deal in this game will come soon. And now to send a reassuring wire to Monsieur Fabert. He will be worried at my strange disappearance from Paris."

So was the curtain dropped on Nelson Lee's first passage of arms with the mysterious Black Wolf.

- Before Nelson Lee fulfilled his vow, much water was to run under the bridges, and stern indeed was to be his struggle with "Le Loup Noir."

THE END.

In a fortnight's time I shall publish another magnificent story telling of Nelson Lee's second encounter with the Black Wolf. Please order your copy in advance.

Next week's story will be entitled:

"THE CLUE OF THE DUPLICATE KEY."

The Editor.

The Boys of Ravenswood College;

or, Dick Clare's Schooldays.

A New Story of School Life. By S. CLARKE HOOK

*Author of the famous Jack, Sam & Pete stories, appearing weekly in
"The Marvel Library."*

Dick Clare, a rich youngster, joins Ravenswood College, and he soon makes his presence felt.

One day news comes to the school that Dick and his chum, Tom, have been drowned, but ultimately they turn up safe and sound.

Melby, one of the other boys, takes a violent dislike to Dick Clare, and is especially jealous because the Headmaster takes special notice of the new boy.

Some time later Melby's father turns up at the school and causes a great disturbance.

Dick, knowing Gowl to be in money difficulties, offers to give him £50 with which to clear himself. (Now read on.)

Nearing the End

"**Y**OU mean to say, Dick Clare, you will trust me with fifty pounds?" said Gowl.

"There is no trusting in the case. I shall hand you that amount the day after to-morrow. You can pay it back when I ask for it—which will be never," said Dick.

"It goes without the saying that I don't deserve——"

"Oh, bother! I'm jolly certain I don't deserve all I get. I'm going to ask you two favours. One is that you will never speak about this again. The second is that you invite Tom and me to tea to-morrow. The chaps know that there has been a feud between us, and it will just show them that it is wiped out for all time."

"I'm downright grateful, Dick," said Gowl. "Of course, I shall be awfully glad for you to come. There's just one thing. The Head is bound to question me, and——"

"No, he won't. The past is done with. He is not going to say one word to you. He told me so."

"You asked it?"

"Yes."

"Does he know that you are paying my debts?"

"He knows nothing except what Melby told him. Now, we will be with you to-morrow at five."

"Yes; but, Dick, there is just one thing I must say, and that is, I deserved——"

"No. That's against our compact. We start from this moment. Everything has got to be forgiven on both sides. I hope you won't say another word, Gowl. I do, really."

"Good."

Dick hurried off, and just caught the post with his letter.

Then he had an interview with Melby, who was trying to do his prep. in an odd five minutes.

"Oh, I say, Dick!" he exclaimed. "You have done me in this time with the governor. He's frightfully ratty."

"Here, it was the fault of the swan," laughed Dick. "But look here, Melby, I've made it up with Gowl. We are teasing with him to-morrow."

"Oh, I say! Why, he will be expelled!"

"Rats! There's no sense in raking up a chap's past. I'll bet there are lots of things in your life you wouldn't like dragged out."

"That's a different thing."

"Of course it is, because it's you and not Gowl. Now, look here, I believe you owe some money round about, and we are getting close on the end of the term."

"They will jolly well have to wait now that you've stopped my father forking out that sovereign. It would nearly have squared them."

"I'll square them for you if you agree to my terms."

"You bet I will. They are bothering me."

"I don't believe they are bothering you as much as the old lady at the tuck-shop; but that doesn't matter. I'll square them if you pledge me your word of honour you won't run into debt again."

"You are a rum chap, Dick. Of course, I know I owe you a bit, but——"

"We will wipe that off as well."

"Well, I promise you faithfully."

"All right, Melby. I'll take your word. By the way, my mother detests anything like falsehood. She is very strict about that matter."

"She's quite right, too. I admire her for her truthfulness."

"Right you are. Now if you can give me the cause to admire you for the same reason I'll send you an invitation to spend some of the holidays at our show. I have her permission to invite two fellows. Tom will be one. You shall be the other—if you give me reason to admire your truthfulness in the future. Good-night, old chap!"

"I say, Dick——"

But Dick had gone.

"Fancy making friends with Gowl," mused Melby. "I say, Dick is a good sort, too. Can't make out how he manages it. Still, if he's made friends with Gowl I'm not going to do anything against him. I'll keep my mouth shut if I can. I mean to get that invite if it's possible. Dick won't go from his word one way or the other. I'll bet they've got a splendid place. They have given me the cold shoulder a bit, but—— Well, bothered if I don't try to give him cause to admire my truthfulness. I can't possibly get into more scrapes than I do at present. Won't it surprise the masters too. I shall have to cadge some clothes from Dick. Oh, bother the prep! I'll trust to luck."

The following day in class Melby came to the conclusion that it does not do to trust to luck. Mr. Foster was severe with him as he floundered through his task.

"It is lamentable," fumed the master. "Do you tell me that the Amazon is in Africa?"

Under ordinary circumstances, Melby would certainly have said that he mentioned America—not Africa.

"I certainly did say so, sir."

Mr. Foster looked surprised. Melby glanced at Dick to see if his veracity should be taking due effect.

"Have you prepared this lesson, Melby?" asked Mr. Foster.

"No, sir."

"Have you any excuse?"

"No, sir."

"Well, be more careful in future, my lad," said Mr. Foster, more surprised than ever.

"I tell you what it is, Dick," exclaimed Tom, a little later. "You have worked wonders with Melby, but I rather fancy you have done it by means of bribery."

"Well, he certainly surprised me this morning."

"Not so much as he surprised Foster, you can bet. Now we shall have to begin to make arrangements for the holidays. There won't be much work after next week, which is a jolly lucky thing for Melby. He might get telling Foster that the Amazon is in London, and that the Thames flows through Australia, and joins the Mississippi at Woking."

"Ha, ha, ha! His knowledge of geography is certainly a little faulty," laughed Dick.

Breaking Up.

VANCE was in the porter's lodge, and he was very angry. He was often in that unhappy state, but on this occasion he had some for cause, for about five hundred boys had asked as many thousand questions.

Every boy in the great college expected to have his box looked after first; and Billy, the odd man, who was helping Vance to get down the boxes, was very busy, for Vance did most of the superintending, while the unfortunate Billy did most of the work. When the boys came back the circumstances were always reversed. Vance always distributed the boxes, and collected the tips, and if Billy wanted to help he was always told to go and hang himself. There were no tips at the end of the term because the boys' journey money was never sufficient for their own requirements, let alone tips for Billy.

"Now then, Vance, you fossilised oyster!" bawled Dick, dashing into the lodge with his chum Tom. "Why don't you fetch my box down? Don't you know that I am waiting?"

"Then go on doing it!" howled Vance. "Do you think I'm forty men?"

"I don't think you are one; but if you don't fetch my box down I'll make you weep!"

"Make me do which?" snarled Vance, striding up to him in a threatening manner.

"Make you gnash your teeth and howl with grief."

"I'd like to see you do it."

"And so you shall," said Dick. "Hi, Billy, come here; you boulder!"

"Bust! I'm busy," panted Billy, as Dick caught him by the coat-tail when he was trying to get a heavy trunk along the hall. As he had got the box on his shoulder he was at a disadvantage. "Let go, will you!"

Dick would not, so Billy gave a violent wrench, and the tail of his coat came off in Dick's hands, while Billy took a forward dive, shot the box over his head, and sprawled upon it.

"Sus—sorry, Billy! Bub—bub! Better luck next time!" said Dick, pretending to sob, while he wiped his eyes with the tail of the coat. It had once been the Head's, and became Billy's when worn out."

"Drat you!" howled Billy. "You've bust the box, and you've ripped my Sunday coat!"

"Which shows you that you shouldn't wear your Sunday coat on week days. Besides, it's ridiculous to wear a coat when carrying boxes."

"No it ain't. It saves your shoulder a bit. How am I to wear that coat now?"

"I can rip the other tail off, if you like," said Dick; then he whispered something in Billy's ear, and slipped a coin of the realm into his hand.

The sorrowful expression left Billy's countenance. A smile usurped its place, and it widened into a grin which revealed all his teeth.

"Leave it to me, young gent," he murmured, dashing up the stairs, and leaving the "bust" box where it had fallen.

In an incredibly short space of time Billy returned with Dick's box, which was a very large one, and very heavy, but Billy managed it all right.

"Shove it there for the present," said Dick. "Come into the lodge. I want to make Vance gnash his teeth, and I'll do it easily. Oh, come in, Billy!" he added, in a voice that was audible to Vance. "Just step in. There's half-a-crown for being obliging. There's half-a-sovereign for prompt attention. There's a sovereign for getting the box on your shoulder."

"Oh, my eyes and limbs!" gasped Billy, taking the coins, while Dick was watching the effect they were having on Vance. "There are two sovereigns for carrying the blessed things downstairs. There's ten shillings for your coat-tail. I will get my mother to send you a new suit when I get home. And there are a couple of sovereigns for luck."

"It's wicked to let a boy have all that money to squander!" howled Vance. "Positively sinful! I shall tell the Head. I won't stand it. It isn't fair."

"Now, there's my other box," observed Dick. "I want that fetched, and——"

Vance dashed from the lodge, and was up the stairs in no time. There was only one box in the dormitory not labelled. It was a very big one, and very heavy, but he got it down all right.

"That isn't mine, my dear man," said Dick.

"What?" howled Vance.

"Oh, hang it all, it's mine!" cried Stace, one of the boys in that dormitory. "It isn't packed yet. Take it up again, Vance."

"I sha'n't!" hooted the unfortunate porter.

Then Stace got angry, and the row the pair made brought Mr. Foster on the scene. Vance and Stace howled at him, as they tried to make him understand what had happened.

"He expects me to trot up and down with my socks and pyjamas and neckties, sir," cried Stace.

"Why hadn't you packed your box before this, Stace?"

"If you please, sir, I've been drawing my journey money."

"Well, what of that! You ought to have packed the box yesterday; or, at any rate, you should have done the greater part of the packing. Take it up again immediately, Vance."

"It's a hat-box, Billy," whispered Dick. "Buzz off and get it, then come down with Vance. I'm determined to make him sorry."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom. "Won't you make your mother sorry as well, Dick?"

"Not a bit of it. She doesn't mind how much I spend, so long as I enjoy myself. We shall have some times of it when you come to her place, I promise you. Here they come—fighting for the blessed box."

"They will smash your tile."

"Shouldn't wonder if they do, but it won't be the first one I've smashed. Oh, thank you, Billy! I see you have wrenched the handle off, but that doesn't signify. There's a sovereign for lifting it, and two sovereigns for bringing it downstairs. I am extremely obliged to you, Vance, for fighting for it. Good-bye, my dear man! Hope you will enjoy the holidays. Yes, yes! You don't like boys, I know. You have told me so before. Jolly nice day, isn't it? There, there, calm your ruffled feelings, my dear man. Shoot them into the trap, Billy. We are going to drive all the way."

"You will have to halve those tips with me, Billy," groaned Vance.

"I'll see you blowed fast!" retorted Billy.

"Come on, you fellows!" shouted Melby, already seated in the waggonette, which was to take them on their journey. "St. Cuthbert snobs have just passed."

"Bother it," exclaimed Tom. "There will be no grub for us at the Red Lion if they get there first."

"I've ordered a feed," said Dick.

"May be," answered Tom. "But it won't be there. They did us down last half that way. They are worse than locusts. Was Hamer with them; Melby?"

"You bet he was, and that other brute Anders. I've seen Hamer eat fourteen fourpenny meat-pies—er—I mean several twopenny meat-pies at a sitting," added Melby, as he caught Dick's eye, and remembered his promise concerning veracity. "Hamer broke one of our chap's legs once. Chucked him into the river and dropped him on the log they use for diving. He's a regular brute. He has never loved you either since that day you hit him on the head with the cricket ball."

"Well, it was an accident," exclaimed Tom, jumping in, while Dick shook hands with Dick, the groom, and made some inquiries concerning his mother.

"As right as rain, Master Dick, and as beautiful as roses; and we're glad to have you back, we are, straight. You liven things up a bit. Met the old colonel yesterday, and said, 'Steady there, Beauty!'"

"Oh, my eyes! Were you referring to his face?"

"Not much. But I said to him gentle-like, 'You will be pleased to hear, sir, the young master is coming home to-morrow.' Ha, ha! You should have heard him being pleased. The vicar came along when he was in the middle of it, and fairly fled."

"It's the old chap who lives close by," explained Dick to Tom. "Jim doesn't like him."

"Do you?" inquired Tom.

"Well, I don't dislike him as much as my mother does. You see, he called on her once and gave her his opinion of me. He gave it for about five seconds, then she rang for Jim, and ordered him to show the old boy out. I believe Jim toed him down the steps."

"It was a sort of accident, Master Dick. My foot happened to touch him. He had no right to insult the mistress, and I don't think he will do it again—not while I'm near. They can go, can't they?"

"Rather!" exclaimed Tom. "But we want to overhaul that other trap—the one you saw pass. We've got to reach the Red Lion before them, otherwise we can whistle for our lunch. I know Hamer's playful ways."

"Well, if we don't overhaul them it will be because he's got rattling good horses, young gent. Are you the one who is coming home with Master Dick?"

"I am," answered Tom. "Going to spend a week there. My parents are away. Besides, Dick needs some one to keep him in order, and perhaps I shall be able to make the colonel friendly."

"Most likely," said Jim, grinning. "You look jest the sort of quiet young gent as would do it."

"The old bounder was a colonel in a volunteer regiment, when they had them," explained Dick. "I'll introduce you to him. There is the other trap."

"That also was a waggonette, but it was considerably larger, and there were

six boys in it. Hamer made his intentions plain by taking the whip from the driver and lashing at Jim as he tried to pass.

Jim returned the compliment, and the St. Cuthbert fellows had a warm time of it, for their driver was obeying his orders not to let them pass.

"I say, Hamer," shouted Melby. "I will give you in custody for this. Just you see if I don't. It's illegal. You've lashed my face, and I won't allow it."

"Why not, you little idiot!" snarled the bully. "Ha, ha, ha! You seem to be standing it pretty freely, too. Ah, let go, you little brute!"

"Not a bit of it," retorted Dick, who had caught the lash of the whip in his hand. "Pay him, Jim!"

"It isn't legal, young gent," said Jim, lashing at all of them, the driver included. "You mustn't hit third parties in the public thoroughfare. I should have thought your knowledge of law would have told you that, Master Dick. Ha, ha, ha! Ain't they enjoying themselves!"

"Stop it, you insolent scoundrel!" howled Hamer. "I'll put you in prison for this."

"Why, what have I done, young gent?" inquired Jim, getting in another flick which caused Hamer to howl. Jim was an expert with the whip, and knew how to produce the greatest effect with the slightest exertion.

"You can get past there, Jim," declared Dick.

"But I don't want to graze my paint, young gent. This is a valuable turn-out, and it's nearly new."

"Oh, bother the paint!" exclaimed Dick. "I suppose it can be repainted."

"There ain't a doubt it will need it too, if I get trying to go through a three-foot space with a four-foot trap. No, no, young gent, I'm waiting till the lane gets wider."

"Then you will have to wait till the Romans come across again, and make our roads wider," said Tom. "It's this width till we reach the Red Lion, and that's about ten miles ahead."

"Suppose you let me drive, Jim?" suggested Dick. "You can use your whip better then."

"I can use it quite well enough as it is," answered Jim. "If you don't believe me ask that young gent you call Hamer."

Hamer hurled a ginger-beer bottle at Jim's head by way of reply, but fortunately he missed his mark, and then he received a lashing that he was likely to remember. The driver was all right now, for he was beyond reach. Each time Jim tried to pass he drew in front of him, and Jim had the option of reining in or going into the ditch, he always preferred the former, for although he knew Dick would take all responsibility for the damage, he did not want such damage to occur.

"It's all right, mate," cried the other driver. "The young gent says I'm to let you pass, so stop your lashing, and give me my whip."

"All right, old boy," cried Dick. "You let us pass and I'll chuck you the whip."

"How am I to know you will keep your word?"

"And how am I to know you will keep yours if I give you the whip—except across your shoulders? You see, we have ordered lunch at the Red Lion, and we prefer getting there before your gang of bounders. You might smother our lunch. I have only ordered enough for four, and what would be ample for four wouldn't be enough for ten, especially if you throw your driver in. He looks fat and hearty."

"You can pass," said the driver. "Wait till I pull into the side."

Breaking Down.

JIM whipped up his horses, but as he did so, Hamer scrambled into the front seat, wrenched the reins from the driver's hands, and, striking his horses with a thick stick, caught Jim's hind wheel with a force that smashed several spokes, and turned it about half a foot out of alignment.

"Go on, Jim!" bawled Dick.

"But look at our blessed wheel."

"Oh, bother the wheel!" cried Dick, touching up the horses with the whip, and as they dashed onwards at a gallop, he flung the whip at the driver's head, while Jim set his teeth and hoped for the best. His horses were fresh, and not accustomed to the whip as Dick had administered it.

"The wheel is grinding against the side of the trap," gasped Jim, trying in vain to check the horses' speed.

"Let it grind," said Dick. "Ha, ha, ha! We've beaten them. Go as hard as ever you can. We have got to arrive a long way in front of them."

"Seems as though they had damaged their wheel charging against us," said Tom, looking back. "The driver has got down."

"Well, that's all right," said Dick cheerfully. "Now, all we've got to do is to drive hard, and we shall have a ripping lunch. Are you hungry, Jim?"

"I feel too sick at heart to be hungry, Master Dick. We are doing shocking damage to the trap. All the point in this world won't set it straight. Jest hark at that wheel."

"You appear to be jolly particular about the beastly wheel, Jim," said Dick. "It doesn't matter. It can't do much more damage than it has done already. What's the odds. You only need a trap for driving purposes, and not for swank. It will go as well with a few scraggs in its side. The wheel can be straightened, and there you are."

"And what will the mistress think about it?"

"Why, Jim, she will be so jolly thankful that my precious neck wasn't broken, that she won't care twopence about the ramshackle turn-out."

"Oh, lor! It's one of the very best, and it was practically new."

"Well, it's bound to get older. Now, do stop your grumbling. You are making more row than that jolly old wheel. Ha, ha, ha! It's giving me electric shocks all up my spine."

It was no good stopping now, so Jim drove on until they reached the roadside inn, where they were greeted by the landlord, who informed them that lunch was done to a turn.

"Trot it up, old chap," exclaimed Dick. "Look here, we want to yafflo it against time. Would you like to take your coat off, Jim?"

"I'll wait on you, Master Dick."

"You'll wait on your grandmother," retorted Dick. "Heave ahead! Buck up, Melby! Don't you get reckless with the fowls. You've got apple-tart to follow. My eyes! Here's a ham! Sit down, landlord. You will have to help us through this little lot."

Dick carved. He put a whole fowl on Jim's plate, and a frightful lot of ham, and Jim had scarcely started when Dick insisted on helping him to more ham. The landlord could not make it out at all, and the way Melby bolted his food really frightened him.

"I've got you a plum-pudding as well as the apple-tart, young gent," he observed, thinking this might induce Melby to go slower, but it had no effect. He said he would be ready for the plum-pudding after he had finished the fowls. He declared that he liked fowls and ham, and the landlord believed him, while Dick had no occasion to glance reprovingly at him. He felt that he was speaking quite truthfully.

"Got a dog?" inquired Dick, gazing despondently at the ham.

"Yes, young gent. Hi, Rover!"

Rover was a great shaggy sheep-dog, and Dick disposed of the ham by pitching it to him, then he put another fowl on Jim's plate, and emptied all the bread-sauce over it.

"Hurry up, Jim," he exclaimed, emptying the dish of new potatoes and the remainder of the peas on his plate. "Don't play with your food. Eat it like a man."

"Blest if I ain't eating it like a boa-constrictor," mumbled Jim. "You see, two fowls and half a ham is rather much at a sitting."

"Nonsense! You ought to be able to get through a snack like that. Don't you eat any more, Melby. I'm relying on you for the pudding. Undo your waistcoat and dance a little."

They got through the meat, and then an apple-tart, and a large plum-pudding were brought up.

"Jim gazed blankly at the quarter of that pudding which Dick put on his plate. The landlord said he never ate pastry.

"You will jolly well have to, old chap. We have got to eat all the provisions you have in the show."

"Well, to tell the truth, young gent, you've nearly done it," said the landlord.

"Have you got any cheese?"

"Yes. But——"

"Trot it out. Anything else?"

"Bread and dripping."

"Trot it up—sharp! And butter, and eggs. I'll buy them all at double price. Here, there's something on account. Look alive! How many eggs have you got?"

"About two dozen."

"Well, hurry them up. Those bounders shall have the eggs; but they sha'n't have anything else. They can reserve their bullying for their own college; they are not going to try it on Ravenswood."

The landlord brought up a basket of eggs, and Dick placed them in a cupboard, while Jim looked very anxious. He did not know whether he would be expected to consume two dozen raw eggs after the start he had already made.

He had received his last help of pudding when the other trap drove up, and the enemy dashed into the place.

Hamer seized Dick by the back of the neck and smashed the remains of the pudding with his face; then Jim got him by the collar and wrenched him off, while Anders knocked Tom head over heels, and the other four joined in the fray.

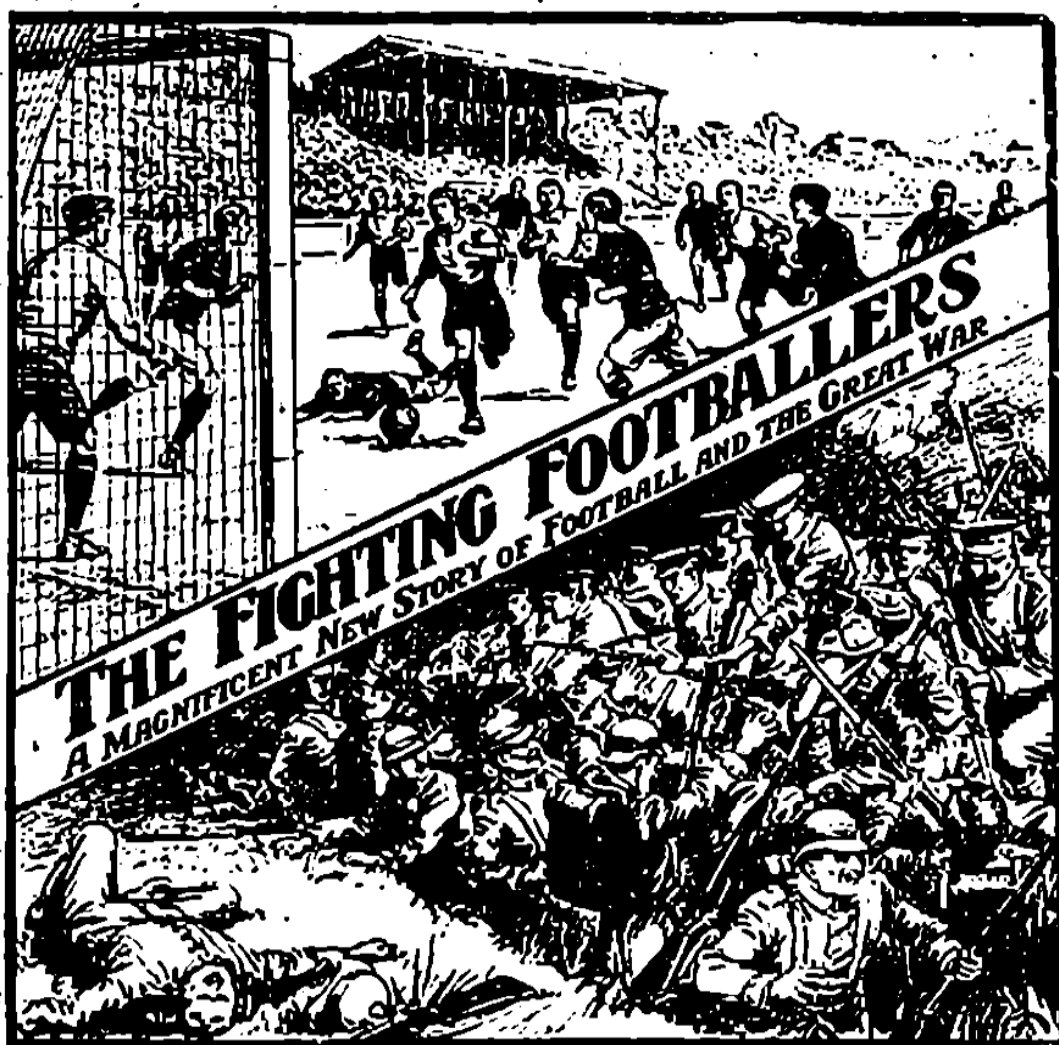
The landlord was not a fighting man. He bolted from the room. He was accustomed to noisy customers at the end of each term, but as the boys always paid for any damage they did, he did not mind much. They were excellent customers when they had meals there.

Dick sprang to the cupboard, and, seizing an egg, sent it full into Hamer's face. After that he sent several more. Once he hit Jim, and he landed another one in Melby's ear; but, as a rule, he hit the foe, and the shocking mess he made them in was surprising.

"Here, stop it, you brute!" snarled Hamer at last, as Jim landed him one on the mark which sat him on the floor. "How dare you behave in this manner, you young fiends!"

(The concluding instalment of this Magnificent Serial will appear on Wednesday next.)

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