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CHAPTER I.

Introducing Madame Yvette Jure—Jean the Apache, otherwise known as the Snake, Makes a Demand—Surrender.

WITH the coming of midnight, the metamorphosis of Paris takes place. The Champs Elysees, the Avenue de Bois, and the wide streets which radiate from the Place de l'Etoile, grow silent and deserted, while even the boulevards attain some degree of nightly quietude.

Across the river, on the Boul' Mich, and through the "quarter," up the hill to steaming Montmartre, the night life of the city may but yawn and awaken—the stringed orchestras of the night cafes may but begin to tune up, and the gaily-attired dancing-girls make their appearance in those halls of gilt and tinsel; but west, by the quiet reaches of the Champs Elysees, "night cometh in its raven dignity."

From the Etoile, straight away to the Place de la Concorde, one can stand and gaze down an avenue of mysterious light and shadow, with the narrowing vista of the lights meeting in a brooding perspective.

A wide, gushing artery of the city by day, the beautiful avenue is a silent channel by night, sleeping in the dim shadow of its own ramparts.

An occasional motor, a lone pedestrian, or now and then a small party returning from one of the theatres, may break the silence of the avenue; but it is not long before even those disturbers of its peace pass away, leaving the great artery to brood alone.

Therefore, had one been abroad to revel in the shadow of the night, or had one been brooding out upon it from one's hotel window, one would quickly have noticed a solitary figure which appeared from the direction of the Etoile, and, choosing the depth of the shadow on one side, began to walk hurriedly in the direction of the Rond Point.

And had one been close enough for detailed observation, one would have seen on this particular night that the figure was that of a woman, heavily veiled, and cloaked in sombre black from throat to feet.

No loiterer of the street was she, as was evidenced by the rapidity of her walk. Straight down the Champs Elysees she went, until across the avenue by the now darkened Colisee she sighted a lone taxi.

With a little click of satisfaction issuing from beneath her veil, she left the wide footpath which she had been treading, and, crossing the avenue diagonally, came up with the man who lounged on the front seat.

"Voila!" she muttered, when she saw that the flag was up. "It is well—this!" Then aloud she said: "Awaken, my friend of the wheel! I would use you!"

The driver, who had been half asleep, roused himself at the sound of her voice, and, gazing at her sleepily, demanded:

"Where do you wish to go? I have had a long day, and am tired! I cannot go far."

"La, la, la!" exclaimed the woman, in reply. "When I wish to make a fortune and grow independent, I shall take to the driving of a taxi! Bestir yourself, my friend! I go only a short distance, and I shall bring you back here."

Something authoritative in the tones of the woman caused the man to clamber down from his place with a muttered apology and open the door.

When she had climbed in the woman leaned forward and said:

"Drive to the corner of the Boul' Mich, by Harcourts."

With a nod and a grunt the man climbed back to his seat, and a moment later the taxi went careering down the Champs Elysees, to turn to the right at the Place de la Concorde, and thence across the Pont D'Alexandre.

On the other side of the river it drove, through to the Boulevard Raspail—that broad boulevard which runs from the old quarter of the nobility far up past Montparnasse—and, reaching the Hotel Lutetia, which lies only a stone's throw from the Square Boucicault and the famous Bon Marche, turned to the left.

Winding and twisting about, it finally came into the Boul' Mich, that thoroughfare of the Latin quarter which in the days gone by was so famous a rendezvous of the art students and the models.

To-day it has suffered much of the eclipse of Montmartre, and like that night quarter, exhibits but a tawdry show of its past glories for the benefit of the uninitiated tourist, who sees the shell and goes away dreaming that he has touched the romance of the past.

Harcourts, the Pantheon, the whole array of little cafes and dancing-halls—what are they to-day? No more the rendezvous of the long hair, the wide, baggy velvet trousers, and the soiled Windsor tie! They reek of staleness and vulgarity, and he who is the wearer of the costume which once spoke of the brotherhood of art is to-day but the empty-headed and empty-pocketed poseur.

Such, alas! is the result of the inevitable change of such things. True it is that there are those who still find a retreat for their illicit doings, but hidden indeed are they from the loud-voiced tourist.

The Quartier Latin! What a world of romance that phrase once held! How meaningless it will soon be! How rapidly the old order passeth! Go ye soon who would taste of its fast vanishing joys, for the day cometh on wings of might when it will be no more—when he who knew it will but sigh with the memory of what once was!

Down the Boul' Mich, which was still crowded with laughing and chatting couples, drove the taxi containing the veiled woman, until it neared Harcourts. There it drew up against the kerb, and stepping from it, the woman told the man to wait.

Without a single glance to right or to left, she gathered her cloak about her, and, hurrying along a side-street which led off the boulevard, kept on until she came to still another narrow thoroughfare, which branched off to the left.

Down this she went until she came to a small gloomy-looking café which rejoiced in the name of Verens, as was evidenced by the single light which shone over the sign.

The woman betrayed no hesitation as she approached the door, but pushing open the half-flap, which barely concealed the interior, she entered.

The place into which she had come held little of the romantic about it, and far less of the beautiful. A small room to begin with, it looked even

smaller owing to the low ceiling, which one could almost touch with one's hands. Along each side were rough tables, served by long benches against the walls and by chairs in front. Down the centre, the full length of the room, there was room to pass through to the rear, which was curtained off by cheap muslin curtains. The walls were smoky and grimy, and both chairs and benches were disfigured by the initials of several generations of art students, cut there in the happy, irresponsible days of youth.

What an index of fame some of those initials would have been had one cared to trace the owners!

On the night in question the place was almost full. Every table had its occupants. Students and scribblers they were, with their attendant models or girls of the quarter. An impecunious lot they were to be sure, but a happy one withal. Beer in huge flagons was the order of the evening, or in a few cases the cheap red wine which Madame Verens served with the meal.

The place was full of smoke and the smell of stale beer. But what cared they? Here and there one broke out into song, and by the unwritten law of the place, be it man or woman, they were given a hearing. Then, if it met with the approval of the habitués, that approval was expressed by a pounding of the flagons on the table and the shrill cry for more. If the contrary, then the talk broke out again until some other would-be singer ventured an effort.

So it went—song, laughter, and talk. It was not very terrible, after all, and some of those there would, when fame had laid the laurel on their brow, look back with wet-eyed regret to the nights at Madame Verens.

Past a table where a would-be caricaturist was sketching the profile of a girl who was singing, went the veiled woman, and keeping on until she came to the curtain at the rear, pushed it aside.

It brought her into a small cubicle which was Madame Verens sanctum, and at a high desk sat the old dame herself. She looked up with a frown of surprise as she saw the veiled woman, for it was only the favoured few of the quarter who were permitted past that curtain. But pausing just within the door, the newcomer said:

"Is Jean above?"

"Ah, it is you, Yvette!" exclaimed the old dame, her brow smoothing. "I didn't know you under that veil! But, yes; Jean has been above this hour or more. Will you go up to him?"

"Merci, madame," replied the woman, in a low tone. "I will go up at once. For the table I will have—er—bien un absinthe—frappe."

"Voila, Yvette. It will go up to you at once."

With a nod, the veiled woman passed through the cubicle, and coming to a flight of narrow stairs, which were almost hidden by the darkness of the passage, she laid her hand on the banisters and began to mount.

At the top she paused for a moment, then walking along a narrow, odourous passage lit by a single feeble gas-flare, she paused before a door half-way down, and tapping lightly on the panel, turned the handle.

As the door swung open it revealed a small room containing a table "à deux," a couple of ancient chairs, a few sketches on the wall, all of them bearing the names of students long since departed from the quarter, and a threadbare rug on the wall.

At the table sat a man, who leaped to his feet as the woman entered.

"Yvette!" he exclaimed.

The woman nodded silently, and through her veil regarded him.

He was typical of a certain class of Paris was this man. Tall, slightly stooped, with a careless manner of movement—a manner which verged more than a little on the spectacular—he was of the sort which was bound to

attract a certain amount of attention. His face was clean-shaven, and his hair was black, close-cropped at the back and sides, and pushed back from the forehead. He was garbed in a black coat, with a waistcoat of a loud pattern and trousers of a lavender stripe. His boots were patent, with grey cloth tops. From the point of view of the new Frenchman, this individual was an unattractive specimen. He echoed a past day, when the prosperous Apache had a certain licence in the city; but now——

Not until a girl had come up with the absinthe frappe and had retired, closing the door after her, did the woman lift her veil. Then she drew it back over her hat, and slipping out of her cloak, tossed it to one side. She stood revealed at last—a slight, beautiful woman, who might have been thirty, but looked no more than twenty.

The eyes of the man glittered as they rested on her beauty, but he only smiled, and motioning her to a chair, reseated himself.

"Well, Yvette," he said, the while his eyes played about her; "you came?"

The woman shrugged.

"I have always come, haven't I?" she asked. "What is it this time? I have told you, Jean, that I cannot submit to any more of your demands. You have bled me of every penny I possess, and I dare not ask my husband for more. Ah, sacre! If I had only known what kind of creature you were!"

Her voice trailed off as she sat back and gazed at the man unseeing. Her mind had suddenly gone back to the past, when she had first fallen into the clutches of the man opposite her.

Then, a simple girl in the quarter, with a penchant for art, she had met this man, who had fascinated her ignorance and innocence. He had been hail fellow with every student in the quarter in those days, and none had dreamed that the youthful Frenchmen who sketched and sang and laughed was even then of the Apache class.

Little did any of them dream that his affluence came even then from a timid soul, into which he had driven the arrow of fear.

In her simplicity the girl Yvette had drifted into an intimacy with him, and then had come the time when she thought she loved him. In her inexperience he represented all that was worthy, and, feeling this, she had poured out her girlish infatuation in letter after letter. Then had come the day when it was discovered that she had a voice.

In that very room downstairs she had been singing one night when the director of one of the great operas had wandered in with one of the students of the quarter. He had heard her sing, had spoken to her, and the result which had followed had been swift and certain. She had been trained, and, under his auspices, had made her debut.

Everybody in Paris acclaimed her as the coming prima donna, and, as the months passed in success after success, her income had doubled and trebled and quadrupled. Then into the very midst of her success had come a man with love. Long ago had Mademoiselle Yvette recovered from her girlish infatuation for Jean. He was of the dim past, and she had forgotten. She had found the love of a woman in the grave man who had laid his name and fortune at her feet. When marriage had followed, she had retired from the stage.

To a beautiful home in the Avenue Wagram was she taken, and there was enthroned as its mistress. Yet all was not honey even then. The man she had married was a widower, and at no time is it easy for the second wife to assume the responsibility of motherless children.

If they are young, and have little memory of the past, then it is soon blended into the passage of time. But if the child is a daughter almost as old as the wife, whom she must look upon as a second mother, if she

must yield her place as mistress of the home to another, then is it indeed hard for the one who comes in.

But Yvette had met the daughter of the man she had married with a smile and a grave little air of sweetness which had gone deep. Over the sulkiness of reserve she had triumphed, until the girl who had greeted her coldly and with hatred now came to her with all the warmth of love.

It had been a greater triumph than her greatest achievement in opera. It seemed then that she had nothing to ask of life. A husband whom she loved, and who loved her, a home of happiness, love, and honour and sweetness.

Then from out of the past one day there had come a letter from Jean of the Quarter, demanding money.

Scarcely able to believe it nothing but a joke, she had yielded to his demand for a meeting, and then the last shred of her girlish ignorance was torn aside as he coolly demanded a great sum, holding her own love-letters over her head as a threat.

Terrified lest the happiness of her home should be wrecked, she had surrendered, and from that day a period of misery had commenced. In less than two years the blackmailer had stripped her of all of her own fortune saved from the days of her successes. Then she had been forced to beg more of her husband, who had given freely, though at the same time wondering at the need for it.

Now her master had summoned her again, and perforce she had come to him at the old rendezvous.

He had all she could give him. What could he possibly demand now? He must have known the tenor of her thoughts, for he smiled and shrugged.

"Be not alarmed, Yvette," he said smoothly. "I have not requested you to come here to-night to ask you for money; though, to be sure, I am without any. The tables are an expensive luxury, and my luck is out. But listen. You have a step-daughter. She is just twenty now, and is very beautiful. For years it has been arranged that she marry the young Comte Phillipé Bergons. You see, I am quite au fait with all that is going on. Her father, your husband, will give her a magnificent dowry, for he is very wealthy, as we all know. Now, I have discovered that on the day of her marriage she will receive the jewels which belonged to her mother. Everyone in Paris knows them. They are the creations of an artist, and their worth is anything. But, Yvette, these jewels will never go to your stepdaughter."

"What do you mean?" gasped the woman hoarsely.

The man shrugged again.

"What I say, Yvette. These jewels must be mine, and, with your aid, they shall be. Wait!" he commanded as she made to speak. "Hear me out. I have made up my mind that they are to be mine. With them I can realise, in one stroke, a fortune. Your part will be very simple, but you must fulfil it. Do this for me, and I will hand you back every one of your letters. Refuse, and I send on a few copies to your husband. Which is it?"

The woman's face went a deathly pallor.

"I had never dreamed that the world could hold anyone so vile," she breathed. "Time after time you promised me back my letters, and yet, like everything else you have told me, your promises were lies. You have stripped me utterly of all I possess. You have jeopardised my position at home, and all because when an ignorant girl I wrote you some letters. Oh, one day you will meet your deserts, Jean! And now you order me to rob my own. It is too awful. You can do what you will. Send the copies of the letters to my husband. There is a limit past which you cannot drive me. Ruin me, if you will; there is always a way out for me."

The man was silent for a little. He was sufficient judge of human nature to realise that he was driving the woman close to breaking-point. If he were to gain his end, and not precipitate a tragedy which would for ever ruin one very lucrative source of income, he must tread very warily.

Finally, he looked up.

"You mean suicide, of course," he said slowly. "Well, that is all very fine; but you make a statement without thinking of the consequences—not to yourself, but to your husband. You escape, but does he? Your object in doing away with yourself would be to get release; but that would not save you, for on the day you died I would still send him the letters, and what would otherwise be a dear memory to him would turn into the arrow of sorrow."

The woman dropped her head with a low moan. Too well she saw how the coils of this Apache, whose intimates called him the Snake, were bound round her. Not even in death was there release.

She raised her head, and, as she gazed across at the man, her eyes burned.

"What is it you want me to do?" she asked thickly.

The Snake smiled, for he scented victory.

"What you have to do is very simple," he said. "Tell me first—have the jewels been yet taken to the house?"

The woman answered mechanically.

"Yes."

"Where are they?"

"In the safe in my husband's library?"

"Your stepdaughter is to be married next week, is she not?"

"Next Wednesday."

"Who has the key of the safe?"

"My husband."

"Can you gain access to it?"

"Yes."

"Then listen. You will get hold of it in some way and take a wax impression of it. That impression you will send on to me, together with an impression or a duplicate of all the keys of the doors leading from the street through the courtyard to the house itself. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"And you will do as I say?"

"Yes."

The woman might have been in a trance, for all the life there was in her tones.

"Are they guarded only by the safe?" went on the man.

"No; there are two plain-clothes detectives on guard over the safe each night. They will be there until after the marriage."

"Ah, that is a complication," muttered the man. "But never mind, that must be got round some way. You send me the impressions of the keys and I will do the rest. You may rest easy in your own mind, Yvette. When I have brought it off I will send you back the letters and will never trouble you again. Nor will there be any suspicion cast on you. I have thought out a plan which will keep the police guessing, never fear. Now, that is all I have to say to you. Get these impressions as quickly as possible, and send them here to this cafe. To-day is Thursday. See that they are here by Saturday. Will you do as I say?"

The woman nodded wearily.

"Yes," she whispered. "Is that all?"

"That is all."

She rose to her feet, swaying as she did so; but, conquering the weakness which assailed her, she reached for her cloak. Slipping it over her shoulders,

she drew her veil down over her face, and, without another glance in the direction of the man, who sat at the table with a sinister smile on his lips, she passed from the room and down the stairs to the restaurant beneath. Once in the street she hurried back to the Boul Mich, and, pausing only long enough to tell the driver to go to the Etoile, she climbed into the cab.

Once within its friendly shelter, she collapsed in a heap in the corner and broke into a torrent of dry sobs which racked her from the Boul Mich to the Etoile.

Arriving there, she got out of the cab, and, tipping the man generously, hurried along to the Avenue Wagram.

Before a pair of stately gates, about halfway down, she stopped, and taking a key from beneath her cloak fitted it into the lock. Slipping within the courtyard, she crossed to a door which opened into the magnificent mansion which the gates concealed, and, opening it, stepped into a splendidly furnished hall.

Treading with certainty and caution, she felt her way across the dimly lit hall to the grand staircase, which she mounted to the floor above. Then along a wide corridor to a door, from beneath which there came a faint line of white.

Turning the handle of that door she stepped within, and, as she did so, an old woman, her maid from the days of her earliest successes, rose to take her cloak.

With a shiver the woman slipped it from her; then, keeping her face averted from the old woman, she passed through to her own bedroom adjoining, and, undressing mechanically, slipped into bed.

Her fault had been little indeed, yet terribly was she paying the price.

CHAPTER II.

The Black Wolf Hears Something of Interest—A Little Sleight of Hand— Sunday Night—With the Compliments of the Black Wolf.

IN the luxuriously furnished library of his house in Montmartre, the Comte de Monte Bello sat before the fire smoking one of his eternal Russian cigarettes, and idly turning over the pages of a magazine.

Outside, the rain beat down fiercely, and, as he glanced out of the window from time to time, the comte snuggled deeper into his chair.

"A day for those who like it," he muttered, as he glanced at the clock: "but for me it is death. Had it not rained— *Entre!*" This, as there came a knock at the door.

In response to his summons it opened to admit a manservant, who bowed awkwardly and stood at attention just within the door.

"What is it, Marcel?" asked the comte genially. "Isn't the day sufficiently horrible without my being worried by you and your affairs?"

The man essayed a smile.

"But, Monsieur le Comte, I have news for you."

"Ah, ha! It is news you have, is it, Marcel? Very well, come closer, and do not shout it to the whole of Paris. Now, then, what is it?"

"Monsieur le Comte has heard of the Apache known as the Snake?"

A faint gleam of surprise entered the comte's eyes.

"The Snake!" he exclaimed. "You mean that vulgar, swaggering nobody who thinks he is clever?"

"That is the man, monsieur."

"I have seen him, Marcel. What of him?"

"He meditates something which affects the Black Wolf, monsieur. My brother, who goes sometimes to the Cave of the Innocents, heard him talking last night, monsieur, and he said he would make the Black Wolf surprised very soon."

The comte sat up and laid aside his book.

"He did, did he?" he said, with a peculiar smile. "Tell me all you know of this, Marcel."

"It is this way, monsieur. My brother, he is a fool! He is friends with the Snake and his like, and he goes with them to their places. Last night he was at the Cave of the Innocents when the Snake came in. He is meditating something, monsieur, and he wanted two men to join him. One he asked was my brother, but he could not accept since he must go to the country to-morrow. He has some affair on there, monsieur, which can be no good if I know him. But the Snake, monsieur, told him he was going to bring off a big coup on Sunday night, and that it would be the biggest jewel haul of recent years. He offered my brother ten thousand francs, monsieur! He also said to them that when he had finished the police would never suspect that he was the one who had done it, but that he had arranged it so the deed would be credited to the Black Wolf, monsieur. That I wormed out of my fool of a brother this morning, monsieur."

The Comte de Monte Bello lit a fresh cigarette, and rising, began to pace up and down the room, while the eyes of Marcel followed him with the affection of a dumb animal. Finally the comte stopped, and, facing Marcel, said:

"Can you discover where one might find the Snake, Marcel?"

"I got that from my brother, monsieur. He goes to-night, which is Saturday, to the Café Verens, off the Boul' Mich, where he is to meet the two who will be his confederates, and where the final arrangements will be made."

"You have done well, Marcel. I, too, will go to the Café Verens to-night. But keep to yourself what you have just told me, Marcel."

Murmuring a word that he would respect the comte's wishes, Marcel retired, and the comte sank once more into the deep chair before the fire, smoking and pondering on what he had just heard.

He sat there until past five, when a footman brought in tea—the Comte de Monte Bello was a devotee of the British habit of afternoon tea—then, when he had finished that, he left the library and ascended to the sitting-room of his own private suite on the floor above.

There he rang the bell, and when the summons was answered, the door opened to reveal an elderly woman, whom the comte addressed as Ninette.

"Ninette," he said, "lay out my things. I will wear black, I think, and get out also the Martigny pearls, for I shall wear them. Then get ready to come with me about seven, for I shall leave here then."

Ninette bowed, and disappeared into the adjoining room, while the "comte" idled about the room, humming the bars of a new opera.

It was some fifteen minutes later when Ninette came out to announce that everything was laid out, and with a nod of thanks the "comte" left the room.

Ninette also disappeared, and it was nearly half an hour before the door leading to the adjoining bedroom opened, and a lovely girl appeared.

She was habited in a beautiful evening gown of black, which, cut low at the throat, revealed a neck gleaming like a pillar of alabaster. Her hair, black as night, was done high upon her head, and clasped by a pearl clasp. About her throat was a magnificent collar of pearls—the Martigny pearls,

the theft of which by the Black Wolf had set Paris by the ears. A single ring set with a pearl was on her hand, but beyond that she wore no other jewels.

Ninette entered the sitting-room just as she appeared, and slipped over her mistress a cloak which she had brought. Then she stood off and gazed with admiration at the girl.

"La, but you get more beautiful every day, mademoiselle!" she said.

The girl laughed.

"That is because I live wisely and well, Ninette," she said. "You thought that a mixed life would be bad for me, and behold, it has done wonders to me! You thought that a girl who adopted the role of a man, as I have adopted that of the Comte de Monte Bello—who lived part of her life in that guise, as I have done; who went back to her own life when she listed; who operated as I have done, setting Paris and the police by the ears as the Black Wolf—would lose all the roses from her cheek. You see, after all, I was right. The life—ah, Ninette! It is heavenly, the freedom of it! To-night, *chérie*, we go across to the Quartier Latin, where I have a little business afoot. Tell Jacques to get out the big car."

"But, yes, mademoiselle," replied the maid, as she started for the door.

When she had gone the girl sat down, and, lighting a Russian cigarette, smiled introspectively. And well she might, for of all the law breakers of modern times, none had succeeded in so setting the police of the great cities of the world by the ears as had this slim girl, who was known as the beautiful Mademoiselle Miton.

Mademoiselle Miton—the Comte de Monte Bello—the Black Wolf! She was each—she was all! And beyond those who were her servants only one person knew it. That person was Nelson Lee of London, and, truth to tell, he had not known it for long.

As a law breaker her career was probably unique. Not one person in a million could have successfully combined the triple role as she did. Yet it is a fact that, as Mademoiselle Miton, she was daintily feminine, while as the Comte de Monte Bello she was slim and almost girlish in figure, yet withal a huge success in that role.

Certain it is that those who knew the smart and Bohemian comte did not dream for a single moment that the "comte" was in reality a girl.

And the chief reason for her success was that she never ran one role into another. In her house in Chantilly she was mademoiselle as mademoiselle. In the house in Montmartre she lived as the "comte," even when alone. By that she had so perfected the part that each nuance of expression and manner came naturally to her.

Therefore, it is not to be wondered at that she should contemplate going to the Cafe Verens as her true self. No one there would be likely to connect her with the Comte de Monte Bello, although it is true that as the comte she knew the place well.

They arrived at the cafe a little after eight, and taking Ninette with her, Mademoiselle Miton passed through the dingy restaurant to the little garden at the rear.

There it was the custom for some of the early diners to have their simple meal and a bottle of red wine, and thither mademoiselle had decided to go.

Securing a small table, which was set close beneath a spreading bush which, in some extraordinary fashion, grew from a green tub which seemed far too small for it, Mademoiselle Miton ordered dinner for herself and Ninette.

Then she sat back to survey her surroundings. There were some eight tables in the garden, and with the exception of one all were occupied—in almost every case by students and models of the quarter.

The same type of gathering might have been found at a hundred small restaurants of the quarter at that hour any evening.

When the dinner had been served by a neatly-dressed girl, Mademoiselle Miton devoted herself to a more detailed study of the customers there, even going so far as to stroll along to the door which opened into the main restaurant.

Mademoiselle was waiting and standing there by the door when she at last saw that for which she was waiting.

It was Jean of the Quarter—the Snake. He was sitting at a table close to the piano, drinking from a huge flagon of beer when she saw him. From the dishes in front of him it was evident that he had but finished his dinner, though he had not been there when mademoiselle had first entered.

Over the top of the flagon his eyes caught those of mademoiselle, and for an instant he stared at her as though scarcely able to believe that she was real flesh and blood. She returned his gaze for the fraction of a second, then dropped her eyes quickly.

The Snake still continued to stare, for such a gem had not come his way for many a day. Knowing the quarter and the man as she did, mademoiselle knew but the barest encouragement was necessary, so once more she raised her eyes to his, seemed to smile fugitively, then disappeared towards the garden again.

With an exclamation, Jean was up and after her. He had caught a single brief glimpse of the white throat beneath the cloak she wore, and if he could believe his eyes then he had seen a pearl collar which was worth a fortune.

"A stranger to the quarter," he muttered to himself. "A sightseer probably, but evidently not averse to a little fun. Well, she will get it from Jean."

Swaggeringly he passed out to the garden, and sighting mademoiselle and Ninette, made his way along to the table where they sat.

As he drew near he raised his cap which he wore, and bowed with what he flattered himself was the pink of gallantry.

"May one presume to join you, mademoiselle?" he asked daringly.

"If monsieur can find any pleasure in our company, I think perhaps he might for a little," replied Mademoiselle Miton.

Ninette, true to her part, frowned both on mademoiselle and on the Snake, but the presence of a duenna only made Jean all the more sure that he had had the good fortune to strike the fancy of sightseer, and a wealthy one at that, for as he sat down Mademoiselle Miton carelessly threw aside her cloak, revealing the great Martigny pearls in all their beauty.

The Snake's eyes remained glued on them, and inwardly Mademoiselle Miton laughed as she saw the greed in them.

"He is what he is," she mused to herself, as she watched him.

Then, with a light laugh, she spoke to him, and the Snake, gathering himself together, endeavoured to make himself agreeable.

From time to time he kept looking towards the entrance to the main restaurant, and mademoiselle knew he was watching for the two men whom Marcel had said would meet him there.

Yet she also knew that by now his mind would be in a ferment over the collar which she wore. If Jean of the Quarter could get possession of it in any way he would do so. But little did he dream that, instead of spreading the web for an unsophisticated girl, he was being cleverly drawn into the trap of none other than the Black Wolf himself—the pride and terror of Paris.

It was when mademoiselle had graciously consented to take a liqueur, and

Ninette had grudgingly assented as well, that the Snake rose to get, as he said, "the best the house could provide."

When he had gone, Mademoiselle Miton leaned over the table and whispered to Ninette:

"Do not drink it, Ninette; it will be drugged. When he returns I shall settle with him."

He came back some few minutes later, followed by a waitress carrying a tray on which were three glass of an amber-coloured liqueur.

The Snake himself handed them to his guests, and, dismissing the girl, resumed his seat. At that same moment Mademoiselle Miton leaned across the table, and her hand went out towards him.

The Snake, with a glitter in his eye, pushed his hand along to meet hers, when even as it was half-way there it stopped, and he grew rigid. His eyes looked cloudy and dazed, then closed, and so he sat.

Mademoiselle watched him carefully: then, when his eyes closed, she quickly thrust her hand beneath her cloak, slipping something which she had held into an inner pocket.

That done, she bent even closer, and under the pretence of putting her arm about his shoulder—an act which was by no means unusual in that place—she went through his pockets with a dexterity which the Snake himself would have envied.

From the pocket of his coat she took several articles, amongst which was a letter. This she slipped across to Ninette.

"Read it quickly, Ninette," she said, in a low tone.

Ninette grasped the letter, and slipping out the single sheet which it contained, she read in a whisper:

"Jean,—In the packet which I am sending you are four impressions. The large one is for the outer gate. The medium-sized one for the front door of the house. The third in size is the key of the library which contain the safe. The small one is for the safe itself. The two guards are on every night. You will have to be careful. If you have any pity left at all, send back my letters. You have made me worse than thief—you have made me traitor to my own husband.—Y."

"Put it in the envelope and give it back," said mademoiselle quickly.

Then from the bag which lay in her lap she took a flat, black article, which at first sight looked like nothing more than a piece of black lacquer.

Laying this on the table in front of her, she took from the medley of articles on the table four keys, which were shiny with newness.

One after the other she pressed upon the flat article before her, and when she removed them there remained a perfect impression of each key in all its details.

Pushing it across to Ninette, she said:

"Put it away, Ninette, quickly. He is coming round."

Hurriedly thrusting the different articles back into the man's pockets, she resumed her former position, and snatching up her glass, poured the contents on to the ground.

Ninette had just done the same when, with a qucer exclamation, the Snake opened his eyes.

"La, la, monsieur, you are ungallant!" cried mademoiselle. "See, we have drunk your health and you have not even lifted your glass!"

The Snake stared at her stupidly for a moment, then tried to smile.

"Pardon, mademoiselle," he said, lifting his glass. "I felt strangely faint for a moment."

"I am sorry, monsieur. It is nothing serious, I hope?"

Jean of the Quarter shook his head.

"I am all right now, mademoiselle, thank you. Did you enjoy the liqueur?"

"It was delightful!" replied mademoiselle. "But now, monsieur, I am afraid we must go. And I see two men in the doorway who keep looking your way."

Mademoiselle Miton rose as she spoke, and the Snake rose with her.

"I will see you along, mademoiselle," he said. "Those men can wait."

Mademoiselle Miton laughed.

"No, no, monsieur, that is impossible! My chaperone will see me safely along."

She held out her hand as she spoke.

"Good-night, monsieur! Thank you for a pleasant hour!"

The Snake took her hand.

"But—but surely I may see you again, mademoiselle?" he cried.

"Perhaps, monsieur. In fact, I think I can promise you that you will see me again. But now, good-night!"

She was away, followed by Ninette, before the Snake could stop her, and as she disappeared into the restaurant, Jean muttered:

"I must follow them. They have taken the drug, and it will work soon. I must be on hand. Sacre, what pearls!"

He went after them, making a sign to the two fellows who awaited him that he would return. He almost ran up the street to the corner and along to the Boul Mich, but, strange to say, there was no sign of the two he sought.

The only thing he could see was a great black car, with servants in black livery, which was driving up the Boul Mich at a rapid pace. So with a curse at his luck, the Snake went back to the Cafe Verens.



CHAPTER III.

The Robbery at the Jures—The Black Wolf Leaves His Sign—The Snake Receives a Surprise—Murder—Flight.

SUNDAY night. Eleven o'clock. Up the Champs Elysees rolled a great black limousine, which turned round by the Etoile and drew up near the top of the Avenue Wagram.

No sooner had it done so than a black-liveried footman leaped down from his place and opened the door. From the car stepped a slight figure clad in a long black cloak, with features concealed by a soft slouch hat of the same colour as the cloak.

He paused long enough to say, "Fifteen minutes," then walked quickly down the avenue.

The man climbed back to his place, and a moment later the car drove on towards the Bois.

The cloaked figure kept on until it reached a pair of large gates about half-way down the avenue. Here it paused, and after adjusting a masque over its eyes, drew out a large key, which glistened new in the faint light which came from a distant street lamp.

Inserting it into the lock, the Black Wolf, for it was her, turned it slowly, and a moment later one of the big gates opened inwards.

Slipping through, the Black Wolf closed the gate after him, and then, keeping to the shadow, made her way across the courtyard to the front door of the mansion.

Here another pause was necessary in order that a second key should be

fitted, but a few seconds later the Black Wolf stood within the main hall of the house listening.

A faint light burned at the back of the hall, and using this as a guide, the Black Wolf made her way along until she stood just without a door which she knew opened to the library.

No sound broke the stillness of the hall, but bending close to the library door, she was able to detect a chink of light shining through the keyhole, and to hear whispers.

The guards were awake, and on guard.

But the danger of the position or the difficulties of it seemed not to worry the Black Wolf.

Thrusting her hand beneath her cloak she drew out a rubber bulb, to which was attached a long rubber tube, at the end of which was a thin black nozzle. Holding the bulb in one hand, the Black Wolf inserted the point of the nozzle in the keyhole, and then gave a sudden press of the bulb. There was a faint hissing sound as the contents of the bulb were shot through the keyhole into the room.

Listening at the door, the Black Wolf could hear no more of the whispering, and after waiting perhaps half a minute, she drew from her pocket another key.

Into the keyhole she inserted this and turned. The next moment the door had swung open softly, and the Black Wolf was within the room. A candle burned on the desk, beside which sat two men in plain clothes. They were both sitting exactly as they must have been when they were whispering, but now their eyes were closed, and they looked as though sleep had claimed them.

With scarcely a glance in their direction, the Black Wolf made for a large safe which stood in one corner, and taking out another key from the inner pocket of her cloak, inserted it in the lock. Within a minute of her entry into the room the door of the safe stood open to the Black Wolf, and there in the centre shelf was a large black leather case.

Taking it out, the Black Wolf walked across to the light with it, and when the spring which released the cover had been pressed, the lid flew up to reveal a collection of superb diamonds. There was a tiara fit for an empress, there were rings and brooches and clasps, there were diamond hair-ornaments and diamond buckles. There was even a pair of handsome diamond shoe-buckles, not to mention a massive set of earrings.

With a soft exclamation of delight, the Black Wolf picked up the pieces as she could grasp them and thrust them into the capacious inner pocket of her cloak.

Then, when the case was quite empty, she drew out a slip of paper on which was written: "Le Loup Noir" (The Black Wolf), and laying it in the empty case, closed the lid.

"That will be a pleasant surprise for the Snake," she muttered.

Then she replaced the case in the safe, closed the door and locked it, and made for the door of the room.

Slipping through into the hall she closed the door gently after her and turned the key. For a few minutes she bent close to it listening.

Suddenly there was the sound of whispering within the room, and she knew that the two guards had come round to resume their conversation, never dreaming what had happened.

With a soft smile playing about her lips, the Black Wolf crept along the hall to the front door, opened it, slipped through, locked it, and started across the courtyard. Two minutes later she was in the avenue again with the big gates standing locked and grim as before.

Along the avenue she strode, taking off her mask as she went, and

scarcely had she arrived at the top when the big black limousine appeared from the direction of the Bois. It drew up beside the kerb, and the footman jumped down to open the door.

Stepping in, the Black Wolf gave the order: "Home," and the car sped down the Champs Elysees towards Montmartre.

The Black Wolf had never pulled off a neater job!

CHAPTER IV.

Nelson Lee Tackles a Baffling Case—Monsieur Fabert, Head of the Criminal Department of the Paris Police, has a Theory—Lee is Puzzled.

NELSON LEE awoke in his apartment at the Hotel Carlton in the Champs Elysees and blinked sleepily at the electric clock which was set in the wall over the fireplace.

Although the blinds of the room had been drawn, there was still enough light filtering through for him to see that it was scarcely eight o'clock.

He had a feeling that something outside himself had dragged him from a sound sleep, for he had left orders to be called at nine, and, as he could see, it still lacked more than an hour of that time.

Just as he was wondering what it could have been the telephone on the night-table beside his bed rang shrilly. Instantly he knew it had been ringing before, for there still remained in his sleep-laden mind the memory of a shrill ringing in his dreams.

Turning over on his side, he took hold of the instrument and removed the receiver.

"Hallo, hallo!" he called.

"Monsieur Fabert is on the telephone, sir," came the voice in reply. "Will you speak with him?"

"Certainly! Connect him!" answered Lee promptly, and by now wide awake.

He wondered what the Chief of the Criminal Department of the Paris Police could want with him at that hour in the morning, for he had left Monsieur Fabert only the previous midnight, and the chief had said then that he would look Lee up at the hotel about noon.

There had been no mention then of an early call. Nor on this occasion had Lee any business with the Paris police. He was in the French capital on a purely private matter, and that having been attended to the previous day, he had intended to return to London during the coming afternoon.

He was to discover in a few minutes, however, that Monsieur Jules Fabert had not called him up on account of any trivial matter, for when the chief's voice came over the wire, Lee could detect in it signs of excitement, if not of agitation.

"Is that you, Lee?" came the voice, in perfect English.

"Yes, yes; this is Nelson Lee speaking," replied Lee. "That is you, Monsieur Fabert, is it not?"

"It is. Good-morning, Lee! Do forgive me for disturbing you at this hour. My only excuse is that something has happened during the night which I am certain will arouse your keenest interest. In fact, had you not happened to be in Paris, I think I should have wired you to come over. It is impossible to tell you the details over the telephone. How soon can you be ready? I have not breakfasted myself, so will call round to the hotel and we can breakfast together there. Then we can go on to the place where the—er—event happened."

"I shall call Nipper at once," said Lee quickly. "It will take me exactly forty minutes to bath, shave, and dress, monsieur. Let us say eight thirty-five in the hotel breakfast-room. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly, Monsieur Lee. I shall be there at that time."

With that the chief rang off, and Lee, hanging up the receiver, hopped out of bed. He opened the door leading into the sitting-room which adjoined, and, crossing that apartment, knocked loudly on the door of Nipper's bed-room.

The lad's voice answered him sleepily, and telling him to bestir himself, Lee hurried back to his own room.

Entering the bath-room, he shaved and bathed at express speed, and then, getting into a well-cut morning coat which was set off by grey striped trousers and fawn spats, he lit a cigarette and entered the sitting-room.

At the same moment Nipper emerged from his room, and bidding his master good-morning, inquired what the fuss was all about.

Lee smiled as he tucked the morning papers under his arm.

"I cannot tell you that, my lad, for I don't know. Monsieur Fabert called up to say that he would be here directly, and that something had happened during the night, which would be of interest to us. That is all I can tell you, for it is all I know. But at breakfast he will probably enlighten us further, and as he should now be arriving, we shall descend at once."

They passed out into the corridor, and making their way along to the lift, were soon shot down to the ground floor. There they walked along towards the door of the breakfast-room, and scarcely had they reached those wide portals, when the swing door in the front of the lobby turned and Monsieur Fabert himself appeared.

He came forward with a smile on his face.

"Punctual as usual, Monsieur Lee," he said, as he shook hands. "I must apologise for getting you out at such an hour, for I know you were tired."

Lee shrugged.

"It is quite all right, monsieur. I am glad you took the trouble. Shall we get along to breakfast, then you can tell us what has happened?"

The eyes of the chief sparkled.

"I fancy I shall make you sit up this morning, Lee," he said. "I have something to tell you which will interest you all right."

It was not until they were seated at the breakfast-table that Monsieur Fabert enlightened them, and then he only spoke when the waiter had retired out of earshot.

Knowing the chief as they did know him, both Nelson Lee and Nipper were aware that he would not have come to them so early unless the matter in hand were one of a particularly important nature; therefore they were both more than keen to hear the tale.

"I had little idea when I left you last night, Lee, that this morning was to see such a development as has come to my notice. Let me tell you, to begin with, that it seems—I say seems—to have a good deal to do with your old friend the Black Wolf. Considering the affair of the Martigny pearls, I knew you would at once be interested."

For obvious reasons Nelson Lee had never told Monsieur Fabert of his second passage at arms with the Black Wolf, which had its inception in the jungles of South America.

"When I was still asleep this morning, the telephone by my bed rang, and I heard the voice of Dupres, my confidential assistant. He told me that a serious thing had happened during the night, so I ordered him to come on to my rooms at once.

"Now listen! This is what he told me. There is a family named Jure

which lives on the Avenue Wagram. It consists of the Monsieur and Madame Jure, and one daughter."

"They—Jure!" interrupted Nelson Lee quickly. "I seem to recollect that name. Wasn't it rather prominent a few years ago?"

"You are right," replied Monsieur Fabert. "Monsieur Jure married a well-known stage lady—Mademoiselle Yvette C—. She retired from the stage just before the marriage."

"Ah! Now I remember," said Lee. "Proceed, please."

"As I was saying, they live in the Avenue Wagram. I shall endeavour to give you a brief outline of the family. To begin with they are wealthy—Monsieur Jure being a well-known member of the Bourse. He is about fifty years of age, and from my own knowledge, a gentle-natured man with fine ideals. The daughter, I should tell you, is his by a previous wife. Mademoiselle Yvette was, as you know, several years younger than her husband when she married him, and my assistant tells me that she is now under thirty. The daughter is twenty. At first I believe there was a little trouble between the stepmother and the daughter, but Mademoiselle Yvette, or Madame Jure as she is now, overcame the girl's dislike, and they have been very happy for some time. These details I have acquired from Dupres, my assistant, and you rest assured that he has verified the facts. For some time past the comte had been attentive to the daughter, and a definite marriage was arranged for next Wednesday."

"Now is where the interesting part comes in. The girl's own mother had some magnificent diamonds—she came from an old and wealthy family. These diamonds were to go to the girl on her marriage, and for the purpose of handing them over to her formally they were brought from the bank to the house. They were in a large leather case, and were put by Monsieur Jure himself in the safe in his library."

"Not satisfied with that safeguard, he sent for two detectives, and they have been on guard over the safe every night since the diamonds have been in the house. Last night those diamonds were taken, and the two men who were guarding them were murdered!"

"Good heavens! I should think you do interest me, monsieur," said Lee in a low tone. "Go on, please."

"Last night, Monsieur Jure locked the two guards into the room," went on the chief. "That was his custom—to lock them in and take the key to his room with him. Then in the morning, at seven, when the servants began to make the house ready for the day, it was the custom for the butler to come to the master and get the key of the room."

"I must say here that each night, before he locked them in the room, Monsieur Jure himself saw that the diamonds were in the safe, and the safe properly locked. Well, this morning the butler went as usual to his master's room for the key. He unlocked the door of the library, and to his horror, discovered both of the detectives lying dead on the floor."

"One of them had been stabbed to the heart, and the other had a terrific gash across his throat. Blood was everywhere about the room, but so far Dupres has been unable to find any traces outside the four walls of the library, which is most extraordinary, as you must acknowledge."

"Where was Monsieur Jure all this time?" asked Lee.

"In bed," replied the chief. "The butler lost his head on making such a ghastly discovery, and brought the whole household round with his cries. Monsieur Jure came down in his dressing-gown, and after confirming the discovery of the butler, made at once for the safe. On opening it he discovered that the diamonds had been taken from the case, but that the case itself had been left."

"Like a sensible man, he drove the servants from the room, locked the

safe, and telephoned at once to the Criminal Investigation Department. Dupres was in attendance, and went on at once. He called me up, as I told you, and when I had gathered the facts of the case, I rang you up."

"But you have not told me in what way it affects the Black Wolf," said Lee, in a puzzled tone.

"Ah! I was keeping that bit of knowledge until the last," responded the chief. "I will tell you. On the floor of the library, where it had obviously been tossed by someone, Dupres found a crumpled up piece of paper, which, on being straightened out, revealed the words: 'Greeting from the Black Wolf.' That is where he comes in."

Nelson Lee folded up his napkin, without replying to the remark of the chief. Then he rose.

"If you are ready, we had better be getting round to the Avenue Wagram as soon as possible," he said.

The chief and Nipper got to their feet, and passing out of the breakfast-room, they got their hats and prepared to enter the chief's car, which stood panting at the kerb in the Champs Elysees.

It was only a short run to the house where the terrible tragedy had occurred, and leaving the car in the street, they entered through the great gates and crossed the courtyard to the main entrance of the house.

An agitated-looking footman opened the door to them, and as they passed down the hall to the library, they saw two of the chief's men standing in the shadow.

In the library itself they found Dupres, and Lee noted how carefully everything had been guarded, by the fact that Dupres himself unlocked the door to them.

He saluted when he saw that it was Monsieur Fabert, and having shaken hands with Lee and Nipper, said:

"I have just completed my examination, Monsieur Fabert. Shall I go over the details of what I have found?"

Monsieur Fabert nodded, and the party walked over to a large screen which stood in one corner. Drawing aside one of the flaps of the screen, Dupres revealed what lay behind it.

Lee could scarcely refrain from a shudder of horror as he viewed the two victims who lay side by side on a hurriedly arranged couch.

"I have placed them there until the arrival of the doctor," said Dupres. "He has been here once already, but is returning."

It is not necessary here to go into the details of the examination which Nelson Lee and Monsieur Fabert made of the two bodies. Sufficient is it to say that when they had finished, the truth was all too plain to them. Both of the detectives had been foully murdered—one of them having been stabbed to the heart, and the other's life blood having gushed forth from a great wound in the throat.

As he straightened up, Nelson Lee said in a low tone:

"It is a most shocking affair. The attack must have been of the most vicious nature."

The chief nodded.

"There can be no doubt about that," he said. "But come, let us replace the screen and see what else Dupres has found."

Returning to the centre of the room they stood in a circle, while the chief's assistant took out his notebook and began to read therefrom.

"Dealing first with the room itself," he began. "you will kindly note, gentlemen, that, as you enter the door, the window is directly in front. It is, as you will see, an ordinary French window, and the closest examination has failed to show any signs that an entry was gained that way."

"It was locked on the inside as usual last night, and this morning it

was found exactly as it was left when Monsieur Jure retired to bed. The only other means of entry is the door. That, according to the custom of the master of the house, was locked by him when he retired, and the key taken to his room with him.

"This morning, when the butler got the key, he found that the door was quite natural in its appearance, and the lock worked freely. It had not been broken, proving that those who came into this room last night were possessed of a key which fitted the lock.

"In the right-hand corner you will see the safe from which the diamonds were taken. It has been left open, and in a few moments I will show you the jewel case which was thrown back into the safe by the thieves.

"Now then, monsieurs, with your permission I will endeavour to relate the results I have come to by my examination here.

"Working from the fact that the lock of the front door showed no signs of having been tampered with, and the fact that all the lower windows of the house were found to be locked, as they had been left when the family retired to rest, I have come to the conclusion that the thieves not only possessed a key or a duplicate of the key of this room, but also one of the front gates, the front door, and the door of the safe. From start to finish there are absolutely no signs of tampering with any of the locks.

"I have submitted the safe to the most searching examination, and can find nothing to go upon there. Therefore, gentlemen, it is my idea that the thieves entered the courtyard some time during the night, crossed to the front door, let themselves into the hall by means of the key which they had, and crept down the hall to the door of this room.

"I have tried to imagine what happened then. The two guards were probably whispering together. At any rate, they were smoking, because on the floor by the side of each I have found the ends of cigarettes which must have been dropped there by them. I have imagined the thieves to have worked very softly at the lock of the door, and to have turned the key, making an entry into the room before the guards were aware of what was happening.

"Then the struggle must have taken place at once. The thieves struck quickly and struck hard, as is proved by the two bodies behind that screen. Then the safe was opened, the jewels taken from the case, the safe relocked, and the retreat made.

"By this crumpled piece of paper we are enabled to fasten the deed upon the Black Wolf. It is crumpled, as you can see, and was probably jerked from the hand of the Black Wolf himself during the struggle. It is my opinion that it was the intention of the Black Wolf to leave it in the safe, and that it was written by him before he came here, and before he knew that there would be killing."

Nelson Lee stretched out his hand for the piece of paper which Dupres had drawn from his pocket. It had been straightened out, but still showed the rayed lines where it had been crumpled up.

"Greetings from the Black Wolf," he read.

His memory went back to the days in Paris when he had first been pitted against the Black Wolf, and when he had been the recipient of so many warnings from that mysterious individual. Certainly the writing on this paper was the same as the writing which he himself knew as that of the Black Wolf, and the paper was a piece of the thick white sort which the Black Wolf had used on those other occasions.

Here and there the paper was stained with a dark-brown stain which Lee knew only too well was blood.

Midway between the safe and the door there was another great patch on

the floor, and here and there bits of the furniture showed the same stain. The struggle which had taken place in that room must have been frightful.

Lee handed the paper across to the chief, and, walking across to the safe, turned the handle. The door came open readily enough, and the first things his eyes lit on was a large leather case.

Taking it out, Lee pressed the spring which released the catch, and the lid flew up, revealing the interior of green satin, empty of the jewels which had lain there such a short time before.

Lee replaced the case in the safe, and walked back to Monsieur Fabert.

"Do you really wish me to assist you in this case, monsieur?" he asked.

The chief nodded quickly.

"If you will give me your aid, Monsieur Lee, I shall be very grateful indeed," he replied.

"I am quite willing to confess that the case interests me exceedingly," went on Lee, "and if there is any hope of bringing it to an early conclusion, then I think Nipper and I can remain in Paris for the purpose of running the Black Wolf to earth."

"Then you agree with Dupres that the Black Wolf did this?" asked the chief eagerly.

Lee shrugged.

"I shall not question the points of Monsieur Dupres's story," he said with a smile. "If I am to assist you I prefer to make an examination myself. Then I shall come to what conclusions I find compatible with the evidence in hand."

With that, Nelson Lee turned, and, walking abruptly from the room, made his way along the hall to the front door.

He scrutinised the lock of the big door carefully; then, starting at that point, worked his way along the hall to the door of the library, examining each portion of the wall on both sides as he went along. But he had arrived at the library door again without finding the slightest mark of blood.

Standing on the threshold of the library he gazed into the room where the tragedy and theft had taken place.

"Is it odd, that," he muttered to himself. "There is blood everywhere in this room, proving how terrible the struggle was. It stands to reason that the person or persons who killed the two guards must have got splashed with blood. There are the stains on the paper to prove that point. But, strangely enough, there is not the faintest sign of blood outside this room.

"The paper, although stained with blood, shows no signs of finger-prints. That is sufficient to prove that the thieves wore gloves of a sort. I can only surmise that they came prepared for any eventuality, and that after the double murder they were able to efface the stains of the struggle from their persons.

"And there again I come to a point worth considering. Monsieur Dupres is one of the cleverest detectives in Paris, and I do not wish for a moment to throw any cold water upon the excellent theory which he has worked out. At the same time, I am afraid I shall have to question it in one or two points. For instance, he has concluded from the paper which he found that it is the Black Wolf who is responsible for this affair. I wonder. I know, even if Monsieur Dupres and the chief do not know, that the Black Wolf is a woman. I know, further, that such a deed as this would not only be beyond her physical strength, but utterly repugnant to her nature.

"She is one of the cleverest thieves in Europe, but murder—no, I cannot credit that. Moreover, the Black Wolf has always made it a practice to work alone. We know enough of her movements to be sure of that point. Then how does it come that she would enter here and commit murder? Certainly the fact that the entry and exit were arranged so faultlessly are

sufficient in themselves to throw a strong suspicion on the Black Wolf, and that piece of paper, as well as the writing, undoubtedly came from the Black Wolf.

"Were it not for that, I should be inclined to think that others had brought off the job and had arranged to throw suspicion on the Black Wolf. But kill those two men—no, the Black Wolf never did that. But what does it mean? That paper certainly bears the writing of the Black Wolf."

Slowly Nelson Lee walked into the room and took up the piece of paper from the table. Bit by bit he examined it again, then turned to Monsieur Dupres, who was watching him closely.

"Just where did you find this, monsieur?" he asked.

Dupres pointed to the floor near the fireplace.

"Just there, monsieur."

Lee walked across to the spot, and, dropping to his knees, made a close examination of the floor; but though he went over every portion the search yielded nothing.

Finally, he got to his feet, and, turning to Monsieur Dupres, said:

"Have you considered the possibility of the thieves having an accomplice within the house?" he asked.

The Frenchman nodded.

"But yes, monsieur. The fact that the doors were opened so easily, and locked after the thieves, proves that there must have been some collusion within the house. I have examined all the servants, but have failed to elicit anything of value. I have men on the job who will keep them all under close surveillance."

Lee nodded his approval.

"And where is Monsieur Jure?" he asked.

"I requested him to remain upstairs for the time being, monsieur. If you wish to speak to him you may do so at any time."

"I should like a word with him, and also with Madame Jure and mademoiselle if possible," replied Lee.

"I will go at once to see if it can be arranged, monsieur. I may say that Madame Jure and mademoiselle are completely prostrated over the occurrence."

"I shall only keep them a few moments," replied Lee.

Monsieur Dupres left the room, and while they waited Lee, Nipper, and Monsieur Fabert discussed the case in all its bearings.

It was some ten minutes or so before Dupres returned, accompanied by Monsieur and Madame Jure. As they entered the room, Lee glanced sharply at the pair of them. Like every detective, he had not put by the thought that it was always possible the master and mistress themselves might have had a hand in the affair, but the moment he looked at them he knew that such a suspicion was impossible.

They were not the stuff of which thieves and crooks are made. Monsieur Jure was grave and sombre, while madame showed red-rimmed eyes from weeping.

Lee met their courteous greeting with a bow, and asked each of them a few questions which had some slight bearing on the case.

Then he signified that he was finished, and when Monsieur Fabert had spoken to them they left the room.

When they had gone Lee turned to Monsieur Fabert.

"I think I have seen all I wish to see here, monsieur. I shall return to my hotel now, for I wish to give some consideration to the evidence which we have been able to collect here."

"Do you agree with any part of Dupres's theory?" asked the chief.

Lee smiled.

"That is impossible for me to answer yet," he replied. "I can tell you better later on. What do you think yourself?"

"I am inclined to agree with Dupres," said the chief, in a low tone, for Dupres was still in the room. "He is the best man we have at the Quai des Orfèvres, and he rarely makes a mistake. Myself, I think the evidence against the Black Wolf overwhelming. At any rate, I shall put my fellows on the trail, and I swear that this time I shall catch the scoundrel."

Lee smiled to himself. He knew how futile the previous efforts of the Paris police had been to run the Black Wolf to earth, and he had a deep respect for the ingenuity of the dame—Black Wolf.

But a thought was beginning to form in Nelson Lee's mind, and he was anxious to get away in order to ponder upon the circumstances surrounding it. Therefore, he took leave of the chief and Dupres, and, signing to Nipper to follow him, made his way to the door. As they went along the hall, Nelson Lee and Nipper came upon an elderly woman, who struck them as being a maid of sorts.

They stood aside to allow her to pass, and while they continued on their way to the door, she disappeared towards the back part of the house.

Neither Lee nor Nipper gave any thought to the meeting at the time, but it was not to be long before they saw the same woman again. They got their hats in the hall, and, passing through the front door, started to cross the courtyard.

Emerging into the Avenue Wagram, they went ahead on foot towards the Etoile, and, walking at a brisk pace, it was not long before they came in sight of the magnificent Arc de Triomphe which crowns the wide Place.

It was just when they were rounding the Etoile to pick up the Champs Elysees, for it is only a few moments walk from there to the Hotel Carlton, when Nipper suddenly caught hold of his master's arm.

"There, guv'nor," he said quickly. "Look!"

Nelson Lee glanced quickly in the direction indicated by the lad, and saw, just crossing the Etoile, a woman.

For a moment he did not recognise her, but when his eyes had taken in the details of her dress, which was almost hidden beneath a long coat, he saw that it was the same elderly maid whom they had passed in the house a few minutes before.

"That is odd," he said in a low tone. "She must have passed out at the rear of the house and come up the other street to the Etoile. It is odd, too, that some of Fabert's men are not after her. They were to watch every servant who left the house. After her, my lad, and see where she goes, and do not let her discover that you are following her."

With a nod Nipper darted away, and as he turned into the Champs Elysees, Nelson Lee saw him dodging across the Etoile on the heels of the woman.

For himself, he continued his way to the hotel, muttering as he went:

"The Black Wolf never committed that murder, nor did she have any hand in it, no matter what Fabert or Dupres may say. She would not be such a fool as to leave that paper there if she had had any hand in it. For the jewels—yes, she may have been mixed up in that. But how? How could she, and not be connected with the murder?"

"If it were not that I recognise both the paper and the writing, I would say that it was all a plant to throw the blame on to the Black Wolf—unless, of course, the paper was stolen and the writing is a forgery. However, I shall go over the affair point by point; then, perhaps, I may arrive at some definite conclusion.

At that moment, he pushed open the swing-door of the hotel and passed into the lobby.

CHAPTER V.

Nipper Has a Queer Chase—The Cafe Verens Again—The Letter—
A Cool Move—What the Letter Said.

NIPPER found it comparatively easy to follow the old woman across the Etoile, for he had the great Arc de Triomphe to dodge round, and, although she looked about her several times as though in fear of being followed, he was certain she did not see him.

She made her way straight across to the top of the Avenue de la Grande Armée, and there signalled the first taxi in the rank.

Nipper had just time to race up to the spot as the cab drove away, and, jumping into another, he told the driver to go after the first.

Down the Champs Elysées the cabs went, and as they passed the Carlton Nipper saw Nelson Lee just turning into the hotel.

Then, on reaching the Place de la Concorde, the leading taxi made for the Pont d'Alexandre, which it crossed. Away, then, they went, turning up the Boulevard Raspail, and so on to the Boul' Mich.

Although Nipper did not know it, the taxi in front was bound for the Café Verens. At the corner near Harcourts, the cab in front drew up, and the old woman descended.

Nipper was out and after her, telling his driver to wait a few minutes, but taking the precaution to give the man more than the fare due in case he should not come back.

Then along he went until he saw his quarry turn into the Café Verens. On the way over in the taxi, Nipper had taken the opportunity to make a radical change in his personal appearance.

In place of the natty lad in grey who had gone with Lee to the Avenue Wagram, he now wore a blue coat—for the grey coat was reversible, being grey on one side and blue on the other, and likewise reversing his cap.

He had also removed his collar, substituting a neckerchief in its place, and with the cap pulled low over his eyes he presented more the appearance of a lad of Montmartre or the Latin Quarter rather than an English lad.

So he had little fear of his identity being discovered by the woman whom he was following.

On entering the café, he saw that she had gone on to the rear, and was standing by a small doorway which was shut off from the main café by heavy curtains. It was the sanctum of Madame Verens.

Nipper slouched along until he came to the table in the corner and, sitting down, leaned back. The table was but a few feet from the doorway where the old woman stood, and from his position he could see her every action.

Scarcely had he taken his place when the curtains were pushed aside, and he saw what he rightly judged to be the proprietress of the place come out.

She glanced inquiringly at the old woman, and the latter, stepping close, whispered something in her ear.

"Jean of the Quarter?" said Madame Verens, in a tone which carried to Nipper.

"He is not here, madame."

Then, at a sign from the other, she spoke in a tone so low that Nipper could hear no more. But he did see the old woman's hand go to her pocket, and then witnessed the passing of a letter from her to Madame Verens.

The proprietress took it, and thrust it into the big pocket of the apron which she wore, saying as she did so:

"It will be delivered this evening, madame, do not fear."

Then the old woman said something else, and took her departure.

Nipper was in a quandary. He wanted to follow his quarry, and yet he

felt sure that the main object of her journey from the Avenue Wagram had been accomplished.

He figured that she would now return to the Avenue Wagram. But she had left a letter here for someone whom she had called Jean of the Quarter, and he was determined to get a glimpse of the contents of that letter if possible.

But how? That was the question.

He was racking his brains over the puzzle when Madame Verens came up and asked him what he would have. On the spur of the moment, Nipper ordered a pot of coffee and croissants.

His eyes were glued on the capacious pocket in madame's apron, where he knew the letter to lie, and as she turned away to get his order, his hand shot out.

For a single moment it hovered over the pocket, then, as madame moved away, his finger shot down, and, holding his hand thus, he gripped the edge of the letter.

A moment later, Madame Verens had disappeared towards the kitchen, leaving the letter in Nipper's hand.

Quickly he dropped his hand into his lap, and, bending over, glanced down at the superscription on the envelope.

"Jean of the Quarter," he read, and that was all.

What did that letter contain? He had it now, and could easily make his escape before Madame Verens detected the loss. But he knew full well that such a move might complicate matters. He could not tell what he should do until he had read the contents.

At that moment madame came back, bearing a large pot of coffee, and as his eyes fell on the steaming spout of the pot, Nipper had an inspiration.

When she had departed kitchenwards again to bring the order of two customers who had just come in, Nipper drew the pot of steaming coffee towards him, and, taking the letter in both hands, held the tip of his fingers together.

In this fashion the letter was quite concealed by the palms of his hands, and, holding them thus, he raised them until they were on a level with his forehead.

Next he leant his elbows on the table, and, pressing his forehead against the edges of his hands, bent forward as though in deep thought.

Anyone watching him from a near-by table would only have thought that he was a young man somewhat depressed, for the letter was not visible save from a point beneath the level of the lad's hands.

But had one been curious, one might have noticed that the steam from the pot of coffee was rising exactly beneath the lad's hands, and Nipper was taking good care that it struck full against the gummed flap of the envelope. It was no easy task, sitting there in that position with the hot steam striking his hands, but he stuck to it, and paid no attention to the occasional curious glance which Madame Verens shot in his direction.

Had he ordered any alcoholic drink, and then sat in that attitude, she would have thought he had been indulging too freely; but she knew that he was perfectly sober, and her main concern was for the few sous which the coffee and croissants would come to.

It seemed an eternity to Nipper before he dared risk dropping his hands into his lap, but finally he did so, and, slipping the letter on to his knees, went to work gently at the flap.

He had not miscalculated the time necessary for the steam to soften the gum, for, working carefully, he was able to lift the flap, and a moment later the folded sheet which the envelope contained lay at his mercy.

Watching his chance, Nipper unfolded it, and eagerly read the contents.

"Jean," he read,— "I send you this as a last appeal. If you do not return my letters to me, I shall destroy myself. I have been your tool in every way. This last affair is too awful! I am beside myself with grief at your brutality. If you do not return the letters you promised me, I shall confess all, and then carry out my purpose. I shall come to the Café Verens this evening for them. Y."

Nipper folded up the letter, and thrust it back into the envelope. His young brow became furrowed with thought.

"That is meant for the man the old woman called Jean of the Quarter," he muttered to himself. "And it came from the house where the murder took place last night. Now, who is there there who could be writing to Jean of the Quarter? Someone whose name begins with 'Y.' It is a woman's writing, and she speaks of having been the tool of this man Jean. Also, she says she will destroy herself unless the letters are returned.

"What letters can she mean? It must be the letters which have given this man Jean the hold over her. It is a queer mixture, and the gov'nor will have to know about this. But I mustn't take the letter. It must remain here for the man Jean to get. I must memorise the contents, then I must manage some way to reseal it, and get it back into the pocket of madame. How on earth can I manage that?"

Nipper pondered the matter as he poured out a cup of coffee and buttered a croissant; then suddenly an idea came to him, and, Madame Verens passing at that moment, he beckoned to her.

"Have you any eggs?" he asked in French.

"Yes," she replied. "How will you have them?"

"Will you please bring me one fresh egg—raw?" said the lad.

Madame Verens glanced at him in momentary surprise, then, with a nod, she departed.

In a few moments she returned, with a single egg in a saucer.

Nipper thanked her, and when she had gone picked up the egg.

"I hate raw eggs," he muttered, "but it must be done, otherwise she will be getting suspicious of me."

Breaking a small hole in the top of the egg, he allowed a little of the white to drip out into the saucer; then, placing the egg to his lips, he threw back his head and allowed the contents to slip into his mouth.

Hating raw eggs as he did, it was almost beyond his power to swallow it, but he managed it finally, and, lowering his head again, returned the shell to the saucer.

As he drew his hand back again, he took care that some of the white which had dripped into the saucer was adhering to his finger.

Picking up the envelope, which had been lying on his knees, concealed by the table itself, he rubbed the white of the egg along the edge which had been gummed. That done, he pressed the flap down, and held it thus until the white had dried.

He knew now that the envelope was not only sealed as firmly as before, but that it would take a sharp eye indeed to discover that it had been tampered with.

He finished his coffee and croissants in leisurely fashion, then beckoned to madame for the bill.

She stood close beside him while she made out the slip, and, with a quick movement, Nipper rose to his feet.

As he did so, he took occasion to stumble against madame, and at the same moment to slip into the pocket of her apron the letter which he had read.

With an apology for his clumsiness, he paid the bill, adding a substantial

pourboire (tip), which was sufficient to soothe madame's ruffled feelings, and then, pulling his cap down over his eyes, made his way from the place.

Once in the street, he hurried on to the Boul' Mich, and, hailing a taxi, there, ordered the man to drive to the Hotel Carlton as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER VII.

Nelson Lee and Nipper See a Suspicious Thing—Lee Sees Light— A Desperate Woman—An Exciting Rescue.

FROM a purely deductive point of view, and with only the material to be gathered at the house in the Avenue Wagram to go upon, it must be confessed that Nelson Lee found little upon which to build a working hypothesis. The known facts comprised little indeed, and could almost be counted upon the fingers of one hand.

There was, first and foremost, the fact of the double murder—gruesome fact, which assailed one with a sharp degree of unpleasantness. There was also the fact that the collection of diamonds had been taken from the safe in the library. Thirdly, there was the discovery of the blood-stained paper by Dupres on the floor by the fireplace. There anything of a really definite nature seemed to end.

From that point all was theory. And by theorising Nelson Lee was compelled to try to find some solution of the mystery, though, to be sure, he had one great advantage over Monsieur Fabert and Monsieur Dupres. That advantage comprised the personal knowledge he had of the Black Wolf, who had been put down by both the Frenchmen as the guilty party.

On the face of it it seemed more than possible that the Black Wolf might have been mixed up in the affair, but when the facts were dissected it assumed quite a different phase in Lee's mind.

Certainly the mystery of ingress and egress smacked more than a little of the methods employed by the Black Wolf, but, on the other hand, the frightful murder in the library could not be reconciled by Lee with what he knew of the Black Wolf.

Indeed, in all the wild stories which were current about that mysterious person, Lee could not recall a single one in which the Black Wolf was accused of the capital crime.

Of robbery and swindling—yes; but of murder—no! Chief argument against that was the blood-stained piece of paper, and to explain that in a satisfactory way Nelson Lee was forced to construct theory after theory on what, to be sure, was a flimsy basis.

Yet after several hours solid thought and deduction from the available evidence he had come to the following conclusions—firstly, that in some way the Black Wolf had been connected with the robbery at least; secondly, that the double murder, which could not be reconciled with what he knew of the Black Wolf, was the work of others; thirdly, that the ease with which ingress and egress had been made pointed to collusion within the house.

Now he came to an impasse. If the Black Wolf had had a hand in at least the robbery, did it argue that the Black Wolf was an accomplice of the murderers? How could such a thing be when Lee could not and would not grant that the Black Wolf would countenance such a frightful deed?

Then what was the probable truth? Was there anything upon which he could hang a thread which might support a theory leading to the truth?

Take the three definite points which he had accepted as facts. In the

fact of the murder there was nothing, when considered alone, for that he had already decided was not the work of the Black Wolf.

The second fact—namely, the robbery—pointed a definite suspicion, and the puzzling piece of paper lent weight to that second point.

The murder had been analysed as far as possible, and had yielded nothing more than he already suspected. The robbery must be set aside for the time being, because whatever he decided regarding that must be inspired by deductions in other directions.

Lastly, he came to the piece of paper. Could he make anything out of that? It had been found crumpled up on the floor by the fireplace. If it had been left by the Black Wolf—and certainly the words upon it pointed that way—as a mockery of the Paris police, then would the Black Wolf have tossed it into an obscure corner of the room?

Above all things, the Black Wolf was an artist in his profession, and there was little of the artistic about that crumpled piece of blood-stained paper.

Why had it been thrown there? What state of mind did it indicate in the one who had thrown it? Certainly not a light mockery which was usually the state of mind of the Black Wolf when upon a coup. Rather it pointed to a condition of mind bordering on anger—or, at least, irritation.

What could be the cause of such irritation? Why not the paper itself? Motive and reconstruction, that was it.

Bit by bit in this fashion Nelson Lee worked his way back until from out the fog of mystery there suddenly emerged a bright ray of inspiration.

If that piece of paper had been the cause of the irritation which had caused it to be crumpled up and thrown in the corner, then a certain theory was possible.

Lee advanced it tentatively. It was certain that the paper had been thrown there after the murders. The bloodstains proved that. Then why was this theory not a possible one?

The Black Wolf had been in the house in the Avenue Wagram the night before. Nelson Lee knew that it was quite within the powers of the Black Wolf to render the two guards hors de combat before he entered the library.

The manner in which the Black Wolf had stolen the Martigny pearls proved that. Nelson Lee knew that one of the strongest weapons which the Black Wolf used was a certain mysterious drug which he could spread about in his immediate neighbourhood, rendering those about him oblivious of what was going on. He himself had been under the influence. Nipper also had felt it. Others, too, had been victims to it.

Therefore, it did not require a very great stretch of the imagination to presume that the Black Wolf had used it upon the two guards. Then the entry into the library would follow, and the theft of the diamond collection would result.

What more like the Black Wolf than to take the jewels and leave a mocking note for whosoever opened the case. Then he would make good his escape, getting away before the two guards recovered from their stupor.

That was only theory, it is true, but it was all part and parcel of what he knew of the Black Wolf.

What next? Enter the men who had done the murder. The struggle had followed their entry, and the deed was remaining proof of the result.

Then, to carry the supposition still further. They, too, had opened the safe while their hands still reeked with the blood of their victims. They had opened the jewel-case, and there, instead of the diamonds which they expected to find, they had come upon the mocking message of the Black Wolf.

What more natural under such circumstances than for the one who found it to crumple it up angrily and hurl it from him? Standing by the safe and doing such a thing it might well fall in the neighbourhood of the fireplace. Then they, too, had made good their escape, and so the terrible deed had remained undiscovered until the morning.

Therefore, by this line of reasoning, there must have been two distinct and separate attempts at the house in the Avenue Wagram, and by the same process of thought it would seem that the Black Wolf had succeeded in making the haul of jewels while the murderers had received nothing for their awful work.

Yet there was still that question of collusion to consider. Someone within that house had furnished the necessary keys or copies of keys.

Had the Black Wolf received these, or had the murderers, or had both? If the latter, then the whole fabric of the theory he had just outlined must collapse to the ground, for it would at once connect the Black Wolf with the murderers, and that was a point which Nelson Lee would not acknowledge.

Then, if not both, who had? Judging from his knowledge of the Black Wolf, Nelson Lee was much more inclined to think her capable of a faultless ingress and egress by her own astuteness rather than the men who had done their work so clumsily and brutally. Brutality rarely goes with artistic natures. The innate refinement of such natures forbids the harbouring of such a bestial quality.

Then the collusion within the house must have been with the murderers rather than the Black Wolf. And, that being so, who could this accomplice within the house have been?

Ah, there was the rub!

Scarcely had he asked himself this question than there was a sound at the door, and Nelson Lee looked up to see Nipper entering the room. It needed but a single glance from the detective to see that his young assistant was brimming over with news of a sort.

"What is it, my lad?" he asked quickly.

Nipper tossed his cap aside, and sat down on the couch which stood near Lee's chair.

"I followed the old woman," he said abruptly, "and it is a good thing I did so. I found out something which I think is important."

"Out with it, my lad!" said Nelson Lee quickly.

Then Nipper began, and related to his master all that happened from the time he took up the trail of the old woman in the Place de l'Etoile.

When he had finished his tale, and had repeated word for word the contents of the letter which he had so cleverly managed to read, Nelson Lee glanced at him with approval.

"You have done magnificently, my lad," he said warmly. "The reading of that letter may have far greater effect on this case than you at present imagine. You say it spoke of the writer going there to-night to get some letter?"

"Yes, guv'nor."

"And it indicated a desperate state of mind?"

"Yes, guv'nor."

"You are quite sure the writing was that of a woman?"

"Certain, guv'nor."

"I think you are right, my lad. The wording of it was the wording a woman would use, too. And the signature—the single letter 'Y.' Good heavens, Nipper, I have just thought of something!"

"What is it?" asked the lad quickly.

"I will tell you later, my lad—I will tell you later. But we shall do little

to-day until this evening. 'Then we shall go in disguise to the Cafe Verens. In the meantime, I shall write a note to Monsieur Fabert. I have come to certain conclusions regarding this case, my lad—conclusions which your information has strengthened materially.'

But not yet did he tell Nipper that the reason of his exclamation a few moments before was the sudden recollection that Madame Jure's own Christian name began with the letter "Y."

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At seven o'clock sharp that evening a tall man, whose appearance was shabby in the extreme, and whose unkempt beard gave little idea as to his age, pushed open the swing flap which half concealed the Cafe Verens from the gaze of the passer-by in the street, and walked into the main restaurant.

Outside there was a steady drizzle coming down, and the cafe was crowded, for on such occasions none of the customers cared to consume their meal in the garden.

The new-comer walked down the full length of the room until he came to the same table at which Nipper had sat that morning, and, sinking into a vacant seat, gave his order.

From his appearance one would scarcely have thought that it was Nelson Lee, the great British detective. At precisely five minutes past seven a lad, dressed in the style of the quarter, entered the cafe and took a seat near the door.

It was Nipper.

Then, at intervals of five minutes, three more men came in and took seats in different parts of the place. The first of these was Monsieur Fabert, well disguised; the second, Monsieur Dupres, who on this occasion presented the appearance of a shabby artist; and thirdly came Monsieur Fiquelmont—another of the assistants of Monsieur Fabert.

None of the five gave any sign of recognition of the other, but each in his turn ordered a substantial meal and began stolidly to eat it.

Yet of those five pairs of eyes, not one but scrutinised surreptitiously each person who entered the cafe, and when Jean of the Quarter came in and disappeared on the other side of the curtains which shut off the sanctum of Madame Verens from the cafe, there was the careless upraising of a knife by Monsieur Dupres to indicate to the other that the man known as Jean of the Quarter, and the one for whom they waited, had come in.

There were few of the characters of Paris whom Dupres did not know. Still they went on with their food, and when some ten or fifteen minutes later the swing door opened to admit a woman, heavily cloaked and veiled, there was another upraising of a knife, this time by Nelson Lee.

He knew instinctively that the woman who had just come in was she who had written to the Snake, signing herself "Y"; and had there been any doubt in the matter it was settled a moment later when she, too, disappeared behind the curtain.

No move yet, only the stolid demolition of the food.

Five minutes went by, and a man slouched into the cafe, looking to right and to left. Straight on to the end of the room he kept until he reached the curtain. Then, with a furtive look about him, he thrust it aside and was gone from view. Another ten minutes, and a second furtive-looking individual repeated the same action.

Perhaps five minutes more went by when the curtains over the doorway were suddenly thrust aside, and the cloaked and veiled woman once more appeared. She hurried to the door, looking neither to right nor left, and

as she disappeared into the street, Nelson Lee shot a quick, meaning look at Nipper.

The lad was on his feet in a second, and tossing down on the table sufficient money to more than pay his score, he dodged into the street.

Then and only then did Nelson Lee rise and make his way through the curtained doorway. At the desk in her sanctum sat Madame Verens. She turned her head as Nelson Lee entered, and, seeing a stranger, frowned sharply.

"What do you want?" she rasped.

For answer Nelson Lee moved towards her, then before she could even cry out, his long arms had wound themselves about her, and his fingers were at her throat.

"Not a word!" he hissed into her ear.

Before she could recover from the surprise the curtains were pushed aside once more, and Monsieur Fabert slipped into the cubicle.

Jerking a cord from his pocket as he came, he slipped it round the woman's wrists and tied them tightly. Then he thrust a gag into her mouth, and when that was securely fixed, Nelson Lee allowed her to slip back into her chair. They took the further precaution of tying her to the chair, and scarcely was this part of the job finished, when first Dupres then Fiquelmont came in.

With his finger on his lip, Nelson Lee passed through the cubicle to the foot of the stairs; then, followed by the others, he began to ascend.

Slowly, step by step, he went up, until he was standing at the top gazing along the dingy and dimly-lit hall.

When his companions had joined him, Nelson Lee tip-toed along the corridor, pausing for a moment outside each closed door he came to.

Finally, when he had passed three, he stopped, and lifted up his hand to enjoin extreme caution on his companions.

Standing thus, Lee bent close to the door, and now he could hear the murmur of voices on the other side.

Slowly he turned his head.

"The birds are here," he breathed to Monsieur Fabert. "I think it is time to move."

The chief nodded, and drawing a heavy automatic from his pocket, signed to his two assistants to do likewise. Lee already had his weapon ready, and when he saw that his companions were prepared for the work they had to do, he lifted his hand and rapped softly on the door.

There was an immediate cessation of the voices on the other side of the door, and he could hear a chair being pushed back gently. Then came the sound of footsteps approaching the door, and a second later the key turned. Slowly a tiny crack of light between the door and the jamb widened, until there was a space of almost an inch. Following that, Lee saw a shadow cross the opening, and the glitter of an eye as the light fell on it.

That was enough. With a word to the others he threw himself heavily against the door, and burst into the room. As he did so he saw two men, who sat at the table, leap to their feet, and a loud curse from the man who opened the door revealed the utter surprise felt by Jean of the Quarter.

Nelson Lee covered the Snake with his revolver, while Monsieur Fabert and his two assistants burst in after him.

That the Snake did not propose to yield without a fight for freedom was evidenced a moment later, for with another curse he ducked, and, shooting out one long leg, kicked over the table. The candle upon it fell to the floor, and one of the other crooks made a motion to stamp out the flames.

A moment later the room was plunged in Stygian darkness.

"Quick," cried Lee—"the door! Don't let them get out!"

Scarcely had he uttered the words when there was a deafening roar, followed by a blinding flash, close to him, and a bullet went whistling over his head to lodge in the door.

Lee leaped like a cat for the place where he had seen the flash, but the Snake had been too quick for him, and he only clutched empty air.

Then, in that small room in the Cafe Verens, there broke out one of the most awful fights it is the power of man to conceive. Seven men there were—seven desperate determined men, three of them bent on escaping or dying, and four of them equally determined to make a capture.

Shot after shot went whistling across the room, flash after flash broke out, until the very rapidity of the firing sounded like the spit of a Maxim gun.

It was every man for himself now—every man trying to pick his antagonist and drop him before he himself was dropped.

Lee had managed somehow to close the door, and what with the fumes of powder and the strained breathing of seven men, the air in the room was almost overwhelming.

Then the fight shifted round a little, and in a lull Nelson Lee saw the door jerked open and a figure slip out into the corridor.

With a shout to Fabert and his men, he tore after, and was just in time to see Jean, of the quarter, racing for the stairs.

Nelson Lee fired from the hip as he ran, and at the top of the stairs the Snake turned and sent a bullet crashing back at his pursuer.

Then he went headlong down the stairs, with Lee after him. They tore through the cubicle where Madame Verens still sat, bound and gagged, and into the restaurant proper, where the customers had one and all risen in horror at the pandemonium which had been going on over their heads.

Some of the women had run into the street, but for the most they were crouching by their tables.

As the Snake burst into the room with Nelson Lee on his heels there were a few screams, but the next moment, when Nelson Lee leaped for his quarry and caught him by the throat, a sudden silence settled over the room, and men and women on all sides watched with bated breath the beginning of a fight that was to go down into the history of the Quartier Latin.

Both weapons were now useless, for the chamber of each had been emptied in the fusillade upstairs, and neither man had had time to slip in a fresh clip of cartridges.

Yet the Snake was no coward, and he was nothing loth to come to grips with the shabby-looking man whom he knew now was of the police.

He swung, with a curse, as Lee's hands gripped him, and drove his fist full into the detective's face. Lee was compelled to take the blow, but the next moment, though he was bleeding badly at the mouth, he had pushed the Snake from him, and was driving in blow after blow.

Back, back, back he drove his antagonist, until Jean was jammed up against a table. Then with a quick leap, the Snake sprang out of reach of the awful punishment he had been taking, and with a lightning-like movement lifted his leg, driving the end of his high heel full to the point of Lee's chin.

Only in time had Lee seen the move, preparatory to the famous French savatte, and had jerked back his head as far as he could. He could not evade the blow altogether, but he managed to minimise its effects, and before the Snake could do it the second time, Lee had rushed into a clinch.

Then all pretence at the rules of fighting were swept aside. Neither man bothered one whit. Each was out to get the other, and in doing so he was compelled to apply every atom of strength and knowledge he possessed. The

rules framed by the famous Marquis of Queensberry were never intended for a fight such as that terrible struggle between Nelson Lee and the Snake.

The customers of the restaurant were still held spellbound by the fury of the struggle, and when the flying, fighting, panting figures approached any of them they were given all the room they required.

By a marvellous bit of strategy, Nelson Lee managed to get his man worked over into a corner, and there, watching that the hell-work was not repeated, he started in with a vicious attack which had the Snake dodging frantically.

He came back pluckily, but Lee was now fighting coolly and with almost professional care. Time after time the Snake tried frantically to avoid the punishment, but Lee was after him like lightning, and, watching his chance, drove a terrible right to the jaw, following it up by a vicious cross left jab.

Both blows caught the Snake on the spot intended, and when the second crashed in upon him, he rocked back on his heels with a look of glassy stupidity on his face.

Drawing back his arm, Nelson Lee sent in another right, and with a queer little groan, the Snake went down to stay.

Like a flash Nelson Lee was on top of him, and a moment later there was a click as he slipped on the handcuffs. He was taking no chances with the Snake.

Scarcely had he done so when there was a stir at the end of the room, and Monsieur Fabert and his two assistants came in, dragging after them the two accomplices of the Snake.

Monsieur Fabert's eyes glistened with satisfaction as he saw Lee.

"I thought he had got away," he panted.

Lee shrugged.

"I thought he would manage to do so," he replied. "But, thank goodness, I was able to overtake him before he got clear of the place. Your men ought to be outside, oughtn't they?"

The chief nodded.

"I told them to have a patrol motor here at half-past seven. Fiquelmont, just slip outside and see if our men have arrived."

Saluting, the assistant went out to the street, and returned a few moments later, followed by four men in the uniform of the Paris police.

They saluted the chief, and stood waiting for his orders.

"Take these three men out to the motor," he said curtly. "See that they are well secured, and then come back to clear this place out. I want it locked and a seal put on the door until this affair is over."

The four men acted promptly and with precision. Jerking the Snake and his two accomplices to their feet, they dragged them outside to the patrol, and forced them into it.

Then they returned to the café, and shouted to the remaining customers that they must depart at once. Seeing now that it was a police-raid, those who were still in the room made good their escape, for there was more than one person there who had no fancy for running foul of the police.

When the place was quite empty, Dupres and Fiquelmont unbound Madame Verens, and talked sternly to her. That done, they locked the front door and put a police seal on the outside. Then, joining Lee and Monsieur Fabert, who were waiting in the latter's car, they all drove on to the Criminal Department Headquarters at the Quai des Orfèvres.

It was just as they were drawing into the kerb in front of that great cheerless stone building that a taxi dashed up to the kerb, and out of it came Nipper. He turned to assist someone from the cab, and they saw a

cloaked and veiled woman, with garments dripping wet, lean heavily on his arm as he conducted her into the building.

They followed close after, and on the way Monsieur Fabert said to Lee:

"I hope, monsieur, we have made no mistake. It was in compliance with the request of your letter to-day that I made all these arrangements for the raid on the Café Verens, but I still cannot see what Jean of the Quarter had to do with the affair in the Avenue Wagram. All the evidence points so strongly to the Black Wolf."

Nelson Lee shrugged.

"Patience, monsieur, patience. When we arrive in your bureau I shall make the charge, and it will be the charge of murder against Jean of the Quarter, and his two accomplices. I have an interesting story to tell you, and unless I am greatly mistaken, I shall be able to bring proof of its truth."

"The woman," murmured the chief; "who is she? And what does your young assistant with her? She was dripping wet—did you notice?"

Lee nodded.

"I don't understand that myself," he said. "But we shall soon know, for Nipper will tell us."

With that they continued their way to the offices of the chief.

CHAPTER VII.

What Happened When Nipper Left the Café Verens—A Struggle in the Water.

TO understand why it was that Nipper was arriving at the Quai des Orfevres with the cloaked and veiled woman dripping wet, it is necessary to go back for a little to the time when he left the Café Verens on her trail, just before Nelson Lee had his terrific fight with the Snake.

It was comparatively easy for the lad to keep her in sight to the Boul' Mich, but there she slipped into a big limousine which stood waiting at the kerb, and the car drove off at once.

It was only by sheer luck that Nipper was able to get a taxi, and, leaping in, he told the driver to keep the big car in sight. Straight down the Boul' Mich the chase led, until, by many turnings and windings, they came to the Boulevard Raspail.

There the car ahead turned to the right, heading for the river, and on reaching the end of the Rue de Belle Chausse, suddenly drew into the kerb.

Somewhat puzzled, Nipper leaned out and told his man to go slowly, but as he passed the larger car, he saw the cloaked woman get out. Then the car drove on, and with a quick glance about her, the woman turned and headed for the river side of the Quai.

Nipper rapped smartly on the window, and when the taxi had stopped, he jumped out, tossing the man ten francs for his fare.

Keeping well in the shadow—for it was still a dark, stormy night—he dogged the woman along as she made her way towards the Quai.

Those who are acquainted with that portion of the Seine will know that just below the bridge which spans it, there is a long stone "slip," running from the Quai proper down to the edge of the river, where almost every day in the year the famous Seine fishermen may be seen angling for the fish which they never seem to catch.

It also forms a highway for loads going to or coming from the numerous

barges which moor there, but on a dark and drizzling night such as the one in question, it is a silent and deserted spot.

Therefore, Nipper was a good deal puzzled to know what could be the woman's object in going down that slip to the edge of the river on such a night.

She was cautious not to be seen, too, for as the lad slipped along after her, keeping close to the high coping of the stone wall, he saw her pause and turn round.

He crouched low, waiting until she should resume her way, and then he was after her again.

She kept straight on to the edge of the river, and creeping along as close as he dared go, Nipper could just make out her figure, where she stood at the very edge of the water, gazing across at the myriad lights which gleamed through the Tuilleries across the river, and at the red glare of the sky in the background where the high lights of Montmartre held sway.

He was intensely puzzled was the lad, but never for a single moment did he anticipate the awful thing which happened a moment later.

He saw the woman raise her arms up towards the sky, then her cloak dropped from her, and a moment later Nipper uttered an exclamation of horror as she plunged full into the black waters of the Seine.

Like a flash he was up and racing down the remaining distance. He gained the edge of the river in a few seconds, and, standing on the same spot where she had stood, he thought he could just catch a glimpse of a white face tossing on the current.

Without the slightest hesitation, Nipper threw his arms over his head and dived in. He came to the surface some distance out, and swimming with a strong, overhand stroke, followed the current in the direction where he had seen that ghastly face.

The seconds seemed ages as they passed, and he began to fear that he had missed her after all.

Just when he was considering turning back to search farther out, he saw an upraised arm, and swimming as hard as he could, he made for it.

He managed to catch it just as it was disappearing beneath the surface and then, in the black waters of the river, he had to struggle with a woman who was determined to drown.

She fought wildly to be released, but Nipper, now that he had caught hold of her, had no intention of being witness to a deliberate suicide if he could prevent it, and although he had to be rough with her to control her, he finally managed to force her to stop her struggles, and a few moments later he was struggling to reach the bank, dragging with him a choking, sobbing woman.

How he managed to make the slip again the lad never knew. But after an eternity of aching struggle, he did manage it, and with a last effort succeeded in dragging himself out of the water with his burden after him.

Another ten minutes was consumed endeavouring to calm her and revive her somewhat, then, wrapping her cloak about her, he led her up the slip to the Quai where they were compelled to stand shivering for some time before a crawling taxi came along.

Nipper's first thought was to get the woman to her home, for while she stood shivering in his arms, he had, to his amazement, recognised her as none other than Madame Jure.

He did not pause to wonder what she could have been doing at the Café Verens, though, to be sure, he was keen enough to put two and two

together, and to realise that it must have been she who had written that note to Jean of the Quarter.

What a woman like Madame Jure would have in common with the Snake—how she had ever fallen into the clutches of such a creature—was beyond him.

But the knowledge caused him to determine to take her to Lee without delay, and, reckoning that Nelson Lee's plans had matured, he knew that his master must sooner or later arrive at the Quai des Orfevres that evening.

It was not far from where they then stood, and knowing that he would be able to get dry garments there for himself and Madame Jure, he told the taxi driver whom he hailed to drive there at once.

Therefore, it was that, as Nelson Lee and Monsieur Fabert arrived at the Criminal Department headquarters, they saw Nipper assisting into the building the woman he had saved from a watery grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Strange Scene at the Quai des Orfevres—Nelson Lee Talks—Madame Jure Makes a Confession—On the Trail of the Black Wolf.

IN the private bureau of the chief of the Criminal Department, there was gathered a strange company. The chief himself was seated at his desk with Nelson Lee close to him.

On the other side of the desk, and clad in dry clothing, which had been provided by the wife of the concierge, sat Madame Jure, with tear-laden eyes drooping to her lap. Close to her sat Nipper, and just behind them were Dupres and Fiquelmont.

In an adjoining room four officers sat with the three prisoners who had been brought from the Cafe Verens. Monsieur Fabert had assembled them thus at the request of Nelson Lee, and now he was waiting for Lee to speak.

The British detective did not waste any time in coming to the point. When he saw that the chief was ready, he rose, and resting his long lean fingers on the edge of the desk, began to speak.

"Monsieur Fabert," he said quietly, "when I wrote to you to-day asking you to make certain arrangements for a raid on the Cafe Verens to-night, it was wholly based on the theories upon which I had been working. True, I had come to certain conclusions, but it was something which my assistant Nipper discovered that decided me."

Then Lee turned slowly round and faced Madame Jure.

"Madame Jure," he said gently, "this morning, when my assistant and I were leaving the house in the Avenue Wagram, we passed in the front hall an elderly maidservant, whom we took casual notice of. On walking up the Avenue Wagram and reaching the Place de l'Etoile, we again saw her hurrying across the Place.

"I sent my assistant to follow her, and need I say, madame, that he tracked her to the Cafe Verens, off the Boul' Mich."

At this point, Monsieur Fabert bit his lip, for he was annoyed that none of his own men had been on the track of the woman.

"She took a letter to the Cafe Verens, madame," resumed Lee, "and how it happened does not matter just now, but I may tell you that my assistant, by a daring trick, not only managed to get possession of that

letter, but he succeeded in reading the contents, and resealing the letter, to return it to the pocket of Madame Verens, from which he had taken it.

"That letter, madame, was addressed to one Jean, of the Quarter, and if you wish I can tell you the contents. It was signed with the letter Y, Madame Jure."

A low moan came from Madame Jure, and though Nelson Lee hated the task in hand, he went on mercilessly:

"I leave you to judge if I am deceiving you, madame. The letter was an appeal to Jean of the Quarter and when my assistant brought back the information, it was all I needed to prove beyond a doubt that the men who murdered the two guards in your husband's library last night, madame, had had a confederate in the house. That confederate was yourself, madame.

"And now, monsieur," he went on, turning back to Monsieur Fabert, "I will tell you in detail what occurred at the house last night. The diamonds which were stolen were taken, as you suspected, by the Black Wolf, but monsieur, the Black Wolf had nothing whatsoever to do with the murder there. Jean of the Quarter and his two accomplices entered the library after the Black Wolf had departed with the booty. It was they who murdered the two guards, and I think, when I have told you all, you will agree with me.

Forthwith, Nelson Lee began and related step by step, the tale which he was enabled to construct from the deductions he had made.

Those in that room listened spellbound as he proceeded, gazing at him as though he were a wizard.

When he had finished, not omitting a single detail, he turned sharply to Madame Jure, and raising a forefinger, said sternly:

"Now, Madame Jure, will you confess? Give us your confidence, and we may be able to help you more than you think."

Madame Jure raised appealing eyes to Lee's, and half rising in her chair, stammered:

"Monsieur—monsieur, it—is—true. I gave Jean of the Quarter impressions of the key. He—he it was who must have done the deed, though, as Heaven is my witness, I did not know such a terrible crime was intended. I have been at his mercy for years, monsieur. Oh! monsieur, you are good and generous. Help me, I beseech you."

With that Madame Jure sank back, and Nipper was just in time to grasp her as she fainted.

Nelson Lee turned to Monsieur Fabert.

"We have in her the proof we desire, monsieur. Bring her round. Face Jean of the Quarter with her, and he will have to confess. Myself, I am going to get the Black Wolf. I will have the Black Wolf here before midnight and I will recover from the Black Wolf the missing diamonds. Make no move, I beg of you, until we have finished all the evidence.

"I cannot see that it will serve any good purpose to punish Madame Jure any more than she has been punished. She was in the grip of that murderous devil, but in her heart she was innocent of any wrong intentions. He held her in the grip of fear. Come, Nipper, we have much to do yet!"

With that Lee picked up his hat, and before the astonished chief could reply, he was at the door with the lad at his heels.

Then the chief found his voice, and called out:

"Will you take any of my men with you?"

"No, thanks," replied Lee pausing.

"Then have my car," said Monsieur Fabert. "It is at the kerb."

"I shall accept that with pleasure," responded Lee, with a nod; and,

leaving the chief still gaping with astonishment, they went down the long stone corridor to the street.

Once they were in the car, Nelson Lee leaned forward, and said to the driver:

"Do you know the Rue de Presle, in Chantilly?"

"But, yes, monsieur," replied the man.

"Then drive to Number Ninety-two," said Lee; and, settling himself in his seat, he smiled at the look on Nipper's face.

"Guv'nor!" said the lad.

"Yes, Nipper? What is it?"

"How did you do it, guv'nor? Things went so quickly, back in Monsieur Fabert's room, that I have not been able to grasp it all. I am sure, too, that Monsieur Fabert has not been able to do so. How did you know that the Black Wolf had nothing to do with the murder?"

"It is a long story, my lad," replied the detective, "and I prefer not to tell you how I arrived at my conclusions until I have roped in the Black Wolf. She is a very slippery customer, and may have cleared out of Paris. But I am taking a chance, my lad. Yet I am willing to wager that when the Black Wolf read of the murder in to-day's papers she was as surprised as any of the public. And let me warn you, my lad, that when we reach her house, if we find her in, we must move very warily. You know, and I know, of the strange drug she uses. We must ensure that nothing of the sort happens to us. Therefore we shall have to strike quickly and surely."

"I'll be on my guard," replied Nipper earnestly; and, with a nod, Lee sank into deep thought.

Nor was any more said between them until the big police car drove past the Chantilly golf links.

Those who read of the first stirring brush between Nelson Lee and the Black Wolf, at the time of the theft of the Martigny pearls, will recall that, as Mademoiselle Miton, the Black Wolf lived in Chantilly. It was the house off the Boulevard Clichy in Montmartre that she used as the Comte de Monte Bello, and it was because she attended with such precision of detail to her separate roles that the Black Wolf was able to go so long uncaptured.

Little did the Paris police or Paris society dream that the charming, beautiful, and somewhat mysterious Mademoiselle Miton was the same as that handsome young Bohemian known as the Comte de Monte Bello, and they would have looked upon one as mad had one suggested that both those individuals hid the identity of the Black Wolf.

Yet Nelson Lee knew it—and the Black Wolf knew that he knew it—and he was fully determined that this visit to the house in Chantilly should not end so disastrously as his first visit there.

A few minutes after passing the golf links, the car drew up at the kerb before the entrance gates to Mademoiselle Miton's house, and, getting out, Lee told the man to wait for them. Then, signing to Nipper to follow, he opened the small gate, and started up the curving drive-way which led to the house.

He rang without hesitation, and they were not kept waiting long. The door was opened by the maid, whom Lee recognised as Ninette.

When she saw who was standing on the threshold, she drew back quickly, and opened her mouth to scream, for in Nelson Lee she scented danger to her mistress.

But Lee was upon her like a flash, throttling the cry in her throat. He had no fancy for the work, but he did not intend that she should upset all his plans.

He worked quickly and deftly, and three minutes later Ninette lay on the hall floor, neatly bound and gagged.

"Come on, my lad," whispered Lee—"we must capture the mistress now!"

At that same moment a silvery voice was raised near at hand, calling:

"Ninette! Ninette!"

Lee stopped short, and, taking Nipper by the arm, drew him in behind the concealment of some heavy curtains, which hung as portières over a door.

Scarcely had they managed this when a light step sounded down the hall, and, peering from between the curtains, Nelson Lee saw a slim figure approaching.

The hall was lit by a single great brazen lamp, which hung at the upper end, and for the moment Lee and Nipper were perfectly concealed.

Scarcely breathing, Nelson Lee watched Mademoiselle Miton approach. Then, as she drew nearer foot by foot, he tautened his muscles for the spring.

Another yard, and she would be just opposite them.

On she came, one more step, and then, thrusting the curtains aside, Nelson Lee launched himself towards her.

She heard him as he came, and, stopping short, gave a sharp exclamation of surprise.

With a swift motion, she thrust her hand towards the bosom of her dress, but, before it reached its objective, Nelson Lee had her wrist in a grip of iron, and, with Nipper beside him a moment later, they soon had her helpless.

Her deep brown eyes blazed with anger through the gloom of the hall.

"So it is you, Monsieur Lee!" she said, panting heavily. "I owe this to you. What is the reason for it, pray?"

Lee smiled into her eyes.

"I regret having been compelled to use force, mademoiselle," he said, "but I have remembered a pleasant little habit you have of drugging those of whom you would rid yourself. I have no intention that it shall happen to me the second time. You ask the reason for this? I will tell you. I want you for a certain little affair at the house of Monsieur Jure, in the Avenue Wagram, last night."

Cool as she was, Mademoiselle Miton's eyes filled with a look of fear. It was gone almost at once, but not before Lee had seen it, and he knew in his heart it was because mademoiselle knew of the double murder which had taken place there.

As Lee had thought, she had read of the murder in the papers, and it had come to her as a tremendous surprise.

She had puzzled over the affair all day, for she knew that when she left the house the two guards were all right.

She knew, too, that the occurrence had placed her in a deadly peril, and, not knowing that Nelson Lee had already raked in Jean of the Quarter and his two accomplices—not guessing for a single instant that his keen mind had ferreted out the truth of the affair and the part played in it by Madame Jure, she saw that if the theft could be pinned down to the Black Wolf, then she stood a good chance of being accused of the murder as well.

Once the Paris police knew that she, Mademoiselle Miton, was the Black Wolf, then her whole secret would be out, and they would act with decision.

Lee knew what she was thinking as well as though he could read her every thought, but he had no intention of enlightening her just then. He was out for business this night, and dispatch was his chief aim.

"You must come with us to the Quai des Orfèvres, mademoiselle!" he said curtly. "Nipper, hand me that cloak which is hanging near you!"

Wrap it round mademoiselle. That is the way! No; keep both her hands outside, where we can watch them."

Mademoiselle Miton submitted in silence, and then, forced by Lee, she walked along the hall to the front door.

She said nothing when she saw Ninette lying, bound and gagged, on the floor, but her eyes filled with anger, and Lee knew if she could she would make him pay for that night's work.

But he was too elated at his capture of the Black Wolf to pay heed to her anger, and, compelling her to come with him, he led the way out to the car.

Once they were ensconced in the tonneau, he gave the order to drive back at once to the Quai des Orfèvres, and some thirty-five minutes later they were once more threading their way along the stone corridor which led to the bureau of Monsieur Fabert.

It would be difficult to portray in words the blank amazement which rested on the faces of those in the room when Nelson Lee, Mademoiselle Miton, and Nipper entered.

Monsieur Fabert still sat at his desk with Messieurs Dupres and Fiquelmont in close attendance upon him. In one corner, under the guard of two men who watched them every moment, were Jean of the Quarter and his two accomplices.

In the same seat she had occupied when they were there before was Madame Jure, looking pale and frightened.

With one accord, they stared at Lee and the two who were with him.

Nelson Lee smiled as his eyes rested on Monsieur Fabert. With a bow, he addressed the chief.

"Monsieur," he said slowly, "permit me to present to you Mademoiselle Miton, alias Monsieur le Comte de Monte Bello, alias the Black Wolf!"

If those in the room had been amazed at Mademoiselle Miton's appearance there under such circumstances, they were even more so at Lee's announcement.

Monsieur Fabert stared at the British detective with frank incredulity written on his countenance. Both he and Monsieur Fiquelmont knew the girl whom Paris called Mademoiselle Miton, and from the look on the face of Madame Jure it was plain that she, too, knew the girl.

Monsieur Fabert rose to his feet.

"But surely, monsieur, this is some joke!" he said. "Mademoiselle Miton the Black Wolf! Impossible!"

"Not impossible, but a fact," replied Lee quietly. "When I have finished my report, you will see that it is not a joke, but sober and serious reality. Mademoiselle Miton, permit me to offer you a seat. Nipper, you will keep your eye on Mademoiselle Miton, and if she makes a single move you will at once seize her."

Nipper nodded, and took up his stand close to mademoiselle's chair. Then, turning to Monsieur Fabert, Lee said:

"I notice Jean of the Quarter here, monsieur. Has he yet confessed to his crimes?"

The chief nodded.

"I have it in writing, monsieur," he responded. "I have just had it and witnessed."

Lee nodded with satisfaction. Then he went on:

"The robbery and double murder at the house in the Avenue Wagram presented some curious phases, monsieur. I will confess that, when I first went to inspect the library, I was tempted to believe with Monsieur Dupres that the Black Wolf had had a hand in the whole business. That was before I had had a chance to properly examine the evidence. But then I devoted

some thought to the matter, and from what I knew of the Black Wolf, I could not reconcile such a brutal deed with her.

"You look surprised when I refer to the Black Wolf as 'her,' monsieur. Do not be astonished. You will understand all in a few moments. The more time I devoted to the case, the more convinced I became that the Black Wolf had been there—had, perhaps, managed to get away with the diamonds—but that there had been other visitors to the house that same night.

"Now I shall outline to you what I consider a reasonable theory. You have the confession of Jean of the Quarter. You will have that of Mademoiselle Miton within an hour, or I shall be very much mistaken in my estimate of her."

Then Nelson Lee began, and, starting with the three major facts in the case, he went over every bit of the evidence, enlarging at each point on the deductions he had made as he had gone deeper and deeper into the case.

He dealt with the fact of the robbery, the fact of the murder, and the fact of the finding of the paper on the floor by the fireplace. He next dealt with the theory of collusion within the house, owing to the ease with which ingress and egress had been accomplished. From that he went on to the long process of analysis which he had applied, and to the result which he had arrived at by it.

Then came the visit of Nipper to the Cafe Verens, when he had so cleverly read the letter which Madame Jure had sent by her own maid to Jean of the Quarter. From that the chief was cognisant of what had occurred, and Lee passed it over quickly.

When he had finished one might have heard a pin drop in the room. Lee waited a few moments to allow his words to sink in, then he went on:

"That is the case as I see it, Monsieur Fabert. When I accuse Mademoiselle Miton of being the Comte de Monte Bello and the Black Wolf I am making a charge which you can prove this very night. Send some men to Ninety-two, Rue de Presle, Chantilly, and have a thorough search of the house made. If you do not find the Jure diamonds, then I shall be very much mistaken.

"You have the confession of Jean of the Quarter. That part of my theory has therefore been proven already. In it you are bound to see that he denies having got the diamonds."

"That is true, monsieur," said the chief, as his eyes rested on one paragraph of the written confession before him. "He says he found the jewel-case empty."

"He was bound to do so," said Lee coolly. "He arrived there after the Black Wolf had already decamped with the booty.

"Now, Mademoiselle Miton," went on Lee, turning to the girl, who was smiling with mockery. "will you confess your part of the affair?"

She did not reply for a moment; then, as her eyes rested on Jean of the Quarter, she shrugged.

"I am surprised that the Black Wolf was accused of such a brutal and bungling affair as the murder of which I read to-day," she said coolly. "My part in the Jure affair was almost exactly as Monsieur Lee has outlined it. That butcher"—pointing at Jean—"boasted unwisely that he would get possession of the Jure diamonds, and would so arrange it that the blame would be thrown on to the Black Wolf. Had it not been for that I should not have bothered myself about it. But I set my wits to work. Watch him now. He recognises me all right.

"I found him at the Cafe Verens one night, and I played with him. I got from him impressions of keys which took one through from the street to the safe where the diamonds were hidden. I had keys made, and last night

I visited the house. I got the diamonds without any trouble, and in their place left a slip of paper for this butcher. That is all."

Lee nodded quickly.

"I was puzzled to know if you had used duplicate keys," he said. "If you had, I wondered how you had managed to get impressions from which to make them. Now, Monsieur Fabert," he continued, "what are you doing about Madame Jure? In view of the confession of Jean of the Quarter, do you not think it possible that her part in the affair may be suppressed?"

Monsieur Fabert stroked his beard.

"I have given that some thought, Monsieur Lee," he replied. "I have come to the same conclusion. I shall also take good care to get possession of the letters which this fellow held over her head as a threat, and she herself shall destroy them. No one need ever know of her part in it at all."

With a cry Madame Jure was on her feet, and bending low over the hand of the chief.

"Monsieur—monsieur," she said brokenly, while the hot tears scalded her cheeks and fell upon his hand, "I kiss your hand with gratitude. You have lifted a mountainous weight from my heart. You have saved me from worse than death."

The chief, in some embarrassment, patted her shoulder and led her to the door.

"Go home, madame," he said softly. "Find your way in as you came out. Forget what has happened. To-morrow you shall have the letters, and can then destroy them with your own hands."

He opened the door as he spoke, and, with a grateful look at Nelson Lee, Madame Jure passed out of the room and out of this story.

A few minutes later, Monsieur Fabert ordered the guards to remove Jean of the Quarter and his two accomplices, and then, requesting Mademoiselle Miton to draw closer to the desk, he set himself to one of the strangest examinations in all his long career.

Nelson Lee and Nipper did not remain for that examination, but, bidding good-night to the chief and his two assistants, prepared to return to their hotel, for they were leaving for London early in the morning.

Just before he went, Lee went across to Mademoiselle Miton, and, bending over her, said:

"Believe me, mademoiselle, I am more than sorry that things are as they are. You are too full of the beauty of youth to follow such a line as you have been following. Even so, I am sorry it fell to my lot to unmask you. Good-bye."

For a moment the lids of the girl veiled her eyes, then slowly she lifted her head and said:

"Good-bye, Monsieur Lee. Your advice is good, I have no doubt; but please spare me any more of it. It comes badly from the one who exposed me."

Lee hesitated, as though he would say something else; then, with a shrug, he bowed and started for the door.

Mademoiselle Miton followed him with sombre eyes until he had passed out; then, with an enigmatical smile, she turned back to Monsieur Fabert.

An hour later Nelson Lee and Nipper had finished their packing, and were just preparing to retire when the telephone rang, and, picking up the receiver, Lee recognised the voice of Monsieur Fabert.

"Is that you, Monsieur Lee?" he asked, in tones laden with excitement.

"Yes—yes," answered Lee quickly. "What is it?"

"I have both good news and bad news for you," said the chief. "My men have but returned from the house in Chantilly, and they brought with them not only the full collection of diamonds which was taken from the Avenue Wagram last night, but also they brought a large collection of articles which had disappeared from many places during the past few months. But to cap that, Monsieur Lee, I have to tell you that the Black Wolf has escaped."

"We were sitting here talking one moment, and at what seemed the next she was gone. My men are on her track now, and I hope to recapture her by morning."

"I hope you succeed," replied Lee; "but, monsieur, I do not think they will run her down. It is a pity that she slipped out of your hands, but we can only hope that the police net will enmesh her."

"It will—it will! It must!" came back the voice of Monsieur Fabert. "Forgive me, Monsieur Lee, for ringing you up at this hour, but I wished to tell you how utterly your prophesy came true. It has been a wonderful bit of work, monsieur. I would we had you in Paris always."

Lee laughed, and, thanking the chief for his kind words, rehung the receiver.

Turning to Nipper, he said:

"What we feared has happened, my lad. The Black Wolf has escaped. I do not think they will recapture her in a hurry."

"Nor do I, gov'nor," replied the lad. "But what do they expect us to do—stand by her night and day. We handed her over to them. They should have been able to hold her."

"It seems so, my lad," rejoined Lee, with a smile; "but let us remember that they still have the Jure diamonds and a lot of other booty as well. And now, Nipper—to bed! We shall start early in the morning."

Bidding each other good-night, they made for their respective rooms, and in the oblivion of sleep forgot the Black Wolf and Jean of the Quarter.

THE END.

Two Forthcoming Attractions.

— NEXT WEEK —

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IN POLAR SEAS.

A Romance of Adventure in the Frozen North.

BY

FENTON ASH.

Author of "A Trip to Mars," "The Radium Seekers," etc.

HUGH ARNOLD a young English lad, goes out to the far North with an expedition. He is joined by an Irish sailor—MIKE O'GRADY, and also VAL RUXTON.

The latter and Hugh become fast friends, but one day Val hints that Hugh joined the expedition under a false name, and says that Amaki, a neighbouring Eskimo, has been asking for tidings of a certain explorer whose name is well known in the scientific world. For some reason, Hugh turns pale.

The camp is raided by a neighbouring party, but Hugh and Ruxton, with two sailors, put up a stiff fight. They are beaten off, and a trap is laid for them.

Having captured the strangers, the leader—GRIMSTOCK—comes upon the scene, and it seems that Hugh and Ruxton are in for a bad time. (Now read on.)

Ruxton is Amused.

"Well, gentlemen," began Grimstock, and his voice was harsh and grating. "What is the meaning of this?"

"Of what?" asked Ruxton, who felt himself more particularly singled out.

"Of what? You ask me? I am told that you have ill-treated these men here. That they came to our camp, of which you were in charge, wishing to know if we had a little tobacco to barter or sell, and that you set upon them, and ruthlessly assaulted, not only them, but others as well, who went out from here to the assistance of their comrades."

Ruxton gave a gasp, while Hugh muttered something under his breath which might have been, "Good gracious!"—only, it wasn't.

"They said that, did they—just that?" Ruxton asked.

"Come, sir, don't beat about the bush," said Grimstock, with ominous coldness. "I want to know what it all means. Why have you behaved in a manner which, as you must know, is likely to get us a bad name amongst those people, and turn those who might have been useful allies into possible enemies?"

"I can answer that question," Hugh burst in.

"I didn't ask you, Mr. Arnold. I asked Mr. Ruxton. I suppose he can answer for himself."

"I've no doubt he can—and will—but he's not going to answer for me," said Hugh hotly. He was stung by his leader's tone, and indignant at the manner in which Ruxton was being dealt with. "I am as much in this thing as he is," he went on, "and I wish to say at once that you seem to have been told a pack of lies. These men are no such milk-and-watery innocents as you appear to think. They're a lot of half-drunken rowdies, who made a descent on the camp while our backs were turned, and——"

"How do you know that, if your backs were turned? And why were they turned? I left you in charge. Why did you leave the camp unguarded?"

"We did not, Mr. Grimstock," Ruxton put in quietly, though he had some difficulty in restraining himself. "We were both there at the time; we were merely walking up and down. It is true that, as Mr. Arnold puts it, our backs were turned for the moment. When we looked round we saw two of these peaceful would-be traders, as you seem to consider them, attacking our two men, and four others walking off with sundry packages under their arms. Of course, we interfered——"

"What do you mean by 'our two men'?" interrupted Grimstock. "You were quite a dozen altogether. It doesn't seem very likely that two or three strangers would attack a camp guarded by a dozen people."

"The others were down yonder, at the Eskimo camp, and there they stuck, and, for the matter of that, there they are now, so there were only two with us at the moment the thieving rascals put in an appearance."

"Ah! Now we're getting at it. And why, pray, did you allow your men to be absent at the Eskimo camp, instead of attending to their duties with you, and looking after my property?"

"Because I couldn't get 'em away," returned Ruxton. "You know what men are, Mr. Grimstock, when they first get ashore after a long bout on board ship. I could do nothing with the beggars, and I almost doubt if you could, either, if you had been there," he added doggedly.

"That's a nice confession to make, Mr. Ruxton," commented the leader, still in the same cold steely tones. "I should be rather ashamed of it if I were in your place. It's as much as to admit that you are not a fit person to be placed in charge of men."

Ruxton started and flushed, and was evidently about to make some warm rejoinder, when Hugh again intervened.

"One moment, Mr. Grimstock," he said, forcing himself to speak calmly. "The important question at this moment is not how these things came about, but what you are going to do with the rioters. Whether we have been to blame is a matter we can discuss afterwards. The thing just now is that, rightly or wrongly, we thought we were defending your goods, and I may say our goods, for some of 'em, at any rate, as you know, are my property as much as yours, and in doing so, we have had to fight almost for our lives. Fortunately, we came out on top; and if you'll take the trouble to go up to our camp, you'll find nine of 'em laid out there, tied hand and foot. The question is what are you going to do with them? While we're standing arguing here they may be getting frost-bitten. We came to see if we could get their sleeping bags to put them in for the night. If you choose to let them loose instead, you can do so, but situated as we were—only four of us—we dared not do it."

Grimstock, who had hitherto kept his gaze fixed chiefly on Ruxton, turned it sharply on Hugh in very evident surprise. There was that in the young fellow's manner, to say nothing of the firm, resolute tones in which he had spoken, which was altogether new to him. Up to this time, Hugh had never shown such an independent spirit, but had always seemed to defer to him as the undisputed leader and master of the expedition.

But whatever his real thoughts may have been, Grimstock gave no indication of them, beyond that one quick glance. He seemed to reflect for a moment or two, and then, as though getting the better of his momentary ill-humour, he said:

"Well, if that be the case, we must, as you say, Mr. Arnold, see to them at once. And if you really had to fight a rowdy gang with the odds of a dozen to four against you, I don't see that you can be blamed much if you used them rather roughly. Certainly, I'm not here to champion the cause

of a lot of drunken ruffians, if that's what they were. Only, you see, these chaps here preached a very different tale to me—showed me their bruises, and all that; one fellow swears you pushed a sledge on top of him and broke his arm. But it isn't what I think about it; it's what their skipper will think if they preach the same tale to him. It seems to me it will be a question of their word against yours. Well, now——"

"What's all that row?" asked Ruxton suddenly.

A noise of barking dogs, mingled with shouts and the cracking of whips, had become audible. Faintly borne at first on the clear, keen air, it was rapidly growing louder.

"Somebody coming," said Hugh, after listening for a moment. "Dogs—sledge. More natives, I suppose."

"No; they're driving too fast for Eskimos," Ruxton declared.

"Besides, those are not natives' shouts, nor," he added, with a short laugh, "native curses. Nobody but a dare-devil white man, one three sheets in the wind, probably, would drive like that by night."

"Then it must be McClinter!" said Grimstock. "At least—er—I heard the men here say they were expecting their skipper, and that is his name."

Ruxton and Hugh both opened their eyes. It was passing strange that their leader should have the name so pat, and they made mental note of the fact, and also of the rather lame manner in which he tried to account for his knowledge.

A few minutes later the sledge arrived, drawn by a team of large Eskimo dogs. It was driven at a reckless speed by a skin-clad figure, flourishing a long whip, which he kept cracking to an accompaniment of shouts, oaths, and snatches of song.

He pulled up suddenly—so suddenly, that another skin-clad figure beside him, who seemed to have been dozing, swung forward and rolled off his seat into the snow.

As the driver threw the reins loose, the dogs started on again, and would have pulled the heavy sledge over the fallen man, if Hugh had not dashed forward and dragged him clear.

"Hallo, Grimstock!" roared out the driver to Hugh. "Mon, I know I'm behind time. Dinna ye fash yersel' about yon sleepy chiel. A mickle bumping'll help t' wake up. Eh? What? Who the deil are you, mon?"

He had suddenly found out that he had been mistaking a stranger for Grimstock. The latter now came up.

"Come this way," he said, taking him by the arm, and leading him out of earshot.

Meantime, Hugh and Ruxton helped to put "the sleepy chiel" on his legs. He turned out, as they afterwards knew, to be McClinter's mate, a rough, surly fellow, who had the appearance of one who had not quite slept off his last debauch.

His first act, when he was completely roused, was to catch up the long whip the skipper had dropped, and set about an Eskimo attendant who had been seated at the back. He blamed him, with much fierce language, poured forth in broken English, for not having been quick enough in going to take charge of the dogs.

Hugh and Ruxton looked at one another and drew back in disgust.

"Nice company we've drifted into," muttered Ruxton, in a low tone. "Skipper and crew are evidently much of a kidney. That doesn't surprise me—I expected it. But what does surprise me is the clear evidence we have here that Grimstock is on friendly terms with such gentry."

"Yes; the skipper had his name as pat as Grimstock had his," returned Hugh, in tones equally guarded. "I confess I don't understand it."

"You will—later on—or I'm a Dutchman," was the enigmatic reply, and just then their leader and his companion came back.

"Our friend here will accompany us to the camp and set his men free himself," Grimstock explained.

"Ye're comin' wi' us, ye ken, Landshutt," said the skipper to his mate, "and bring ma' whip wi' ye—an' yer ain, too."

"He's going to set 'em free himself, is he?" Ruxton whispered to Hugh. "Yes, and in his own fashion, too, I reckon. Well! The beggars deserve no mercy. They'd have smashed us up in their drunken fury if we hadn't been too much for 'em. I, for one, sha'n't feel any sympathy for 'em if they get it hot."

And, as a matter of fact, they did get it pretty hot. McClinter and his mate cut their bonds and set them on their feet, one after the other, and then laid their whips about them in no playful fashion. The men, on their part, made neither resistance nor remonstrance, but accepted it all as though it had been an ordinary part of the day's routine, and slunk back to their camp like whipped hounds.

Then, Grimstock went off to the Eskimo camp, to round up his own recalcitrant followers, and the skipper and his man accompanied him there also. Whether the whips were used there, in like manner, neither Hugh nor Ruxton knew, for they remained at their own camp, putting things straight, and making preparations for a night's rest.

Presently, the missing men came dropping in by twos and threes, some looking sheepish, some roaring out in noisy chorus, most of them walking unsteadily. They stumbled into the tents set apart for them, scrambled somehow into their sleeping bags, and lay down.

"I'm going back to the ship," said Grimstock, shortly, when he had seen them all into their quarters. "I shall expect to see you two gentlemen there an hour or so before sunrise, so as to get everything ready for landing more stores as soon as it's light enough."

And with that, he and his two strange companions went off together.

Hugh and Ruxton had a tent to themselves, and they were not long before they turned in.

"Well," said the latter, before going to sleep, "this is our first night ashore on the little trip that was to bring everybody engaged in it fame, and honours, and so on. What do you think of it?"

"I don't know what to think. I'm both surprised and puzzled. Putting aside the scrimmage, who are these people? Who is McClinter? What's he doing here? How came Grimstock to know he was here? And why did he come to meet him in this queer, clandestine sort of way?"

But Ruxton did not attempt to answer these questions. He only gave a short, grim laugh.

"I fancy you'll meet with a good deal more that will both surprise and puzzle you before we're many weeks' older, or I'm a Dutchman," he said. And with that he turned over and fell asleep.

The First Motor-Sledge—Eskimo Dogs Disapprove Running Amok— A Plucky Rescue.

AFTER a few hours' sleep, Hugh and Ruxton woke up, scrambled out of their sleeping bags, and called the two sailors. These, in turn, roused up the other men, who, still sleepy and half-dazed, after the "feasting" in which they had indulged overnight, turned out in ill-humour, grumbling and discontented at being called so soon.

The moon had disappeared, and it would have been very dark had it not been that the sky was lighted up by the northern lights, which threw a weird, lurid, fitful sort of twilight over the desolate landscape.

Bob Cable and a couple of men went off to the Eskimo camp to bring back the teams of dogs, which had been taken there the previous evening to be fed and spend the night.

Presently, a noise of much barking, cracking of whips, and shouts in a strange tongue, announced that they were on the move, and a little later the teams appeared. They were in charge of a dozen Eskimos, who proceeded to harness them to the sledges which had come in so handy for purposes of defence in the early part of the night.

Then, the whole party, save a couple of men who were left in charge of the tents, moved off through the strange, dim light, and proceeded across the ice to the distant ship.

There they found Grimstock already at work with the crew of his vessel, and the new-comers joined in the necessary preparations for landing further stores.

The morning was fine, and when the sun made its tardy appearance, it rose in an almost cloudless sky, shining cheerfully upon a busy scene. There were the sounds of the clanking capstans and rattling chains, the chanting songs of the sailors, the noise and bustle of shifting heavy cargo and hoisting it into the steam pinnace lying alongside. This travelled to and fro between the ship and the landing place, puffing and coughing, churning up the dark waters, and bumping its way through masses of floating ice.

The stores included half a dozen large motor sledges—novelties which excited no small amount of curiosity and astonishment among the aborigines, who had never in their wildest dreams imagined such a method of travelling over their snowy land.

They were, indeed, almost as much a novelty to the white men themselves as to the natives, for though similar machines had been tried with success amid the snows of Norway, this was the first time they had been seen on the ice-fields of the Far North. Much curiosity, therefore, was felt as to how the experiment was likely to turn out.

"It's evident the dogs don't approve of 'em," laughed Hugh. "Just see how disgusted they look! It offends their dignity to have to play second fiddle to such un-doglike monstrosities."

Not only the dogs, but their native masters, looked askance at this new-fangled method of travelling. Dog-sledges had been good enough for them and for their ancestors from time immemorial. But as to these queer contrivances, which went by themselves and required neither whips to urge them, nor "pemmican," or other food to eat, they knew not what to think. They regarded them with mingled awe and fear, and forthwith dubbed them by a name which was the naive equivalent for "devil-sled."

Now, Val Ruxton had been trained as an engineer, and Grimstock had consulted him at the time the expedition was being organised, as to the advisability of adopting these new devices. He had assisted at their trial tests before leaving England, hence, he felt a special interest in them now, and had arranged to drive the first one himself.

As the dogs had so unmistakably evinced their disapproval of the new arrivals, it was deemed better to let them go on first with their own drivers.

As soon, therefore, as a couple of dog-sledges had loaded up, they drove off, and a little later, Ruxton, with Hugh beside him, took his seat on one of the motor-sledges and started in their wake.

The motor, besides carrying a heavy load of its own, was towing two loaded dog-sledges, in charge of Mike and Bob. These two sailors, it should

be mentioned, had been picked out by Grimstock's lieutenants to attend specially on them. Hence, their present post of honour, which made them the envy of the rest of the crew, who, with Grimstock himself, were watching the performance of the machine.

The start-off was a splendid success. The motor quickly showed that it thought nothing of its loads, and was not afraid of the slippery ice. Away it went, drawing with ease the smaller sleds behind it. Panting, whirring, amid a chorus of cheers, it glided over the frozen surface at a rate which showed at once that it would very quickly overtake the teams of dogs in front of it.

Gradually the speed increased, but with it the humming increased also, till it grew into a loud, unearthly wail. Soon this reached the ears of the dogs, and inspired them with a desire to stop and turn round to see what kind of monster it was that was pressing them.

"I say! Isn't this glorious!" cried Val. "It's a bit of an eye-opener, you know! Why, we shall be able to reach the Pole in no time if we can travel there in this style!"

"Yes, if our stock of petrol doesn't give out," Hugh assented. "But how about those johnnies in front of us? I'm afraid we're scaring those dogs out of their lives. Perhaps we'd better stop for a few minutes, and give the drivers a chance to get their teams in hand."

Ruxton saw the force of this and drew up; but not without a protest.

"Humph! We sha'n't gain much, after all, if we're going to have all this fuss every time," he grumbled. "Why don't the stupid drivers clear off to one side, and give us a chance to get on ahead?"

"They seem to have come to the conclusion that that is their best plan," observed Hugh. "I can see that they're trying to do it."

Amid much shouting and cracking of whips, the Eskimos effected this manoeuvre, and managed to drive their unruly animals off to the right, leaving the track clear for the motor.

"Thank goodness for that," muttered Ruxton. "Now we'll go past in style, and show 'em what we can do!"

Forgetting the sleds he was towing, he started forward too quickly. There was a jerk, the towing line snapped, and the motor-sledge flew forward at full speed. Then, with that erratic freakishness which motors so often exhibit as part of their nature, it suddenly became unmanageable, and dashed off to the right towards the barking dogs, as though determined to punish them for their impertinence.

Another moment and it would have been amongst them; but the panic-stricken animals, now completely out of hand, started off in their turn, and galloped for their lives, heading straight for a wide lead in the ice.

The driver of one team somehow succeeded in turning his pack, and raced past the end of the fissure; but the second one was less skilful or less lucky, and the whole plunged into the water, the sledge carrying its unfortunate driver with it.

Ruxton, meantime, had managed to bring the motor to its senses—and a standstill; and springing down he and Hugh ran forward to the edge of the water.

There they saw the dogs swimming about, doing their best to keep their heads above water, but still held by the harness to the submerged sledge; which fact showed that it could not be very deep there. Of the driver nothing could be seen.

Without a moment's hesitation Hugh dived into the ice-cold water.

It was even shallower than he expected, and the first thing he did was to dash his head against the sledge which was lying on the bottom. The knock was a nasty one; but paying no attention to it he began groping

about till he grasped the man he was after; only, however, to find that he was pinned down under the sledge.

Rising to the surface for a fresh gasp of air, he turned over like a porpoise, and plunged downward again in such a way as to get his feet on the bottom. Then he got both hands under one side of the sledge, and with a mighty effort, raised the whole affair sufficiently to enable him to get the driver clear. A moment later he regained the surface with him.

Here he found himself in fresh difficulties. He came up in the midst of the crowd of struggling dogs, and some of them resented his intrusion amongst them and began to attack him viciously.

Hampered as he was by the dead weight of the one he had rescued—the man was unconscious—Hugh found himself in a very tight corner. He could not hold up the man and fight off the dogs as well; but he was not going to let go. Then an idea occurred to him.

He seized one of the dogs nearest to him from behind by the harness, in such a way as to make him, whether he wished to or not, assist him in supporting his burden with one arm, the while doing that he beat off the rest of the dogs as well as he could with the other.

There was a whizzing sound, something hurtled through the air, and a noose fell over his head. It was a rope which Ruxton had thrown, and Hugh slipped an arm through it.

Then there came a tug on the line, and he was drawn towards the edge of the ice. As the dogs were tethered to the sledge they were quickly left behind, and he released his hold of the one he had seized. A moment or two later he and his burden were hauled on to the ice.

Eskimos are pretty well used to an occasional plunge into the icy water of their seas. They meet with many such little incidents in the course of the hunts after seal and walrus, and this one soon came to and seemed none the worse for the experience.

Hugh himself was nearly exhausted, but after a pull at a flask which his friend produced, he began to pick up.

The whole adventure had been witnessed from the ship, and a party, consisting partly of sailors and partly of natives, presently arrived, and set to work to recover first the dogs and then the sunken sledge.

Meantime, the rescued Eskimo, a rather good-looking man for one of his race, was volubly pouring out his thanks, though, as he spoke in his native tongue, Hugh did not understand a word he said. Ruxton, however, who had been amongst these people before, and could speak the language a little, was able to interpret.

"He is telling you how grateful he is," he explained. "He is telling you his name, and a good part of his family history. He is called Lybendo, and he is particularly anxious that you should remember the fact. I suppose he is someone of importance amongst his own people. He also is filled with wonder and admiration at the prowess you displayed. He declares it would have taken two ordinary men to have lifted the loaded sledge up and pull him from under it even on dry land—to say nothing of doing it at the bottom of eight or nine feet of water."

Hugh laughed in his usual easy, good-humoured fashion.

"Say something nice to him, Val, by way of acknowledging the compliment," he said. "And then, if you've no objection, I'd like to resume our interrupted journey. The sooner we can get to some place where I can get a change, the better I shall be pleased. I'm already frozen stiff all over. These Eskimo jolunnies may be used to that sort of thing; but to me as yet it feels jolly uncomfortable."

(Another Stirring Instalment will Appear Next Week.)

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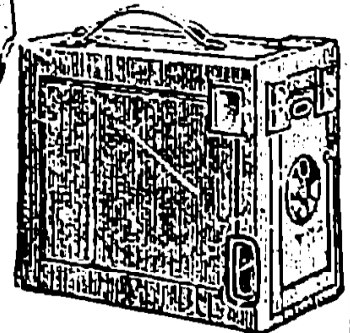
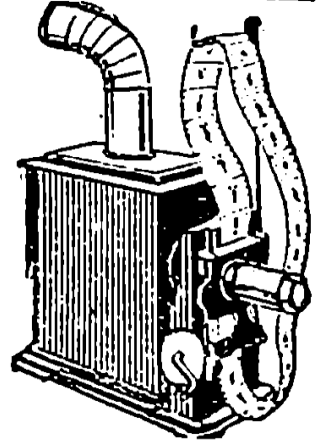
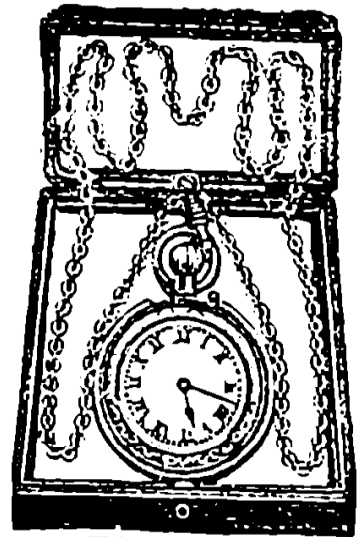
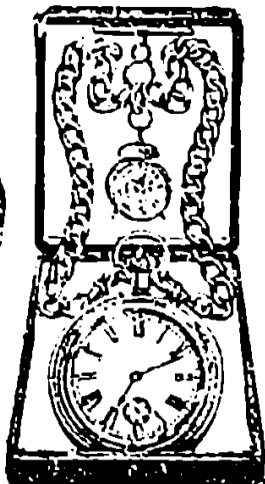
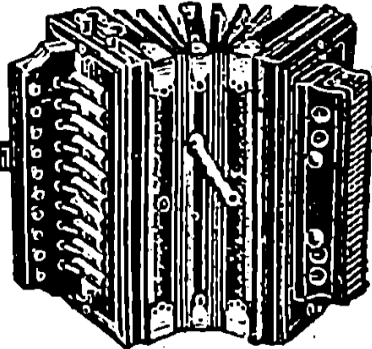
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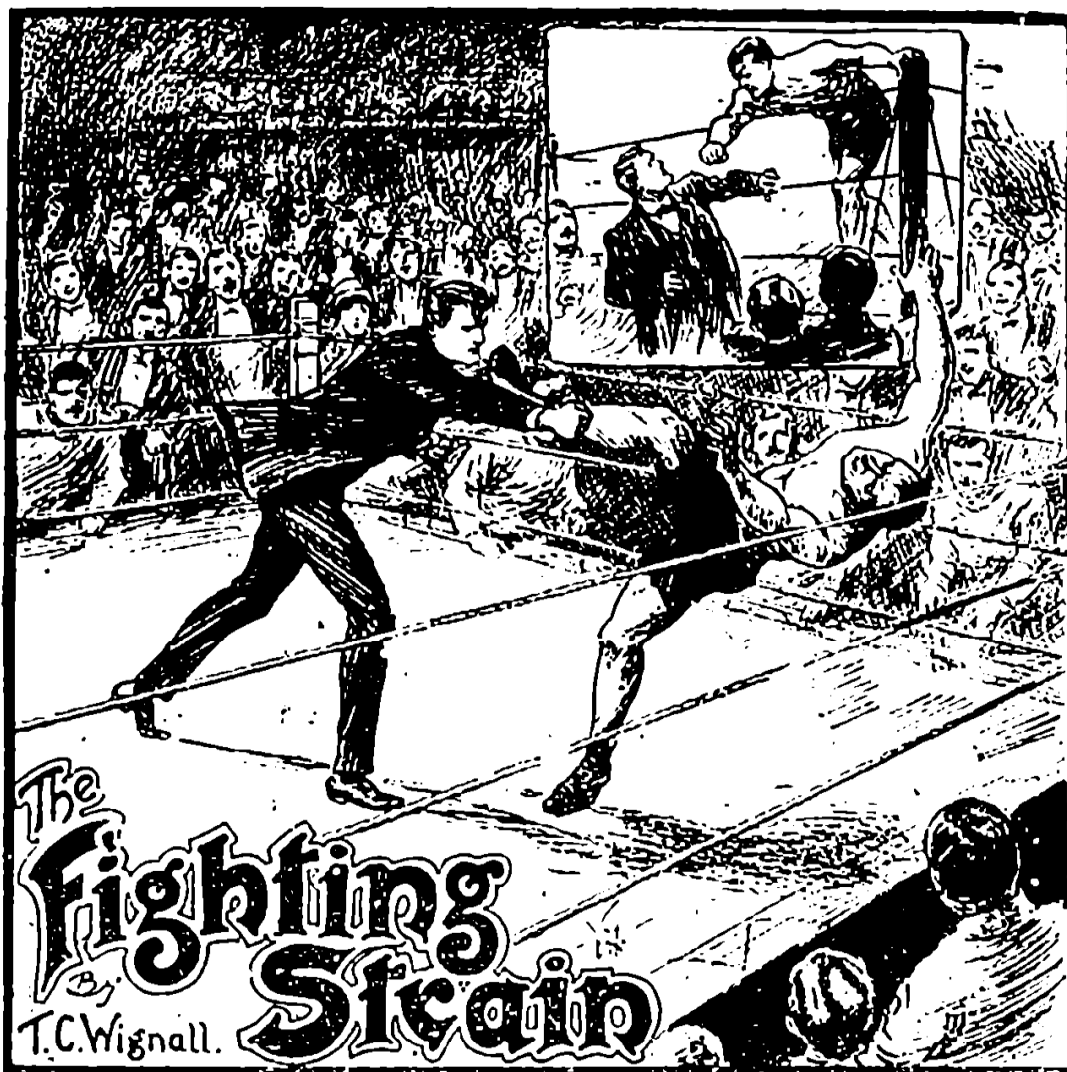
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