

"SECRET SERVICE!"

Extra-Long Detective-Thriller Inside!

THE NELSON LEE

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**WOLF SAVES
HIS MASTER!**

New Series No. 155.

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

January 7th, 1933.

SECRET.



A valuable State document is stolen, and grave international complications are threatened. The document must be recovered at all costs, and to Nelson Lee, the famous detective, is given the seemingly impossible task of getting it back. In this perilous undertaking he is given plucky assistance by Nipper and the great hound, Wolf!

CHAPTER 1.

The Fight in the Dark.

IT was with a sigh of thankfulness that Mr. Erasmus Mayn, the manager of the famous Veuxpillo Art Galleries, had seen the doors close on his fashionable clientele, and, after a careful glance around,

had hurried off to keep an appointment.

The galleries were situated in an unfrequented street at the back of Leicester Square. After the caretaker had swept and made things tidy for the night, and had duly locked up, the place was in utter darkness, and profound silence for several hours. Then something happened.

—Starring **NELSON LEE**, Detective, And His Assistant, **NIPPER** !

SERVICE!



The clocks were now striking a quarter to eleven. The south room of the galleries was wrapt in impenetrable darkness; the line of stained glass windows were shuttered and barred, and not a gleam of light crept in from the outside world.

Suddenly the silence was broken by the sound of a door creaking on its hinges, and almost immediately a thin beam of white light shot across the room.

Then stealthy footsteps began to pad across the polished floor, and the light moved slowly along the paintings that hung around the wall and presently came to rest.

In the white circle of the flash-lamp the portrait of a man showed up with startling distinctness. The picture was painted in oils, and on the grey military tunic several rows of foreign decorations and orders glistened in still lustre.

The strange intruder stood gazing at the portrait for some moments. Then he slipped beneath the oak balustrade that railed in the pictures and prevented people from touching and injuring them.

With a rapid movement he lifted the portrait from its hook and laid it flat on the floor, and set to work with quick, nervous energy.

Every now and then the thin steel blade of a knife gleamed in the light of the electric torch, and the sharp sound of it cutting through canvas followed.

Twenty minutes must have passed by like this. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, the stranger rose to his feet, and, lifting the picture from the floor, replaced it on its hook.

He held in his hand what looked like a square patch of canvas. This he folded into a small, thick wad, and carefully wrapped it in a sheet of brown paper.

After picking up various instruments from off the floor, and dropping them into his pockets, he slipped under the wooden balustrade again and made to cross the floor.

The next instant he had stepped back with a half-stifled exclamation. A few yards away from him another man was standing; the light from the torch shone full on his face. It was thin and angular, and the swarthy skin was drawn tightly over the high cheekbones. His nose was deformed, as if it had once been broken and had not mended properly.

As he stared at the other man's face his black, deep-set eyes glowed with a fierce, sinister light through his mask.

After that first exclamation neither man spoke; except for their laboured breathing, the silence was unbroken. Then the newcomer moved swiftly forward, the torch dropped from the other man's fingers, and the next moment they were locked in one another's arms in a desperate struggle for mastery.

They slithered to and fro on the polished floor, their breath coming in deep, panting sobs. A hand was raised on high, grasping a thin steel blade; the other man's fingers were gripping the wrist.

They lurched and staggered up and down, and the knife was brandished backwards and forwards as each strove to force it from the other's grasp.

But the newcomer was the stronger; his fingers were closing round his opponent's wrist like a steel vice. Slowly and surely the upraised hand was being forced down, while the beads of perspiration stood out on its owner's forehead, and the fierce light of despair shone in his eyes.

Then the wrist suddenly grew limp, the blade swooped down impetuously, and with a gasping cry the man staggered back, crashed against the wooden balustrade and crumpled to the floor. For a few moments the other man stood breathing heavily. Then he stooped to the floor, and, picking up the torch, flashed it around.

The little brown-paper parcel was lying a few yards away, where it had been dropped in the desperate scuffle. He pounced on it eagerly, thrust it into his pocket, and, without glancing at his prostrate foe, hurried away.

Strangely enough, one hour had scarcely elapsed after this sinister scene, when another visitor arrived at the Veuxpillo Galleries—a

big, athletic-looking man, muffled up to the eyes. He was aghast to find the big doors of the galleries unlocked.

He entered, and made his way to the very room where the crumpled form of the stricken man lay. He stooped for a second over the figure, then turned his attention to the portrait that hung on the wall above him. He took it from its hook, turned it round and examined the back.

Then, with a muttered "Too late!" he, too, hurried away into the unknown from whence he had come.

The last visitor was James Stone, of the British Secret Service!

CHAPTER 2.

Nelson Lee Gets Busy.

AS Nelson Lee and Nipper thrust their way through the swing glass doors a gentleman came to meet him and held out his hand.

"I'm glad you have come, Mr. Lee," he said, somewhat anxiously.

"Mr. Erasmus Mayn, I believe!" said the detective, taking the outstretched hand.

"That's right, Mr. Lee," answered the manager of the Veuxpillo Galleries. "The police have only been here a few minutes; I telephoned for you at the same time."

"Then the body has not been removed, Mr. Mayn?"

"Not yet, Mr. Lee. Inspector Frenton, from Scotland Yard, is just taking the necessary dispositions."

"Perhaps you will give me a full account of what has happened, Mr. Mayn? Your telephone message was very brief."

"I will, Mr. Lee," said the manager. "Excuse my agitation—I am somewhat unnerved. There is not very much to tell. I came here at nine o'clock this morning just to have a look round before the galleries open to the public. The outer doors were locked, and although I rang the bell, I got no answer."

"Whom did you expect to answer, Mr. Mayn?"

"The caretaker, Mr. Lee. He sleeps on the premises."

"I understand, Mr. Mayn. Pray proceed."

"After ringing the bell several times and getting no reply, I began to grow a little concerned——"

"One moment, Mr. Mayn," interrupted the detective. "Have you no key to the door yourself?"

"I have one, Mr. Lee, but I do not carry it about with me as a rule. It would have taken too long for me to have gone back for it, so I fetched a locksmith and had the lock forced. When I got inside there were still no signs of the caretaker. I went up to his room, but he was not to be found."

"You say he sleeps on the premises, Mr. Mayn?"

"That is so, Mr. Lee."

"Then did his bed look as if it had been occupied?"

The manager shook his head.

"No," he said. "The bed-clothes were undisturbed."

"And you cannot account for his absence?"

"I am absolutely at a loss for an explanation, Mr. Lee."

"Then what did you do?"

"I made a hurried inspection of the galleries. Everything seemed all right until I got to the south room. There I found the door unlocked, and directly I entered I noticed some dark object lying on the floor over to the left. I flung open the shutters of the windows, and made the dreadful discovery of which I have already spoken to you on the 'phone."

"Thank you, Mr. Mayn," said Lee. "That will be enough for the present; but I am afraid I shall have to worry you again later on."

"Do exactly as you think fit, Mr. Lee. I am only too anxious to get this dreadful mystery solved. I took the precaution of seeking your expert advice for that reason."

"Then we will go along to the south room, Mr. Mayn, if you will be good enough to lead the way."

They went along the corridor and entered the south room. A little group of men were bending over the body that lay on the floor. Inspector Frenton turned round as the detective approached.

"Hallo!" he said, somewhat surprised. "You here, Mr. Lee?"

"Mr. Lee is acting for me in a private capacity, inspector," interposed Mr. Mayn.

Inspector Frenton raised his eyebrows, but did not offer any further comment. At that moment the doctor, who had been kneeling on the floor, rose to his feet.

"That will do," he muttered, and picked up his bag.

Then he saw the detective and added pleasantly:

"Good-morning, Mr. Lee! So you've come along. Well, it's a queer business, to say the least. It will tax all your ingenuity."

"What's the cause of death, doctor?" asked Lee.

"Stabbed to the heart, Mr. Lee. Must have been instantaneous."

"Just one more question, doctor, before you go. When do you suppose the poor fellow met his death?"

"Been dead some hours, Mr. Lee. Must have happened somewhere about midnight—or a little before."

"Thanks, doctor. No other conclusions?"

The doctor shook his head and smilingly withdrew. Inspector Frenton was just giving instructions for the body to be removed. Lee laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"One moment, Frenton," he said. "Is this the position in which he was discovered?"

"It is, Mr. Lee. He hasn't been moved yet."

The detective gazed long and earnestly at the dead man. Not a detail escaped those penetrating eyes of his. He was making a mental picture of the scene, and, later on, much might depend on the record furnished by his retentive mind.

"Have you established his identity yet, inspector?" he asked presently.

"No, we haven't, Mr. Lee. Doesn't seem to carry any papers about with him. But some of his linen seems to be marked with the initials, 'G.F.'"

"Anything at all in his pockets?"

"Yes. Those things over there."

Lee glanced in the direction indicated. A few miscellaneous articles were lying on the floor. He went over and examined them. There were a pair of forceps, a thin steel rule, some brass-headed drawing-pins, a small bottle of liquid glue, a roll of adhesive tape, and one or two other delicate instruments.

Nelson Lee's brows contracted thoughtfully as he gazed at this curious collection of articles. What did they mean? What were they doing in this man's pockets?

"Is there another way of entering the galleries besides the one I came in this morning, Mr. Mayn?" he asked.

The manager shook his head.

"No, Mr. Lee," he said. "The only other way is through the windows, and they were all shuttered and barred when I came here this morning. I am quite sure they had not been disturbed."

"And the door of this room was open, you say?"

"It was, Mr. Lee. I remember locking it myself last night before I left."

The detective's mind was working quickly. To have opened the door of the south room someone must have had a key. In that case, doubtless, the doors leading to the street had been opened in the same way. After committing his fiendish crime, the murderer had fled from the building, and had locked the outer doors before making good his escape.

NELSON LEE turned to the inspector. "You didn't find the key of the outer door in his pocket, I suppose?" he asked.

Frenton shook his head.

"No," he said. "That's all I found down there."

"It seems quite inexplicable," muttered Mr. Mayn.

Lee nodded his head but did not reply. Inspector Frenton looked up sharply.

"Don't you worry, Mr. Mayn," he said. "Just wait until we lay our hands on this caretaker fellow. No doubt he knows all about it. Shouldn't be surprised if he committed the crime."

Nelson Lee smiled dryly at the inspector's cocksure manner.

"You're more optimistic than I am, inspector," he said.

Frenton's eye brows went up again.

6 THE MAN WHO DEFIED THE WORLD ! Astounding Story of Modern Pirates.

"You trust the Yard for clearing the matter up, Mr. Lee," he said. "And now, if you're quite finished, I'll get the body removed to the ambulance."

Lee stood aside and watched them pick up the body and carry it out into the corridor. Then he turned to Nipper.

"Now they're gone, Nipper," he said, "we'll get busy and see if there's anything to be discovered."

He knelt to the floor and began to scrutinise it very intently. The manager stood by and watched him in silence. Presently Lee picked up a black cloth button. He stared at it for a few moments; it looked as if it had been pulled off from someone's coat, and one edge of it was slightly flattened. Then he dropped it into his pocket and turned his attention to the floor again.

"There are a number of scratches here, Nipper," he said presently. "There must have been a furious struggle here quite recently."

He continued his scrutiny until he came close up to the balustrade. The lower wooden rail was only about an inch from the floor. Lee put his fingers beneath it and slowly drew them along. Then he dragged out something from beneath, and, holding it in the palm of his hand, gazed at it curiously.

It was a piece of paper so tightly folded that it only occupied a quarter of an inch of space. Yet the thing that impressed Lee was that it was perfectly clean, while his fingers were covered with the dust and dirt that had accumulated beneath the rail.

It was evident that it had not laid there long. It must have got lodged beneath the rail only recently.

He carefully unfolded it. It was bigger than he had supposed, about the size of a half-sheet of notepaper. But it was quite blank. There was not a mark on either side of it.

Lee held it up to the light and looked for the water-mark; but there were no traces of any. He folded it up at last, and, putting it into his pocket-case, continued his investigation.

It was between the balustrade and the wall that he made his next discovery. A number of dirty white chippings were scattered about over the polished floor. At first Lee could not think what they were.

"When was this room last swept out, Mr. Mayn?" he asked.

"Directly the galleries closed yesterday evening, Mr. Lee."

The detective stared at the strange particles again. Then, suddenly, it dawned upon him what they were. They were fragments of hard paste—some special glue that was used for mounting pictures and photographs.

At that moment Lee happened to glance above his head. The portrait of the old man in the grey military tunic hung just above him. It occurred to him that the glue might

have possibly become dislodged from the frame and fallen on to the floor.

He rose to his feet and lifted the painting away from the wall. For some moments he scrutinised the back of the picture, and as he stared at it a number of vague suspicions and lightning thoughts were speeding across his keen brain.

He knew, then, that he had stumbled right across the main plot of this strange mystery; that by the quick grasp and sifting of elementary facts he had made a discovery that was as startling as it was obscure.

"What painting is this, Mr. Mayn?" he asked quietly.

"That is Murillo's Don Montino, Mr. Lee."

"Can you tell me anything about it?"

"Not very much, Mr. Lee. The picture was hung some time back, in the Paris Salon. I bought it two days ago through a French agent."

"Is it of any great value?"

"I gave a hundred guineas for it, Mr. Lee. But that is not a great price when dealing with old masters. There are pictures worth a great deal more than that hanging in this room. That Velasquez immediately on your right is worth ten times that sum."

Feeling more perplexed than ever, Lee sought about in his mind for some other explanation. It did not appear to be an art robbery. The picture had obviously been tampered with, there was no doubt about that. And on the back of the frame Lee's keen eyes had spotted something else. There were two small smudges, faint, but quite clear to his expert eyes. He knew immediately what they were. They were blood-stained fingerprints.

"Would you trust this painting in my hands for a day or so, Mr. Mayn?" he asked.

The manager looked somewhat surprised by Lee's question.

"Why, if you wish it, certainly, Mr. Lee," he said. "But I do not quite follow you. Do you think this painting is connected in any way with what happened last night?"

"I have my suspicions, Mr. Mayn."

"But in what way, Mr. Lee?"

"You must pardon me," said the detective, "if I cannot satisfy your curiosity at the present moment. For certain reasons I want to have this picture examined by Mr. Charles Osburn, the fine-art dealer, of Charing Cross Road. It is very possible that I may be able to furnish you with further information later on."

The manager shrugged his shoulders submissively.

"Very well, Mr. Lee," he said. "Just as you wish. Shall I send it along to Mr. Osburn?"

"No; I will take it myself, Mr. Mayn. It is not very big, and I can easily carry it."

"Then I will have it wrapped up immediately, Mr. Lee, if you will wait just a few moments."

CHAPTER 3.**The Woman in the Musquash Coat.**

TEN minutes later Lee and his young assistant left the Veuxpillo Galleries. The detective was carrying under his arm the painting by Murillo. He hailed a taxi that was turning into the square and they both clambered inside.

As the vehicle began to move away from the kerb Lee leaned out of the window and gave a swift glance behind him. Something had attracted his attention; almost intuitively he felt that his movements were being spied on.

The only person he could see was a woman wearing an expensive musquash coat; she was standing still in the middle of the pavement. He could not see her face, as it was heavily veiled, but he felt sure that behind it her eyes were watching him curiously. An instant later the taxi had swung round the corner.

Nelson Lee sank back in his seat with a thoughtful look on his face.

The taxi stopped in the Charing Cross Road, and the detective and his assistant got out. Mr. Charles Osburn's rather antiquated-looking shop was crowded with fine art treasures. The detective was immersed in some old steel engravings when the art dealer himself came out of his office.

"Ah, Mr. Lee," he said, glancing at the frame that was tucked beneath his arm, "you are not going to tell me that you have changed your occupation?"

Lee gave vent to his familiar chuckle.

"No," he said. "I've got nothing to sell, Mr. Osburn. But I want your advice on a certain matter."

"Come in here, then, Mr. Lee. Delighted to be of any service. And now, Mr. Lee, fire away," he said, when they were seated in his snug little private office.

The detective cut the string around the painting and removed the paper covering.

"I want you to express your opinion of this painting, Mr. Osburn," he said.

The art dealer's critical eye rested for a few seconds on the portrait.

"It reminds me of the seventeenth century school or art," he said. "The work of Murillo, for instance."

"You are quite right, Mr. Osburn. It is supposed to be Murillo's Don Montino."

"Yes, of course, Mr. Lee. I recognise it now by the photographs I have seen. It is not worth much, you know. It is one of his very early efforts and rather crude."

"Then you are quite sure that it is a Murillo, Mr. Osburn?"

"Ah, Mr. Lee, now I see what you are driving at! You wish to know if this is a genuine Murillo? I should certainly not stake my reputation on such a brief inspection. It looks like a Murillo, but I do not say that it is. It may be an imitation. In any case, it is a remarkably clever one."

"And how would you discover if it were an imitation, Mr. Osburn?"

"There are a number of methods of ascertaining that, Mr. Lee. A dark varnish may be put on the picture to make it resemble the paint of great age. That is a common trick of art swindlers. By cleansing the panel I could soon see if it were a genuine Murillo, however."

"Very well, then, Mr. Osburn. I am going to ask you to undertake that task for me. This painting was hung in the Veuxpillo Galleries. Mr. Erasmus Mayn has allowed me to take it away in order that you may examine it. And now I want you to look at the back of the frame and tell me what you think."

The art expert held the picture up so that the light from the window fell on the back. For two or three minutes he scrutinised it in silence. Then he turned quickly to the detective.

"This canvas, Mr. Lee, has only just recently been put on the wooden stretcher," he said. "In fact, the glue is even now not quite hard."

Lee's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. He remembered the queer implements that had been found in the dead man's pockets—the pair of forceps, the bottle of paste, and the other things—and he began to understand what they had been used for.

"I thought as much, Mr. Osburn," he said quietly. "And now, when can you let me know definitely if the picture is genuine or merely an imitation?"

"Some time this afternoon, Mr. Lee. I will ring you up if you wish."

"Thanks, if you will. There is one other thing I must do before I go. I will lay the picture on this table, if you don't mind."

Lee took a small glass phial from his pocket containing French chalk. He very carefully sprinkled some of the white powder on the edge of the frame, then blew it gently away. But some of the chalk still adhered in the shape of two clear fingerprints.

"I am going to ask you not to touch the picture until a photograph has been taken of those fingerprints, Mr. Osburn," said Lee. "My assistant will see to that matter at once. Is that quite agreeable to you?"

"Quite, Mr. Lee. I will take care that it is not disturbed."

"Thank you," said the detective. "I will expect you to ring me about four o'clock."

"I shall not forget, Mr. Lee."

A moment later Lee and his assistant were standing in the street once more.

"You go straight away and fetch the photographer, Nipper," said Lee. He paused abruptly and stood gazing intently across the road.

"That's dashed funny!" he muttered, and grabbed his assistant by the arm. "Nipper," he said quickly, "follow that woman in the musquash coat. She's just disappearing

round the corner. I'll attend to the photographer. Quick!"

He watched his assistant dash across the road and turn the corner, then began to walk slowly up the Charing Cross Road.

CHAPTER 4.

Nipper on the Track.

NIPPER followed the strange woman up Shaftesbury Avenue, keeping about fifty yards behind, and watching her movements very carefully. Somehow there was something familiar about her which he could not quite understand. He could not help thinking that he had met her before somewhere or other.

He hurried his steps as he approached Piccadilly Circus; the street was becoming crowded, and he was afraid of losing sight of his quarry. Then he saw her suddenly disappear into the Tube station.

Nipper hastened in after her, procured a ticket at the slot machine, and managed to keep her in sight down the escalator. Once she turned her head in his direction; but he could not make out her features, the veil she was wearing partially obscuring her face. He noted the flash of the dark eyes, however, and had a momentary feeling that she was aware of his presence.

The lady caught a train on the Bakerloo line. Nipper got in the same compartment, but sat at the other end. He did not wish to make his presence too obtrusive. His quarry got out at Waterloo and went up to the Southern Railway terminus. Then Nipper saw her enter a public telephone-box. After a few minutes had elapsed she came out again and walked across to the booking-office.

As Nipper stood there hesitating what to do next, he saw the lady leave the booking-office and walk across to No. 4 platform. His ready wit immediately suggested a way out of the difficulty. From platform No. 4 the trains took a wide, circular route back to Waterloo again. He would take a ticket to Teddington, which, being the farthest station on the loop, would allow him to get out at any station on the route that he wished.

A moment later he was hurrying across to platform No. 4 with the ticket to Teddington in his pocket.

The lady in the musquash coat was some distance down the platform. Nipper did not attempt to approach her; he thought it best not to take risks of betraying his purpose. When the train came into the station he watched her enter a first-class compartment, then clambered into a third-class one adjoining.

As the train stopped at each station on its journey, Nipper kept a keen look-out for the woman in the musquash coat. But he did not see her among the passengers who

alighted. Over half an hour passed like this; then, at Hampton Wick he caught a glimpse of her as she went swiftly past his window.

He opened the door and sprang out. The woman was speaking to two men who had met her on the platform. They seemed to be listening intently to what she was saying, then they raised their hats, and, with a nod of her head, she left them and hurried through the barrier.

The two men passed Nipper as he walked quickly towards the gates; but he did not stop to pay much attention to them—he was too eager not to lose sight of the woman in the musquash coat.

When he got down to the street he saw that she had taken the road to the left. There were few people about; the one or two passengers who had left the train were hurrying away, and the place was soon deserted.

Nipper was not very familiar with his surroundings, but he knew that they must be close to the river, and going towards it. At the end of the road the woman turned to the left again and disappeared. When Nipper reached the corner he saw her walking along about two hundred yards ahead. The name-plate bore the words, "Robespierre Gardens."

On one side of the road were fields and allotments, and on the other side was a row of large detached houses, standing in their own grounds and evidently fronting on the river. Except for the woman he was following, not a solitary person was in sight, and a great quietness seemed to brood around. Nipper crossed the road, and, keeping in the cover of the trees, continued shadowing the strange woman.

He had not gone more than about thirty yards when he suddenly heard the sound of hurrying footsteps behind him. He glanced quickly over his shoulder. Two men had just rounded the corner and were coming swiftly towards him. He knew immediately who they were; they were the two men to whom the woman had spoken at the station a little while before.

Feeling a little apprehensive, Nipper slowed down and decided to let them get in front. They were close behind now—another moment and they must pass by. Then he felt himself grabbed on either side and a hand was clapped over his mouth.

He struggled violently, and succeeded in wrenching himself away. But his assailants were too strong for him. The next moment his legs were dragged from under him, the other man seized his wrists, and, still struggling feebly, he was being frog-marched along. A gate was opened and they passed up a white gravelled path.

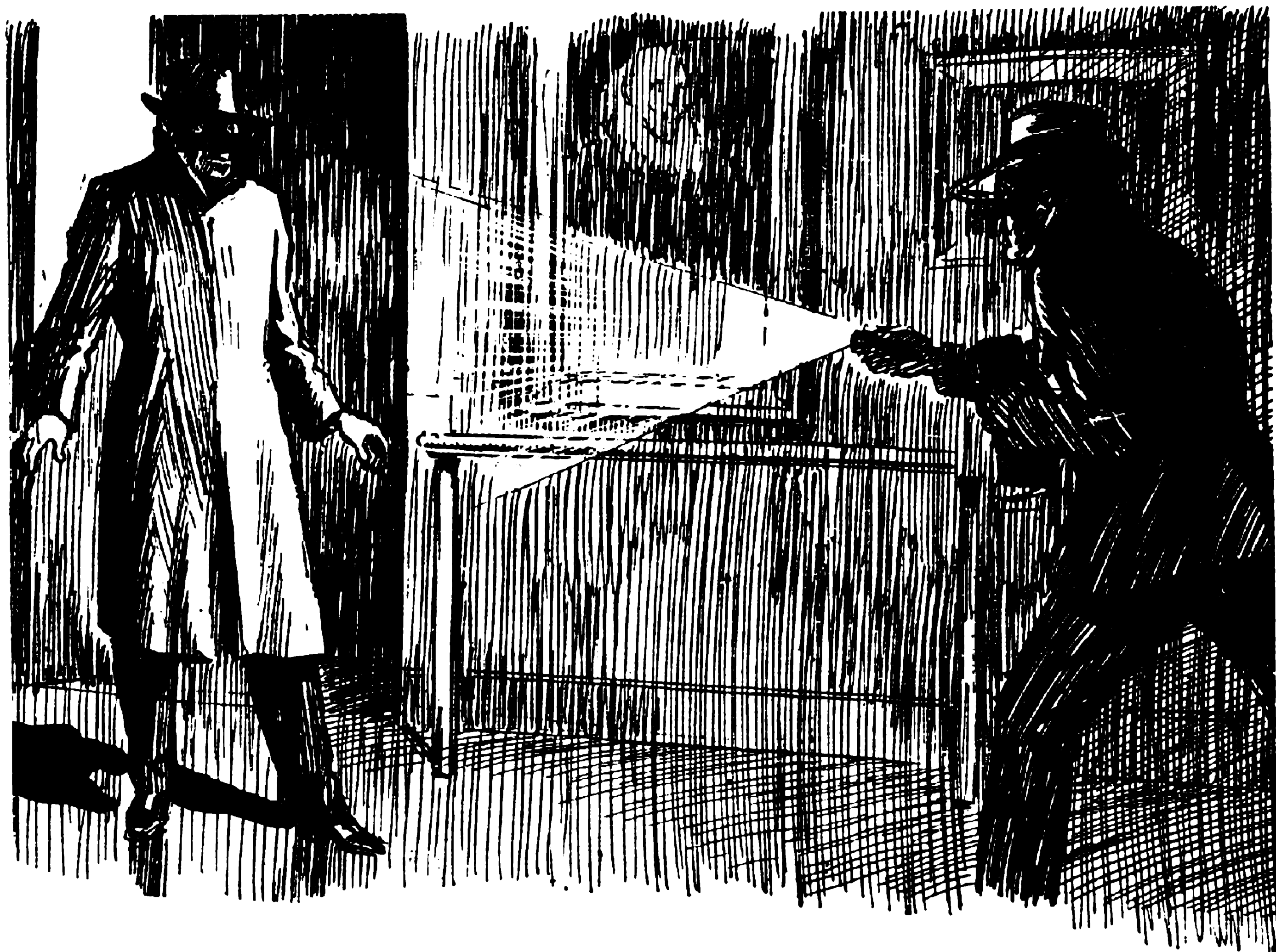
Nipper could have cried with vexation. He saw it all now; it was a trap that had been carefully set for him. He was a fool not to have suspected it before. The woman must have known she was being followed when she arrived at Waterloo. She had got on

the telephone and asked these two confederates to meet her at the station. They had waited behind and watched to see if her suspicions were correct. Since he had left the station his movements had been spied on.

The two men carried their burden along the path that skirted the side of the house, and then went down a flight of steps at the

They had not treated him with any great violence; in the scuffle they had not handled him more roughly than they could help. If they had wished, they could easily have knocked him on the head, and no one would have been the wiser.

They seemed more anxious to prevent his interfering with their plans than to wish to do him any injury. He had not the vaguest



The two masked figures faced each other in the dark picture gallery. Each measured his opponent with fierce eyes, for they knew that the fight that would follow would be to the death.

rear. Nipper was lowered to the floor and released. A door clanged to behind him, a key turned in the lock, and all was silence.

Nipper climbed to his feet and glanced around. The room was in the basement, and only partially lit by a little grated window that was very high up and close to the ceiling. The floor was stone-flagged, the walls of solid brick, and the door heavy and studded with iron.

Evidently the place had once served as a pantry, for there were marks on the walls where shelves had been removed. But the place was now bare and destitute of furniture.

Nipper leant against the wall and began to think over his position. What did his captors mean to do with him, he wondered. Why had they brought him here—and what mysterious plot were they hatching?

notion as to their identity, and from first to last neither of them had spoken a word.

But somehow or other he must effect an escape. Lee would be wondering what had become of him. He began to inspect his surroundings, going round the room and carefully examining the walls and door. It did not take him long to discover how slender the chances of escape were; the room was too strongly built to offer any great hopes of getting away without some outside assistance.

He turned his attention to the window. It was too high up for him to reach and was heavily barred. Even if he could have wrenched the iron grating away he very much doubted if he could have squeezed himself through.

He sat down on the stone floor and gave himself up to silent meditation.

CHAPTER 5.

"We are too late!"

AFTER Nipper had been captured, the lady in the musquash coat began to retrace her steps, and a few minutes later entered the house where he had been taken. She let herself in with a latch-key, and crossed the wide, lofty hall to a room that overlooked the river.

There she removed her hat and veil and stood gazing reflectively out of the window at the broad, sweeping lawn that reached down to the water.

Her face, which was very youthful, was also strikingly beautiful, for she was none other than Mademoiselle Paulette Lebrun, one of the cleverest agents of the French Secret Service.

As she stood staring pensively in front of her, footsteps sounded in the hall outside, and the next moment the door opened and her two companions entered.

"Ah, Mademoiselle Paulette!" said one of them in French. "We have got the youngster safely under lock and key. And now we will talk."

"But he must not come to any harm," Paulette insisted. "He is the assistant of Monsieur Lee, the great English detective. We can trust him implicitly."

"Trust no one, Paulette," said the man firmly. "You may be quite right, but we must take no risks. The matter is too important to take any notice of sentiment. For some reason or other you were being shadowed. We work too much in the dark to distinguish between friend and foe, and we do not want anyone prying round here just yet. It is not safe."

The man spoke with an air of authority. Evidently he held some high post in the service of his country, for his companion followed his words attentively, and kept silent. Mademoiselle Paulette gave a little petulant toss of her head.

"Very well, monsieur," she said. "It shall be as you wish."

"Have you found out what has happened to the picture?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur; it was taken from the galleries this morning to a place in the Charing Cross Road."

"Do you mean that it has been sold?" asked Maurice sharply.

"No, Monsieur Maurice; I do not think so."

"Then why has it been taken there?"

"Listen, monsieur, and I will tell you. Last night something happened in the Veuxpillo Galleries—a man was killed!"

"Killed, Paulette? Good heavens! But who was he?"

"It was Gustave Fulk, the painter, monsieur," said Paulette quietly.

Maurice drew in his breath quickly.

"Ah!" he muttered. "Then it is as we thought. Gustave Fulk was a traitor—he sold himself to the enemies of his country."

"But he has paid the price, monsieur."

"You are quite right, Mademoiselle Paulette. Yet I do not quite understand. How is it that this Gustave Fulk was killed, and what was he doing here?"

"I cannot answer your questions, monsieur," said Paulette. "But it is clear that Gustave Fulk knew of the whereabouts of the stolen cipher. When it was discovered that the document had been stolen from the Foreign Office, suspicion immediately fell on Kalib Pasha, the Turk. He was followed to the house of Gustave Fulk, and a search was made. But nothing of an incriminating nature was found."

Her companion was silent for a moment. A look of perplexity had come into his face.

"I cannot understand what happened, Paulette," he said presently. "But we are sure now that the cipher was glued to the back of the Murillo. That is why we could not find it when we made our search. Somehow we must gain possession of the painting—and quickly, too."

"The English police evidently suspect something, monsieur," said Paulette. "Nelson Lee has taken the picture to an art expert named Charles Osburn."

"They will spoil everything," rapped out Maurice sharply. "They are trying to find out who killed Gustave Fulk. And it does not matter to us. We are playing a bigger game. Soon everything will be in the papers, and we do not want that to happen. Somehow we must get hold of the picture—there is no time to lose."

A thoughtful expression came into Mademoiselle Paulette's face. She began twisting her glove in her delicate fingers while her companions watched her anxiously. Presently she looked up.

"You will leave it to me, Monsieur Maurice," she said quietly. "Somehow we will get hold of the picture before it is too late. I will go now, and I will take Bervais with me. He may be useful."

A look of relief swept across Maurice's face. He held out his hand impulsively.

"It is well, mademoiselle," he said. "I know you will not fail. Bervais will go with you and I will stay here until you return or send me some message. It is quite clear?"

The girl nodded her head.

"Quite clear," she said. "You may rely on me, monsieur."

Half an hour or so later Mademoiselle Paulette and her companion, Bervais, were on their way to Waterloo again.

For a considerable time after they had gone Maurice prowled restlessly up and down the room. He was plainly ill at ease and very anxious as to the outcome of the venture on which Julie had embarked.

Presently he became more composed, and, sitting down at a writing-table in the corner, took out a bundle of letters from his pocket and went carefully through them. Then he began to write industriously, making frequent references to the letters at his elbow.

Whatever his task was, he was evidently absorbed in it to the exclusion of every-

thing else. He did not pause again until the waning light told him that the afternoon was drawing to a close. Then he glanced at the clock and rose abruptly to his feet.

Carefully putting the papers away in his pocket, he crossed the hall and entered a little room on the opposite side. On a bracket in the corner stood a telephone; on the other side was a dresser containing a few kitchen utensils, and nearby was fitted a gas ring. A table stood in the centre and three or four chairs. The window was heavily barred.

Maurice switched on the electric light and took a loaf of bread, some butter and a teapot from the dresser. For some minutes he busied himself with the gas ring. Presently a sudden thought seemed to occur to him; he gave vent to a muttered exclamation.

"Quite forgotten the youngster!" he murmured.

He took a shiny automatic from his pocket and went swiftly down into the basement.

Nipper peered anxiously into the stranger's face as the door pushed open, and although it was nearly dark, recognised him as one of the men he had seen at the station that morning.

His first instinct was to make a dash for liberty. But the weapon in the other's hand had him well covered, and he decided it was better to bide his time.

"Hungry?" asked Maurice, in a pleasant tone of voice. "Come this way. But do not try any tricks. We do not wish you any harm, but I shall fire if you attempt to escape."

He stood aside and allowed Nipper to pass in front. Together they went along a stone-flagged corridor and up a flight of steps into the hall.

"The door on your right," said Maurice curtly, from behind. And Nipper had no alternative but to obey.

Still facing his prisoner, Maurice locked the door behind him and motioned Nipper into a chair.

"Now," he said, with a dry smile, "there is not much to eat, but you are welcome to what there is. Remember that I am armed, and shall not hesitate to fire if necessary."

Nipper did not think it was necessary to reply to this threat. He was ravenously hungry; the loaf of bread and the butter seemed priceless luxuries to him in his present state. He set to work with a will, and did not pause until his keenest pangs of hunger were somewhat appeased. His companion joined him in his meal, but did not offer any further comment.

Five minutes or more passed in silence. Nipper was getting in a state of nervous tension; he could not stand it much longer; he must make his dash soon, or else it might be too late. And at that moment the front door shut with a slam, and hurried footsteps sounded outside in the hall.

His companion sprang to his feet, hesitated a moment, then hastened to the door.

"I'm only just outside," he said, with a threatening gesture. "Keep where you are!"

The door shut behind him and the key was turned in the lock. Nipper sat listening intently for a moment or two. The footsteps crossed the hall, and then the sound of voices followed.

This was his chance; it was a case of now or never. He crept to the door and tried the handle. It was securely fastened, and he dare not attempt to force it; his enemies were too near for him to risk making a noise. Then he turned his attention to the window again; but a very brief examination told him how hopeless that was.

Nipper felt his chances slipping by; somehow he must get away. Then his glance rested on the telephone standing on the bracket in the farther corner.

In a moment he had sped across the room and had snatched the receiver from its hook. Although it only occupied a few seconds, it seemed an interminable time to Nipper before the girl at the exchange answered. He gave Lee's number in a voice that shook with excitement.

"Quick, please, miss. It's urgent!" he said.

It seemed as if he would never get through in time; each second seemed more like an hour to his excited imagination. Then the detective's familiar voice spoke at the other end of the wire and Nipper gave a sigh of overwhelming relief.

"Hallo, hallo!" he said in suppressed tones. "Is that you, guv'nor? I'm at Robespierre —"

But he got no further in his brief statement. The door was suddenly flung open, a hand grasped him roughly by the collar, and dragged him away, and the receiver dropped from his fingers.

Struggling violently, he was grasped by the hands and feet, and carried downstairs into the basement. A moment later he found himself back again in the little stone-flagged room, with the door securely fastened behind him.

Meanwhile the two men had hastened upstairs to the room that overlooked the river. Mademoiselle Paulette was standing by the table on which lay the painting that had hung in the Veuxpillo Galleries that morning, and which Lee had subsequently taken to Mr. Charles Osburn in the Charing Cross Road.

Maurice turned the picture over and scrutinised the back, while his companions watched him in silence. Presently he looked up with a shade of perplexity on his face.

"It is strange," he muttered. "The document was supposed to be glued to the back of the canvas."

He turned the picture over in his hands and eyed it suspiciously, then took up a clasp-knife and began making little cuts all

over the canvas. The look of perplexity on his face deepened, and a stern look crept into his eyes. He laid the picture down at length, and drew in his breath sharply.

"We are too late!" he said, and his voice shook with anxiety. "The cipher is not here. This picture has been tampered with. See, the varnish has been cleaned off the surface and some of the pigment scraped away."

A moment of intense silence followed the man's remark; the three of them stood casting glances at one another as if this discovery had taken them wholly by surprise. Then Maurice suddenly became galvanised into action.

"Quick!" he said. "There is no time to waste. Somehow Kalib Pasha has managed to get hold of the cipher. The position is serious. I must return to Paris immediately. You will get instructions from me to-morrow, mademoiselle. Now we will catch the next train to London; we will discuss our plans as we go along."

As Monsieur Maurice was speaking in short, authoritative accents he was cutting the portrait from the wooden frame. He rolled the canvas up and put it in his attache-case, then put on his hat and coat.

"Do not stop for anything," he said quickly. "Everything now depends on speed. To-morrow I will send someone to release that youngster in the basement. His chatter might interfere with our plans now, and we will take no risks of that to-night!"

CHAPTER 6.

Wolf Lends a Hand.

NELSON LEE was at his wits' end for once. The murder at the Veuxpillo Galleries had developed into what seemed like an unfathomable mystery, that grew more and more complicated as he went along.

Several amazing things had already happened. Firstly, the bloodstained fingerprints on the frame of the Murillo portrait had turned out to be the fingerprints of James Stone, of the Secret Service!

As if that discovery was not sufficiently astounding, Charles Osburn had 'phoned to say that the portrait was a clever fake, the false picture having been painted and substituted for the original only quite recently.

What was more, Mr. Osburn said that he had handed the portrait over to Mr. Mayn, the manager of the Veuxpillo Galleries, who had called for it. Mr. Mayn had declared that Nelson Lee had 'phoned him asking him to fetch the portrait from the Charing Cross Road.

And Nelson Lee had done no such thing! The sequel came rapidly. Mr. Mayn arrived at the Gray's Inn Road, breathless with rage and filled with apprehension. While walking along the street with the portrait under his arm, it had been snatched

from him, the thief had jumped into a waiting car and got clean away with his booty, and when Mr. Mayn had made an effort to grab the rogue, a lady in a musquash coat had somehow blundered in his path and ruined his chances.

To add to all this, while Mr. Mayn sat in Nelson Lee's own chair in the consulting-room, panting after having blurted out his amazing story, Nipper had got through on the 'phone, but had only been able to give half his message—"That you, guv'nor? I'm at Robespierre—"

The sudden, strange silence could only mean one thing. Nipper had been forcibly dragged from the telephone.

For some minutes after he had heard Nipper's voice on the telephone, Nelson Lee stood with a puzzled frown on his face. For the life of him, he could not think what to do. His young assistant was in trouble somewhere; something extraordinary must have happened for him to have been cut off so abruptly; and yet he had no way of going to his assistance.

What had Nipper said? "I'm at Robespierre——" Yes, that was the place he had mentioned—Robespierre something! It suddenly occurred to the detective that he might find some such name in the Directory.

He turned to the manager, who had not spoken since the telephone-bell had run out.

"Excuse me, Mr. Mayn," he said. "I have been called up about some matter of importance."

Lee took down the Directory and began to search through it. Eventually he found what he was looking for in the suburban part; the place was named Robespierre Gardens, and was situated up the river near Teddington.

He closed the Directory with a sharp snap.

"I shall have to hurry away, Mr. Mayn," he said. "Some urgent business has suddenly demanded my attention. Perhaps you will give me your private address, then if I wish to see you before to-morrow, I shall know where to find you."

"Very well, Mr. Lee," said the manager, "here is my card. In any case I shall expect to see you in the morning. The whole business is worrying me to death; I rely absolutely on you."

The detective ushered his visitor out with some haste. Directly he was gone he opened the back door.

"Wolf! Wolf!" he called softly.

The dog gave a joyful whimper in answer to his master, and came bounding into the room.

"Not much you don't understand of the King's English, old boy," muttered Lee. "Where's Nipper, boy?"

The great Alsatian began to grow restless, and ran round the room, whimpering softly. Then he sank back on his haunches in front of his master and stared up in his face with a wistful expression.

Lee put the animal on the lead, opened the door, and stepped out into the street. At

the further end of the Gray's Inn Road he picked up a taxi.

"To Teddington," he said. "Double fare if you're quick!"

The driver earned his money. He dropped Lee a few yards from the end of the Robespierre Gardens. Lee called the dog in a low voice. The animal came obediently to his side. He slipped the lead on his collar and then made his way slowly down the road.

The place was wrapped in silence, and very dimly lit. Once the detective caught sight of the river shining through a gap in the trees. This occasioned him some surprise, for he did not know how near he was to the river.

Presently he came to a turning on the right. On the river side a row of large detached houses loomed up in the darkness; the right side of the road had not been built on. A line of wooden palings edged the pavement. Lee peered at the name-plate that was fixed at the corner, in white letters were painted the words, "Robespierre Gardens."

He stared across at the gaunt-looking houses with a feeling of curiosity. Had he come to the right place? Was his young assistant shut up in one of these? At any rate, he would see what Wolf could do. If Nipper had been here the dog might possibly pick up his scent.

Lee crossed the road, and then stooped down to the dog and held his great head in his hands.

"Wolf, old fellow," he said, "we're after Nipper—Nipper! Find him, boy!"

The Alsatian seemed to know exactly what his master said. He cast a swift look of understanding up at Lee, then struggled to get away. The detective let go of the dog's collar, but still held tightly to the lead. With Wolf straining eagerly a yard or so in front, he made his way slowly along the pavement.

Lee was just beginning to think that he was on a wild-goose chase, when the Alsatian sank his head to the ground and began sniffing suspiciously.

They were just outside a large house. Lee glanced up at the windows. Not a ray of light showed from any part of the building.

"What is it, Wolf?" he asked sharply.

The dog lifted his head momentarily at the sound of his master's voice, then sank his nose to the ground again. He seemed now to be thoroughly excited, and the hair along his back was bristling in a thin line. For a few moments he sniffed a few yards, up and down, then began to move slowly up the road.

The dog was now slowing down. He seemed to have difficulty in going any further. Presently he stopped altogether and nosed eagerly around. Then with a soft whimper he began to retrace his steps. As they approached the house he grew more impatient, but he came to a halt where he had previously picked up the scent, and seemed plainly disconcerted.

For the space of a minute or two the detective was as puzzled as the Alsatian. The scent evidently stopped abruptly here. If Nipper had been this way, then he must have suddenly vanished at this spot. At first he could not think what had happened. The dog was plainly excited, and his eyes were blazing with anger.

Then, an explanation suddenly flashed across Lee's mind. Nipper must have been set upon here, and taken by surprise. His assailants had picked him up and carried him off somewhere. That would explain why the scent had so abruptly finished. He had been carried into one of these houses; it was from one of them that Nipper had telephoned.

He took a swift glance around. A telephone post stood a few yards away, and the wire ran straight across to the roof of this very house. It did not take Lee long to make up his mind. He pushed open the gate, and with Wolf close on his heels, crept up the gravel path to the front door.

At the top of the steps he stood listening, for a moment or two. Not a sound came to his ears to disturb the silence. He knelt down and placed his eye to the keyhole, but he could see nothing; the place was in darkness.

It suddenly occurred to him that he had arrived too late. No doubt, Nipper had been caught at the telephone and taken from the house before help could arrive.

Spurred on by this thought Lee abandoned his usual precaution. He took a bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, and fumbled with the lock. In a moment the door swung open, and he stepped inside.

He closed the door gently behind him, and stood listening intently, but, save the panting of the Alsatian there was not the slightest sound. Then he took out his electric torch, found the electric switch on the wall and flooded the hall with light.

The spacious hall was somewhat tastefully furnished; a thick Axminster rug covered the floor. At the further end a door stood half open. Lee went quietly across and entering the room, switched on the light. Then he gave a quick intake of breath, and stood staring in surprise at the table.

On it was lying a faded gilt frame. He knew in an instant that it was the frame of the faked Murillo that had been stolen from Mr. Mayn an hour or so ago. But the painting was now gone. It had been cut out with a knife; the frayed canvas still adhered to the inside edge.

Feeling more mystified than ever, the detective glanced curiously round the room. Then the low growl of Wolf came to his ears. He hurried out into the hall again; the dog was sniffing suspiciously at a door on the left and scraping at it with his great paws. Lee tried the handle. It yielded to his grasp, and Wolf sprang inside.

Wondering why the dog was so excited, Lee peered into the room. The light from the hall was sufficient to see everything clearly. In the centre of the room stood a table, on

which were the remains of a meal; evidently someone had been there quite recently.

Wolf was over in the corner nosing around in the same excited manner. Then Lee saw the telephone on a bracket just above.

Then this was the room from which Nipper had telephoned? There could be no doubt about that; it explained why Wolf was so excited. But where was Nipper now? What had happened to him after he had been dragged away from the instrument?

Wolf was now making for the door again. The dog seemed pleased and his tail wagged joyfully. Lee followed him across the hall and then down into the basement. They went along a stone flagged corridor, the detective sending a thin beam of light ahead from his torch.

Outside a door on the left the Alsatian suddenly stopped, took one or two deep sniffs, and then began to scrape furiously with his paws. Lee pushed back the rusty bolts and swung open the heavy door.

In the circle of light from his torch Nipper's white face stared out at him with mingled surprise and joy.

CHAPTER 7.

The Mysterious Message.

THERE was plenty for both Nelson Lee and Nipper to explain to each other, but the result was still mystery.

They were in the room where the detective had seen the frame of the Murillo picture on the table.

Nipper looked decidedly bothered and bewildered.

"Well, I leave it to you, guv'nor," he said. "It's just got me beaten. I can't understand how you make head or tail out of things."

Lee shook his head doubtfully.

"I'm almost as stumped as you are, Nipper," he said. "However, we'll get away from this place as soon as possible. But I'll just have a look round first, although I don't think I shall discover much."

Lee's latter remark proved quite correct, although they went over the whole house, nothing was found to throw any light on the identity of the present occupants.

The house was furnished throughout with an air of quiet luxury, but, apart from the heavy costly furniture there were no small articles and ornaments of any value.

Strangely enough, although there were a number of bed-rooms upstairs, yet not one of them contained a bed. In this respect they were all incomplete, just as if they were dummy rooms.

"It's quite evident, Nipper," said Lee, as they crossed the hall again to the room they were in at first, "that no one sleeps here. It's one of those silent houses that are used very occasionally by people on secret business from the Continent; a sort of recognised meeting-place in case of emergencies.

He stopped abruptly just as he was moving towards the door, and stood looking at the

little writing-table that stood over in the corner. Then he went quickly over to it and picked up the blotting-pad that lay on the top.

The paper was scored with ink marks made by Monsieur Maurice a few hours before. Lee's keen eyes saw at a glance that they had been made quite recently. If the blotting-pad was anything to go by, then someone had sat at that table this afternoon and written a number of letters.

Nipper watched Lee closely as he held the blotting-pad in his hand and carefully scrutinised it. He knew the detective too well to ask any questions until he had finished, but he felt instinctively that something important was to happen. It was like Lee to make some fresh discovery just at the last moment.

Lee presently walked over to the mirror that hung above the mantelpiece, and held the blotting-pad so that he could see its reflection in the glass. He turned it about several times and stood surveying it with contracted brows, then, without taking his eyes off the mirror, he spoke to Nipper.

"Got a pencil and paper on you, Nipper?" he said quietly.

"Yes, guv'nor!"

"Then copy this down as I read it out."

He began to spell out very slowly various words and phrases, sometimes asking Nipper to erase one, and then going back and repeating himself.

It was no easy task on which Lee was engaged. The centre of the pad resembled a huge blot of ink more than anything else; it was only round the sides that the marks could be recognised as writing. The letters were so jumbled together as to be almost unintelligible, and with the exception of one letter in English the writing was in French.

But the detective was not easily defeated, and after much stumbling he managed to read out quite a number of words and phrases which Nipper took down.

He came to a pause at length and took the paper from Nipper's fingers. For some five minutes he studied it in silence, making various jottings on the margin of the paper. Then he copied something out on a separate piece of paper and handed it to his assistant.

"What do you make of that, Nipper?" he asked.

With growing perplexity Nipper stared at the following unintelligible jumble of letters and words:

"—with—fai— He a.ked or We.ter—XXI—oreig Se—vi.e, and ga.e—he—e-wo.d 'Twe.ty fat.o.s—eep and t.ent. le.gu's a.ay. Hi—o.fici—nu.ber, is f.fty fi— It is im.or. an. to em.mb.r tha—"

Nipper smoothed back his hair with a bewildered expression.

"Is this a Chinese puzzle, guv'nor?" he asked blankly.

"Looks like it, Nipper," said Lee, with a low chuckle. "Now, I'm going to see if I can make sense of it."

He picked up the pencil again and began to fill in letters here and there. Over



Nipper reached the 'phone and frantically asked for Nelson Lee's number. At last he was put through. "Hallo, hallo!" he said. "Is that you, guv'nor? I'm a prisoner at Robespierre!" Quick footsteps sounded behind the young detective, and the gaoler dashed forward with a snarl.

some words he brooded for quite a long time, and it was only after several repeated efforts that he succeeded in discovering the missing letters.

Finally he wrote the whole message out again and handed it to Nipper.

"Can you make anything of it now, Nipper?" he asked.

Nipper stared at the paper again. Written down in Lee's clear hand was the following message:

"—without fail. He asked for Western XXI Foreign Service, and gave the key-word 'Twenty fathoms deep and twenty leagues away.' His official number is fifty-five. It is important to remember that—"

"It's certainly readable now, guv'nor," said Nipper after a moment's pause. "But it simply gets me stiff how you manage to find out all that. What are you going to do now? After all, it doesn't seem to convey much."

Lee did not answer. He was still gazing at the message, and there was a curious glint of suppressed excitement in his eyes. Then he suddenly jumped to his feet.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I'll try it!"

"Try what, guv'nor?" asked Nipper, more bewildered than ever.

"Where's the telephone, Nipper? In the next room, isn't it?"

"Yes, but—"

"Don't stand there arguing, Nipper," said Lee. "Come on, this way—"

Followed by his astonished assistant, the detective hurried across the hall to the room where the telephone was installed. Snatching the receiver from its hook he placed it to his ear and waited patiently.

"Western XXI, please, miss," he said presently.

After waiting for about half a minute a voice said:

"Western XXI."

"I want Foreign Service," said Lee.

The familiar sound of a switch being plugged in followed, then a man spoke in sharp, crisp tones:

"This is Foreign Service," he said.

The moment had arrived for Lee to try the effect of his chance shot. His reply came firmly and without a moment's hesitation.

"Twenty fathoms deep and twenty leagues away," he said.

"What number?" asked the voice immediately.

"Number Fifty-five," said Lee.

"Hold on!" said the voice curtly.

Lee experienced a strange thrill of excitement. His quick brain had immediately grasped the significance of the message which he had so cleverly deciphered.

On the spur of the moment he had decided to put his conclusions to the test; but the results so far had been quite beyond his expectations. He waited anxiously now to see what would happen. A moment later the voice at the other end of the wire spoke again.

"Hallo, Fifty-five! The chief will see you to-morrow morning at half-past eleven. Is that clear?"

"Where?" asked the detective quickly.

"At Thirteen, Kursan Place," said the voice.

Before Lee could make any further remark a click sounded in his ear as the receiver at the other end was replaced on its hook.

Lee's pulses were now beating quickly as he turned to Nipper.

"I'm in it now with both feet, Nipper," he said.

Nipper had a feeling that he was a little beyond his depth. His head was in a turmoil. Lee seemed to be playing with black magic.

"Well," continued the detective. "I've not the slightest notion who was speaking at the other end of the wire, but I've arranged to meet the chief at eleven-thirty to-morrow morning at Number Thirteen, Kursan Place."

"The chief, guv'nor?" echoed Nipper. "Who on earth is the chief?"

"Goodness only knows, Nipper. The chances are that I shall put my foot in it with a vengeance. But that doesn't matter; the chief will have a nasty shock, whoever he is!"

CHAPTER 8.

"Number Thirteen."

THAT same night there was a remarkable burglary at the art dealers premises owned by Charles Osburn in the Charing Cross Road. The remarkable thing about it was that although the place was turned upside down, Mr. Osburn could find nothing missing, despite the fact that the safe had been burst open, that there was money lying about, together with statuettes and pictures worth many thousands of pounds.

The news was soon conveyed to Nelson Lee, and Inspector Frenton called upon him quite early. Lee simply listened to the news and vouchsafed no comment, which Frenton regarded as highly suspicious. The Scotland Yard man was huffy with Lee because the famous detective refused point-blank to give away one iota of what he had discovered at the Veuxpillo Galleries. And, to make matters worse, in Lee's consulting-room Frenton saw with his own eyes the empty frame of the stolen Murillo portrait. Lee even refused to explain that, and Frenton went away threatening a subpoena at the inquest on the murdered man, which would compel Lee to stand as witness and be questioned by the coroner.

But there were other things more important on foot for Lee to worry about Frenton. It wanted about two minutes to the half-hour when Nelson Lee turned the corner into the quiet and select neighbourhood in which Kursan Place was situated.

About half-way down the road the detective suddenly stopped and stood for a moment silently looking up at the house in front of him. On the fanlight over the door was painted in white letters the number 13.

Lee's pause was sufficient only to assure himself of the number; it was not his way to hesitate at the last moment. He had already made up his mind, and decided on his line of action. He opened the gate and walked quickly up the tiled pathway and gave a sharp rat-tat at the knocker.

Almost immediately the door was opened by a man in brass buttons. He stood aside, and, without making any remark, seemed to expect his visitor to enter. The detective stepped inside, and the door closed quietly behind him.

Lee found himself standing in a wide, gloomy hall, which was partitioned off from the farther part of the house by a green baize door. On the right was another door. The commissionaire opened it, and, silently motioning the detective inside, closed it behind him.

The detective suddenly experienced the unpleasant sensation that someone else was in the room besides himself. He glanced round sharply and found himself face to face with a suave-looking man in black, who had entered so quietly as to have made no noise.

For a moment Lee felt just a little taken back; he stared at the stranger suspiciously and sized him up. The man inclined his head as if in acknowledgment, and returned Lee's stare with a look of mute inquiry.

The silence became rather strained; suddenly it occurred to the detective that the man was waiting for him to speak. It was a critical moment. Instinctively Lee felt that the fate of his enterprise hung in the balance, that everything depended on his saying precisely the right thing.

A swift process of reasoning went on in his mind. His hesitation was only momentary, then, with lightning speed, he had reached a decision.

"Twenty fathoms deep and twenty leagues away," he said in cold, deliberate tones.

The man before him betrayed not the slightest emotion; but Lee felt intuitively that he had said the right thing. Then, for the first time, the stranger spoke.

"And your number?" he asked, in a quiet, dispassionate voice.

"Number Fifty-five," came the quick response.

Without a word the man turned on his heel and left the room.

Nelson Lee felt a little thrill of triumph. His faculties had not played him false. He felt sure of that. His instincts had led him aright. He had risen to the occasion through his usual cleverness and ingenuity. Whatever happened now, he had passed the first critical test.

At that moment the door opened, and the suave-looking man reappeared.

"The Chief will see you now," he said. "Follow me, please."

He led the way outside and crossed the hall, with the detective following close on his heels. They passed through the green baize door, which shut to behind them of its own accord.

Lee's keen eyes noticed that the house was immediately transformed. An air of great munificence seemed to pervade the place, in direct contrast to the bare hall and ante-room that he had just left; a thick pile carpet covered the floor, on which their feet made no noise, and in the centre of the embossed ceiling was a dome of coloured glass,

which threw a soft, subdued light over the well-appointed vestibule.

The detective noticed all these things in a few swift seconds. He found himself wondering who this man was in the black coat. There was a quiet air of authority about him, as if he were a well-trained servant occupying a rather important position.

There was something impressive and solemn about the place. It seemed to go by clock-work. Lee had the strange feeling that he was surrounded by some hidden organisation, which was controlling and directing a secret, but all-powerful machine.

Then he found himself following his guide up a wide, curving staircase, covered by the same thick pile carpet. Presently the man stopped at a door facing them, knocked gently, then turned the handle and motioned Lee inside. The door closed softly behind him.

A short, stout man in a black frock coat was standing over the other side of the room staring out of the window. At Lee's entry he turned swiftly and took a step forward. The next moment he gave a startled exclamation, and a look of utter astonishment swept over his face.

The surprise was mutual; even the detective's imperturbable face lost for a moment its habitual calm and self-assurance. Then, almost simultaneously, the words dropped from their lips:

"Nelson Lee!"

"Sir Vrymer Fane!"

CHAPTER 9.

The "Chief" Explains Things.

AFTER their first quick exclamations the two men regarded each other in a dead silence for the space of half a minute.

Lee's mind was working swiftly. The significance of his position was now clear to him. In a flash the mystery of No. 13, Kursan Place was explained.

He had wondered who the Chief could possibly be. Now he knew. The Chief stood before him. It was Sir Vrymer Fane, the great head of the British Secret Service, the Minister to whom the tangled skein of European politics was nothing but a game of chess, and who fingered his pieces with such consummate skill and cunning.

He had blundered right into one of the hidden cloisters of the British Secret Service. He knew that he had gained admittance by a pure accident; that without the chance discovery of the secret countersign he would never have been able to have penetrated this jealously guarded sanctum.

It was Sir Vrymer Fane who broke the strained silence, and behind his obvious bewilderment there was a faint note of displeasure.

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Lee?" he asked in a quiet, cold voice.

"I have come to see the Chief, Sir Vrymer," replied Lee.

"But I am the Chief."

"I did not know that."

The minister seemed more perplexed than ever; his face was a study in bewilderment.

"But what is the object of your visit, Mr. Lee. Tell me, who let you in?"

"The commissionaire at the door."

"Yes, but didn't you see anyone else—my private secretary?"

"I saw a gentleman dressed in black, Sir Vrymer. It may have been your secretary?"

The minister seemed to hesitate a moment, as if carefully framing his words.

"What did you say to him?" he asked.

"I said: 'Twenty fathoms deep and twenty leagues away.'"

Sir Vrymer Fane drew in his breath sharply.

"Then you knew the countersign!" he muttered, and his face was troubled and anxious. "Did you say anything else? Did you give a number?"

"I gave the number fifty-five, Sir Vrymer."

The minister had got beyond feeling surprised now; if the detective had suddenly turned into an elephant it would not have added to his confusion.

"Then it was you, Mr. Lee, who rang up Western XXI last night?" he asked.

Lee nodded an affirmative.

"It was," he said. "And may I ask whom you expected it to be, Sir Vrymer?"

"You seem to know so much, Mr. Lee, that I shall not be taking any risk if I answer your question. I thought the man who rang up Western XXI last night would be the man I should meet here this morning at half-past eleven; that is, Number Fifty-Five. And Number Fifty-five is James Stone!"

Nelson Lee had got himself well in hand now; he had recovered from the first surprise of this unexpected meeting. When he had discovered that strange message on the blotting-pad at Robespierre Gardens it had been due merely to sudden impulse on his part that he had 'phoned up Western XXI.

Yet his impulse had led him right; fifty-five was James Stone's official number, and Stone had been in the Veuxpillo Galleries on the night of the crime.

"That is a very interesting piece of news, sir," he said. "Strangely enough, Stone is the very man I am most anxious to meet."

"You are, Mr. Lee? And for what reason?"

"To ask him what he was doing in the Veuxpillo Galleries on Tuesday night, when a certain man was stabbed to death."

Sir Vrymer Fane passed his fingers through his hair with great agitation. He seemed to be getting more and more confused.

"You have got me completely muddled," Mr. Lee, he said. "Let us start at the beginning. You mentioned this crime at the Veuxpillo Galleries. Of course, I have heard about it, but what has Stone got to do

with it? What are you doing here? What the dickens does it all mean?"

He waved his hand about in despair, then sank down in a chair and motioned to Lee to be seated. The detective told Sir Vrymer the bare details of the crime, of the missing picture, and the discovery of Stone's blood-stained fingerprints on the frame.

The minister leaned forward, his hands were trembling a little as he gripped the arms of his chair, and his face was grave and set.

"Mr. Lee," he said slowly. "I apologise if I seemed discourteous a short while ago. I was so astonished at seeing you here. That has still to be explained. But you have stumbled on something of the utmost importance. From what you tell me I have not the slightest doubt that on this picture was concealed the secret cipher which was stolen last week from our embassy in Paris."

"Ah," exclaimed Lee, "now I begin to see things more clearly! But will you give me your reasons for that statement, sir? It may explain several points that still baffle me."

"Certainly I will. Immediately we learnt of the loss of the cipher we placed the matter in the hands of James Stone. He went over to Paris immediately. Two days later I had a communication from him to the effect that the cipher had been stolen by a man named Gustave Fulk, a painter, who had been employed at the embassy on some job or other."

"And you have not heard from Stone since?"

"Not a word, Mr. Lee."

"Did he speak to you on the telephone, Sir Vrymer?"

"Yes, he did. But he did not say where he was."

"What day was that, sir?"

"On Tuesday—the day of the crime."

"We are unravelling the problem bit by bit, sir. The man who was killed in the Vauxpillo Galleries on Tuesday must have been Gustave Fulk; his handkerchief was marked with the letters, G. F. Evidently Stone followed him across from Paris that day. He must have 'phoned you directly he arrived at Dover."

The minister nodded his head, and Lee continued.

"That brings me to another point. How did you know it was Stone speaking? Did he give his name?"

"No."

"Then he used the countersign, and gave his number—Fifty-five."

"That is so, Mr. Lee. But how on earth did you know that?"

"When Stone 'phoned you up, Sir Vrymer, he must have been spied on by someone; perhaps he spoke from a public telephone box. At any rate, part of his conversation was overheard. While following up this mysterious crime I came across a plotting-pad containing a portion of a letter. The statement that aroused my interest was: He asked for Western XXI, Foreign Service, and gave the key-word, 'Twenty fathoms deep

and twenty leagues away' His official number is fifty-five."

"Then that explains how you came here—you acted on the information in that letter?"

"Just so, Sir Vrymer."

"You are a clever man, Mr. Lee. I was startled when I saw you enter. The real meaning of this house is an absolute secret. When I come here I always enter by the back; and it is only used when we suspect that our movements are being watched. The counter-sign must be changed immediately."

"You have heard nothing further from Stone since Tuesday, Sir Vrymer?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Lee. I am puzzled to know what has become of him."

"Do you understand the significance of those finger-prints, sir?"

The minister looked at the detective with narrowed eyes.

"I do," he muttered. "They rather point to the fact that Stone killed Gustave Fulk."

"That is certainly the obvious explanation, sir. But we do not know all the facts yet; there may be another explanation."

"There may be," agreed Sir Vrymer. "But I am not concerned so much with that. If Stone killed this man he did it in self-defence—I am sure of that. What is troubling me is the present whereabouts of Stone and this secret cipher."

"That is the thing which is baffling me," said Lee. "If Stone did kill Gustave Fulk, what has happened to the picture? If Stone has it, he would have reported to you directly, wouldn't he?"

"Certainly he would, Mr. Lee."

Lee was silent for a few moments. There was a missing link somewhere. If he could only discover it the solution of this baffling problem would be within his grasp.

"Do you know if this man, Gustave Fulk, was acting for anybody, Sir Vrymer?" he asked presently. "What was his object in stealing the cipher?"

"I will tell you, Mr. Lee. Just before the loss of this cipher was discovered a highly confidential communication was sent us by our Paris embassy. The communication reached London after being strangely delayed en route, and we have reason to believe that during that time the envelope was opened and a copy made of the contents."

"May I ask what was the nature of that communication, Sir Vrymer?"

The minister hesitated a moment before replying.

"I trust you implicitly, Mr. Lee," he said, "therefore I will answer your question. I have not forgotten the important services you were able to render me on another occasion. The communication contained the text of the Anglo-French agreement on the Turkish question."

"And it was in code?"

"It was in code, Mr. Lee; but the stolen cipher is a key to the code, and anyone having it would be able to read the agreement."

"You say the communication was highly confidential, sir?"

"So highly confidential, Mr. Lee, that we must prevent its disclosure at all costs. The position is fraught with anxieties. If a premature disclosure of the agreement were made it would possibly lead to grave international complications."

"You say it was the text of the Anglo-French agreement on the Turkish question, Sir Vrymer. In that case, would not the certain Government be prepared to pay a big price to gain possession of this stolen cipher?"

"Precisely, Mr. Lee. I may tell you that we suspect a certain Turkish official named Kalib Pasha, who came over for the Peace Conference, of being concerned in making a copy of the agreement."

"And do you know his present whereabouts?"

Sir Vrymer shook his head.

"Unfortunately, we have lost trace of him," he said.

"One other question, Sir Vrymer. The French authorities are naturally acquainted with all that has happened. It will be to their interests as well as ours to regain possession of the stolen cipher."

"Naturally, Mr. Lee."

"And are you aware of what efforts they are making towards its recovery?"

"No; their Secret Service works as silently as ours, and they would not inform me of its movements. Of course, directly they recovered the cipher they would advise me of the fact. But why do you ask?"

"For several reasons, Sir Vrymer. One is that the faked copy of the picture was stolen yesterday, and it has just occurred to me that the French Secret Service might be responsible."

"And what are you going to do, Mr. Lee?"

The question was asked with forced indifference; but the anxiety behind the minister's words did not escape Lee's keen observation.

"A tragedy occurred in the Veuxpillo Galleries on Tuesday night, Sir Vrymer," he said quietly. "Mr. Mayn, the manager, has placed the case in my hands. Since Stone was in the south room about the time the crime took place, I naturally suspect him of knowing something about it. My next step, therefore, will be to find James Stone."

The minister held out his hand.

"Then you can kill two birds with one stone, Mr. Lee," he said, "for if you find out what has happened to Stone you will doubtless also discover the whereabouts of the stolen cipher. At any rate, I place that commission in your hands; in pursuing your own private work I ask you also to look after the interests of your country."

Lee gripped the outstretched hand in his own.

"I understand, Sir Vrymer," he said.

"And now, Lee, I am going to ask you to leave by the back entrance. It will be safer. We do not know who may have followed you here, and, as I am leaving now myself, I

will give you a lift in my car. If you should want to see me again you had better come to Whitehall Court."

CHAPTER 10.

The Blank Paper Speaks.

NIPPER gasped with amazement when Nelson Lee told him who the chief was he had seen to see, and all that had transpired from that meeting, but he had little time to revel in his amazement, for Inspector Frenton called again.

The Yard man tried to bully Lee into telling what he had so far discovered about the murder in the Veuxpillo Galleries, but the detective was not to be so easily drawn. Frenton explained that the missing caretaker had been found in a cheap lodging-house. The man had been lured from his post by means of a bogus message, and drugged.

Lee treated this piece of news as if it didn't matter. Frenton fumed with rage, and threatened to get Lee into the coroner's court with a subpoena and forcing him to talk. He went in a huff, but Lee was only too glad to see the back of him. There was something far greater at stake than Frenton's injured dignity.

The detective sat down in the swivel chair and glanced over his desk. Then he suddenly caught sight of an envelope addressed to himself and picked it up.

"What's this, Nipper?" he asked.

"Oh, I clean forgot about that, guv'nor," said his assistant. "I found it in the letter-box a short time ago."

"It's got no stamp on it, Nipper," said the detective, staring at it curiously. "It must have been delivered by hand. We'll see what's inside."

He tore the envelope across and drew out a piece of notepaper. On it was written in block letters the following brief communication:

"Greetings to Monsieur Lee.—It was shame to lock the poor Nipper in the cellar. But he would follow me, and I could not throw him off. He is like the brave Wolf, that boy, he takes a grip and will not leave go. I hope, Monsieur Lee will have the good success."

Nelson Lee read the missive through in silence, then handed it to his assistant.

"Just cast your eyes over that, Nipper," he said.

Nipper's mouth dropped open as he read the strange communication.

"What on earth does it mean, guv'nor? Wonder who she is—and where was this sent from?"

"The address has been torn off—you can see that, Nipper. And the writing is in block letters. Our lady friend is evidently not very anxious to disclose her identity."

"But she seems to know all about us, guv'nor. Haven't you the slightest idea who she can be?"

A look of abstraction had come into the detective's eyes. He did think of Made-moiselle Paulette Lebrun of the French Secret Service, but he didn't definitely mention her.

"By the way she writes English, Nipper, I should think she must be a French woman."

Nipper still held the slip of paper in his hand.

"Seems quite a friendly little note, at any rate, guv'nor," he said.

"Yes, it does, young 'un. You'd better give it to me. I'll put it in my pocket-book. It's not much, but I'll keep it as a souvenir."

He took out his pocket-case, and, folding the note up, pushed it in the cover. As he withdrew his fingers he dragged out another half-sheet of notepaper.

Lee glanced casually on either side; the paper was quite blank. He crumpled it in his hand, and was about to throw it in the waste-paper basket, when he hesitated, as if something had occurred to him. Then he unfolded the paper again, and, smoothing it out flat on his desk, sat eyeing it critically.

He remembered now what it was. It was the piece of paper he had found in the Veux-pillo Galleries on the morning after the crime. It was lodged beneath the wooden rail, and the reason why it had so interested him was because it was perfectly clean, while his fingers had been covered with dust. Evidently, the paper had fallen there quite recently.

The detective turned it over and over in his hand.

"If it could only speak," he muttered below his breath, and stared at it with a frown on his face. He ran his fingers over the surface several times, feeling the texture critically, then smelt it to see if it had any scent.

A strange look came to his eyes. He turned swiftly to his assistant, and only the faint note of eagerness in his voice betrayed the excitement he felt. He had detected a faint aroma that indicated a probable way of extracting the secret from the paper.

"Nipper!" he said sharply. "Get me a lemon—quickly!"

"A lemon, guv'nor?"

"I said, a lemon, Nipper."

Something in the detective's voice warned Nipper that it would not be wise to argue at the present moment. He hurried outside and returned in a few moments with the required lemon.

"Right, Nipper. Now bring me the test-tube rack, and the chemical cabinet."

Again Nipper hastened to obey.

The detective took out his pocket-knife, and, slicing the lemon in halves, squeezed a little of the juice in a test-tube. Then he busied himself with a number of bottles of various shapes and colours, adding a few drops out of this one, and pouring a little more out of another. Every now and then he shook the solution vigorously, and allowed the effervescence to subside before proceeding.

Finally he seemed satisfied with the result, and, standing the test-tube in the rack, waited while the solution cleared into a pure amber liquid. His assistant stood by his elbow, watching him in silent wonderment, and not daring to ask any questions.

Presently, Lee picked up a camel-hair brush and dipped it into the liquid in the test-tube, and with a few quick passes, painted over the surface of the piece of paper.

For a few minutes he sat staring at it intently. But nothing happened—the paper still remained blank. A shade of disappointment passed over Lee's face. He turned the paper over and repeated the process on the other side.

The result was almost instantaneous. The piece of paper acted like a photographic plate when placed in the developing solution in the dark room. Before the eyes of the detective and his astonished assistant, there appeared on the white surface a faint scrawl, which grew more and more distinct every moment.

Nelson Lee had performed the seemingly impossible—he had made the piece of paper speak!

"Shakes alive!" muttered Nipper, staring at the strange, illegible writing as if loth to believe his eyes. "If that don't knock Maskelyne and Devant's mysteries into a cocked hat!"

But Lee was oblivious of his assistant's bewildered surprise. He was carefully scrutinising the writing, and he saw immediately that it was some foreign tongue. For the moment he was nonplussed, then he recognised the characters to be Arabic.

The detective had a sufficient smattering of the tongue to be able to make himself understood in Arabic, but when it came to reading the language, it was quite another thing—especially as the writing itself was none too legible. He ran his eyes swiftly down the page and gave a slight start as his glance rested on the signature that was scrawled at the bottom.

Crabbed and ill formed as the letters were, he could not fail to recognise what they were. It was the signature of Kalib Pasha!

Even Lee's impassive face lost for a moment its imperturbability. It was impossible for him to over-estimate the importance of this discovery. What amazing piece of information was contained in that letter? What was the secret nature of this communication that had led the writer to take the precaution of using invisible ink?

But there was no time to waste. The surface of the paper was getting dry, and already the ink was fading away into invisibility again.

"Nipper," he said breathlessly, "don't ask questions. I'll tell you everything afterwards. Get a sheet of paper, quick, and make a copy of this letter. I'll do the same."

Lee set to work at high speed. As near as possible he made an exact copy of the document. But the writing was becoming

very faint by the time he had got to the signature.

Nipper was not yet finished; he was not so expert with the pen as the detective. The writing was almost unreadable before he got to the last line, and before he could complete it the ink had quite disappeared. The sheet was blank again; on its surface was no sign of the secret it had contained.

"That'll do, Nipper," said Lee. "I asked you to make a copy so as to check mine. If I happen to have taken anything down wrong no doubt it'll be all right on yours. Understand?"

"I've got you, so far, guv'nor," replied Nipper. "But I don't know what it's all about."

"That will come later," said Lee, placing the scrawled notes in an envelope and handing them to his assistant. "I want you to take them to Professor Bailey and wait for a reply. I've put a note inside explaining everything, but I'll get on the 'phone to him immediately, and tell him you're coming. You know where to find him—the School of Modern Science, at Hampstead."

"I know, guv'nor. I've been there before."

"Off you go, then!"

Lee got through to the professor a few minutes after his assistant had left and made matters clear. Then he replaced the receiver and leant back in his chair. He could hardly retain his impatience. Everything depended on the contents of that letter.

The mystery had reached a stage now when he wanted some fresh clue to help him solve the problems that confronted him. He hoped to find that clue in this secret letter written in the invisible ink.

He fell to pondering over the whole strange business, going through every detail, and seeing if he had failed to take into consideration any essential fact.

But always his mind seemed to come round to that absorbing question: Where was James Stone? What had happened to the famous King's spy? What part had he played in the crime at the Veuxpillo Galleries; what was the meaning of those blood-stained fingerprints?

He was still wrestling with his problem some considerable time later when Nipper returned from Hampstead.

"Ah, Nipper!" he said. "Have you done the useful?"

"Yes, guv'nor! Here's Professor Bailey's answer."

With a feeling that everything hung in the balance, Lee opened the blue envelope and took out the enclosures. One was a brief covering letter from the professor, which hardly interested him.

He picked up the other sheet on which was written the translation of the secret message, and as he read it through that queer, set expression came into Lee's face, which always indicated to Nipper that the detective had made some extraordinary discovery.

On the sheet of paper, in Professor Bailey's handwriting, was written this strange message:

"Watch Gustave Fulk very closely. He is no longer to be trusted. The picture has been taken to London. It is at present hanging in the Veuxpillo Galleries, and its number is forty-seven. You will know best how to gain possession of it. They are observing my movements very closely; everything I do is known, so once you have the picture in your possession follow me immediately to Algiers. You know where we met before—the Ak-el-baran—at the foot of the Kasbah. I say, watch Gustave Fulk! Do not fail me! You know the penalty.—'Kalib Pasha.'"

Nelson Lee handed the missive to Nipper in silence. It was clear to him now. This letter had explained the whole thing.

So, there was a third person in the Veuxpillo Galleries on Tuesday night—there must have been for this letter to have got in the south room. It did not belong to the murdered man, and it certainly wasn't sent to James Stone.

And it was this unknown third person who had killed Gustave Fulk; there could be no doubt of that. Gustave Fulk had attempted to betray his comrades. Very likely some other country had offered him a big price for the secret cipher, and he had determined to gain possession of it.

Being a clever painter, he had made a copy of the Murillo while it hung in the Paris Salon. He had crossed to England and succeeded in substituting the fake for the genuine picture. Then, at the last moment, this third person had intervened with such a tragic result.

Nelson Lee turned to his assistant, who was still staring at the letter.

"We're leaving London in two hours, Nipper," he said quietly. "See that you have everything ready, and travel as light as possible. We're taking Wolf with us."

"Leaving London, guv'nor?" echoed Nipper, not quite sure that he had heard right. "Where are we off to, now?"

"To Algiers, young 'un!"

CHAPTER 11.

While Dawn was Breaking.

KALIB PASHA, the treacherous Turk, was in Algiers, waiting to receive the stolen cipher from his confederate. Other people, besides Nelson Lee, knew that. James Stone, the King's spy, knew it, and having been too late in arriving at the Veuxpillo Galleries, he had gone at once to Algiers, to keep a close watch on the Pasha.

And Mademoiselle Paulette Lebrun, having also been too late, and having failed to find what she wanted in the shop of Charles Osburn, had also decided to concentrate her attention on Kalib Pasha. She, too, was in Algiers. She it was, who, anticipating trouble, had asked for help from the headquarters of the French Secret Service, in Paris.

So it came about that Bervais travelled south across France in the same train in which Nelson Lee, Nipper and Wolf travelled. And none of them were aware of this important coincidence, but settled down to travel as comfortably as possible and to pass the dreary hours away as best they could in patience.

It was now about midnight. For nearly five hours the express had been rushing on through the night, tearing up mile upon mile of its long journey across France to the south and Marseilles.

Even Nelson Lee and Nipper, and the faithful Alsatian, had at last succumbed to the fatigues of the day. Coiled up in their narrow bunks the detective and his assistant slept peacefully, and forgot the toils and troubles of their strenuous lives. The dog slumbered restlessly at his master's feet.

Except for the thin edge of light that still crept beneath the blinds of the two adjacent compartments, the long line of sleeping cars was wrapped in darkness. Evidently all the passengers, except those two, had followed Lee's example, and had taken themselves to their bunks.

In one of these compartments was an Arab with a broken nose—the man of whom the French Secret Service had heard rumours, and suspected. He sat in the corner of the coupé with his back to the engine, and for the last hour or more he had not moved.

Only the smouldering fire in his dark sinister eyes showed that he was awake and watchful. He still clasped in his hands the leather case, as if its contents were too valuable for him to let it go from his grasp.

Silent, morose and taciturn, he sat there like a graven image; and except for the occasional flicker of an eyelid, not a muscle of his face moved, and from one hour's end to another he never shifted his position from the corner of his coupé.

He was a fanatic, imbued with but one thought. And that was to fulfil his mission, to do his master's bidding, to carry the thing that was in his case safely to Kalib Pasha.

In the adjoining coupé sat Bervais, the French agent. He also sat in the corner, but facing the engine, so that only a slight wooden partition separated him from the stranger next door.

But Bervais was as restless as his neighbour was still and tranquil. He had just rung

the bell for the third time in the last hour.

"A coffee!" he asked of the steward who answered the summons.

"You will want nothing else to-night, sir?" asked the man, as he laid the tray on the seat beside the passenger and stifled a yawn.

The request was more in the nature of an



In the circle of glowering faces the disguised Nelson Lee and Wolf, of that sinister crowd long enough to enable Nipper to recognize

ultimatum than a question. Bervais saw the man's meaning; he yawned himself through utter weariness.

"No," he said. "You can turn in. I shall—after I've drunk this."

The steward nodded and left the compartment.

But, weary as he was, Bervais had no intention of turning in. He had seen the Arab with the broken nose—the man for

whom the French Secret Service was looking—the man for whom Kalib Pasha was waiting in Algiers! Fortune to-night had placed in Bervais' hands too big an enterprise for him to ruin his chances by giving way to such weaknesses of the flesh.

Already there flitted before his eyes the

Not until the night was passing away and the first faint flush of dawn was quivering in the eastern sky did he stir in his corner. Then he suddenly sat up with a start.

For the moment he could not believe that he had been asleep. Surely he had not been guilty of such a gross betrayal of his trust? He rubbed his eyes and stared blinkingly around. Then, for the first time, he noticed the faint tinge of dawn in the eastern sky that crept through the corner of his blind.

Then he had slept! He must have slept for some hours!

Bervais sprang frantically to his feet, dragged open the door and stepped out into the corridor. He had flung precaution to the winds now, his one idea was to retrieve this disgraceful error of which he had been guilty. He stepped quickly to the next compartment, took a key from his pocket, and, unlocking the door, entered without a moment's hesitation.

The stranger had not moved since he had last peered beneath the blind; he sat in the same corner, with his back to the engine, and in his hands he still grasped the leather wallet. But at Bervais' entry he did not look up; his eyes were closed. He, too, had at last succumbed to Nature's demands—for he was asleep.

Luck was on Bervais' side—in spite of the fact that he had been caught napping in the real sense of the word. Nobody was astir yet; it was too early for that. For an hour or so more he could depend on being undisturbed.

Very stealthily Bervais crept towards the sleeping man. His nerves were in a state of tension; the creak of his boots sounded to him like a pistol-shot. Then he put out his hands to the leather wallet.

Inch by inch he raised it from the nerveless fingers. He could feel the man's breath fanning his hands; he dared not breathe himself for fear of

waking him. Slowly and with infinite care he lifted the wallet from the other's grasp. Presently his patience was rewarded—the wallet was his.

With the wallet in his hand Bervais crept quietly out of the compartment back into his own. There he unloosened the strap and opened it with trembling fingers. The thing he sought was there; he drew it out—a thick wad of canvas, folded, with the painting of Murillo inside.



his hound, commenced their sham fight. Could they hold the attention over the stolen document from one of the watching Arabs?

alluring prospects of a speedy promotion if he would but play his cards right. There must be no sleep for him to-night—not until his work was done, at all events.

And yet, strangely enough, while Bervais was urging on himself the necessity of keeping awake, he was already asleep. Outraged Nature had at last come into her own. Bervais slept! And while he slept in the corner of his coupé he dreamed pleasantly of his promotion, and thought he was awake.

Bervais lifted his attache-case from the rack, and took out another wad of canvas. It was the faked Murillo that Monsieur Maurice had cut out from the frame in the house in the Robespierre Gardens. He would put the fake back in the leather wallet and then replace it in the hands of the sleeping man.

It was a clever ruse on the part of Bervais. The stranger next door would never find out what had happened until it was too late, and by that time Bervais would be back in Paris with the stolen cipher in his possession.

It was certainly a cunning move; and if Fate had continued to smile on Bervais this story might have had a different ending.

But at the very moment when he was most in need of it, Bervais' luck deserted him. As he was in the act of inserting the faked Murillo in the leather wallet, the door of his coupé was flung violently open; there was a snarl of rage, and before Bervais could do anything he was grasped round the waist by two lean, wiry arms.

The man with the broken nose had suddenly awakened to discover his loss. Like a tiger robbed of its prey, he was now driven to fury to recover it.

Backwards and forward the two men swayed to the rocking of the train. Bervais was a good athlete; he could hold his own with most men in a rough-and-tumble. The surprise attack had taken him at a momentary disadvantage; his foe had grasped him from behind, but by squirming violently he managed to throw him off, and for a moment they faced each other.

Then Bervais whipped out his revolver; but before he could level it his adversary had sprung on him again, and a desperate struggle began, while the train still thundered on through the cold, silent night.

Writhing and twisting, they fought up and down the narrow coupé. No words were exchanged; there was no quarter asked or given; each man knew that he was fighting for dear life. Both were panting breathlessly; the sweat was pouring down their faces; yet neither paused in the fierce, deadly contest.

Bervais was strong; but his foe was a fanatic. He fought with the instincts of a tiger, and used his hands, nails, teeth and feet like a wild cat at bay. The revolver had fallen to the seat. Presently Bervais managed to snatch it up again. The cold muzzle touched the other man's forehead; the Arab's sinewy fingers grasped at Bervais' wrist and jerked it up. There was a flash and a report that was lost in the thunder of the train, and the furious struggle still continued with undismayed frenzy.

Now they were on the floor, twisting over and over like two eels, then on the seat. Sometimes one seemed to gain the advantage, sometimes the other. Both men's faces were now lacerated and torn, but they did not pause for breath; the fight still went on.

They were up against the door now. The Arab was gripping his adversary's throat, and his eyes gleamed like two live coals. Bervais was gasping for breath; his strength was failing him.

The Arab suddenly relinquished his grasp and gave a deft twist to the handle of the door. The wind caught it and flung it open. The next moment, with a despairing cry, Bervais went hurtling backwards and disappeared.

The Arab dragged the door to and stood there, breathing heavily. Then he turned and looked for the leather wallet. It had been kicked beneath the seat. He picked it up, and, seeing the dispatch case on the seat that had belonged to Bervais, flung it out of the window. After straightening up the compartment, he stepped out into the corridor and silently returned to his own coupé.

The train still rushed on its journey. The grey dawn had now broken over the broad bosom of the earth. Presently the red rim of the sun appeared in the east.

Yet another two or three hours were to elapse before any of the occupants of the train had a suspicion of the grim tragedy that had been enacted at the break of dawn.

CHAPTER 12.

The Black Cloth Button.

NIPPER sat up with a yawn and blinked around in a dazed sort of fashion. At first he could not think where he was or what was happening. Then everything came crowding back into his mind.

He glanced out of the window. The sun was some yards above the horizon, and blazing like a white ball of fire. The broad undulating fields of France—its vineyards and orchards—lay glistening in the morning's dew.

He clambered out of his bunk and stuck his head out into the corridor. Lee was already dressed. He was standing by the window, smoking a cigarette and contemplatively watching the passing landscape. Wolf was there, too, standing on his hind legs with his paws on the window-frame, and with his great head waving to and fro in the rush of air.

The detective turned his head, and, seeing his assistant, nodded pleasantly.

"Had a good sleep, Nipper?" he asked.

"I should say so, guv'nor!" replied Nipper, a little ashamed of his laziness. "But I could just do with a cup of tea!"

"Don't know about tea, Nipper, but you can have some coffee. I could do with a cup myself. Just get into your things. I'll ring for the attendant."

It did not take Nipper long to dress. As he came along the corridor, rubbing his face with the towel, he almost collided with the steward who was carrying the tray of coffee. He followed the man into Lee's coupé.

The steward cast an anxious look at Wolf, hurriedly deposited the tray in the corner and backed towards the door. Then he paused. He was a talkative little man, and he had news that was worrying him.

"It is very strange, monsieur," he began, in a confidential tone, "but there is a gentleman missing from the train."

Lee felt suddenly interested. Then raised his eyebrows casually.

"Missing?" he said. "How?"

The steward glanced quickly over his shoulder, then continued in the same confidential tone:

"He was up very late last night, m'sieur. At twelve o'clock I took him a coffee. He seemed very strange then. This morning he is not in the coupé, and his bed has not been slept in."

"But he may be on the train somewhere," said Lee.

The man shook his head doubtfully.

"He may be, m'sieur," he said. "But I do not think so."

The detective regarded him in silence for a moment.

"You had better make a few inquiries," he said. "Let me know if you cannot find him on the train."

"Very good, m'sieur," said the man, and, stepping out into the corridor, closed the door softly behind him.

Nipper had not been able to follow the conversation, but he saw that something was amiss.

"What's the trouble, guv'nor?" he asked.

"Passenger mysteriously disappeared during the night," said the detective, slowly sipping his coffee.

"Disappeared, guv'nor?"

"Yes—so the steward says. He took him a coffee at twelve o'clock; this morning he is not to be found anywhere, and his bed has not been slept in."

"That's rummy, guv'nor. Mysteries seem to chase us wherever we go. Wonder what could have happened?"

"May be still on the train, Nipper. At any rate the man's going to make a few inquiries and let me know."

They drank their coffee in silence, and turned their attention to the window again. The sun was getting higher and higher now, the sky was blue, and the dry, bracing, exhilarating air that came through the open window soon dispelled any lingering touch of mystery. Lee had almost forgotten the incident when the steward silently entered the coupé again.

"It seems that he is missing, m'sieur," he said.

"You have made inquiries?"

The man nodded positively.

"He is not on the train, m'sieur."

"Which is his compartment?" Lee asked.

The steward answered with a trace of eagerness in his voice, as if he hoped Lee would investigate the circumstances.

"It is the twelfth coupé down, m'sieur," he said. "Number eight."

"Then I will have a look at it."

Lee turned to Nipper.

"Come on, Nipper!" he said. "This is getting interesting."

They stepped outside and closed the door behind them.

"Good dog, Wolf!" said Lee. "Stay there, old fellow." And he began to follow the steward along the corridor.

At coupé number eight they stopped. The steward opened the door and they passed inside.

Lee glanced curiously around the small compartment. As the steward had said, the bed had not been slept in. To the unexperienced eye, however, there were no other signs to arouse suspicion that anything untoward had happened.

But Nelson Lee knew immediately that something was amiss. There was no deceiving his keen, observant eyes. He noted the little, jagged tears in the floor rug, the ripped-up blind, and several other evidences of the fierce struggle that had gone on at the break of dawn.

At that moment the steward left the compartment to attend to a call. Lee turned to Nipper.

"This may prove interesting, after all," he said. "If I am not greatly mistaken something dramatic happened in this coupé after the steward left it at twelve o'clock last night."

He began to make a careful scrutiny of his surroundings, closely examined the partitions and woodwork. There was no doubt about it, a struggle of some sort had occurred here quite recently. The smears on the woodwork were caused by someone's fingers clutching at it for support. The meaning of the marks was quite apparent to Lee.

He stared up at the white-painted ceiling, then gave a quick exclamation.

"See, Nipper!" he said. "That hole was made by a revolver-shot. The bullet is still embedded in the woodwork."

"Jove, guv'nor, you're right!" said his assistant. "What on earth could have happened? Wonder who fired it?"

"Goodness knows, Nipper! But that's evidently not been there long."

Lee suddenly noticed something lying in the shadow of the door. He stooped to the floor and picked it up. It was a button—just a disc of metal covered with black cloth. But the peculiar part about it was that in one place the edge was a little flattened as if the machine had worked too near the edge of the sheet of metal from which the disc had been stamped.

After minutely examining it, Lee handed it to his assistant.

"Do you remember my finding a button like that, Nipper, in the Veuxpillo Galleries on the morning after the crime?"

"Yes, guv'nor, you're right there! It certainly was identical with this. But it's not a very uncommon sort of button. It may simply be a coincidence."

"It may be, Nipper. But there is another small detail about it that you haven't noticed. One edge is a little flat. Do you see?"

"So it is, guv'nor!"

Lee gave a thin smile.

"There may be nothing in it, Nipper," he said. "But it's certainly a remarkable coincidence."

He knelt down on the floor and began to grope under the seat. Then his fingers closed on something crisp like a thick piece of brown paper. He dragged it out and rose to his feet. Then even Lee's habitual calm left him, and he gave a quick gasp of amazement.

In his hands he held the faked copy of the Murillo!

The detective stared at the painted canvas as if unable to believe his eyes. What did this astonishing discovery mean? How had the faked Murillo got there?

Then the finding of the black cloth button was no coincidence. It had been torn off a man's coat, and that man had been in the south room of the Veuxpillo Galleries on the night of the crime.

But who was this man? And where was he now?

Was he the man who was missing now from the train? And, if so, what had happened to him during the night? There had been a struggle of some kind in this coupé; someone had fired a revolver. There was, therefore, a second man to be accounted for. Had he also left the train, or was he still on it?

The more Lee probed the problem the more mysterious it seemed to become. He was still deep in thought when the steward returned a few minutes later.

"You have not found anything, m'sieur?" he asked anxiously.

Lee shook his head. He had hastily concealed the painting under his coat for certain reasons of his own.

"I am afraid it is a case of suicide," he said. "What was the gentleman like? Was he a countryman of yours?"

"Ah, yes, m'sieur; a young man—about thirty, I should think. But very highly strung. I could see that."

"And how was he dressed?"

"In grey serge, m'sieur. But I did not observe very closely."

"You are sure it was grey serge?" asked the detective.

"Quite sure of the colour, m'sieur."

Lee thought of the black cloth button that was in his pocket. Somehow his reasoning was at fault; the evidence did not tally. One would not expect to find black cloth buttons on a grey serge coat. But there was a second man to be accounted for; possibly the button had been wrenched from his coat.

"Do the occupants on either side know about this?" he asked.

"Yes, m'sieur. I have asked them if they remember being disturbed in the night, but they heard nothing strange."

"Then the matter had better be reported."

The man nodded.

"Nothing can be done until we reach Lyons, m'sieur," he said. "It is no use stopping now."

"When do you expect to reach Lyons?"

"Three-quarters of an hour, m'sieur, or even less."

"Then we'd better get some breakfast while there's time," said the detective. "Come on, Nipper, we're both pretty hungry."

As they passed number nine coupé on the way to the restaurant car, Lee caught a glimpse of the occupant. The man was in his shirt-sleeves, but his face did not impress Lee very favourably. He noted the swarthy features, the high, prominent cheek-bones, and the ugly, broken nose, and decided to renew his observations later on.

It was while Lee was hurrying across the station approach at Lyons to catch the Marseilles train that the next event occurred. A man was just getting into a taxi, and as Lee passed he recognised his face. It was the man with the broken nose, who had occupied coupé number nine.

But there was another important detail that the detective's keen eyes had noted almost unconsciously, and even then he did not appreciate its significance until he had gone a dozen steps or so. Then he suddenly halted and swung round on his heel. The man was wearing a black coat, and it was fastened with one button only; the two lower ones were missing.

The detective stood there in doubtful hesitation. The taxi had already drawn away from the kerb, and was moving out of the station. For an instant he was minded to follow it. Then he thought of Nipper and Wolf, and the train he was to catch, and decided to let the matter drop.

But while the train was on its way to Marseilles, Lee's mind was busy with a hundred and one harassing questions. He felt sure that the man with the broken nose had murdered Gustave Fulk in the Veuxpillo Galleries. Fulk had stolen the real Murillo and substituted the fake picture, only to lose his life and his booty as well.

But, in that case, the man with the broken nose should have had the real portrait in his possession, with the stolen cipher attached to it. The French Secret Service had obtained the faked picture from Mr. Mayn, only to discover how they had been forestalled. How, then, did that faked picture find its way to the train from Paris?

Maybe the missing man had had it with him. In that case, the missing man must surely have been a French Secret Service agent. Maybe he tried to steal the real picture from the man with the broken nose and substitute the faked one. It seemed that he had failed!

Of course, it was all guesswork, but the guesses were fitting in with the clues Nelson Lee had in his possession. In any case, he knew that the man with the broken nose was hastening to Algiers to meet Kalib Pasha.

"We shall meet again," said Nelson Lee grimly to himself.

CHAPTER 13.

The Mosque of Ak-el-Baran.

MADEMOISELLE PAULETTE LEBRUN, and James Stone, were both in Algiers, unknown to Nelson Lee. He had not stumbled across them, despite the fact that they were on the same task as himself; but, then, it was highly probable they were in disguise.

The detective had, however, found Kalib Pasha, and had found out much about the man. The significant thing he discovered was that the Turk made it a habit to go to the Mosque of Ak-el-Baran every evening. As the man with the broken nose had travelled from Paris on the same train as Nelson Lee it was feasible to suppose that he had arrived at Algiers about the same time and by the same boat and would lose no time in passing the stolen cipher to Kalib Pasha at the mosque.

"When that meeting takes place, I must be there," said Nelson Lee, and made his plans accordingly.

Punctually at eight o'clock, two turbaned figures, clad in loose burnouses, and with an Alsatian following close at their heels, passed down the narrow little side street of Ak-el-Baran, and entered the gaudily painted mosque.

Although nobody would have recognised them, one of these swarthy-looking Arabs was Nelson Lee, while the shorter of the two was Nipper. They entered the mosque without being questioned, and Wolf, who was too cunning to make himself conspicuous, crept in between his master's legs.

The place was dimly lit, and it was a few minutes before they could accustom their eyes to their surroundings. Then Lee perceived that the mosque was already crowded with dark figures, who squatted slipperless on the floor, but kept the centre of the place clear.

"Let's squat down here, Nipper," whispered the detective, "then we can get a good view of what's going on."

He sat down himself, and Nipper followed suit, with Wolf crouched between them.

"What a weird-looking place, guv'nor!" Nipper whispered. "Sort of gives one the creeps."

"You wait until the fun begins, Nipper; you'll feel it creepy then."

Lee was right; at that very moment the orchestra started up. The din was ghastly as the barbaric-looking drums struck up a fierce, rhythmic tattoo, to the accompaniment of a number of squealing flutes and whistles. Wolf was so moved that he lifted his head and howled in unison. But

Lee silenced him with a gesture of disapproval.

Then a number of half-naked dervishes rushed out from a room at the farther end and began dancing up and down the space in the centre, with frenzied cries and strange squirmings of their bodies. The barbaric music grew louder and quicker until it sounded like a fiendish racket, and the dancers worked themselves into a state of madness, writhing and shaking and waving their arms as they spun round in the centre of the floor.

The squatting audience remained silent and unmoved, as if the scene that was being enacted was quite an ordinary everyday affair. The dervishes rushed back from whence they came, and Nipper, at any rate, was too dazed, bewildered and disgusted by the men's antics to say anything.

"See that man who's just entered, Nipper?" whispered Lee. "He's the man with the broken nose who occupied coupé number nine, the man I missed at Lyons. There'll be something doing after all. See? He's just squatted down over yonder."

Nipper glanced over in the direction indicated.

"That's the man, right enough, guv'nor," he said excitedly. "Wonder what his game is now?"

"We'll keep our eyes skinned, Nipper."

The Arab with the broken nose took a swift glance round the room, as if he were searching for somebody. Then his eyes came to rest on a spot over on Lee's right.

The detective turned and looked in that direction. Just beyond the shadow of light a man was sitting at a little trestle-table. His face was thin and arrogant, and his forehead high and narrow. He appeared to be dressed in a European costume, but on his head he wore a bright red fez.

Nelson Lee knew at once who he was. It was Kalib Pasha—the Turkish official who had written that letter making an appointment at the Mosque of Ak-el-Baran. Things were going to happen to-night.

The music started up again at that moment with such suddenness that Wolf could hardly be restrained from repeating his last howling performance. This time a number of dusky maidens glided out from the room at the end and began to pirouette in the centre of the floor, brandishing their snake-like limbs to and fro, and wriggling up and down like eels.

Lee's attention, however, had been attracted to the door from which the dancers had emerged. Standing there, looking on unconcerned at the barbaric spectacle, was the slim, graceful figure of a girl. He could not see her very distinctly, but he

knew immediately that she was different from the rest.

Something about her calm, imperious air seemed to fascinate the detective. He wondered what she was and what she was doing in this ghastly den of barbarous rites and devilment. She was clothed in soft, flimsy draperies; her rounded arms were bare and—unlike the other coppery women—snow-white. She was shod in silver sandals, and her silken stockings were of the same colour. As the dim light shone on her golden bronze hair a cusp of jewels flashed forth innumerable points of fire.

The music suddenly rose to a crescendo again, and then sank to a low, melancholy thrumming. The girl in the flowing draperies and the silver sandals came slowly into the centre of the ring, and then began to glide gracefully to and fro in Salome fashion.

The priest eagerly watched her every movement, as if this were some new turn for which he was responsible and as if he were not quite certain of the result.

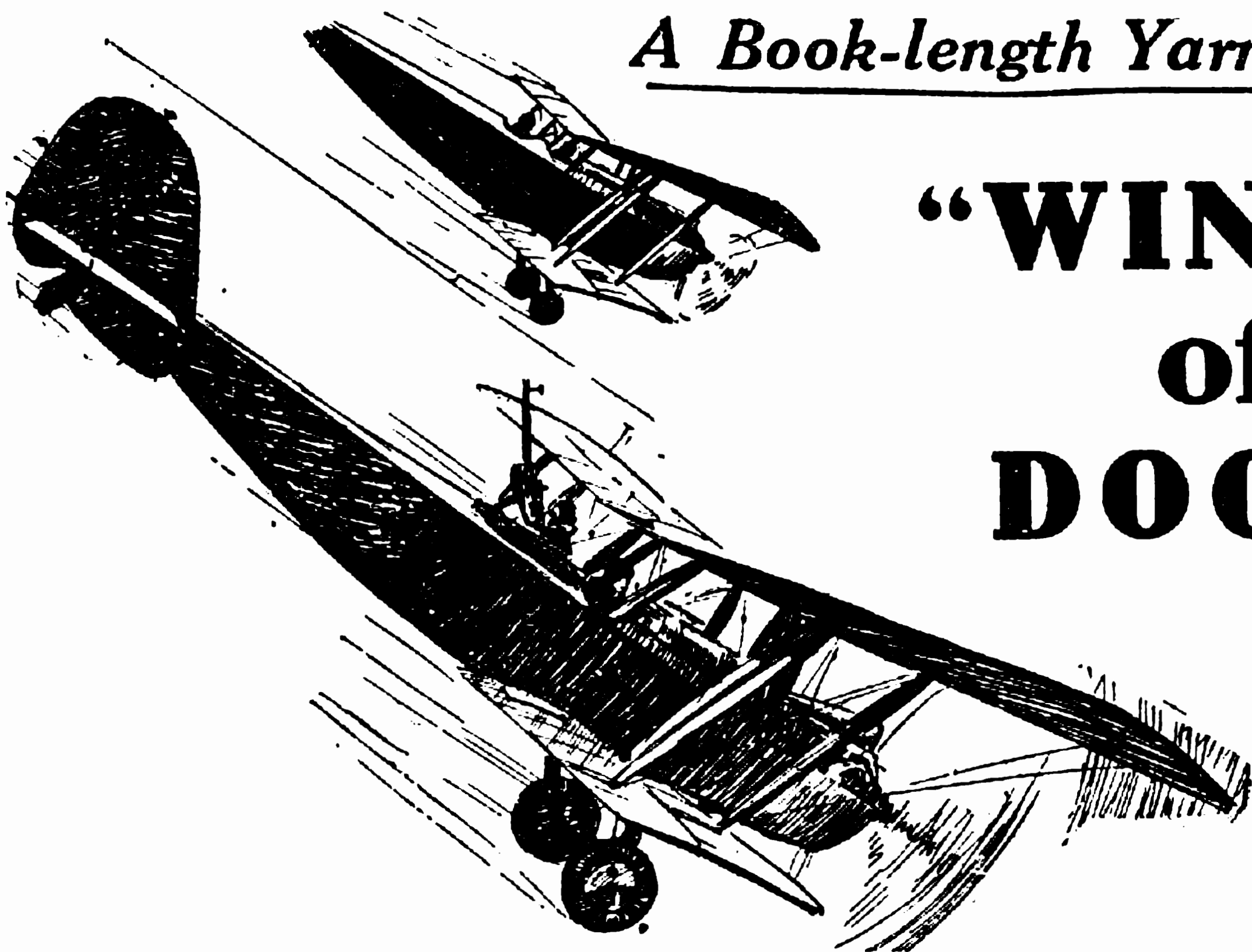
But as the detective's gaze now rested on the girl before him there flashed across his mind for the second time the vision of another woman—a woman of slender grace and charm, and with a mass of wavy golden hair crowning her white forehead.

Could this slender, graceful girl be Made-moiselle Paulette, the French Secret Service agent—the girl with the dark, alluring eyes, whose irresistible charm and beauty had overcome the strongest of men, and whose daring and courage had raised her so high in the services of her country?

At that moment the girl began to sing. She sang in French—a low, plaintive love-song, which thrilled Lee strangely, and even seemed to affect the audience of stolid, doltish natives. Her voice was soft

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and musical, like the hushed playing of a viola.

The song came to a finish, and the girl glided slowly round the circle of dark faces to the subdued throbbing of the tom-toms.

Lee glanced round for the Arab with the broken nose. He had just joined the man with the red fez. And at that moment the detective saw something pass between them—something that looked like a large leather wallet.

The girl was slowly gliding towards the trestle-table. In front of it she stopped and held out her white arms alluringly to the man in the red fez. His eyes were burning brightly, and a faint flush had mantled his sallow face. Lee could see that he was madly proud of being singled out in this fashion. He beckoned the girl and smiled, and she went and sat down by his side.

The tom-toms still kept up the rhythmic thrumming; the audience seemed to have reached a state of hypnotism; the natives were rocking themselves to and fro with a low, crooning moan. Lee decided that it was time to act.

"Nipper," he whispered, "Wolf and I are going to do a turn. See that fellow in the red fez? He's got a leather wallet. While I keep the pot boiling, make your way over to his side. When you see me bring out the faked painting, grab that wallet! Don't wait for me. Get it somehow, and make a bee-line for the hotel. Understand?"

Nipper nodded his head. He was trembling with excitement and the perspiration was streaming down his face. The prospect of something doing appealed to him—anything to break the frightful tension to which his nerves were strung.

Lee spoke a sharp word to Wolf, rose suddenly to his feet, and sprang into the centre of the floor. The Alsatian's body hurtled through the air at the same time, and landed by the side of his master.

The priest gave a startled exclamation, and half-rose from the floor; then he sank back again and stared stupidly at the strange Arab with his great savage dog. The orchestra seemed to regard this as quite a legitimate turn, and the tom-toms and flutes broke out into an infernal racket again.

Nipper watched his master in open-mouthed wonderment. Lee was getting Wolf to go through some of his familiar tricks. Nipper had often seen the dog perform in this manner, but to-night it seemed novel and unnatural—the strangeness of the place added a glamour to the performance.

For a time Lee contented himself with exhibiting Wolf's cleverness and cunning

to his strange, admiring audience. The dog knew his master's every movement and expression, and entered into the spirit of the thing with zest and keen enjoyment. They played together in the centre of the floor—leaping, turning and twisting about one another, while the drummers kept up their monotonous tattoo.

Then the detective began his star turn. He stepped back a few paces from the dog, then began to creep slowly towards him with his hands held out threateningly. Nipper, who could not keep his eyes from this spectacle, knew immediately what Lee was about. Wolf and his master were to have a sham fight.

As Lee slowly approached the animal, the dog crouched down on the floor and watched his master intently, with the rough hair along his spine bristling angrily and his great fangs bared. Then, with a roar of fury, he sprang straight at his master's throat.

Nelson Lee and Wolf rolled over and over each other on the floor, first one of them seeming to gain the advantage and then the other. They writhed and twisted and grappled with one another as if they were engaged in a struggle for life or death, and all the time the furious barking of the great dog sounded above the devil's tattoo of the orchestra.

Presently the detective disengaged himself from the scrimmage and, springing to his feet, raced frantically round and round the outside edge of the ring, with a look of utmost terror on his face. Wolf's teeth were buried in his burnous, and as he tried to shake off the dog's grip he swung the animal high over the sea of dark faces that spread around.

But Nipper knew now that, real as the fight appeared to the onlookers, it was all a sham. For as his master passed him he deliberately winked his eye, as much as to say, "How's this for a show, Nipper?" The youngster gave a grin of appreciation, and then suddenly remembered Lee's last injunction. He immediately began to wriggle himself in the direction of the table at which the man in the red fez was sitting.

Lee was now in the centre of the floor again, and had assumed the defensive. The Alsatian circled around his master, watching warily for an opening to make another attack; every now and then he leapt in and made snarling snaps at Lee's legs, his great jaws closing together like spring traps.

Then Lee made a dash at the Alsatian's head, and again they rolled over and over on the floor. A furious struggle ensued; for a time it was difficult to see which was man and which was dog. In the dim

yellow light it was impossible to think that those two writhing forms were merely shamming.

Once again Lee shook off the dog and sprang to his feet. He stood in the centre and spoke a quick word of command to Wolf, and the Alsatian immediately came to his side and crouched down submissively at his feet.

Nelson Lee lifted his right hand above his head, while his left went into the folds of his burnous. The barbaric music immediately hushed and died away, and a deathly silence brooded over the place.

Lee's eyes roved slowly over the sea of dark, tense faces until his gaze rested on the face of the man in the red fez. He was staring at the detective in silent fascination, while the girl at his side seemed just as deeply impressed. But, just behind, Lee had also seen the face of his young assistant, and, although no sign passed between them, he knew that Nipper was waiting for the signal agreed upon.

The detective spoke in a calm, clear voice, in Arabic.

"If Kalib Pasha is here," he said, "then, in the name of Allah, I command him to step forth, for here is Murillo's painting of Don Montino!"

And as he spoke the last words he dragged from the folds of his burnous a wad of canvas and, shaking it out, displayed the faked copy of the Murillo.

The effect was electrical. The man in the red fez gave a gasp of surprise, and his face went livid. Then he rose unsteadily to his feet and stepped towards the detective. But at the same moment a tall, big-boned man clad in a flowing burnous, who had been looking on from the rear, made a great spring and landed in the centre of the floor.

Then the girl in the silver sandals, and the broken-nosed Arab also rushed forward, and in a moment Lee found himself in the centre of an excited crowd struggling for possession of the painting.

In order to give his assistant time to get clear, Lee hid the Murillo in the folds of his burnous and tried to shake himself free from the hands that grabbed him.

For a few seconds the audience remained squatting on the floor, evidently thinking that they were now witnessing another turn; then, suddenly scenting that something was wrong, the crowd of dark-faced men began clambering to their feet and jostling one another round the little group in the centre.

Then the struggle suddenly became furious. The big-boned man picked up

the broken-nosed Arab as if he were a mere baby, and dashed him violently into the face of the Turk with the red fez. Then he turned swiftly to the detective.

"Just hand over that picture, you dirty heathen humbug," he exclaimed in English, "or I'll knock the sawdust out of you!"

He gripped Lee by the throat with one hand, and with his other tore open his burnous and dragged out the fake Murillo.

The detective struggled to get away, but the man's fingers were like steel springs, and his grip never relaxed. Dimly he saw two queer blue eyes staring fiercely into his own, and an irregular-featured face that seemed strangely familiar in spite of the brown stain that covered the skin.

In those few tense moments Lee had seldom thought more quickly.

"Twenty fathoms deep and twenty leagues away!" he gasped.

With a quick cry of surprise the man dropped his hold and stared at Lee as if he had seen a ghost.

"Who the deuce are you?" he asked in bewilderment.

Before Lee could make any reply, the lights were suddenly extinguished, and he found himself knocked over and being swept backwards and forwards in the crowd that surged in the centre of the mosque.

The confusion was indescribable, and the noise deafening. Still intoxicated with religious enthusiasm, the crowd shouted and screamed and fought each other in the darkness in an effort to find their way to the door.

Then, to add to the terror of the scene, a little burst of flame suddenly sprang from the inner chamber and spread fiercely along the dry wooden wall.

The mosque was on fire!

The scene that followed was appalling to behold. The panic-stricken natives fought with the frenzy of despair to escape from the burning building. A mad stampede was made for the narrow doors, and in a moment the mob of crazy men were crushed together in a living wedge, tearing each other with their nails in a paroxysm of terror.

Then, into this seething wall of human bodies, sprang the big-boned man with the queer blue eyes. Lying across his left shoulder was the figure of the girl in the silver sandals. Using his strong right arm as a battering-ram, he began to hew a path towards the door.

Before his incredible strength the living barricade seemed to melt like butter. Slowly but surely he carved his way

through the dense mass of bodies towards the doors. In those few moments his right arm seemed to work like a great steel tentacle—sawing, cleaving, and rending a path for himself and his unconscious burden.

And then once more he stood out in the open.

He stood for a moment, taking great deep breaths and filling his lungs with the fresh air. Then with the girl still lying across his shoulder, he strode swiftly down the little side street and made his way in the direction of the French quarter of the town.

As he walked down the wide boulevard of brilliantly lighted shops and gay cafés, many people turned to stare at this big man in the turban and the flowing burnous, carrying on his shoulder the graceful figure of the girl. But he took no heed of their idle curiosity, and something in his manner warned them to steer clear of his path.

He approached the hotel overlooking the harbour, but did not enter by the main entrance. Instead, he made his way round the back of the building, and, passing through a small wicket gate into the courtyard, mounted the outside iron spiral staircase, put there in case of fire, and entered a room on the second floor.

There he deposited his burden on a bed and began sprinkling her face with water. In a few seconds the girl opened her eyes and stared up at him wonderingly.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Have no fear, Mademoiselle Paulette," he said in a low voice, "you are quite safe—you are in your room in the hotel."

The girl glanced round the room and then rested her eyes on the man's face again.

"It is the big Monsieur Stone!" she said, with the light of recognition in her dark eyes.

"Yes, it is I right enough, mademoiselle," he answered. "But if you are all right I must go. You saw that man with the dog in the mosque? I know now who it was—it was Nelson Lee! I must go back and find him. I reckon he'll need all the help he can get! I don't know what his game is—what he was fooling there for—but I'm going back."

She stared at him for a moment, then started to her feet.

"Nelson Lee!" she gasped. "Of course—the man, and the brave dog—I ought to have guessed. But—go, m'sieu—I am all right!"

James Stone, the King's spy, rushed back to the burning mosque.

CHAPTER 14.

Lee's Thrilling Experience.

NELSON LEE had only a very hazy idea of those first few terrible moments in the blazing mosque.

When James Stone's iron grasp had relaxed from his throat he had stumbled back gasping for breath, and been swept hither and thither in the panic-stricken crowd. Then he received a violent blow on the head and sank down unconscious.

He could only have remained insensible for a few brief moments, however, for he suddenly came round to find himself lying in the centre of the mosque, staring up at the blackened ceiling. He climbed unsteadily to his feet and began to take stock of his position.

The place was like an inferno; the heat was terrific. The wall on one side was now a sheet of flame; the ornamental pilasters and the tinselled finery that was draped between them were wreathed in fire, and flung out showers of sparks, which threatened every moment to envelop the whole mosque in flames from floor to ceiling.

Lee hugged his burnous tightly around him and turned towards the doors. Escape was impossible that way. The entrance was blocked with human bodies; they were piled one upon the other. Most of them had already perished of suffocation; only those on the top still struggled feebly to find an escape from their dreadful doom.

Yet somehow he must find a way out. His position was critical. At any moment the ceiling might cave in and bury him in a tomb of flames. If he were to escape at all it must be now. The smoke and fumes were getting thicker. It was difficult to breathe. His throat was parched with the dry, intense heat.

He looked about him eagerly, searching for some loophole that might hold out some small hope of escaping from this dreadful vault of fire. And at that moment he came face to face with another figure that had suddenly risen from the floor.

He recognised him instantly, in spite of the crazy look in his face and wild, staring eyes. It was the man with the broken nose—the man who had come here to-night to keep the appointment with Kalib Pasha.

The Arab, too, seemed to recognise in the man before him his foe—one who would mean ruin for him unless he died—the man who somehow had found the Murillo. The Arab apparently thought that Lee had got hold of the real Murillo. It never occurred to him that anyone in Algiers could have the faked picture.

He peered into the detective's face for a few tense seconds with a look of fierce hatred in his eyes, then, with a howl of

demoniacal rage, flung himself on him. Lee had had the Murillo. During the first panic Kalib Pasha had discovered he had lost the wallet. Naturally, the Arab thought Lee was the thief!

Nelson Lee beat him off with a stinging blow in the face.

"Fool!" he cried fiercely. "Save yourself. In a moment it will be too late."

But the madman took no notice of the detective's warning cry. The blow had momentarily dazed him, but the next moment he sprang forward again with blazing eyes, and, although Lee did his best to ward him off, he could not prevent him coming to close quarters.

Biting, tearing, snarling, the Arab dragged Lee to the floor, where they rolled over and over among the burning embers, which were now dropping from the blazing pilasters. In vain Lee tried to tear the frenzied man's fingers from their tenacious grasp. The man clung to him like a limpet and fought with the fury of a wild-cat.

Lee struggled to his feet again, with his foe still clinging desperately to him. Up and down the blazing room they staggered, with the flames licking zigzag above their heads, and all around them, and throwing out showers of sparks and dense volumes of smoke. Then, with a superhuman effort, the detective wrenched himself from the Arab's grasp and flung him off.

The madman went staggering backwards across the floor of the mosque and crashed up against a blazing pilaster, which immediately broke under his weight. Then the architrave above, now without any support, caved in with a great burst of fire and engulfed him in a blazing mass of wreckage.

Then, for the second time that night, Lee remembered no more. The overpowering heat and the frightful exertions he had undergone were too much even for his iron constitution. He dropped to the floor, insensible.

When he came to again it was some moments before he could realise where he was. The events of a few minutes ago, and his terrible fight with the crazy Arab, seemed distant and remote in the present confused state of his mind. His body felt one huge blister, his tongue was swollen so that it seemed to occupy the whole space of his head.

He gazed vacantly up through the sweltering heat and smoke. A tornado seemed to be raging above his head—a tornado of hissing red fire. He appeared to be moving; the floor was slowly scraping against his cracked, blistered hands.

Suddenly his brain cleared of the fog that enveloped it. He knew instantly that

he was moving, that he was being dragged over the floor of the mosque. Something was gripping him by the collar of his burnous; he could feel the cloth tightening under his armpits each time his hands scraped the floor.

He wriggled himself over and scrambled to his knees. A hot, rasping tongue rubbed against his face like a flint file. He reached out his hand and felt the great, shaggy head of Wolf.

He could not see the dog. The hot, blinding smoke choked him. But he could feel his teeth tearing frantically at his burnous as the faithful animal sought to urge his beloved master forward. Crawling on his hands and knees, Lee allowed his trusty guide to direct him where he chose.

The floor of the mosque was like a hot plate. Innumerable glowing embers pierced and blistered his hands, but he still went on through the choking smoke. He trusted Wolf implicitly, yet he could not help wondering where he was going. In front was a great flame of fire. They were getting nearer and nearer to it.

Then Lee suddenly put his hands on mere emptiness. He lurched forward, felt a wooden rung beneath him, tried to save himself, and ended up by rolling down a flight of steps. A moment later he was brought up with a jolt at the bottom.

He felt the dog tugging at his burnous again, and began to crawl towards him. And as he started to move, a great rending noise sounded from up above; there was a series of ear-splitting reports, then a mass of blazing debris came hurtling down the steps.

He had escaped from this dreadful blazing furnace only a moment too soon. The blazing roof of the mosque had caved in.

Still led by the Alsatian, Lee crawled slowly along the dark tunnel. Presently the thick smoke fumes began to lift; cool wisps of fresh air smote against his parched, blistered face. Then he felt a flight of wooden steps leading upwards immediately in front of him, and, crawling up them, found himself out in the open once more.

It was then that Lee realised to the full the nerve-racking experience he had undergone. It was only by a miracle that he had escaped being incinerated in the burning mosque. Had not Wolf turned up at the fateful moment he would have been lying now amongst the blazing wreckage, and nothing would have been left of him but a charred cinder.

He tried to reach out to the brave dog, but fell back again with a dry, feeble sob. He was too weak and exhausted to move

any farther; he felt half-roasted, as if his body were desiccated of moisture.

The Alsatian lay at his side, panting desperately, his flanks heaving like bellows as he struggled for breath. The great hound was almost as exhausted as his master.

The burning mosque was now about a hundred yards away. Dense volumes of smoke still swept skywards, pierced by tongues of red flame. As he lay there Lee could hear a confusion of hoarse shouts and cries, and vague forms flitted about around the blazing debris like so many demons, vainly trying to stop the flames from spreading.

The secret entrance to the mosque came up in a little cobbled court, where the detective was now lying. He was comparatively safe where he was, the wind was blowing the other way, and the flames were not likely to advance in this direction.

He lay there as if in a waking dream, not attempting to move after that first painful effort, while random thoughts passed idly across his brain.

He might have lain thus for over an hour; he had no idea of the time. But, without seeing him go, he somehow knew that Wolf was no longer at his side. Poor old Wolf! What a brick he was! In that

last supreme effort to save his master he had all but perished himself.

Then Lee thought he heard footsteps approaching across the cobbled court. A moment later he felt the dog's nose gently rubbing against his parched face. Then a dark, turbaned figure bent over him and peered into his face.

Very tenderly the stranger put one arm under his shoulders and the other beneath his legs, and lifted him up as if he were an infant. He did not speak a word. Neither did Lee; he only wanted to lie still.

They began to move across the cobbled court, and through a winding passage out into the narrow street. Then the strange man in the turban and burnous went more swiftly. Lee did not take much heed of the rest of that journey. The gentle rocking motion seemed to soothe him. He closed his eyes and his mind became a blank.

CHAPTER 15.

A General Meeting.

LEE suddenly felt suddenly stinging cold touching against his parched lips. It brought him to his senses with staggering abruptness. Then a gentle trickle of icy water began to ooze down his dry throat.

"GUSSY DISCOVERS AMERICA!"



Tom Merry and Co., and Pongo, the dog, have many strange adventures on their way from New York to Arizona. Pongo in particular is always up to something, as you can see in the cover picture shown here! And to add to it all, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the swell of the Fourth-form at St. Jim's, falls in love! Get yourself a copy of this week's GEM and read this ripping yarn of schoolboy adventure! It's packed with thrills and laughter!

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It gave him a sensation of exquisite pain, but he gulped the cool, refreshing liquid eagerly and already began to feel a new man. For some moments he did not open his eyes; he was lying on a soft, downy bed, and the feeling of complete restfulness was too delicious to be disturbed.

Then a man spoke in a deep bass voice very close to him.

"By George," he muttered, "it is old Lee, right enough. What a wonder the fellow is!"

Lee tried to smile, but did not succeed very well. The muscles of his face seemed to require oiling. Then, almost mechanical, something prompted him to murmur:

"Twenty fathoms deep and twenty leagues away!"

The man gave vent to a deep chuckle.

"Blest if the fellow hasn't got it on the brain!" he said.

Then Lee opened his eyes.

A turbanned head was very near his; two queer blue eyes were looking at him tenderly from a familiar, irregular-featured face.

"You'd have it on the brain," he said, "if a great, hulking lump of a fellow was throttling your windpipe."

The big man laughed rather nervously, and impulsively held out his hand, then drew it back quickly.

"I won't shake your hand, Lee, old fellow," he said, with a little tremor in his voice, "but you can take it for granted."

The detective suddenly raised himself with an effort and sat up.

"Why, what's the matter with my hand, Stone?" he asked, gazing at it curiously. "Is it too dirty?"

"It's not too dirty, Lee, but it wants lubricating. You've been sitting too close to the fire. By gosh, man, but you'd have been nothing but a lump of desiccated soup if you'd remained there much longer. Here, take this pot of vaseline and rub it into your skin."

"I certainly seem rather sunburnt," laughed the detective, as he took the vaseline and started rubbing it into his hands.

"Don't talk, Lee. Keep quiet and rest yourself."

"But I'm going to talk, Stone. I've got lots to say, and I'm quite fit to say it. Just give me another drink, there's a good fellow. Not the glass, the jug—and fill it to the brim."

Lee took a long pull and heaved a sigh of intense satisfaction.

"Where's Wolf?" he asked suddenly.

The dog crawled out from under the bed and, resting his great head on the

counterpane, blinked up at his master, with a feeble wag of his tail.

Lee looked into the faithful animal's eyes, and could not find words to express himself. He glanced quickly at Stone. The two men eyed each other in silence for a moment. Then Stone spoke.

"He's the goods!" he said simply.

Wolf sank down contentedly on the floor, quite satisfied to have done his duty according to his canine code of "playing the game."

"Tell me what happened, Stone," said Lee, as he gently smeared the vaseline over his face.

"Not much to tell, Lee. I was in the mosque when it caught fire, and managed to save my skin. I returned there about an hour ago. This old dog suddenly pounced on me and began tearing at my burnous. I tried to beat him off, but he wouldn't leave me alone, so I followed him. And—to cut it short—found you lying in a little brick court at the back."

"You were in the mosque this evening, Stone?"

"Yes; and watched your thrilling performance. Snakes alive, Lee, but I was never so taken in before in my life! I never dreamt it was you. You were about the last person I expected to see in Algiers."

"D'you know why I'm here, Stone?"

"That's just what I'm bursting to know, Lee. Don't tell us the whole story now; that'll take too long. And I know it's much too interesting to spoil. Put it in a nutshell."

"Right, Stone! I'm here killing two birds with one stone."

The King's spy looked perplexed.

"For mercy's sake don't talk in parables!" he said.

"The first bird," continued the detective, unmindful of the interruption, "happens to be the bird who killed Gustave Fulk in the Veupillo Galleries last Tuesday week."

"Ah, now we're getting to it! So they've dragged in the famous Nelson Lee to solve the baffling mystery!"

"Precisely, Stone. And the famous Nelson Lee would like the equally famous James Stone to explain how he came to leave two bloodstained finger-prints on the frame of a certain painting that hung in the south room on the night of the crime."

James Stone looked somewhat startled.

"Good gracious, Lee," he exclaimed, "what a sleuth hound you are! But you don't suspect me of being implicated in the crime, do you?"

"I'm merely asking you for an explanation, Stone."

"Well, I'm not bound to tell you that, Lee, but I will. I went to the galleries for a certain reason, which I won't mention. But I was just too late. I tripped over this fellow in the dark, and must have got some of the blood on my fingers. Then, for the reason already mentioned, I lifted the picture away from the wall. And that's how the finger-prints came to be there."

"That's exactly what I thought, Stone. As for your reason for being there, you needn't keep that a secret, because I already know it. You were there after the secret cipher that was stolen from our Paris Embassy."

"The deuce, Lee, but you seem to know everything!"

"Well, naturally, Stone, since that happened to be the second bird to my stone," remarked the detective dryly.

"What do you mean?" asked Stone sharply.

"Wait until I've done with the first bird, Stone. It may interest you to know that the man who killed Gustave Fulk perished himself to-night in the fire at the mosque."

"He did?"

"Yes; but I'll tell you that story later on. And now for the second bird. I think my stone has killed that also. It was to find out where a certain James Stone had hidden himself, and incidentally to discover what had happened to the stolen cipher. I received those instructions from the lips of Sir Vrymer Fane himself."

Stone gave an ejaculation of astonishment.

"Phew, Lee," he exclaimed, "we shall have to call a special session to listen to your story."

Then, as an afterthought, he added quickly:

"But you haven't quite killed the second bird, Lee!"

"How?"

"You've found me!"

"Yes?"

"But you haven't found the stolen cipher!"

"I think I have, Stone. At least, I'm hoping that Nipper, my assistant, has it in his pocket at the present moment."

"Where is he, Lee? We must get hold of it quickly."

"What's that row outside in the corridor?" asked Lee suddenly.

"Somebody's coming," said Stone, and turned to the door just as it was thrust violently open, and Nipper and Mademoiselle Paulette burst into the room.

"It's the guv'nor!" shouted Nipper breathlessly, and in his relief and joy he would have flung himself on Lee if James Stone had not put out a restraining hand and held him back.

"Steady, youngster!" he said. "The boss isn't shaking hands to-day."

Then Nipper saw the detective's blistered hands and scorched eyebrows, and his mouth dropped.

"You're not badly hurt, are you, guv'nor?" he asked very anxiously.

"No, I'm all right, Nipper," said Lee. "A little bit scorched, that's all."

But Mademoiselle Paulette Lebrun's womanly sympathy was not content with that. She lifted the detective's hand tenderly and pressed it to her lips.

"Did I not say that Monsieur Lee was too cold to be roasted?" she said. "But the poor Nipper was so distracted."

Lee could not help laughing at the girl's quaint way of expressing herself.

"So that is what you said, mademoiselle," he laughed. "But even an iceberg will melt if it's too near the fire. However, I've had time to freeze again since."

"Ah, but, Monsieur Lee, the Nipper really thought you were dead!"

"You did, Nipper?" asked Lee.

"I certainly had the wind up, guv'nor, when you didn't come back. I went to the mosque afterwards. Then I met Miss Paulette."

"I see, Nipper. Well, I've got to thank old Wolf, here, for not being frizzled to a cinder at the present moment."

"Then he found you, guv'nor? I sent him back."

"You sent Wolf back, Nipper?"

"Yes, guv'nor. He followed me out of the mosque. When I got some distance down the road I saw the flames shooting up. So I told Wolf to go back and find you. I had to go to the hotel. You told me, you remember."

"You're a good lad, Nipper," said Lee quietly. "You certainly saved me from being burnt to death. It was something too ghastly in that blazing inferno."

Mademoiselle Paulette knelt down and hugged the dog in her white arms.

"The brave Wolf!" she murmured. "But he is just too splendid, messieurs!"

The detective glanced at the girl's slight graceful figure as she knelt on the floor caressing the great dog, and his eyes narrowed reflectively.

"I think, Mademoiselle Paulette," he said, "that we were playing hide and seek together in London last week—were we not? You were our mysterious friend—our lady friend—in the musquash coat, who decoyed Nipper to his doom in Robespierre Gardens?"

Paulette looked up with a merry laugh.

"That is just so, Monsieur Lee," she agreed. "It was a shame to lock the poor

Nipper in the cellar. But my friends and I, we had to do something!"

Nelson Lee glanced at the silver sandals that were showing beneath her dark mantle, and continued.

"And it was also you, mademoiselle, who danced so beautifully in the mosque to-night, and sang that sweet little French song that delighted us so?"

"It was, Monsieur Lee."

The detective looked at her appraisingly, and could not keep the admiration from his eyes.

"You are a wonderful little woman, mademoiselle," he said quietly.

The girl rose to her feet and glanced at the detective with a mischievous look in her dark perplexing eyes, then turned to James Stone.

"But, Monsieur Stone," she asked, "who was that crazy fellow with the mad performing dog—the man and dog who seemed to fight, and yet did not?"

Both Nelson Lee and Nipper joined in James Stone's amused chuckle.

"We were both of us taken in there, mademoiselle," he said.

"Taken in?" queried the French girl. "I do not understand that, monsieur."

"Taken in," repeated Stone. "Deceived. Lee has certainly got the laugh of us over that."

"But, oh, it was so droll!" continued Paulette merrily, "the cold, grave Monsieur Lee, rolling over and over like a marabout, or medicine-man. And then the brave Wolf with his big teeth—but it was so droll! It makes me think of the big Monsieur Stone, dressed as an Arab, then forgetting himself and shouting out so loud in English!"

Stone became rather flustered.

"All right, Mademoiselle Paulette," he said hastily. "You need not rub it in!"

But Lee looked up at him good humouredly.

"If he hadn't blurted out in English I might have been throttled instead of burnt," he said. "I'd like to know, Stone, just who you thought I was?"

"I didn't care who you were," declared the king's spy. "I saw that Murillo you had and I meant to get it from you, if I had to kill you for it."

He paused, rather awkwardly, then blurted out impatiently:

"But, Lee," he said anxiously, "we've all got lots of things to tell each other. Let's leave them for a bit. I'm anxious about the stolen cipher. Where is it?"

Mademoiselle Paulette Lebrun immediately became grave and serious. Beneath her charming exterior lurked always the knowledge of the bigger game

she played with such dexterity and cunning. She glanced expectantly at the detective.

"What happened to the wallet, Nipper?" asked Lee, a little anxiously.

"I'd forgotten all about that, guv'nor," said his assistant, and, diving into the inside of his coat, drew out the large leather wallet.

Stone seized it eagerly.

"You don't mind, Lee?" he said, and, undoing the strap, drew out a wad of canvas.

He shook it out with hands that trembled a little, and displayed the oil painting of the old man in the grey military tunic. Then he turned the picture over and carefully scrutinised the back, while Mademoiselle Paulette gazed intently over his huge shoulder.

"Thank heaven, Lee," Stone muttered at last. "It's the genuine Murillo, this time."

"And is the stolen cipher there as well, Stone?" asked the detective.

"Yes, it's here right enough, Lee. See! The canvas has a false backing of thin parchment. It is glued securely to the canvas. The cipher is written on the inside. It would have to be very carefully steamed off. That is why they cut the picture from the frame. You understand?"

"I understand, Stone. And now you've got it in your possession, you'd better look after it well. I must confess that I'm not too anxious to sleep with the thing in my room. It seems rather unhealthy to me."

Stone smiled grimly.

"I agree with you, Lee," he said. "It's not exactly a life insurance policy. Kalib Pasha is staying in this very hotel. He would give a fortune for this piece of canvas. But it will never leave this room again!"

He went quickly over to the empty grate.

"Watch me, mademoiselle," he said. "You can inform your people what has happened."

Thrusting the picture between the bars of the grate, he struck a match and applied it to the canvas.

The inflammable material quickly caught alight and flared up. In a few moments nothing was left of the Murillo but a few carbonised ashes.

Nelson Lee watched in silence until the last flame had flickered out.

"You have just burnt one hundred guineas, Stone," he said eventually.

The king's spy shrugged his shoulders.

"In the game we play, Lee," he said

(Continued on page 38.)

MY DEAR CHUMS,—
By the time you reach this editorial chat you will, no doubt, have finished reading our long complete story, "Secret Service," and I can now imagine you all saying. "And a very good start to the New Year!" Yes, I think we can all agree

on that. But this is nothing to what we are going to do. Make no mistake about that. I said last week that we were going to make 1933 a greater year of triumph for the NELSON LEE than ever, and I mean it.

In next week's issue you will find the opening chapters of our Great War Story, "The Green Button!" I simply can't find enough words of praise for this story, and I'm dead certain you will say the same after you have read the opening chapters next week. "The Green Button!" grips you!

Right from the very beginning you will find yourself whirled "into action" with a truly amazing companion—none other than Lord Montague Merriman, "Monty" for short, the pride of the British Secret Service.

Monty is a whale for adventure. Unless there's overwhelming odds against him, and the situation is precarious in the extreme, Monty can't be happy. And when he does go into action, the enemy has to watch his step very, very carefully.

Don't forget, "The Green Button!" starts next week.

I MENTIONED last week that Mr. E. S. Brooks is preparing another fine long series of School and Detective Stories for you. This series is a snorter. The scenes are laid at St. Frank's School and the surrounding neighbourhood, and the "star" characters are Fighting Jim Kingswood, St. Frank's headmaster, Nelson Lee, and Nipper. One great attraction in the series is that Nipper returns to the school in his old capacity of scholar and skipper.

The first story in this series appears in a fortnight's time. Look out for it!

Just one last word. You can do your bit towards making the success of the Old Paper even greater than it is by introducing it to your pals who, so far, do not read it. Let them know what a treat they are missing—after that, they will be as keen to read the "N.L." regularly as you are yourself. And, finally, place a standing order with your newsagent for THE NELSON LEE. Safety first!

PEN PALS.

Miss P. Hall, Scrivens Hill, Woodford Halse, Rugby, wants girl correspondents in Canada; ages 13—14.

John O. B. Krikor, P.O.B. 58, Athara, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, wants to hear from a



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reader who lives on a farm in England; aged 13.

Swanny Mayhew, 30, Eveline Road, Mitcham, Surrey, wants to hear from readers in South Africa and New Zealand.

Miss Kathleen M. Hillitt, Rozel, 63, Painswick Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, wants

girl correspondents in France and America; music, dancing, amateur theatricals; ages 15—16.

K. Jennings, 11, Hawthorn Avenue, Gainsborough, Lincs., wants to hear from stamp collectors in U.S.A., France, Germany and the Dominions.

W. H. J. Cornelius, 56, Tyler Avenue, Loughborough, Leics., wants correspondents; he would like to hear from a French boy.

Thomas W. Hutt, 18, Malcolm Street, Erskineville, N.S.W., Australia, wants to hear from keen stamp collectors in the Empire; ages 17—20.

Miss Betty Fairie, 11, Burnbank Terrace, Lenzie, Glasgow, wants girl correspondents.

Harold W. Whittle, 29, Alsop Street, Semaphore, South Australia, wants correspondents interested in stamps and view-cards.

Kenneth French, Roma, Florence Avenue, Maidenhead, Berks, wants to hear from W. Hodgkinson.

John McPherson (13), The Friends' School, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wants correspondents.

Tom Moffatt, 6, St. George's Road, Preston, N.18, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, wants correspondents anywhere, especially South America and Mexico.

Kevin W. Harrington, 66, Queen Street, Sandy Bay, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wants correspondents interested in cricket; any part of the world; also to exchange newspapers.

Guy L. Hallett, The Friends' School, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, wants correspondents.

Burton Trask, P.O. Box 515, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, wants correspondents in the Empire.

Miss Helen Ashmore, 25, Keston Street, Mill Hill, Bolton, Lancs, wants girl correspondents; England, France, India or Canada.

Leo Caminsky, 369, Commercial Road, Maritzburg, Natal, South Africa, wants to hear from correspondent in a Public school.

Jack Goodwin, 30, Stanley Street, Ormskirk, Lancs, wants correspondents interested in autograph collecting, films, stage and good music.

Miss Joan McNulty, 10, Balfour Street, Holderness Road, Hull, wants girl correspondents.

SECRET SERVICE!

(Continued from page 36.)

quietly, "one hundred guineas is a very small premium to pay to cover such a tremendous risk."

"Then it is rather an expensive pastime," rejoined the detective drily.

"Expensive, but necessary, Lee," added Stone nonchalantly.

"Well, Stone," said Lee presently, "I am anxious to hear your story."

Mademoiselle Paulette nodded her head vigorously.

"You are right, monsieur," she said. "Tell him, Monsieur Stone."

"Well," said Stone, "when the copy of the Turkish Agreement was sent from the Embassy in Paris to London, we had reasons to believe that the envelope had been tampered with and a copy made of the Agreement. That didn't matter a lot, because it was in code, which no one could translate without the cipher."

"So a watch was kept," added Paulette.

"Yes," agreed Stone, "a watch was kept at the Embassy. All the same for that, the secret cipher was stolen under the noses of our men. Everybody was suspected, naturally. Anyway, the cipher was suddenly missing."

"Now, at that time our ambassador in Paris was very interested in art. He had bought several valuable pictures and had engaged an artist named Gustave Fulk to clean and touch up these old masters. Among them was the portrait of Don Montino, by Murillo. Fulk said he would take some of the smaller pictures home with him to work on them in the evenings."

"And he smuggled the cipher out of the house, concealed on the back of the canvas of the Murillo," said Lee.

"Exactly," replied Stone. "When the cipher was found to be missing, everyone in the Embassy was searched; but by that time Fulk had gone home. Some of our men, with a representative of the French Secret Service, went to Fulk's house. Kalib Pasha had just arrived there, but made out he was simply a friend of Gustave Fulk's, calling to inquire after his health. Both the pasha and Fulk were searched, as also were Fulk's rooms; but, of course, nothing was found."

"But Kalib Pasha went away at once without the cipher, not daring to stay for it. And that evening the ambassador called for the Murillo, because the Paris Salon had offered to buy it from him as it was. He sold it the same day, and it went to the Salon, who, as it happened, sold it again at considerable profit to the Veuxpillo

Galleries. Thus the stolen cipher was whisked out of the hands of Gustave Fulk, and he dared not protest.

"The strange thing was that Fulk made himself noticeable at once to me, when I got to Paris on the job of finding the cipher, because he arrived at the Salon in obvious agitation, wanting to know what had become of the Murillo. That struck me as remarkable, seeing that the picture never had belonged to him, anyway."

"Well, to cut a long story short, I shadowed Fulk closely, and found that he had meetings with a broken-nosed Arab, who, now that the hue and cry was on, was acting as go-between for Kalib Pasha and Fulk. But the artist was also meeting secretly the representative of another foreign power—names don't matter now. In fact, Fulk was being bribed to double-cross the Turk, and he was apparently prepared to run that risk."

"I climbed a stack-pipe and looked in Fulk's rooms that night. He had a photo of the Murillo painting and was copying it to scale. He worked all night, and when the job was done—cleverly done, too—he left for London. I followed him all the way. At Dover I left him, only to 'phone to headquarters."

"I remember that," laughed Paulette. "I was there, following you."

"And she heard you give the counter-sign and your number," added Lee. "She told Monsieur Maurice. He noted it down in a letter to his chief, and left the record on his blotting-pad in the house at Robespierre Gardens. But go on, Stone."

"I trailed Fulk to London, and then he got in a taxi. He must have guessed by that time that he was being shadowed, and slipped me somehow. I tried all I knew to find him again, but failing, I went to the Veuxpillo Galleries."

"Of course, you will realise that at this time we did not know what Fulk had done with the stolen cipher. It was only guesswork on our part. But we suspected Fulk and reckoned he would lead us to the cipher. I was the only person then who tumbled to what Fulk had done with the real Murillo. I staked everything on that rough guess and went to the Galleries. But the broken-nosed Arab must have been closer on Fulk's trail than I ever was, and he got there first. I reckoned I got there about ten minutes after Fulk died; but I was too late, anyway. I couldn't stop to give the alarm. My job was too important. I knew that Kalib Pasha had vigorously denied all knowledge of the stolen cipher, and had gone to Algiers as if he were on holiday. As his man had got the cipher, there was only one thing left

(Continued on page 44.)

COCK O' THE WALK !



The reign of Edward Oswald Handforth as skipper of the Lower School is drawing to a close, for Reggie Pitt has hit upon a brainwave to force Handy to relinquish the reins of power. And Handy falls into the plot head-first !

The Dress Inspection!

“**G**REAT corks!” said Handforth, after breakfast. “What’s all this?”

He was staring out of the window of his study into the West Square. It seemed the entire Remove was congregating there for some reason. Most of the fellows were already present, and others were hurrying up.

Handforth had escaped from the breakfast-table before the rest of the fellows—pleading a lack of appetite, which was perfectly true—and he had again sought refuge in Study D.

At last he had got the typewriter going. By grim concentration, he had found out how it worked. But the discovery only dismayed him. For the confounded thing was so laboriously slow that it would probably take him a couple of hours to do one page. And even then it wouldn’t be worth reading! He would have to type several “practice” pages first, before he could start on the actual manuscript. This, being for Irene Manners of Moor View School, must be perfect.

For a brief second a sinister suggestion had occurred to him. Why not rush the manuscript to a typewriting office in Bannington? But he had dismissed this base idea with a frown of self-condemnation. He had promised

Irene that he would type it himself—on his own machine. And that was the point. Irene could easily afford to have it typed at a proper office, and if she ever found out that he had adopted such measures, she would never forgive him. No, it was a labour of love—and he would have to do it, captaincy or no captaincy.

He turned in his chair, and stared through the window. The noise of the gathering juniors had disturbed him. His hair was ruffled, he was perspiring, his collar was limp, and he was generally desperate. This typewriting was getting on his nerves! To-day was Friday. To-morrow was a half-holiday, and he had to play in a match. On Sunday he couldn’t do any typewriting at all. And on Monday he had promised— It was impossible! At least, it could only be done if he devoted himself to it to the exclusion of everything else. And it was for Irene!

“The thoughtless rotters!” snapped Handforth fiercely, as he leapt to his feet. “It’s a pity they can’t go somewhere else for their beastly drilling, or whatever it is! Right under my window!” he added bitterly. “By George, I’ll show ’em!”

He flung open the window and leaned out. “Hi!” he bellowed. “Clear off!”

"Hallo, captain!" chorused a dozen voices, as a dozen hands went to the salute.

Handforth made a curious sound, swallowed hard, and saluted.

"Anything wrong, Ted?" asked a voice behind him.

He turned, quivering, and found Willy in the room. He stood there, and goggled. His expression was so alarming, in fact, that Willy was half scared.

"What's the matter—choking?" he asked. "You've been eating something again! I've often warned you—"

"Get out!" croaked Handforth, pointing. "I locked that door!"

"Yes, I noticed it," said Willy. "You locked it before it was latched, so I only had to give it a push, and it came open. Just like you, Ted! You can't even lock a door without bungling it!"

"I haven't slaughtered anybody in this world yet—but unless you get out of this room in ten seconds there'll be a funeral!" panted Handforth thickly. "I came here so that I shouldn't be disturbed—"

"Yes, but what about the inspection?" asked Willy.

"The—the what?"

"It's a quarter-past nine," said Willy. "Haven't you seen the chaps collecting in the Square?"

"Yes, I have!" snorted Handforth. "And a crowd of rotters they are! Disturbing me just when I want to be busy—"

"But, you fathead, they're waiting for you!" broke in Willy, amazed. "Ye gods and little fishes! Have you forgotten that you gave the order?"

"Order?" breathed Handforth, a dim memory coming back to him.

"The dress inspection at nine-fifteen," said Willy. "I've got the Third all lined up, to watch the fun. They're reserving me a place in the front row. But as you weren't there, I thought I'd better come and fish you out. You've got a dreadful memory, Ted?"

But Handforth hardly heard. He was staring dazedly out of the window. So the Remove was collecting out there according to his orders! It was so startling that he could hardly realise it. Without question, they were obeying him! While he had forgotten all about the inspection, they had remembered it! It was such a reversal of the ordinary order of things that Handforth was dazed.

There was the Remove—waiting for him! He couldn't possibly get out of it. He was the Form captain, and it would be an utter farce unless he went out and made the inspection. And this was to be a daily occurrence, too—by his own instructions! Handforth was realising to the full how his orders were recoiling upon his own head. It was all right while the Remove ignored them, but when the Remove obeyed them it was a horse of another colour!

"Well?" asked Willy. "What do you think you are—a cab-horse? Going to sleep standing up?"

Handforth started violently.

"Of all the voices in this world, I hate yours the most!" he said hoarsely. "Clear out of this study before I forget that you're my minor—before I forget I'm bigger and older! I warn you, I'm dangerous!"

Willy grinned.

"That's nothing new, old son," he said coolly. "You've always been dangerous. But we know how to deal with you. Dynamite is dangerous, if it comes to that, but people handle it every day with perfect safety. You'd better buck up with that inspection, or you'll look a bigger chump than you are now! You ought to thank me for coming here and reminding you."

"Thank you?" panted his major.

"Of course," said Willy. "What would you have looked like if you had ignored that inspection altogether? In fact, it's worth five bob!" he added thoughtfully.

Handforth made a determined rush, but Willy dodged through the doorway and skipped down the passage.

"I'll collect that five bob to-morrow!" he said cheerily.

Handforth went out rather unsteadily, realising that he could do no more typewriting before lessons. That meant he wouldn't do any typewriting at all, for the simple reason that he hadn't actually started yet. Some demon of fate was making it impossible for him even to type the title!

As Form captain, it was plainly his duty to attend this inspection. He had ordered it, and there was no getting out of it. But, by George, he wasn't going to waste any time over it! He'd pick out the slovenly ones with an eagle eye, and rushed them off upstairs to tidy themselves! He'd show his full authority! He was in no mood for overlooking the slightest fault.

The Remove was lined up in the West Square in two columns, and as Handforth tore through West Arch in the most undignified manner, the Remove saluted to a man—smartly and startlingly.

Handforth saluted in turn—carelessly and grudgingly. He came to a halt in front of the juniors, and swayed. One glance was enough. He was just in front of Somerton and Teddy Long and Hubbard. They were the three most slovenly chaps in the Remove, as a rule—but at the present moment they were spick-and-span. Again his weapons were torn out of his hands!

"Attention!" he rapped out, in his confusion.

The Remove saluted again, and Handforth breathed hard.

"Don't do that!" he shouted, as he returned the salute.

"We're only obeying orders, captain," said Pitt, saluting.

The Form captain fled, pacing up and down the line in sheer desperation. There wasn't a fellow he could pick on. In spite of his dismay at this discovery, he couldn't help feeling a little proud, too! By George! He had tamed them, and no mistake! They had obeyed his orders in a startling manner.

"Well, you seem all right," he admitted grudgingly. "I expect you'd better dismiss—"

"Handforth, what is all this remarkable display?"

Edward Oswald turned and found Mr. Wilkes walking up.

Handforth saluted before he realised what he was doing.

"Inspection, sir," he explained. "I'm Form captain, you know."

"Yes, I heard that you had been elected," said Mr. Wilkes dryly. "So this is an inspection, Handforth? A new idea of yours, I take it?"

"Yes, sir."

"But what is the nature of the inspection?"

"Dress, sir," said Handforth. "I've been displeased with the general appearance of the Remove, sir. Baggy trousers—dirty shoes—untidy hair, and all that sort of thing, sir. So I instituted this morning inspection, just so that I could keep my eye on the chaps."

Mr. Wilkes nodded.

"A very praiseworthy notion, Handforth," he agreed. "It seems that your ideas of a Form captain's duties are novel. And the Remove appears to be taking full notice of your instructions. I have seldom seen the boys so smart."

"Yes, sir," said Handforth, with satisfaction. "My idea, sir."

"I rather think the inspection would be a greater success, Handforth, if you gave more thought to your own appearance," continued the Housemaster grimly. "Perhaps you don't realise the unconscious humour of your action. Surely the inspector should be at least as smart as the inspected."

"Eh?" gasped Handforth. "I—I mean—"

"I have seldom seen the Remove so smart—and I have seldom seen you so slovenly," continued Mr. Wilkes, with a frown. "Good gracious, Handforth—look at your shoes!"

Handforth looked at his shoes dazedly. They mocked at him.

"Look at your hair!" said Mr. Wilkes. "Untidy, uncombed, and matted! Your collar is crumpled, and stained with ink, and your general appearance is slovenly to a degree. I am amazed that you, a Form captain, should have the audacity to hold an inspection! Go indoors at once, Handforth, and make yourself tidy! Boys, you may dismiss!"

The Remove dismissed, happier than it had felt for days—and Handforth crawled indoors, conscious of the fact that he had come a frightful cropper.

And all this was the result of the Remove's obedience!

Near the Breaking-point.

THE day passed in a kind of nightmare for Handforth.

He had done so much saluting by tea-time that his arm was actually hurting him. There was no imagination

about it. A dozen times he had informed different fellows that they could regard the order as cancelled. But they simply took no notice! They saluted him just the same—and he was obliged to return it! Such rigid adherence to orders was terrifying.

And if there was one word in the English language which he detested it was "captain." He had heard it thousands of times during the day. Nobody spoke to him without calling him "captain" and saluting him. And the more he tried to escape these unwelcome attentions, the more he ran into them. And not in a single instance could he detect any sign of deliberate ragging. And, if it comes to that, there was none. In the ordinary course of events, Handforth passed dozens of fellows every hour of the day, and there was no necessity to pile anything on until the evening—when, unknown to Handforth, the Remove would make a final burst of activity.

During tea, Handforth looked a wreck. There was a hunted expression in his eyes, and if footsteps sounded in the corridor he gave a violent start. Church and McClure were feeling just a bit sorry for him, but they stuck to their guns. They would be more pleased than anybody else to see him resign the captaincy. They were longing for peaceful times again.

"I don't want any tea!" said Handforth wearily.

"It'll do you good, captain," said Church.

Crash! Handforth's plate splintered to the floor as he leapt to his feet.

"Don't call me captain!" he raved violently.

"Sorry, it was a slip!" gasped Church.

"Well, don't make any more slips!" shouted his leader desperately. "I'm sick of that word—and I never want to see another salute as long as I live. I keep telling the rotters to drop it, but they won't! Go out of this study and leave me alone!—I've got to work!"

"You mustn't forget your promise, you know," said McClure.

"Promise? What promise?"

"Well, you offered to help the chaps in their troubles," said Mac. "I know for a fact that Dick Goodwin is coming over here after tea, to ask your advice about a new table he's making. Dick's keen on carpentry, you know, and he's keen to have your opinion."

"All right, I don't mind giving it to him," growled Handforth, having nothing else to say. "But I don't want to be pestered—"

"Pestered!" interrupted Church, in surprise. "Hang it, that's a bit ungracious, Handy, isn't it? When the fellows accept your offer, and honour you by coming for their Form captain's advice, you can't call it being pestered."

"Give me some tea, and dry up!" muttered Handforth.

"We're only reminding you," said McClure, as he poured the tea out. "So don't lock your door, and tell everybody to go away."

It wouldn't be playing the game! And if there's one thing about you, Handy, that the Remove counts upon—it's the certainty that you'll always play the game."

"Yes!" said Handforth miserably.

To his joy, Church and McClure took themselves off immediately tea was over, and for a dizzy quarter of an hour he believed that he was to be left undisturbed. The typewriter was on the table in front of him, and he had at last succeeded in getting the title of Irene's story on the paper to his satisfaction. And then, to his horror, he discovered that the machine had blobbed a lot of oil on to the very centre of the page.

"Help!" he moaned. "I've got to do it all over again!"

Tap!

There was a soft knock on the door, and Handforth jumped. The haggard expression on his face became positively alarming.

"Come in!" he muttered between set teeth.

The door opened, and Canham, of the West House, came in. Canham was a quiet fellow, and he was looking thoughtful.

"Sorry to trouble you, captain," he said, saluting.

Handforth winced, and returned the salute.

"Well?" he asked ominously.

"You know what you said last night," went on Canham. "You told us to come to you with our little troubles and things. Can you tell me the age of Harold Lloyd?"

"The age of Harold Lloyd?" repeated Handforth blankly.

"Yes, captain."

"Harold Lloyd?" breathed Handy.

"He's a cinema star, you know——"

"Do you think I don't know who Harold Lloyd is?" roared Handforth fiercely. "How the dickens should I know how old he is, you West House idiot?"

Canham started back.

"But—but I'm interested in film stars, you know, and you told us to come to you, captain," he protested. "I thought you'd help."

"I'm sorry!" he said. "I don't know how old Harold Lloyd is, and I don't care! You want my advice, do you?"

"Yes, please, captain."

"Then buzz off!" snapped Handforth fiercely. "That's my advice!"

Canham went, the door closed, Handforth breathed a sigh of relief—and the door opened again.

"Busy, captain?" asked Dick Goodwin cheerily.

He came in, saluted, and grinned. Handforth had always rather liked Goodwin, but just at the moment he felt like annihilating him.

"I'm making a new sort of table," said the Lancashire boy briskly. "By gum, it's real champion! It folds up into such a small space that you can put it behind the door. But when you need it large, it comes out as big as this one."

"What do I care about your rotten table?" groaned Handforth. "Can't you leave me alone? D'you think I care whether your table goes behind the door or through a key-hole?"

"But I want your advice," said Dick, in surprise. "You see, captain, I haven't quite decided whether I shall use oak or mahogany. Which do you think is the best? It's only a small question, but I always like the advice of an expert. And you, being our Form captain——"

"Oak!" said Handforth, with a gulp. "Oak, my lad! There's nothing in the world to beat oak! Now clear off, and never let me hear about your fatheaded table again!"

"Well, you needn't talk like that——"

Dick Goodwin was interrupted by the opening of the door, and Jack Grey came in. He saluted smartly as Dick left, and sat down on the edge of the table. Handforth was nearly purple in the face, and he gave a hopeless, despairing glance at his typewriter.

"About my banjo, captain," said Jack.

"Your what?" croaked Handforth.

"My banjo, captain," said Jack Grey. "I was wondering if you could tell me how to put some new parchment on it. Some fat-head pushed his finger through mine, and it costs a lot to have them done at the shop. Do you know where I can find some parchment?"

This sort of inquiry struck Handforth as being outrageous.

"No, I don't!" he roared. "Why come to me? Do you think I've got parchment up my sleeves or in my ears? Blow your banjo! I hope somebody shoves his foot through it!"

"But as Form captain——"

"I'm fed up with being Form captain!" hooted Handforth desperately. "I've had nothing but trouble ever since——" He pulled himself up, and pointed to the door.

"Clear out, and keep out!" he breathed.

"All right, if that's the way you're going to treat us, I'll go," said Jack coldly.

He left the study and slammed the door. Handforth sat there, weak and trembling. He was startled, too. After all, the chaps hadn't been so very unreasonable in their simple inquiries. And he had told them to come to him! He set his teeth, and went to the door, his eyes on the key.

Then it opened, and De Valerie came in.

"I'm just writing a letter to my mater, captain," he said, without beating about the bush. "Now, she promised to send me a fiver in her letter before last, and there wasn't a sign of it in the letter that came this morning. She seems to have forgotten all about it. What shall I do?"

"Do?" said Handforth feebly. "How should I know?"

"Well, I want your advice," said De Valerie. "Just one of those little problems you were referring to last night, captain."

Handforth's brain reeled.

"Why come to me?" he asked drearily.

"But, as Form captain——"

"I don't care whether I'm captain or whether I'm not!" interrupted Handforth.

De Valerie sniffed.

"A fat lot of notice I shall take of your offers again, captain," he said tartly. "Hang it, captain, I did think you were a man of your word! It's a bit of a shock to have these eye-openers, captain!"

He passed out, leaving Handforth dazed, and Church passed in.

Knocked Off His Perch!

"**A** M A N of my word!" muttered Handforth, in an agony. "And he says he's had an eye-opener! And he called me 'captain' three times in one breath!"

"You are wanted, Handy," said Church briskly.

"Wanted?" repeated Edward Oswald.

"I think it's Doris—she's on the 'phone," said Church.

"Great Scott!" gasped Handforth.

He ran out like mad. Perhaps Irene didn't want the story typed, after all!

He rushed to the common-room, and found it crowded. But he took no notice of the twenty or thirty salutes

that bombarded him as he pushed through the crowd to the telephone-box.

"Hallo!" he panted, as he put the receiver to his ear.

"Oh, Ted, is it you?" came Doris' voice. "Sorry to disturb you, captain, but have you got fairly going on that story yet?"

"No! I—I mean—— The fact is——"

"Renie doesn't say much, but I believe she's keen," went on Doris.

The joy faded out of Handforth's life.

"You're a dear, Ted!" said Doris. "Irene will be awfully proud of you when you come along with that complete manuscript on Monday. So-long!"

The line became dead, and Handforth reeled.

So Irene was keen! She was expecting the typed story on Monday!

"Good man!" said Reggie Pitt heartily, shortly after. "We want you, captain!"

"Want me?" asked Handforth.

"Yes; we're holding a discussion about footer, and as you're the captain, we can't get along without your advice," said Pitt.

"I'd settle the point, but the other chaps insist that you, as captain——"

Handforth gave a wild yell. He glared round feverishly.

"Blow the captaincy!" he

roared. "I can't bother with it!"

"Can't bother with it?" gasped Dick, in amazement.

"No!" bel-
lows Handforth.

"I'm fed up!"

"You mean, you resign?" asked Pitt, in a sorrowful voice.

"Yes, I resign!" hooted Handforth.

"Is this final?" asked Pitt sadly.

"Yes, it jolly well is!"

"Then we've got to elect another captain at once!" said Pitt.

"Poor old Handy!" yelled a dozen voices. "Ha, ha, ha! How do you like it, captain! You've been sold, captain! You're dished, captain!"

Handforth stared at the throng glassily

"Sold!" he gasped faintly.

"I'm just going to ring up Doris, and tell her that you've resigned," smiled Reggie. "Then she'll tell you that it doesn't matter about that manuscript."

"Doesn't matter!" repeated Handforth, his jaw dropping.

"That was just part of the wheeze!" explained Reggie. "Of course, Irene wasn't in it, and she asked you to type the manuscript in good faith. Still, all's well that ends well. We obeyed you in every detail, and you weren't satisfied, so you can't grumble!"

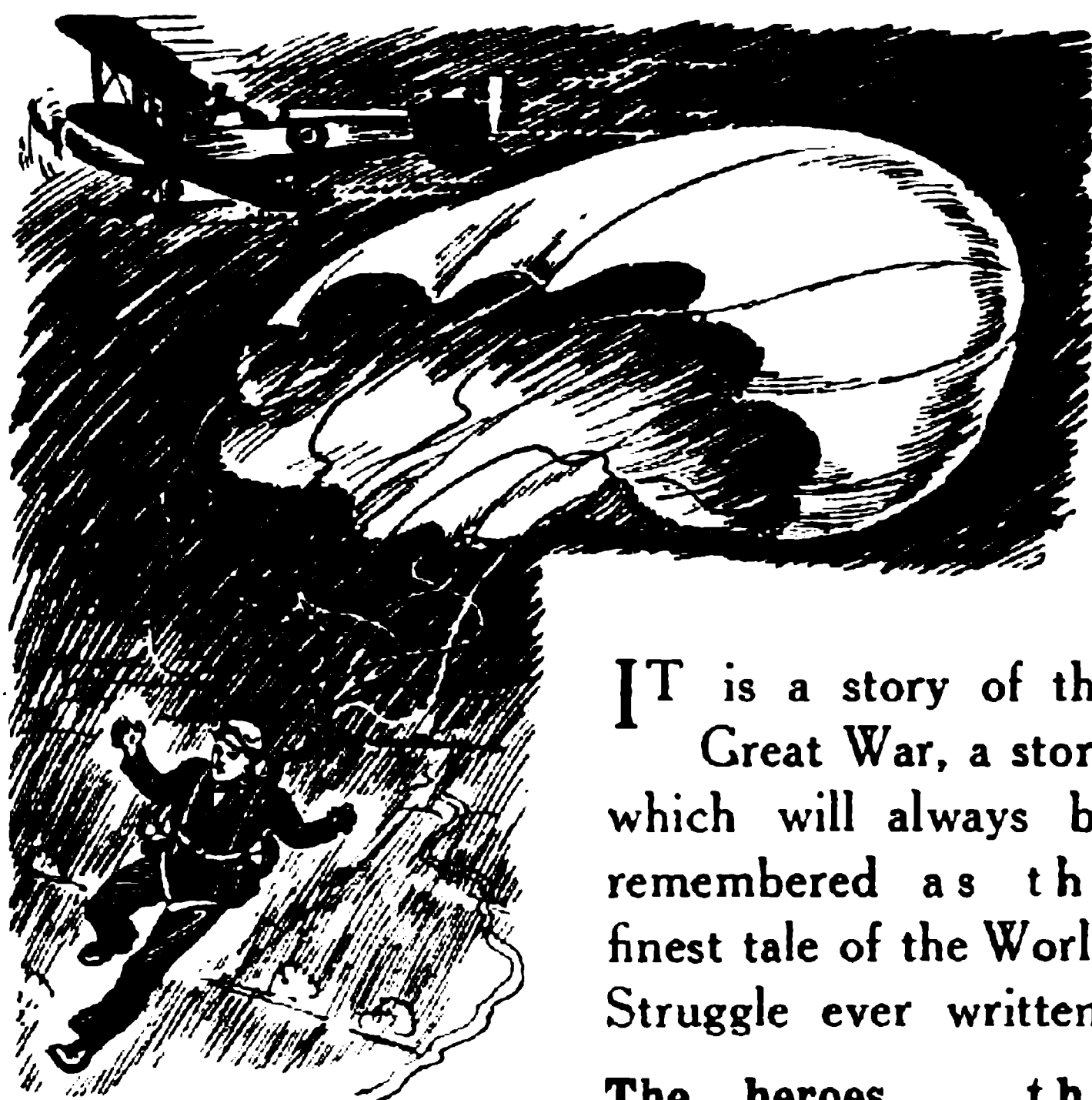
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dished, by jingo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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Handforth gazed at the laughing Removites. In a flash he realised that he had been spoofed; that the Remove had tricked him into his resignation!

"You—you rotters!" he shouted furiously. "I'm still captain——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I'm not going to stand any rot——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Edward Oswald Handforth gave one gulp of helpless defeat and fled. He staggered into Study D, and Church and McClure followed close at his heels. From the common-room came the faint echoes of joyous laughter.

"We're awfully sorry, old man——" began Church gently.

"Sorry?" interrupted Handforth, with a sudden expression of intense relief in his eyes. "What are you sorry about?"

"The way you were dished out of the captaincy——"

"Well, you can keep your sorrow for someone else," broke in Handforth happily. "By George, I'm glad!" he added, sitting down. "No more worries—no more bothering about the chaps or anything! I was sick of the captaincy, anyhow."

"Thank goodness!" murmured Church and McClure. "Then we go on in the old way?"

"Yes, my lads," murmured Handforth dreamily. "By George, what a relief!"

And the leader of Study D tacitly it. He had had his fill!

THE END.

(Look out for the opening chapters of a Sensational New Story of the Great War, dealing with the startling adventures of a young secret service agent behind the German lines. It is entitled, "The Green Button!")

SECRET SERVICE!

(Continued from page 38.)

for me to do, and that was to rush to Algiers, get into touch with the pasha, and trust to luck."

"So!" exclaimed Paulette. "But I was watching you, Monsieur Stone, when you went into the Galleries, and when you came out. I, too, knew then that the secret was mixed up with the Murillo; but at that time I did not know the pictures had been changed, and that the Turk had the real one. Monsieur Lee took the false picture to the art expert. We got hold of that picture, only to find out that we also were too late. But Monsieur Lee and the Nipper knows all that happened after that."

"I shan't forget it in a hurry," said Nipper with a grin.

"After all," observed Paulette, "if Monsieur Lee and the brave Wolf had not been in the Mosque of Ak-el-Baran that night, maybe we should all have been—too late! Who can tell?"

"I can't," declared Stone. "All's well that ends well, and I'm not bothering now. I'll have another buttered scone, please, Lee, and then you can spin your side of the yarn."

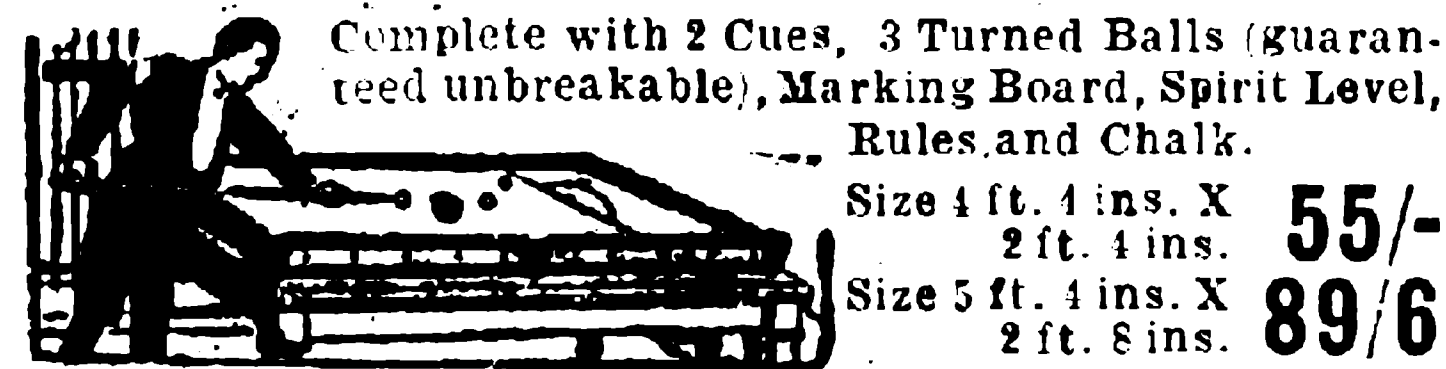
And Nelson Lee obliged.

THE END.

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