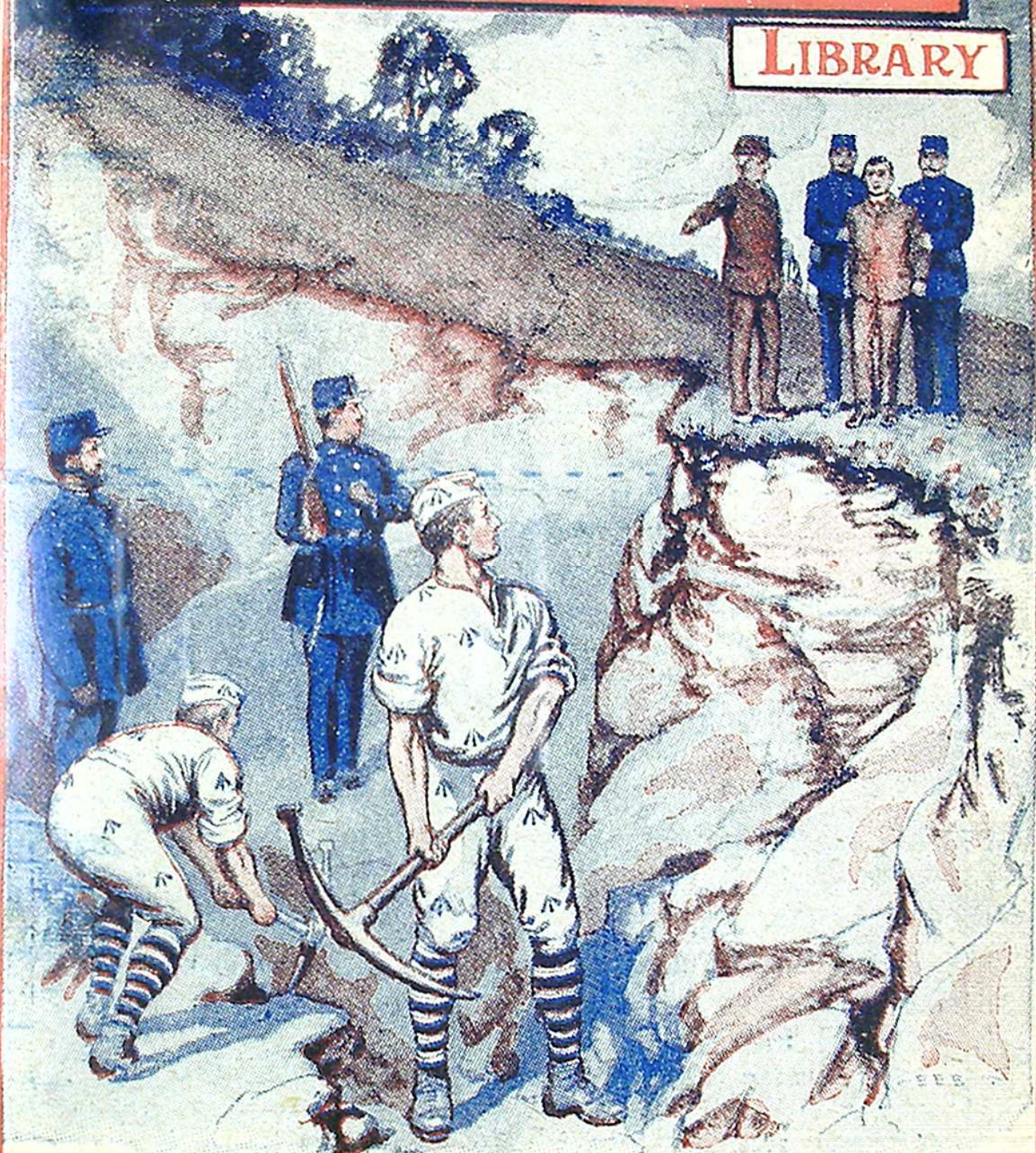


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# The Convict's Vendetta

*A Grand Complete Tale of Nelson Lee and Nipper*

## FOREWORD BY THE EDITOR

*GILBERT FOYL* was a young London stockbroker, who was the victim of a gross miscarriage of justice. He was arrested for the murder of another stockbroker, named *SALTER*, who had really been murdered by a discharged clerk named *SHAND*. *NELSON LEE* was engaged on behalf of Foyl, but although the detective obtained moral proof that the crime had been committed by Shand, he could not lay his hands on Shand, who had fled to America after making it appear that he had drowned himself in the Thames.

Foyl was tried at the Old Bailey before *MR. JUSTICE MEREDITH*. The leading counsel for the prosecution was *CRAWFORD BANHAM, K.C., M.P.*, and the principal witnesses against Foyl were a clerk named *ARNOLD* and a pawnbroker named *LEGG*, who—quite honestly but quite mistakenly—identified Foyl as the man who had purchased the revolver with which the murder was committed. In the end Foyl was found guilty and sentenced to death, but his sentence was afterwards commuted to penal servitude for life.

To add to Foyl's bitterness, he received two letters from the girl to whom he was engaged—*JESSIE MALVERN*—from which it appeared that she believed him guilty, and threw him over. Unknown to Foyl, these letters were forged by *HUBERT PRYCE*, the rascally son of Jessie's unscrupulous guardian, *COLONEL PRYCE*.

At the time of his arrest, Foyl and his partner *HERVEY* were conducting a speculative deal, which afterwards turned out so well that they made a profit of over half a million. After Foyl had been sentenced he made over his share of the profits to Hervey, but the latter declared he should always regard the money as Foyl's, and if ever Foyl came out of prison he would find his quarter of a million waiting for him.

(Now read what follows.)

## CHAPTER I.

### The Return of Gilbert Foyl.

**A** SULTRY August afternoon was drawing to its close, and David Hervey, in his office in Threadneedle Avenue, had just affixed his signature to the last of a big pile of letters when his head clerk announced a visitor.

"Who is it?" snapped Hervey, for the heat had made him rather irritable this afternoon.

"He's a stranger to me, sir, and he refuses to give his name," replied the clerk. "He said you'd know him when you saw him, and I was to tell you that his business was both urgent and private."

For a moment Hervey hesitated; then:

"All right; show him in," he growled.

The clerk withdrew, but presently returned and ushered in an elderly-looking man whose clothes were obviously new and unmistakably ready-

made. We have described him as "elderly-looking" by reason of the fact that his hair was snow-white and his face was deeply lined; yet, somehow or other, when one looked at him closely, one realised that he was not by any means as old as he looked.

"Well, sir, who are you, and what do you want, and why did you return your name?" demanded Hervey, in not too friendly tones.

The stranger waited till the clerk had left the office and closed the door; then he planted himself in front of Hervey, and looked him steadily in the eyes.

"Don't you know me?" he asked quietly.

"No, I'll be hanged if——" began Hervey.

Then he stopped and caught his breath. A startled look came into his face and he began to tremble. For a second or two he gazed fixedly at the stranger, then the truth—the wonderful, incredible truth—burst on him like a thunderclap.

"Good heavens—it's Foyl!" he cried, leaping to his feet and seizing the new arrival's hand.

"Yes, it's me," said Foyl. "But please don't speak so loudly. I don't want anybody except yourself to know that I am here."

"But—but how did you get here?" stammered Hervey, half crazy with excitement and joy. "I thought you were at Dartmoor. Have you escaped? No, no; that's impossible, of course! Have they let you out on ticket-of-leave?"

Foyl shook his head.

"No, I haven't run away, and they haven't let me out on ticket-of-leave," he said. "I'm a free man now—as free as yourself. In other words," he added, with grim sarcasm, "they have granted me a free pardon for a crime which they have discovered I never committed!"

"Then the truth has come to light at last, thank Heaven!" said Hervey delightedly. "How did it come out?"

"In a very simple and unromantic fashion," answered Foyl. "Some little time ago a man, who went by the name of Hurst, met with a fatal accident in New York. When the doctors told him that he couldn't recover, he confessed that his name was Shand, and that it was he who had murdered Marmaduke Salter. He gave full details of the crime and how he escaped from England—details, by the way, which fully confirmed Nelson Lee's theory—and then he died.

"His signed confession was forwarded to Scotland Yard by the New York police," he continued. "It was submitted to the Home Secretary, and yesterday morning I was informed by the governor of Dartmoor that his Majesty had granted me a free pardon. They offered me two hundred pounds as compensation—two hundred pounds for wrecking my life! But I scornfully rejected the offer—and, that's all!"

"But why has nothing of this been published in the newspapers?" demanded Hervey. "Why has there been no official announcement of the fact that your innocence has been established?"

Foyl shrugged his shoulders.

"When the police make a mistake," he said, "they don't rush into print and proclaim to all the world that they have made a mistake. You wouldn't expect them to. They naturally wish to hush the matter up and keep it dark, and I'm perfectly willing that they should do so."

"But that's nonsense," protested Hervey warmly. "You have been publicly branded as a murderer, and now that your innocence has been proved, we must make the whole country ring with the news."

Again Foyl shook his head.

"You have always been my friend," he said—"the best friend I ever had. Do you still wish to be my friend?"

"Of course."

"Then promise me that until I give you leave you won't tell anybody that my innocence has been proved and that I have been released from prison. Promise!"

"Yes, I'll promise if you insist on it," said Hervey reluctantly. "But I must confess I don't understand——"

"You'll understand later," said Foyl grimly. "In the meantime, what about that flutter in White Eagles? I'm not forgetting, of course, that I made over my share of the profits to you before I went to prison; but I also remember that you expressed your intention of holding it in trust for me, in case I ever came out of prison. Do you still adhere to that intention?"

Hervey looked at him reproachfully.

"Did you ever know me go back on my word?" he said. "Of course, I adhere to my intention. I have always kept a separate account of your share of the profits, and the money is yours whenever you want it."

"How much does it amount to?"

Hervey opened his safe and consulted a ledger.

"As near as I can tell, without going carefully into the account," he said, "the sum at present standing to your credit is about two hundred and seventy thousand pounds."

It might have been as many pence for any sign of elation which Foyl displayed. He had just learnt that he was worth over a quarter of a million, yet never a quiver disturbed the impassiveness of his face.

"When can I have it?" he asked quietly. "It is Tuesday now. It will take you some time to realise the securities and arrange matters with the bank. If I call here again on Saturday morning, can you give me a cheque for the amount?"

Hervey stared at him in blank amazement.

"We'll talk about the money in a minute," he said. "In the meantime, what do you mean by saying you'll call here again on Saturday morning? Now I've found you, do you think I'm going to part with you as easily as that? You're coming home with me, of course, and you're going to stay at my house till your affairs are put in order and you're ready to set up a house of your own."

Again Foyl shook his head.

"You're very good," he said, "but I've made other arrangements."

Hervey was hurt—deeply hurt—but was too proud to show it.

"Oh, very well," he said coldly. "If you've made other arrangements I've no wish to disturb them. If you'll call again on Saturday morning I'll have the account made out for you, and as soon as you've gone over it and found it correct, I'll give you a cheque for the balance."

"Thank you," said Foyl, picking up his hat. "And, in the meantime, you'll remember your promise not to tell anybody that I'm at liberty?"

"Certainly," said Hervey.

"Thank you," said Foyl again; and, without another word, he left the office.

For nearly half an hour after he had gone Hervey sat at his desk, lost in thought. From time to time his eyes grew dim, as though the tears were very near.

He was thinking of the past—of the days when he had stood by Foyl

when all the world had been against him. He had been Foyl's closest friend, his staunchest defender and supporter. And this was his reward!

"He was a different man in those days," he mused. "In those days he would never have acted as he acted this afternoon. He would never have treated me as if I were merely a casual acquaintance who had no claim on his confidence. No, he has greatly changed in the last two years.

"But, after all, it would be strange if he hadn't changed," he added, by way of comforting himself. "A man can't spend two years in prison, knowing all the time that he is innocent, without becoming hardened and soured. I mustn't judge him too harshly. I must wait a bit. When he has tasted the sweets of liberty for a while, and has mixed with his friends, he'll soften and unbend and become his old self again."

When Foyl called at the office again on Saturday, however, there was no sign of any softening and unbending. On the contrary, he was more reserved and stand-offish than ever.

"Yes, that seems all right," he said, after glancing over the balance-sheet which Hervey had prepared. "Have you written out the cheque?"

"No, but I'll do so now," said Hervey, opening his cheque-book.

"Make it payable to Robert Smith," said Foyl.

Hervey looked up with a questioning glance.

"Is that the name you're passing under at present?" he asked.

"It's the name I wish you to put on the cheque," said Foyl, in a voice that forbade any further questions.

Hervey wrote out the cheque and handed it to Foyl, who, without even looking at it, slipped it into his pocket and held out his hand.

"Thank you," he said. "Good-morning!"

This was more than Hervey could stand.

"Foyl, what's come over you?" he almost sobbed. "What have I done that you should treat your oldest and closest friend like this? I know you've had a lot to bear. I can imagine what you've suffered——"

"Oh, no, you can't," interrupted Foyl fiercely. "No one can imagine what I've suffered. Look at my hair. A man's hair doesn't turn white for nothing. Look at my face, and remember that I'm not yet forty. Think of me as I was two years ago, and look at me now!

"For two years," he continued, "I've been shut up in prison and compelled to herd with the scum of the criminal world. For two years my name has been a symbol of shame and disgrace. Even these things I might have borne, but—but"—here his voice broke—"the bitterest blow of all was that the girl I loved believed me guilty and deserted me. They can give me back my liberty, my good name, my position, but they have robbed me for ever of that which was dearer to me than my life—the love of the girl who had promised to be my wife."

As if ashamed of his outburst, he snatched up his hat and strode to the door. With his hand on the handle, he turned round and there was a wild, uncanny light in his eyes which made Hervey shiver.

"And now I'm going to have my revenge!" he hissed. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth—that's my motto now! All I live for now is vengeance, and I have sworn that every one of those who conspired to wreck my life—from the judge who sentenced me, to the meanest witness who gave evidence against me—shall suffer as I have suffered!"

He opened the door and was gone before Hervey could speak.

"Mad—quite mad!" muttered Hervey to himself. "His sufferings have turned his brain."

And perhaps, after all, David Hervey was right,

## CHAPTER II.

## The Disappearance of Crawford Banham.

**S**UMMER had gone, and autumn had followed, and now it was November. In the House of Commons an important debate was in progress, and Crawford Banham, K.C., M.P., had just concluded a brilliant speech in his well-known slashing style.

As he resumed his seat, amid the enthusiastic plaudits of his friends, an attendant glided up to him and handed him a telegram. He opened it, and no sooner had he read the first words than his face went suddenly white.

"Wife met with serious accident," he read. "Come at once. Doctor has wired for London specialist, who will join you at King's Cross."

"PARKER."

"Bad news, old man?" asked a colleague, who had noted his sudden blanching.

"Very bad," said Banham, in a husky voice. "My wife, who is staying with friends in York, has met with an accident; and Mr. Parker—that's the name of the friends with whom she's staying—has wired for me to go at once."

A look of deep sympathy crossed his colleague's face, for it was well known in the "House" that Crawford Banham was devoted to his young and beautiful wife, to whom he had only been married a few months. At the same time this colleague was a practical man, and the first thing he did was to glance at the clock.

"Then you've no time to lose," he said. "If you hurry, you'll just have time to catch the 11.45 from King's Cross, which will land you in York about half-past three to-morrow morning."

With his brain in a whirl of anxiety and grief, Banham left the House, jumped into a taxi, and drove to King's Cross station. The York express was standing alongside the platform; and as he walked towards it, after booking his ticket, two well-dressed men accosted him.

"Mr. Crawford Banham?" said the elder of the two, raising his hat.

"Yes."

"I'm Dr. Stone," said the man, mentioning the name of a famous London surgeon.

"You are going to York to see my wife?"

"Yes. Didn't they tell you they had wired for me?"

"They said the York doctor had wired for a London specialist, but they didn't mention any name."

"Well, it was for me that Dr. Naylor wired. He said your wife had fractured her skull, and he feared an operation would be necessary. As he didn't feel competent to perform the operation himself, he asked me to come by the 11.45 and to bring an assistant with me."

He waved his hand towards the other man who was with him.

"This is my assistant—Dr. Birrell," he said. "As I am old-fashioned enough to prefer privacy when I travel, I've reserved a first-class compartment in the non-corridor portion of the train. Will you join us?"

"With pleasure," said Banham.

Dr. Stone led the way to a first-class compartment, in which were a large portmanteau and a couple of professional-looking bags. In this compartment the three men took their seats, and a few minutes later the train steamed out of the station.

It should here be explained that the train was not due to stop until it reached Grantham, at 1.45. In other words, after leaving King's Cross, it was scheduled to make a non-stop run of exactly two hours.

For nearly half this time the three men kept up a desultory conversation; then Dr. Stone turned to his assistant.

"By the way, Birrell," he said, "did you put any chloroform in my bag?"

"I think so," answered Birrell. "But I'll see."

He opened one of the bags, and after rummaging in it he drew out an amber-coloured bottle.

"Yes, here it is," he said.

Acting on a natural impulse, Banham turned to look at the bottle. When he turned his head again he found himself gazing into the muzzle of a revolver in "Dr. Stone's" outstretched hand.

"One sound, and you're a dead man!" said the so-called doctor, in a low, fierce voice. "Draw down the blinds, Birrell, and get the stuff ready."

For a moment Banham was too dazed and bewildered to grasp what was happening.

"Is--is this some stupid joke?" he faltered, finding his tongue at last.

"It's a joke you won't relish, I fear," said the "doctor" grimly.

Still covering Banham with the revolver in his right hand, he raised his left hand to his face and jerked off a wig and false beard.

"Now do you know who I am?" he asked.

Banham shook his head and glanced out of the corner of his eye at the red chain which was labelled "Danger Signal," and which had replaced the old-fashioned "communication cord."

"I don't," he said, for the sake of gaining time. "To the best of my belief I have never seen you before."

"Oh, yes, you have! But I don't wonder that you don't recognise me. Two years in prison make a great change in a man's appearance, don't they? Let me assist your memory. Do you remember a man of the name of Gilbert Foyl—a man who, thanks in part to you, was convicted of a murder of which he was innocent? A man who, thanks again in part to you, was sent to penal servitude? You remember him, I see. Well, I am Gilbert Foyl!"

"And you have escaped from prison?" gasped Banham.

"Not at all," said Foyl. "I have been pardoned—pardoned for a crime I never committed!"

Once more that wild, maniacal light blazed in his eyes.

"And now I'm out for revenge!" he continued. "Every one of those who helped to send me to prison shall suffer what I have suffered and shall drain the cup of my vengeance to its bitterest dregs. And you, Mr. Crawford Banham, who did more than any other man to convince the jury that I was guilty, you are going to be the first victim of my vendetta!"

"Then that telegram about my wife—"

"Was a forgery," said Foyl calmly. "So far as I know, your wife is as well as ever she—"

Before he could say more Banham made a sudden desperate leap towards the danger signal. But Foyl had expected this, and a blow between the eyes with the butt-end of his revolver sent Banham reeling back into the corner of the seat. Then, dropping his revolver, Foyl seized his victim by the throat, forced him down on the seat, and turned to his confederate, who, in the meantime, had sprinkled a pad of lint with some of the contents of the amber-coloured bottle.

"Quick!" he said hoarsely. "We must be getting near the cutting now."

While Foyl held the barrister down and gripped the windpipe to prevent him calling out, his confederate pressed the chloroformed pad over Banham's mouth and nostrils and compelled him to inhale the stupefying fumes.



It was in vain that Banham fought and struggled. Little by little the deadly vapour stole away his senses and robbed him of his strength. Feebler and feebler grew his struggles, till at last they ceased and he lay on the seat, a limp and huddled heap of insensibility.

"That's enough," said Foyl. "Now for the sack."

His confederate opened the big portmanteau and drew out a bulky sack, to the neck of which were affixed a stout leather strap and a strong steel buckle. Into this sack the barrister's unconscious form was quickly thrust, after which a couple of ropes were passed round the sack and securely knotted.

"Now see where we are," said Foyl.

His accomplice lowered one of the windows and looked out.

"We're not in the cutting yet," he said, "but I can see the signal-light in the distance, and it's against us, so that's all right."

He had scarcely spoken ere the driver of the engine blew a long blast on his whistle, following which he clapped on his brakes and the train began to slow down. A few moments later it came to a standstill in a long, deep cutting bordered on each side by high embankments.

Almost before the wheels of the train had ceased to revolve Foyl opened the carriage door. It was pitch-dark in the cutting, but by the light which filtered through the other carriage windows he could see four shadowy figures standing at the side of the line. At the sight of Foyl, they glided towards the open carriage door, and in little more time than it takes to tell Foyl and his confederate, by means of the ropes, lowered the sack into their upraised arms. No sooner had this been accomplished than the signal-light changed from red to green, and Foyl had barely time to toss out the big portmanteau and one of the bags ere the train moved off again.

"End of Act One," chuckled Foyl as he closed the door and drew down the blind. "Now to change our disguises."

He opened the remaining bag, which contained two long, light overcoats, a couple of caps, and a pair of false beards. With the help of these he and his companion completely altered their personal appearance, and when the train reached Grantham they calmly stepped out of the train, gave up their tickets—which were single tickets from King's Cross to Grantham—and walked out of the station.

Half a mile from the station a powerful motor-car was waiting for them. Its engine was running, and as soon as they had taken their seats the chauffeur, without a word, slipped in his clutch and the car dashed off at racing speed in a southerly direction.

— —

## CHAPTER III.

### Nelson Lee's Three Visitors.

TWO days elapsed before Crawford Banham's disappearance excited any particular attention. Then his wife happened to wire to him from York, and, receiving no reply, she wired to his secretary, who wired back that Banham had not been seen at his London house, or at his chambers, since Tuesday evening.

Thoroughly alarmed, Mrs. Banham took the next train up to London. Failing to obtain any news of her husband at their London house, or at his chambers, or at any of his clubs, she drove to the House of Commons, where eventually she heard—from the member who had sympathised with him—that he had received a telegram on Tuesday night informing him

that his wife had met with a serious accident, and requesting him to come to York by the next train.

Knowing, of course, that the telegram must have been a forgery, Mrs. Banham invoked the aid of Scotland Yard. The police first made inquiries in York, where they ascertained that the telegram had been handed in by a man who had given the name of Parker, but whose personal appearance the clerk could not remember. The original telegram was produced, and was found, of course, not to be in Mr. Parker's writing.

By this time it was evident that the missing barrister had been made the victim of a cunning and deeply-laid plot. As the result of further inquiries, the police discovered the taxi-cab in which he had driven from the House of Commons to King's Cross station. From the booking clerk they ascertained that he had taken a first-class single to York. A porter remembered seeing him talking on the platform to two men, whose descriptions he gave. Another porter deposed that Banham and these two men had taken their seats in a reserved first-class compartment in the non-corridor portion of the train. And that was as far as the police were able to carry the case.

Inquiries were made at Grantham, York, Newcastle, and even as far north as Edinburgh and Aberdeen; but at none of these stations had anybody been seen to leave the train who resembled Crawford Banham and his two companions. They were known to have stepped into the train at King's Cross, but from the moment the train steamed out of the station all trace of them was lost.

These facts, when published in the newspapers, gave rise to a tremendous sensation in the country. Little else was talked about but the "Mysterious disappearance of a well-known M.P." The police were bombarded with theories and suggestions, but, with one exception, nobody dreamed of connecting the case with the name of Gilbert Foyl.

The exception was David Hervey. For three months, true to his promise, he had told nobody that Foyl was now at liberty. But when he read the news of Banham's disappearance, when he remembered the leading part which Banham had played in securing Foyl's conviction, when he remembered Foyl's wild talk about having his revenge on those who had conspired to wreck his life, he began to wonder if Banham's disappearance was the work of Gilbert Foyl, and whether he ought not to confide his suspicions to the police.

Never had Hervey been placed in such a difficult position. Friendship pointed one way and duty another. He was deeply attached to Foyl, and would not willingly do anything to injure him, yet he could not square it with his conscience to assist Foyl, even by his silence, to carry on a war of revenge.

At last, after several days of mental-torture, he decided to consult Nelson Lee, who had just returned to England from South America, where he and Nipper had been conducting an investigation on behalf of the Argentine Government. Nelson Lee had also been Foyl's friend; he would understand Hervey's dilemma, he would advise him what to do.

It was on Tuesday morning, nearly a week after Banham's disappearance, that Hervey presented himself at the great detective's rooms in Gray's Inn Road. Nelson Lee and Nipper had just finished breakfast, and the detective was wading through a huge pile of correspondence which had accumulated during his absence.

"Hallo, Hervey—glad to see you!" was the detective's greeting. "What's brought you here so early in the morning? Some of my investments doing badly?"

"Oh, no," said Hervey, as he dropped into a chair. "I've called to have

a talk with you about the disappearance of Crawford Banham. You'll have heard of it by now, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Nelson Lee. "We only landed last night, so I don't know much about the case, but from what I've read in the papers it seems to be creating a tremendous stir.

"But, look here," he added banteringly. "why on earth should you display any interest in Crawford Banham's fate? He was no friend of yours. On the contrary, it was he, almost more than anybody else, who helped to send your dearest friend to prison for a crime which you and I know he never committed."

"Meaning Gilbert Foyl?"

"Of course."

"Well, it's because Gilbert Foyl was my dearest friend that I've come to ask your advice to-day. Did you know that Foyl was liberated from prison last August?"

"Indeed I didn't! But I've been abroad for the last three months, you know. Why was he liberated?"

Hervey hesitated before he replied. Even at the last minute he recoiled from the notion of breaking his promise. Eventually, however, his sense of duty urged him on, and, after pledging Nelson Lee to secrecy, he told him the whole story of Foyl's two visits to his office in the previous August.

"You're the only person to whom I've told this," he said in conclusion, "and I'm breaking my promise to Foyl by telling even you. But now that you've heard my story, don't you agree with me that Banham may have been kidnaped by Foyl as the first instalment of his scheme of revenge?"

"It is possible—even probable," said Nelson Lee. "Have you communicated your suspicions to the police?"

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed Hervey. "I don't want to harm Foyl—I want to save him. If he has really done this thing, I'm sure he isn't morally responsible for it; he's mad. The injustice he has suffered has turned his brain. That's why I've come to you instead of going to the police. I want you to find some way of tracing Foyl, of getting at him, of reasoning with him, of persuading him to give up these wicked schemes of revenge before he goes too far.

"You were his friend once," he concluded, with pathetic earnestness. "You did your best to save him two years ago. Will you be his friend again? Will you do your best to save him now from the madness which has come upon him?"

"If he has broken the law," said Nelson Lee gravely. "I cannot promise to shield him, or to help him to evade the punishment which the law provides. I am here to serve the cause of justice, not to defeat it."

"But the poor fellow is mad," pleaded Hervey. "Surely you don't believe that a man should be punished for what he does when he isn't responsible for his actions?"

"Certainly not," said Nelson Lee. "But tell me more about Foyl. Have you ever seen him, or heard from him, since his second visit to your office?"

"No," said Hervey, "but I've made certain inquiries on the quiet, and I find that he adopted the most elaborate precautions to cover up his movements. With the cheque which I gave him he opened an account in the name of Robert Smith at one of the London banks. He then drew all the money out of the bank by means of cheques made out in different names. With these cheques he opened about a hundred small accounts, in different names, in various parts of the country. Then he drew all the

money out of these banks, one at a time, and asked for it to be paid to him in gold.

"What happened next, one can only guess," he concluded. "Having turned all his cheques into gold, he probably deposited the money in one or more banks, under one or more names; but as gold coins cannot be traced, it is impossible to find out where he is living now, or under what name he is passing."

The detective looked doubtfully at Hervey.

"That doesn't sound like the action of a madman," he said. "On the contrary, it suggests the carefully-planned method of a man with all his wits about him."

"But madmen sometimes display the most extraordinary cunning, don't they?" protested Hervey.

"That's so," admitted Nelson Lee.

As he spoke some one rapped at the door.

"Come in," he called out.

Mrs. Jones appeared and handed him a lady's visiting-card.

"There's a lady downstairs wishes to see you," she said. "I told her you were engaged, but she begged me to give you her card and ask you to see her as soon as possible."

The detective glanced at the card and then at Hervey.

"It's Mrs. Crawford Banham," he said quietly.

"She has come to consult you about her husband's disappearance!" gasped Hervey. "She has come to ask you to try to find out what has become of him."

"One need not be a detective to guess that," said Nelson Lee, with a smile.

"Don't see her," said Hervey in an agitated voice. "Send her away. Say you are too busy to undertake the case!"

"But why?"

"Because, if you engage yourself to Mrs. Banham, you'll be taking sides against Foyl."

"Not at all."

"You will," said Hervey vehemently. "Anyhow, it isn't fair to give Mrs. Banham the preference over me. I came to see you before she did, and I ought to have the first claim on your services."

"Supposing I grant your claim?" said Nelson Lee. "What is it you wish me to do? You wish me to reason with Foyl and persuade him to drop this mad scheme of revenge. But I can't reason with Foyl until I've discovered where he is. You believe that it was he who kidnapped Crawford Banham. If you are right, wherever Crawford Banham is, there is Gilbert Foyl. Mrs. Banham wishes me to find her husband. You wish me to find Gilbert Foyl. On your own theory, if I can find Crawford Banham I shall find Gilbert Foyl. Therefore, by doing what Mrs. Banham wishes me to do, I shall be doing what you wish me to do. In other words, even if I engage myself to Mrs. Banham, and place my services at her disposal, it by no means follows that I shall be taking sides against Foyl."

"That would be true," said Hervey, "if you would promise not to hand Foyl over to the police when you discover where he is."

The detective shook his head.

"I can't make any promises at present," he said. "In the meantime, I see no reason why I shouldn't see Mrs. Banham and hear what she has to say."

"But you won't tell her anything of what I've told you?" begged Hervey. "You won't tell her that you suspect it was Foyl who kidnapped her husband?"

"Certainly not. What you have told me I shall regard as strictly private and confidential."

Hervey rose to his feet and picked up his hat.

"I suppose I'd better leave you now," he said.

"You needn't go unless you wish," said Nelson Lee. "Perhaps, on the whole, you'd better stay and hear what Mrs. Banham has to say."

Hervey dropped back into his chair, and the detective turned to Mrs. Jones, who was still standing at the door.

"Show Mrs. Banham up," he said, sweeping his letters into a drawer.

Even Hervey, much as he resented Mrs. Banham's visit, was moved to pity when she entered the room. She was a young and beautiful girl, not long out of her teens, but her face was haggard and drawn, her eyes were red with recent weeping, and her whole appearance was that of one who was bowed and crushed with anxiety and grief.

Ignoring Nipper and Hervey, she walked straight up to Nelson Lee and clasped her hands.

"Oh, Mr. Lee," she almost sobbed, "I can't tell you how thankful I was to read in the paper this morning that you were back in London. I have wanted your help so much, and it nearly broke my heart last week when they told me you were abroad. All my hopes are built on you, and you won't fail me, I know. Indeed, if you fail me, I think I shall die. You know why I have come to see you, don't you?"

"It's about your husband's disappearance, I assume," said Nelson Lee, as he placed a chair for her. "As you know, I only returned from South America last night, so I don't know very much about the case. Supposing you begin at the beginning and tell me all about it."

Despite her youth, Mrs. Banham was very level-headed, and in the course of the next ten minutes she gave Nelson Lee a very complete and very lucid account of her husband's disappearance and the unavailing efforts which the police had made to trace him.

"Do the police suspect anybody?" he asked when she had finished.

"Nobody. The whole affair, in fact, is most incomprehensible."

"Had your husband any enemies—anybody who owed him a grudge?"

"Not that I'm aware of, and I think it most unlikely. At any rate, I never heard him speak of any one whom he regarded as an enemy."

"Had he any financial troubles or domestic worries?"

"None whatever."

"And nothing has been seen or heard of him since he stepped into the York express, in company with two unknown men, at 11.45 last Tuesday night?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"The police, you say, have made inquiries at every station at which the train stopped. Do you know if they have ascertained if the train pulled up at any place between any of the stations?"

"I can't say for certain, but I don't think that point has been inquired into."

"Then I must inquire into it myself," said Nelson Lee. "In the meantime——"

Again his landlady knocked at the door.

"Come in!" he called out, somewhat irritably.

Mrs. Jones opened the door, but before she could speak an aged man, who had followed her upstairs, pushed his way past her and staggered wildly into the room.

It was Mr. Justice Meredith, the judge who had sentenced Foyl to death. His face was positively green with fear, his eyes were bulging with terror.

his knees were knocking together, and altogether he was in a pitiable state of nervous collapse.

"Hide me! Save me! Protect me!" he moaned, tottering towards Nelson Lee and wringing his hands. "My liberty, perhaps even my life, is in danger. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Suddenly he caught sight of Hervey, and a cry of terror burst from his quivering lips.

"That's his partner!" he shrieked. "I remember his face. Perhaps he's one of his spies. What is he doing here?"

"My lord," said Nelson Lee earnestly, "pray calm yourself and tell me what has happened."

"Gilbert Foyl!" gasped the judge incoherently. "It was he who kidnapped Baugham, and to-day he's going to kidnap me!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### The "Bagging" of the Judge.

**B**OTH Nelson Lee and Nipper had half suspected what was coming, and so had Hervey, so that none of these three was unduly startled by the judge's sensational announcement. Mrs. Banham, on the other hand, was both startled and excited.

"Who do you say it was who kidnapped my husband?" she cried.

"What do you say is his name?"

"Gilbert Foyl," replied the judge.

"And who is Gilbert Foyl?" she demanded.

The judge glanced helplessly at Nelson Lee. He did not feel in the mood for entering into lengthy explanations. Neither did Nelson Lee—just then.

"His lordship may have been shadowed here," he said to Nipper.

"Take a cautious squint through the window and see if there are any suspicious-looking characters loafing about in the street outside."

Then he turned to Mrs. Jones.

"You can leave us now," he said. "If anybody else calls to see me this morning, say that I'm not at home."

Mrs. Jones departed, and a moment later Nipper came back from the window.

"There's nobody who looks as if he were watching the house," he said, "but there's a taxi-cab outside the door."

"That's mine—at least, it's the one in which I came here," said the judge, who, now that he found himself in the presence of Nelson Lee, seemed to be gradually recovering from the shock to his nerves. "In my excitement I forgot to pay the man and send him away. Shall I do so now?"

"Not yet," said Nelson Lee. "Tell me your story first."

"That's soon told," said the judge. "I had just finished breakfast this morning, at my house in Tudor Square, when my butler brought me a note which he said had been handed in at the front door by a man who said there was no reply. I opened the note, and— But here it is. Read it for yourself."

He handed the detective a sheet of notepaper on which was written in a small, neat hand:

"Two years ago, at the Old Bailey, a man named Gilbert Foyl was tried before you for the murder of a stockbroker in Peufold Lane. Thanks to

your vindictive summing-up, the jury found him guilty, and you sentenced him to death.

"I am that man. As you may have heard, my innocence has been proved and I have been set at liberty. But my life has been wrecked and all that I held dear has been taken from me. All I have to live for now is REVENGE on those who wronged me.

"It was I who kidnapped Crawford Banham, and he is now serving the first stage of his punishment. You are the next on my list, and I am sending you this note to inform you that within the next twenty-four hours I will deal with you as I have dealt with Crawford Banham.

"You may communicate with the police, you may hide yourself where you will, but I shall bag you, all the same.

"GILBERT FOYL."

"My nerves are not very strong," said his lordship, "and as soon as I had read that note I was so upset that I hardly knew what I was doing. I could only think of you as the most likely man to protect me from this arrogant scoundrel; so I snatched up my hat, rushed out of the house, hailed a passing taxi, and drove straight to your rooms. Do you think it would have been better if I had sent for the police?"

"Perhaps it would," said Nelson Lee. "All the same, I'm very glad you came straight here."

He waved his hands towards Mrs. Banham.

"This is Mr. Crawford Banham's wife," he said. "We were discussing her husband's disappearance when you arrived. May she read this note?"

"Certainly."

Mrs. Banham read the note aloud, so that both Hervey and Nipper heard its contents.

"And who is Gilbert Foyl?" she asked again.

The detective glanced at Hervey.

"I think I'll leave you to answer that question," he said. "It's no secret now, you see, that Foyl is at liberty, or that he has embarked on a war of revenge, or that it was he who kidnapped Mr. Banham."

Realising that there was no further need for concealment, Hervey once more told the story of Foyl's visits to his office; following which he told how he had come to confide his suspicions to Nelson Lee and to ask the detective to try to find Foyl and persuade him to abandon his vendetta.

"The poor fellow is quite mad," he said, addressing his remarks more particularly to Mrs. Banham. "And if you knew his story as well as I do, you wouldn't wonder that the injustice of it all had turned his brain. He was in love—passionately in love—with a young and charming girl. Her guardian didn't want her to marry Foyl—he wanted her to marry his own son. Probably he kept her well supplied with the most unfavourable reports of the evidence against Foyl, with the result that she believed him guilty, and wrote to him that all was over between them."

"She couldn't have loved him very much," murmured Mrs. Banham, who was thinking that nothing could ever make her believe that her husband had been guilty of a crime.

"I know nothing about her love for him," said Hervey, "but I do know that he was madly, passionately in love with her, and it is the fact that he has lost her, more than anything else, which has driven him off his head. So don't be too hard on him, Mrs. Banham. Remember what he has suffered, and think of him as leniently as you can. He has undoubtedly committed a great wrong by kidnapping your husband; but Mr. Lee will find him, and restore your husband to you; and when he has done so, I pray you to be merciful to Gilbert Foyl and grant him your forgiveness."

Mrs. Banham was deeply moved by Hervey's appeal, for she was of a romantic and sentimental nature, and she could imagine what Foyl had suffered through the loss of the girl he loved. But there was nothing romantic or sentimental about Mr. Justice Meredith.

"All this talk about Foyl's sufferings is beside the mark," he said loftily. "It is sufficiently scandalous that he should have kidnapped Mr. Banham, but it is perfectly monstrous that he should dare to threaten one of His Majesty's judges! Such an outrage is unpardonable! I trust you agree with me, Mr. Lee? I trust you do not share Mr. Hervey's extraordinary view that we should sympathise with Foyl and condone his criminal acts?"

"I certainly think that Foyl is deserving of our sympathy," said Nelson Lee. "At the same time, we must not let our sympathy blind us to the fact that he has committed a very serious breach of the law, and is now proposing to commit another. Although we may find excuses for his conduct, it is, none the less, our duty to oppose his schemes and to do our utmost to defeat them."

"Quite so—quite so!" said the judge. "That is very well put. I couldn't have put it better myself. And now to come to the point. Foyl has announced his intention of kidnapping me within the next twenty-four hours. What steps do you propose to take to oppose and defeat such a villainous scheme?"

"While you have all been talking," said Nelson Lee, "I've been trying to think of some plan by which I could meet the wishes of all three of you. Each of you has made a different request to me. Mr. Hervey wants me to find Foyl and persuade him to abandon his campaign of revenge. Mrs. Banham wishes me to rescue her husband, and your lordship desires me to save you from being kidnapped. It is a difficult problem, but I have thought of a plan by which I think I can do what each of you desires me to do."

"And your plan?" asked the judge.

"I will disguise myself as your lordship," said Nelson Lee, "and I will dress myself in your clothes. I will then leave you here in charge of Nipper while I take your cab and drive to your house. You have doubtless been shadowed here by some of Foyl's spies. When they see me leave this house they will think it is you. They will shadow me back to your house, and some time within the next twenty-four hours they will kidnap me. They will take me to Foyl's headquarters, and there I shall find both Gilbert Foyl and Mr. Banham."

"He would kill you!" gasped the judge. "He would shoot you on the spot when he found how you had fooled him."

"Oh, no, he wouldn't," said Nelson Lee. "Foyl and I were very good friends at the time of his trial, and he knows that I worked tooth and nail to save him. He will be very angry at first, of course, when he finds that it is I whom he has kidnapped, instead of your lordship, but he won't harm me. I shall then be able to reason with him, and show him the wicked folly of his conduct, and persuade him to set Mr. Banham free and abandon his war of revenge."

"Splendid! Magnificent! An inspiration of genius!" cried the judge enthusiastically. "Let us change clothes at once!"

Mrs. Banham rose hastily to her feet.

"I suppose Mr. Hervey and I may go now," she said.

"Not yet," said Nelson Lee. "Although Nipper couldn't see any suspicious characters in the street, I haven't the slightest doubt that Foyl's spies are keeping watch on the house. At present they don't know that you and Mr. Hervey are here, and they don't even know if I am at home. I want them to think that I am out—that's why I sent Nipper to the



window, instead of looking out myself; but if they saw you and Mr Hervey leave the house they might suspect that I was in, and that you had been consulting me."

"Then you wish us to remain here until you have left the house and the spies have followed you?"

"Yes," said Nelson Lee. He turned to the judge. "Please come with me," he said.

He led the judge into his bedroom, which opened off the sitting-room, and closed the door. About twenty minutes later the door opened and the judge came back into the sitting-room.

"Good gracious! Why, you haven't even changed your clothes yet!" exclaimed Mrs. Banham. "What on earth have you been doing all this time? I thought you'd have finished by now."

"We have finished, madam," said the judge, in his Law-Courts' voice.

"But I thought Mr. Lee was going to dress himself in your clothes," she protested.

"He has already done so, madam," said the judge blandly.

Mrs. Banham stared at him and then at Hervey, and then at Nipper.

"Will someone please explain what the man is talking about?" she asked. "He is still wearing his own clothes, and yet he says that Mr. Lee has already changed clothes with him."

Hervey shook his head. He was as bewildered as Mrs. Banham. Nipper's eyes began to twinkle; then he suddenly burst out laughing.

"Shall I explain, Mrs. Banham?" he said. "That isn't Mr. Justice Meredith who stands before you; it's the gov'nor—Mr. Lee, I mean—disguised as the judge and wearing the judge's clothes."

"Impossible!" she gasped.

"But true," said Nelson Lee, in his natural voice. "So you think my disguise will pass?"

"It's absolutely perfect," she declared. "I've never seen anything so marvellous in my life."

"You think it will deceive Foyl's spies?"

"It would deceive the judge's wife, if he has one."

The judge himself now came out of the bedroom, arrayed in one of the detective's suits, and grinning from ear to ear like a delighted schoolboy.

"Isn't he a wonderful man?" he said. "Would you have believed that anybody could so completely change his identity?"

"Spare my blushes, if you please," said Nelson Lee. "I'm going now, but before I go let me first explain the idea which I wish to impress on the men who are watching the house. I wish them to believe that his lordship came here to consult me, but was told by Nipper that I was not at home. I want them to think that he waited three-quarters of an hour, and then, as I hadn't turned up, he drove back to his house in Tudor Square.

"In order to carry out this idea," he concluded, "Nipper will now escort me to the door and see me off. After I've gone, Mrs. Banham and Mr. Hervey will remain here for another hour and will then slip out quietly by the back door."

"And how long am I to remain here?" asked the judge.

"Until further notice," said Nelson Lee. "Both you and I are on the telephone, so that I can 'phone to you from Tudor Square if I have anything fresh to communicate. Now, Nipper, come along."

Nipper led the way downstairs and opened the front door. The taxi-cab in which the judge had arrived was still standing alongside the kerb.

"Turn her round," said Nipper to the driver, and when the latter had obeyed, Nipper crossed the pavement and opened the cab door.

All this time Nelson Lee was standing on the doorstep, shaking with pretended fear and glancing nervously up and down the street.

"Tell the man to drive me to 19, Tudor Square," he said.

Nipper did so with inimitable gravity.

"And you'll not forget to deliver my message to Mr. Lee the moment he returns?"

"I'll not forget, my lord," said Nipper solemnly.

Once more the detective glanced up and down the crowded street. Then, with a hop, skip, and a jump, he dashed across the pavement and dived into the cab.

"Tell him to drive as fast as he can," he called out in a shrill voice, "and not to stop for anything or anybody till he reaches my house."

Nipper closed the cab door and repeated these instructions to the driver. A moment later the cab was on its way to Tudor Square.

From time to time—still acting the part of the terrified judge—the detective thrust his head out of the cab window and glanced behind him as if he were fearful of being followed. He saw nothing to arouse his suspicions, however, and at last, after a quick and uneventful run, the cab pulled up outside the door of 19, Tudor Square.

The moment the cab pulled up, the detective sprang out, tossed half-a-sovereign to the driver, dashed up the steps, flung open the door, staggered into the entrance hall, and locked the door.

Hearing the bang, the butler hurried from his pantry, which opened off the entrance hall. At the sight of his master—as he supposed—a look of relief crossed his face. He was evidently an old and valued servant who enjoyed all the privileges of an old retainer.

"I'm so glad you've returned, sir," he said. "I was becoming very anxious about you. You rushed away in such a hurry from the breakfast table that I feared——"

There was a telephone in the hall, and before the butler could say more, the bell began to ring.

The butler picked up the receiver, and after listening for a few seconds turned to Nelson Lee.

"There's someone wishes to speak to you on the telephone, sir," he said.

The detective crossed the hall and took the receiver from the butler.

"Hallo?" he called out.

"Hallo!" said a voice at the other end. "Who's that?"

"Mr. Justice Meredith," said Nelson Lee, in a perfect imitation of the judge's voice.

A chuckle came along the wire.

"Very well done," said the voice at the other end. "But you shouldn't tell stories, even over the telephone."

"Do you wish to insult me?" demanded Nelson Lee, with a fine show of indignation.

"Certainly not. I should never forgive myself if I thought I had insulted Mr. Nelson Lee."

"Who in thunder are you?" gasped the detective, with a strange sinking at his heart.

"Gilbert Foyl!" was the astounding reply. "I'm at your rooms in Gray's Inn Road, and I've rung you up in order to inform you that you needn't waste any more time in fooling around at Tudor Square. I've bagged the judge—as I said I would—and I'm now going to take him to join Mr. Crawford Banham!"

## CHAPTER V.

## How it Was Done.

**T**HE butler thought his master had suddenly gone mad. And, indeed there was something near akin to madness in the frenzy of rage, mortification, and chagrin with which Nelson Lee hurled the receiver from him, swept the butler from his path, dragged the door open, and dashed out of the house.

Never in his life had the great detective received such a humiliating blow. Never had he been so neatly scored off. Never had his pride been so humbled in the dust. He was furious—furious with Foyl, but still more furious with himself for having been so completely outwitted.

"I shall be the laughing-stock of the country," he groaned, as he sprang down the steps. "He appealed to me to save him, and while I was playing the mountebank and thinking how clever I was, Foyl was laughing at me behind my back and waiting until I was out of the way to carry out his threat."

At the corner of the square he found a taxi, in which he drove back to his rooms, hoping against hope that he might arrive before Foyl had left. As the taxi swung into Gray's Inn Road, he opened the door, and before it actually stopped in front of the road he sprang to the ground, darted across the pavement, thrust his latchkey into the door and flung it open. Then, kicking the door to behind him, he dashed towards the stairs, and there came upon the first sign of Foyl's visit.

Nipper, bound and gagged, was sitting on the bottom step of the stair case, with his hands tied behind his back and lashed to one of the bannister posts.

In mad haste the detective tore away the gag.

"Has he gone?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Ten minutes ago," said Nipper.

"Was he alone?"

"No. He had two men with him."

"They have taken the judge away with them?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"In a car."

"And Mrs. Bauham and Hervey?"

"Have't seen them since you left. They're still upstairs in the sitting-room, I expect."

The detective controlled his excitement with an effort.

"Tell me quickly all that has happened since I left," he said as he started to unfasten the cords with which Nipper was bound.

"After I'd seen you into the cab," said Nipper, "I came back into the house and shut the door. When I turned round, after shutting the door, I found myself looking into the muzzle of a revolver. The man at the other end of the revolver was Gilbert Foyl. I shouldn't have known him, he's so changed, but he told me afterwards who he was. Behind him were two other men, each with a revolver in his hand.

"After advising me to keep quiet if I valued my life," continued Nipper, "he told me who he was and said he had come for the judge. He swore he'd shoot me if I made the slightest attempt to raise the alarm; and as I saw he was in deadly earnest I'd no choice but to let the two men bind and gag me and tie me up to this post."

"But how had they got into the house?" asked Nelson Lee, as he severed the last cord.

"They must have overpowered Mrs. Jones, I expect," said Nipper, staggering to his feet. "I've never seen her since you left. Let's see if she's in the kitchen."

They hurried down to the kitchen, which was in the basement, and there they found Mrs. Jones, bound and gagged and trussed up in one of the chairs. She was so incoherent with fright when they released her and questioned her that pages would be required to record her story in her own words. Boiled down, the essence of her tale was this:

After she had admitted the judge and had taken him upstairs to the detective's sitting-room, she had returned to the kitchen, where she had been instantly seized and gagged by three men who had evidently come down the area steps and entered the kitchen while she had been upstairs. After binding her and lashing her to one of the chairs, they had gone upstairs—and that was all she knew.

"I can guess the rest," said Nipper. "After they had secured Mrs. Jones they crept upstairs and listened outside the sitting-room door. They heard you say you would disguise yourself as the judge and drive to Tudor Square; so they concealed themselves in one of the rooms downstairs and waited until you'd left the house. They then overpowered me, went up to the sitting-room, collared the judge, and took him away in their car."

"But how do you know they took him away in a car?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Shortly after they had gone upstairs, after binding and gagging me," said Nipper, "I heard a car pull up outside the front door. A few minutes later Foyl and the two men and the judge came down the stairs. Each of the two men had hold of one of the judge's arms, and Foyl was walking behind them with a revolver in his hand. The judge was paralysed with terror, and the two men had almost to carry him. They passed me without a word, and a moment later I heard the car drive off."

"You heard no sounds of a struggle in the sitting-room? No cries of alarm, no shouts for help from Hervey and Mrs. Banham?"

"Not a sound, except the ringing of the telephone bell," said Nipper. "We shall probably find that Hervey and Mrs. Banham have been treated in the same way as me and Mrs. Jones."

They trooped up to the sitting-room, where they found, as Nipper had predicted, that Hervey and Mrs. Banham had been bound and gagged and tied to a couple of easy-chairs. Mrs. Banham was in a dead faint, and while Nipper and Mrs. Jones endeavoured to revive her, the detective released and questioned Hervey.

"About five minutes after you and Nipper had left the room," said Hervey, "we heard footsteps outside the door. We thought it was Nipper coming back, but when the door opened I was astounded to see Foyl walk into the room with two men at his heels. They were all armed with revolvers, and while Foyl covered the judge, his two confederates covered Mrs. Banham and myself.

"After swearing he would shoot us if we made the slightest sound, Foyl announced that he had come for the judge. Mrs. Banham promptly fainted, and I thought the judge was going to follow her example. I never saw a man so petrified with terror in all my life. He was absolutely incapable of speaking, much less of offering resistance. He could only stare helplessly at Foyl, like a bird that has been fascinated by a snake.

"I appealed to Foyl and implored him to relinquish his wicked schemes. I might as well have appealed to a stone wall. He did not even condescend

to answer me, but curtly ordered his men to bind and gag me. When this had been done, and Mrs. Banham had been served in the same way, Foyl opened the window and thrust out his hand. This was evidently a signal to some confederate in the street, for a few seconds later I heard a motor-car draw up outside the house.

"Foyl then closed the window and walked over to the telephone. He rang up a number which I suppose was the judge's house, and I heard him tell you he had bagged the judge and was going to take him to join Mr. Banham. He then turned to his two confederates and ordered them to lead the judge to the car. Each of them took an arm, for the judge was half dead with fright and could hardly walk. Foyl marched behind them, and that was the last I saw of them."

By this time Mrs. Banham had recovered from her faint. Her first words were words of bitter reproach.

"Oh, Mr. Lee, I never thought that you would fail me like this," she said in tearful accents. "I had counted so much on your help—and this is how you repay my confidence. You have allowed an innocent man, who came to you for protection, to be kidnapped under your own roof!"

The detective bowed.

"I accept your rebuke," he said. "I feel that I've deserved it. At the same time, Foyl has only won the first round, and one round doesn't constitute a fight."

"Then you don't acknowledge defeat? You will still continue the fight?"

"To the bitter end! This is a personal matter now. Even if you withdraw your commission and dispense with my services, I shall still go on with the case. Foyl has challenged me in my own house—he has put me on my mettle, and I will never drop the case until I have rescued both your husband and the judge."

"And brought Gilbert Foyl to justice," added Mrs. Banham.

"Or brought him to his senses," said Hervey. "It is hard, I know, after what has happened this morning, to ask you to think leniently of him. But I do hope, Mr. Lee, that when you have succeeded in tracking him down—as I'm sure you will—you'll make allowance for the fact that he is mad and is not responsible for his actions."

"I'll consider that point when I've tracked him down," said the detective grimly.

"How will you start to track him down?" asked Mrs. Banham.

"I've already given you a hint," said Nelson Lee. "Your husband is known to have entered the train at King's Cross, and it seems to be proved that he did not leave it at any of the stations at which the train stopped. If that is so, it is perfectly clear that he must have left the train, and the train must have stopped at some place which was not a station. That is to say, it must have pulled up—perhaps only for a few moments—at some place between two stations.

"Acting on this hypothesis," he continued, "I shall start my investigations by going to King's Cross and ascertaining if the train was pulled up at any place which was not a station. If it was—and it must have been—I shall go to that place and make inquiries in the neighbourhood. What I shall do after that, of course, depends on the result of my inquiries. That is all I can say at present."

Mrs. Banham rose to her feet and smoothed the creases out of her dress.

"I'm sorry I spoke so unkindly just now," she said, holding out her hand. "I didn't really mean what I said. My faith in you is still unshaken. You

will find my husband, I know, and restore him to me. You have my card. You know my address. You will let me know at once, won't you, if you have any news of my husband?"

The detective promised; and after some further conversation his two visitors took their departure—Hervey on foot, and Mrs. Banham in a taxi.

## CHAPTER VI.

### Gassed I

AS SOON as his visitors had gone the detective doffed his disguise; then he and Nipper made their way to King's Cross station.

"I am acting on behalf of Mrs. Crawford Banham, whose husband has mysteriously disappeared," said Nelson Lee when he had found the official he wanted. "As you know, he left this station by the 11.45 express last Tuesday night and has never been heard of since."

The official, whose name was Drake, nodded sympathetically.

"A strange and mysterious affair," he said. "The police are utterly baffled."

"So I understand," said Nelson Lee. "The train, I believe, stopped at Grantham, York, Newcastle, and Edinburgh; but at none of those stations was anything seen of Mr. Banham and the two men who were with him when he left King's Cross."

"That is so."

"Well, can you tell me, or can you find out for me, if the train stopped anywhere else—anywhere, I mean, between those stations?"

"It is rather strange that you should ask that question," said Mr. Drake. "The train ought not to have stopped, except at the stations you have named; but, as a matter of fact, it was pulled up for a few moments, through the signal being against it, in Abbeyvale cutting."

"Where's that?"

"About three-quarters of a mile beyond Abbeyvale station, which is about midway between here and Grantham."

"Why was the signal against the train?"

"That's in dispute. When the train reached Grantham, the driver reported that he had been pulled up in Abbeyvale cutting. When the signalman at Abbeyvale was asked why he had set the signal against the express, he replied that he had not done so. He declared that if the signal was against the train, somebody must have tampered with it—a most unlikely explanation!"

"Then you doubt the signalman's statement?"

"Yes. The conclusion we have arrived at is that the man forgot to lower the signal for the express, and afterwards invented the tampering theory to cover his forgetfulness."

"That isn't the conclusion I should arrive at. On the contrary, I should think the man was right, and the signal was tampered with."

"By whom?"

"By some confederate of the men who kidnapped Mr. Banham. Probably these men arranged with a confederate to set the signal against the express, and during the few minutes that it was standing in the cutting, they removed Mr. Banham—whom they had previously rendered unconscious—from the train."

"By Jove! I never thought of that!" said Mr. Drake, in a startled

voice. "And it has never occurred to the police, either. I'm sure. All the same, it's a plausible theory."

"It's theory I should like to test, at any rate," said Nelson Lee. "When does the next train leave for Abbeyvale?"

Mr. Drake consulted a guide.

"One forty-five," he said. "It's a slow train, I'm sorry to say—the expresses don't stop at Abbeyvale—and you won't get there until three fifty-four."

The detective glanced at his watch.

"Ten minutes past one," he said to Nipper. "That gives us ample time for lunch. Come along."

They lunched at the station, and at 1.45 they left for Abbeyvale. The train stopped at every station, and lost a few minutes on the way, so that it was four o'clock when they reached Abbeyvale. Ten minutes later, having obtained permission to walk along the line, they were standing in the cutting.

"In all probability," said Nelson Lee, "this is where Banham was removed from the train. The next question is, what did the men do with him after they had removed him from the train? Did they take him to some house in the neighbourhood, or did they simply carry him to a car which was waiting conveniently near?"

"In either case," he continued, "our course is plain. We must explore the country on both sides of this cutting. If we come across a likely-looking house, we must find out who lives there and how long they have lived there. If we find that the house was only taken a few weeks ago—that is to say, since Foyl came out of prison—we must contrive to see the tenant and see if he is Foyl."

"What do you mean by 'a likely-looking house'?" asked Nipper.

The detective answered his question with another.

"If you had made up your mind to kidnap a number of men and keep them in captivity," he said, "what sort of a house would you choose for your purpose?"

"It would have to be a fairly big house," said Nipper. "There would be myself and my confederates and my prisoners, and a small house wouldn't accommodate us all. I should also choose a house that stood in its own grounds, some distance from the road, and as far as possible from any other houses."

"Exactly!" said Nelson Lee. "Well, that's the sort of house we must look for—a big house, standing in its own grounds, and in a lonely situation."

"And if there is no such house near here?"

"We shall be driven to the conclusion that Foyl and his confederates carried Banham to a waiting car and drove away with him to some place at a distance from here. In that case, we shall have to try to trace the car by inquiring of everybody in this neighbourhood if they saw a strange car near here between half-past twelve and one o'clock last Wednesday morning."

"But it will be dark if we stand talking here much longer," concluded Nelson Lee. "Let us start our search. We'll take this side of the railway-line first."

They scrambled up the embankment, scaled a fence, crossed a field, vaulted over a gate, and found themselves in a deserted country lane which was bordered on each side by tall, thick hedges. Owing to these hedges, which kept off the wind, the surface of the ground in the lane never got a chance to dry. In winter it was always wet and muddy; and the moment Nelson Lee vaulted over the gate he saw something which brought a cry of satisfaction to his lips.

"Here's the first proof that we've struck the trail," he said, pointing to certain impressions on the muddy ground. "What do you make of those?"

"They're the wheel-tracks of a motor-car," said Nipper, without a moment's hesitation. "The car came down this lane, turned round at this gate, and then went back the way it had come."

"The truth, and nothing but the truth, but not the whole truth!" said Nelson Lee, with a laugh. "You've missed one fact. The car came down this lane, and turned round at this gate, but before it went back it stood for quite a long time outside this gate. See how deeply the wheels have sunk into the mud at this place."

"That's so," said Nipper. "Probably the driver of the car was told to be at this gate at a certain time and to wait here until Foyl and his confederate arrived with Mr. Hanham."

"Probably," said Nelson Lee. "At any rate I think we may safely assume that after Hanham had been removed from the train he was carried to this gate and placed in a car. Although these tracks are more than a week old, they tell their tale as clearly as if they had only been made this morning. Let us follow them and see where they lead to."

They trudged up the lane, which eventually joined the main road to Abbeyvale. All the way along the lane the wheel-tracks of the car were perfectly plain and distinct; but when once the car had reached the turnpike, with its smooth, hard, metalled surface, all trace of it had disappeared.

"Now, which way did the car go, I wonder, when it reached this road?" mused Nelson Lee. "Did it turn to the right, in the direction of Abbeyvale, or did it turn to the left?"

"I vote for the left," said Nipper. "They would want to avoid the village, wouldn't they?"

"It might have been Hobson's choice with them," said the detective. "They might not have been able to avoid passing through the village in order to get to the place to which they wished to go. However, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we'll assume your theory to be correct. We'll try to the left, to begin with; and if we draw blank, we'll come back to this point and try to the right."

They turned to the left, and after walking along the road for nearly a mile, they came to where another country lane branched off from the turnpike.

"Ah! So your theory was correct, you see!" exclaimed Nelson Lee, drawing Nipper's attention to another series of wheel-prints. "These tracks exactly match those tracks we saw in the other lane."

Nipper examined the tracks, and nodded.

"So the car turned down this lane," he said. "I suppose we can't do better than follow its example!"

They turned into the lane—which they afterwards learned was really a private road—and at the end of a ten minutes' tramp they came to a pair of big iron gates which gave admittance to the spacious grounds of an old-fashioned country house.

By this time it was growing dusk and they could only just glimpse the house from the gates. From what little they could see of it, it appeared to be deserted; and the neglected state of the grounds bore out this assumption.

The drive was overgrown with grass and thickly carpeted with dead leaves. The shrubs and bushes on each side of the drive were straggling and untrimmed. The flower-beds were jungles of weeds and grass. The gates, which stood wide open, were red with rust and falling off their hinges.



## THE CONVICT'S VENDETTA

2

To add to the general air of dreariness and desolation, a chill north wind was blowing straight down the drive and moaning through the branches of the leafless trees.

"This is the sort of house we're looking for," said Nelson Lee, peering up the neglected drive. "It's big; it stands in its own grounds; and it's in as lonely a situation as any kidnapper could desire!"

"All the same," said Nipper, "it can't be the house where Mr. Banham and the judge are imprisoned. You can see for yourself that the place is deserted."

The detective pointed to the surface of the drive.

"Then how do you explain those wheel-tracks?" he asked. "Mr. Banham may not be here now, but I'm convinced he was brought to this house last Wednesday morning. Let us stroll up the drive and have a closer look at the house."

They sauntered up the drive, but had not gone very far when the detective suddenly halted and pricked his ears.

"Listen!" he said. "That's a motor-car! It's coming down the lane! Probably it's coming to this house. We'd better hide behind one of these bushes till we see who it is."

He and Nipper darted to the side of the drive, and at the same instant as they dropped on their hands and knees behind one of the bushes, the car turned in at the gates and came humming up the drive.

There was only one man in the car, and as the car glided past their hiding-place, both Nipper and the detective saw the man's face and recognised him instantly.

"Foyl," murmured Nipper, in a tense excited whisper.

The word had scarcely crossed his lips ere Foyl stretched out his hand and turned a tap at the side of the car. No sooner had he done so than a loud hissing sound was heard, while at the same instant a dense cloud of greenish vapour poured out of a tube at the back of the car, and, driven by the wind, came rolling down the drive towards the bush behind which the detective and Nipper were crouching.

This was in the days before the modern Huns had familiarised the world with the use of asphyxiating gas. Small wonder, then, that Nelson Lee was so completely taken by surprise that the rolling cloud was upon him before he had grasped its meaning.

What happened next, he never clearly remembered. His first impression was that somebody had suddenly seized him by the throat and was trying to strangle him. When he realised that this was the effect of the gas, he staggered to his feet and caught hold of Nipper's hand.

"Run—run for your life!" he gasped, in a choking voice.

Hand in hand, they staggered blindly a few yards down the drive, while above the hiss of the escaping gas they could hear Foyl's mocking laughter. He had evidently stopped the car and was gloating over their futile attempts to escape.

Suddenly Nipper stumbled and fell on his knees.

"I—I'm done!" he moaned. "Leave me and save your—"

The words died on his lips, and when Nelson Lee tried to drag him to his feet again, he saw that the lad was unconscious.

With a superhuman effort, the detective raised Nipper in his arms, but no sooner had he done so than he felt that he himself was losing consciousness.

For a moment or two he reeled and swayed like a drunken man, still clasping Nipper in his arms. Then he pitched to the ground and all became blank.

## CHAPTER VII.

## A Peep Behind the Scenes.

**W**HEN Nipper came to his senses his first impression was that he had been burned alive. He was in total darkness, he could hardly breathe, and he could not move a limb. As his brain grew clearer, however, he realized that he could not have been buried, since he could faintly hear the throbbing of an engine and the "swish" of rubber-tired wheels.

He tried to raise his head and found that he was lying under a heavy rug, or perhaps under several rugs. Eventually he decided—and decided rightly—that he was lying in the bottom of a swiftly-moving motor-car, bound, gagged, blindfolded, and covered with a rug.

For hour after hour—years they seemed to Nipper—the car sped on its way, now groaning up a hill, now flying down a hill, now rattling over a bridge. At last, to Nipper's intense relief, it slackened speed and stopped. Strange voices reached his muffled ears. Somebody opened the door of the car and dragged aside the rug which covered him. He was lifted out of the car and carried up some steps. Finally he was laid on a couch, his limbs were unbound, the gag was removed from his mouth, and the bandage from his eyes.

He then discovered that he was in a brilliantly-lighted room which was simply but tastefully furnished. Whether it was night or day he could not tell, for the window was screened with closely-fitting shutters. He fumbled for his watch, and found that it had been removed from his pocket.

The man who had carried him into the room was gathering up the ropes with which Nipper had been bound. He appeared to be a butler, and was a complete stranger to Nipper.

"If it's a fair question," said Nipper calmly, "may I ask where I am, and why I've been brought here?"

The butler shook his head.

"I am forbidden to answer any questions," he said. "The master, no doubt, will tell you all he wishes you to know when he comes to see you. In the meantime, my orders are to see that you have everything you wish—except, of course, your liberty. Would you like some food?"

Except that he was very stiff, and that he had a slight headache—due, no doubt, to the gas he had inhaled—Nipper was feeling practically all right again; and the butler's question reminded him that he was hungry.

"Is it breakfast-time or supper-time?" he asked, hoping to gain some idea how long he had been on the journey, and how far he was from the place where he had been "gassed."

Again the butler shook his head.

"I am forbidden to answer any questions," he repeated.

"Then make it ham and eggs," said Nipper.

The butler gravely inclined his head and left the room, locking the door behind him.

As soon as he had gone, Nipper stole to the window with the intention of opening the shutters and taking stock of his surroundings. To his chagrin, however, he found that the shutters were secured on the outside, and that there was not even a chink through which he could get a glimpse of the outer world.

Presently the butler returned with a substantial meal, to which Nipper did full justice. A long wait followed; then the door opened and Foyl came into the room.

"Well, how are you feeling now?" he asked pleasantly.

"All right," said Nipper, in anything but an amiable voice. "But it doesn't much matter about me. The question is, how's the governor I mean, Mr. Lee?"

"By this time, no doubt, he's as right as you are."

"Is he here?"

"Oh, no. I left him on the drive at Huntcliffe Grange."

"Is that the name of the place where you gassed us?"

"Yes. How did you track me there?"

"That would be telling."

"Then I won't ask. But I think I can guess. You ascertained that the train had pulled up in Abbeyvale cutting, and you guessed that it was there that I and my confederate removed Mr. Banham from the train. You guessed correctly. Mr. Banham was removed from the train while the train was standing in the cutting, and he was afterwards placed in a car and taken to the Grange. But he only remained there a few hours, and was then brought here.

"You will wonder, no doubt," he continued, "why Mr. Banham was taken to the Grange instead of being brought straight here. I will tell you. When I first started planning my campaign of vengeance, I knew that I should need a big house in a lonely situation in which to imprison my captives. I applied—under an assumed name, of course—to various agents in different parts of the country, and asked them to send me their lists. Among the houses which were recommended to me was Huntcliffe Grange; but after viewing the house, and all the other houses which had been submitted to me, I finally chose the house in which we are now talking."

"And what is the name of this house?" asked Nipper innocently.

Foyl brushed the question aside with a derisive smile.

"After I had taken this house," he said, "and had completed my preparations, I decided to start my campaign by kidnapping Mr. Banham. I knew that the surest way of luring him into my power would be to send him a wire to say that his wife was seriously ill. As his wife was then in York, that meant that I must kidnap him at some point between London and York. I consulted a map, and saw that Huntcliffe Grange was only a short distance from the railway. I then decided on the plan which I afterwards carried out.

"I sent one of my men to York," he continued, "with instructions to send off the forged telegram at a certain time. I sent another man, with a car, to wait for me at Grantham. I sent six other men, in another car, to Huntcliffe Grange with orders to break into the house and prepare one of the rooms for Mr. Banham's reception. One of the six was to set the signal against the train. Another was to wait with the car in a lane near the cutting, and the other four were to wait in the cutting to receive Mr. Banham. With another of my men, I then betook myself to King's Cross station and waited for Mr. Banham to appear."

He described how he and his confederate had chloroformed the barrister and handed him out to the four men in the cutting.

"They carried him to the car," he concluded, "and took him to the Grange. Myself and my assistant, after disguising ourselves afresh, left the train at Grantham, walked to the car which was waiting for us there, and returned to Huntcliffe Grange. By the time we reached the Grange Mr. Banham had recovered from the effects of the chloroform, and as soon as it was dark we placed him in one of the cars and we all came here."

"Very neat," said Nipper. "But why did you go back to the Grange to-day, or yesterday, or whenever it was?"

"After I had bagged the judge," said Foyl, "I left him in charge of two of my men, with orders to bring him here. I had intended to spend the rest of the day in London, preparing for my next raid, but all at once I remembered that I had left some papers at the Grange which might give the police a clue to my present address. I determined, therefore, to motor over to the Grange and secure the papers before I came here.

"Before I tell you what happened at the Grange," he added, interrupting the thread of his story for a moment, "I ought to explain that all my cars are fitted with an apparatus for baffling my pursuers if ever I am in danger of being caught. This consists of a large cylinder of compressed gas, which can be made to issue in dense clouds from the back of the car by merely turning a tap. If I were the inhuman brute which some people make me out to be, I should have selected a gas which would have killed those who inhaled it. As I draw the line at murder, all my cylinders are charged with a gas which merely renders its victims unconscious for an hour or so and leaves no injurious after-effects.

"To resume my story," he continued, "I motored from London to the Grange. Just as my car turned in at the entrance gates I saw two figures disappearing behind one of the bushes at the side of the drive. I did not know they were you and Mr. Lee, but I guessed it was somebody who had tracked me to the Grange and was planning my arrest. I gave no sign that I had seen the two figures, but as soon as I had passed the bush I turned on the gas—with what result you know."

"Yes, I know," said Nipper, shuddering at the recollection. "And when did you discover it was me and the gov'nor?"

"When the wind had dispersed the gas. You were both unconscious, and for a moment I was puzzled how to act. Eventually, I ran up to the house and secured the papers; then I concealed you in the car, after binding and gagging you, and brought you here."

"Leaving the gov'nor lying unconscious on the drive?"

"It was the best place for him. The fresh air would soon revive him. In fact, he was beginning to show signs of coming round before I left."

"But why did you bring me here, and leave the gov'nor behind?"

"I did think at first of bringing Mr. Lee and leaving you behind, but on second thoughts I decided it would be too dangerous. If I may say so without offence, you are not quite so clever as Mr. Lee. If I had brought him here, he might have discovered things which I do not wish to be discovered. With you, I have no such fear."

"Thanks," said Nipper drily. "And you're now going to keep me a prisoner here, I suppose?"

"Not at all," said Foyl. "On the contrary, I'm going to send you back to Mr. Lee in a few hours' time."

Nipper stared at him in stupefied bewilderment.

"Then why have you taken the trouble to bring me here?" he gasped.

Again that wild, vindictive light glittered in Foyl's eyes.

"Because I want my future victims to know what is in store for them," he almost hissed. "You are to be my messenger to the people on whom I have declared war. I am now going to give you a peep behind the scenes, and I wish you to describe what you have seen to Mr. Lee, and to the police, and to the public. In a word, I have brought you here because I want all the world to know how Gilbert Foyl wreaks his vengeance on those who wrooked his life."

He touched a bell and two men appeared. To Nipper's amazement, they were dressed as prison-warders!

"Blindfold this young gentleman," commanded Foyl.

Without a word the two men obeyed.

"Now follow me."

Each man took an arm, and in this fashion Nipper was led out of the room. Presently he realised that they had left the house and were in the open air. How far they walked, and in which direction, he could not tell. At last Foyl gave the order to halt.

While the two men still gripped Nipper by the arm, Foyl dragged the bandage from his eyes. No sooner had he done so than Nipper uttered a cry of amazement.

It was broad daylight, and he was standing by the side of a quarry in which two men in the garb of convicts were hewing stone. Two warders were supervising their work, and near by stood a sentry, armed with a rifle.

"Do you recognise them?" asked Foyl, pointing to the two "convicts."

"Yes," gasped Nipper. "One of them is Mr. Crawford Banham, and the other is Mr. Justice Meredith!"

Hearing their names, the "convicts" turned round. At the sight of Nipper they dropped their picks and ran towards him. Instantly the sentry raised his rifle to his shoulder.

"Halt, or I fire!" he cried.

The two men halted and gazed imploringly at Nipper. One of the "warders" brandished his staff in their faces.

"Back to your work, you dogs!" he thundered.

The two men groaned, picked up their picks, and meekly returned to their hewing.

Foyl chuckled and rubbed his hands.

"This is what they made me suffer," he said, "and now they're suffering the same themselves. Isn't that poetical justice? There are only two of them at present, but there'll be others by and by. Oh, yes, there'll be others! Every one of those who conspired to wreck my life shall suffer as I have suffered——"

He broke off abruptly and signed to the two men who had charge of Nipper. In silence they blindfolded him again, and led him back to the house.

Shortly after entering the house Foyl once more gave the order to halt. When the bandage was again removed from Nipper's eyes he found himself in a stone-flagged corridor, on each side of which was a row of cells. Over each cell door was a card bearing a name.

"These are the cells," said Foyl, "in which my prisoners have their meals and in which they spend their nights. Only two of them are occupied at present, but the others will be occupied before very long."

He pointed one by one to the cards above the doors.

"Meredith," he said. "That's the judge's cell. Banham—the glib-tongued barrister who persuaded the jury to convict me—that's his cell. Legg—the pawnbroker who identified me as the man who bought the revolver at his shop. I haven't got him yet, but he's the next on my list. Arnold—the clerk who gave evidence against me—he comes after Legg. Dawson—the constable; Gilmore—the foreman of the jury; all their cells are ready and waiting for them, you see!"

He opened one of the doors and explained to Nipper that each cell was an exact imitation of the cell which he himself had occupied at Dartmoor. Then he showed him the yard in which the "prisoners" were exercised, and the room in which they were punished for breaches of the rules—a sinister-looking room which contained among other things a cat-o'-nine tails and several sets of irons.

"I couldn't have done all this if I hadn't been a wealthy man," he said. "But you can get anything you wish—even revenge—if you have plenty of

money. With money I bought this house, and built the prison quarters, and provided myself with a fleet of motor-cars. With money I bought the men you have seen to-day—the butler, the warders, the sentry—and many others whom you haven't seen. They are all my devoted slaves. They know my plans and they will help me to carry them out, even at the risk of their lives.

"Nobody in this neighbourhood," he continued, "knows who I am, or suspects the business on which I'm engaged. I am known by a name which is not my own, and I'm regarded by my neighbours as a rather eccentric gentleman of studious and retiring habits! You will tell all this to Mr. Lee, of course, and also to the police; but you can also tell them from me that they will never discover where I am living. Even you, when I have sent you back to London, will have no idea what the outside of this house is like, or in what part of the kingdom it is situated."

Once more he signed to the "warders," and again the bandage was applied to Nipper's eyes. When it was removed, he was back in the room into which he had been carried on his arrival. The butler, who had removed the bandage, was standing in front of him; but Foyl and the "warders" had disappeared.

"You are to start for London in two hours' time," said the butler in a mechanical voice. "Some food will be provided for you before you start, and in the meantime the master advises you to lie down on the couch and have a sleep."

"Shall I see Mr. Foyl again before I leave?" asked Nipper.

"I believe not," said the butler coldly; and without another word he left the room and locked the door.

After his departure Nipper sat down on the couch and mentally reviewed the strange scenes he had just witnessed. He had no intention of going to sleep, but tired nature would not be denied, and the next thing he remembered was the butler shaking him by the shoulder and informing him that the car would be ready in twenty minutes.

Some food and drink were on the table, and after Nipper had made another hearty meal, the butler summoned two of the "warders," and in little more time than it takes to tell Nipper was once more bound and gagged and blindfolded. He was then carried out of the house and deposited in what he afterwards learned was a powerful touring car which had been converted into a closed car by means of a hood and side-curtains.

He was not laid on the floor of the car and covered with a rug, as on the previous occasion, but was comfortably settled in the corner of a luxuriously-padded seat. A hot-water bottle was placed beneath his feet and a thick fur rug was tucked in round his legs. Somebody—he afterwards discovered it was Foyl—stepped into the car and sat down by his side. Then the butler closed the door, the chauffeur slipped in his clutch, and the car glided off.

For more than an hour the only sounds which reached Nipper's ears were the chuff-chuff of the engine, the swish of the wheels, and an occasional blast on the horn. At the end of that time he fell into a dose, and when he awoke the car appeared to be threading its way through the noisy streets of a large town. Presently it seemed to have reached the open country again, and later it appeared to be passing through another town. And during all this time the man at Nipper's side never uttered a word.

Despite his efforts to keep awake, Nipper presently fell asleep again. How long he slept, he never knew. When he awoke, the man at his side had removed the rug and was cutting the cords which bound Nipper's legs.

"We are now in Gray's Inn Road," said the man, and Nipper recognised Foyl's voice. "I'm going to drop you at the door of Mr. Lee's rooms. Please stand up."

Nipper staggered to his feet and Foyl turned him half-round so that he faced the door on the left-hand side of the car.

"If I liberate your hands," said Foyl, "will you give me your word of honour that you won't remove your gag until you are out of the car?"

"No!" said Nipper, whose wrists were lashed together behind his back. "I won't make any promises."

The words had scarcely crossed his lips ere the car pulled up with a jerk outside the door of Nelson Lee's rooms. No sooner had it stopped than Foyl, with one stroke of his knife, severed the cord which bound Nipper's wrists; while at the same instant he opened the door and gave Nipper a sudden push.

Impelled by the push, Nipper stumbled headlong out of the car and fell, sprawling on the pavement. Bruised and shaken though he was, he scrambled hastily to his feet and dragged the bandage from his eyes.

By that time, however, the car had leaped forward like a thing alive; and as Nipper tore the gag from his mouth, the car whizzed round a neighbouring corner and vanished from his sight.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### "The Next on the List."

WHEN Nelson Lee recovered consciousness on the drive at Huntcliffe Grange, he found a scrap of paper pinned to his coat. On it was pencilled:

"Don't worry about Nipper. He'll turn up all right some time tomorrow.—GILBERT FOYL."

Deeply chagrined, but relieved to know that Nipper was safe, the detective explored the deserted house but failed to find any clue worth mentioning. He spent the rest of that day and most of the following day in making inquiries in the neighbourhood, but again without any tangible result. In the evening he returned to London, where the first person he met on entering his rooms was Nipper.

There is no need to repeat Nipper's story. It is enough to say that he told the detective all that happened from the moment when he had come to his senses, after being gassed, to the moment when Foyl had pushed him out of the car.

"And you have no idea where Foyl's house is?" asked Nelson Lee.

"Not the least," answered Nipper. "I can't even guess how far it is from London, for he took my watch away; so I don't know what time I got there, or what time I left."

The detective glanced at the clock. It was half-past nine.

"Foyl told you," he said, "that James Legg, the pawnbroker, was the next on his list?"

"Yes."

"And Foyl is now in London," said Nelson Lee meaningly.

"He was in London half an hour ago," said Nipper, "for it was nine o'clock when he shoved me out of the car."

"Then there's no time to be lost," said Nelson Lee, rising to his feet. "If Legg is the next on Foyl's list, and Foyl is now in London, he probably intends to kidnap Legg to-night. I must go to Legg at once, and put him on his guard. Are you too tired to come with me?"

Nipper scoffed at the idea of being tired, and within five minutes he and Nelson Lee were on their way to Bermondsey.

The pawnbroker's shop, it should here be explained, was in Gatling Road, and was next door to a jeweller's shop. Legg, who was a bachelor, lived over his shop, and he and his assistant were the only persons who slept on the premises.

Before going to Gatling Road, the detective called at the police-station in Boathouse Lane--which was only a few minutes' walk from Gatling Road--and confided his suspicions to the inspector.

"Nipper and I will stay all night with Legg," he said. "I don't suppose the attempt will be made--if it is made at all to-night--before midnight at the earliest. It is now ten o'clock. In an hour from now will you arrange for half a dozen constables to be concealed within easy distance of Legg's shop, and will you instruct them to rush at once to my assistance if I blow my whistle?"

The inspector promised to see that this was done, and Nelson Lee and Nipper walked on to Gatling Road. Legg's shop, of course, was closed for the night, but a light was burning in one of the upper windows. The detective rang the bell at the private entrance; and after a brief delay the door was opened by Legg himself.

"Why, it's Mr. Lee and Nipper, isn't it?" he exclaimed, peering out into the darkness. "Come in! Come in! Whatever brings you here at this late hour?"

It was not until the pawnbroker had led them up to his sitting-room that Nelson Lee explained the object of their visit. When Legg heard that he was the "next on the list," he was overwhelmed with panic, but was somewhat reassured when Nelson Lee explained that he and Nipper were going to spend the night with him, and that the police would be mounting guard on the house from eleven o'clock onwards.

"You and your assistant, I believe, are the only persons who sleep on the premises," said Nelson Lee. "What's your assistant's name?"

"Dack," replied Legg.

"Is he in at present?"

"Yes. He's in bed, and by this time, no doubt, he's fast asleep. He was not feeling very well to-night, so he went to bed early. Shall I go and wake him and bring him down, so that you may tell him what your plans are?"

"Is he a man whom you can trust?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, I really know very little about him. He has only been in my employ since yesterday. My late assistant left in rather a hurry, and I advertised for another. Dack was one of those who answered my advertisement, and as he offered to come for five shillings a week, in order to learn the business, I decided to take him for a month on trial. He isn't very satisfactory, and I don't think I shall keep him beyond the month."

"Then I don't think we will take him into our confidence. We won't trouble to wake him--if he is really asleep."

"Why do you say 'if he is really asleep'? You speak as if you suspected him."

"I suspect everybody! Foyl seems to have spies and agents everywhere; and when I hear that Dack only came to you yesterday, and was so anxious to come that he offered to come for next to nothing, it makes me wonder if he may not be one of Foyl's spies. Where does he sleep?"

"In one of the rooms on the second floor."

"And where do you sleep?"

"In the room to the right of this. I find it convenient to have my bedroom on the same floor as the sitting-room."



After some further discussion, Nelson Lee glanced at his watch. It was a few minutes after eleven.

"The police will now be at their posts," he said. "It's time you went to bed—or, at least, it's time you pretended to go to bed. Before you go to bed, however, as Dack may have heard you let us in, he may as well hear you let us out."

"But you're not going to leave me, are you?" cried Legg in dismay.

"We're going to pretend to leave you," said Nelson Lee, with a smile.

"You will now take us downstairs and open the door. You will bid us good-night in a loud voice—but we sha'n't go out—and you will then bang the door and lock and bolt it. You will then return to this room, while Nipper and I will steal upstairs and creep into your bedroom. You will remain in this room for five or ten minutes, and you will then switch off the light and go to your bedroom. You will switch on the light in the bedroom and leave it on for a few minutes, as though you were undressing. You will then switch off the light, and leave the rest to me."

This plan was duly carried out, and half an hour later the detective and Nipper and Legg were ensconced in the darkened bedroom. The pawnbroker was sitting on the edge of the bed, Nipper was crouching beside the window, which had been opened a few inches, and Nelson Lee was kneeling at the door with one ear to the keyhole.

Three hours passed, then Nelson Lee's quick ears caught the click of an opening door on the second floor, followed by the stealthy patter of stockinged feet.

"Dack's coming downstairs," he whispered.

The footsteps paused for a moment outside the bedroom door—as if Dack were listening to make sure his employer was asleep—and then passed on.

"He has gone down to the ground floor," breathed Nelson Lee. "You two stay here, while I follow him and see what he's after."

He took off his boots, opened the bedroom door without a sound, and stole to the head of the stairs. From certain sounds which came from below, he guessed that Dack was unfastening the door which led into the yard at the back of the premises. He crept downstairs and cautiously peered into the room behind the shop.

By that time Dack had opened the door. He had a flashlight in his hand, and by its light the detective saw two men glide in through the open door. One had a small handbag, and the other carried a bulky portmanteau. Both of them were strangers to Nelson Lee.

After admitting these two men, Dack softly closed the door and signed to the men to follow him. With a silence that a Red Indian might have envied, the detective stole back to the pawnbroker's bedroom and noiselessly closed the door.

"Dack has admitted two men and is bringing them upstairs," he whispered. "Probably they are agents of Foyl's who have come to kidnap Mr. Legg. Here's my whistle, Nipper. The moment they enter this room I'll switch on the light and cover them with my revolver. While I hold them up, you fling the window wide open and blow this whistle as a signal to the police."

Nipper had scarcely time to snatch the whistle from Nelson Lee's hand, and the detective had barely time to draw his revolver from his pocket, ere footsteps were heard outside the bedroom door.

Then a strange thing happened. To Nelson Lee's bewildered amazement, the three men passed the bedroom door, and a moment later he heard them creeping up the stairs which led to the floor above.

"I don't understand this," he whispered in a puzzled voice. "Dack

knows that this is your bedroom, yet he has taken the two men up to the second floor. I must shadow them and find out what their game is."

"No, no! For pity's sake don't leave me!" pleaded Legg, who was rapidly giving way to panic again.

"Nipper will see that you come to no harm," said Nelson Lee, as he opened the door and stole out on to the landing.

By this time the three men had reached the second floor and were mounting the stairs which led to the third and uppermost floor. Revolver in hand, the detective followed them and saw them enter one of the rooms at the top of the house. They partly closed the door behind them, and somebody struck a match.

Scarcely daring to breathe, the detective crawled to the outside of the partly-open door and peered through the chink. He then perceived that the room was an attic under the slates, and was evidently used as a lumber-room. It was lighted in the daytime by a skylight in the roof, but was now dimly illumined by a candle which Daek had just lit.

"I've done my share now," the detective heard Daek say to the two men. "It's up to you chaps to do the rest. There's the skylight. If you stand on one of these boxes you'll easily be able to open the skylight and climb out on to the slates. The second skylight on the left is the one which leads into the house above the jeweller's shop."

On hearing these words the truth burst on Nelson Lee like a thunderclap. He had been following a false scent. These men had not come to kidnap Legg. They were burglars, and their object was to rob the jeweller's shop next door. Daek was a confederate who had taken a situation at Legg's in order that he might admit the other two and enable them to enter the jeweller's shop by means of the skylight in the roof.

"So that's the game, is it?" the detective muttered. "The sooner I nip it in the bud the better, for if once the men get out on the roof, their capture will be both difficult and dangerous."

Musing thus, he flung the door open and sprang into the room.

"Hands up—all three of you—or I fire!" he cried, flourishing his revolver. "You may as well chuck up the sponge, for the house is surrounded by police, and you can't escape."

Never was a surprise more dramatic or more complete. Without a word the two would-be burglars dropped their bags and meekly raised their hands, while Daek, who was evidently an arrant coward, sat down on one of the boxes and began to blubber.

"Nipper!" shouted Nelson Lee at the top of his voice.

Nipper bounded up the stairs three at a time.

"We were on a wrong tack," said Nelson Lee when Nipper burst into the room. "These men hadn't come to kidnap Mr. Legg, but to burgle the shop next door. Run downstairs, open the door, whistle for the police, and bring them up to this room as quickly as you can."

Nipper raced downstairs, and a moment later the shrill blast of a whistle was heard. The sound seemed to sting the two burglars into action, for they suddenly made a rush for the door.

Crack!

The detective fired, but even as his finger pressed the trigger, one of the men knocked up his arm and struck him in the face. Nothing daunted, the detective lashed out with his fist and sent the fellow sprawling on his back. Meanwhile, the second man had whipped out a revolver, but before he could fire Nelson Lee sprang at him and planted his fist between his eyes. As the man went reeling to the ground, his revolver exploded and the bullet struck Daek in the chest. With an agonised scream, Daek rolled off the box on which he had been sitting, and at the same instant as he

crashed to the floor, Nipper dashed into the room with half a dozen constables at his heels.

When the police had secured the two burglars, Nelson Lee examined Dack, who had lapsed into unconsciousness.

"I'm afraid he's done for," he said to one of the constables. "Is there a doctor lives near here?"

"There's one in the next street," replied the constable.

"Then go and fetch him as quickly as you can," said Nelson Lee. Then he turned to Nipper.

"Where's Mr. Legg?" he asked.

"I left him in his bedroom, half-dead with fright," said Nipper.

"Then you'd better go back to him and tell him what has happened," said Nelson Lee.

Nipper hurried away, but presently came back with a white, scared face.

"I can't find Mr. Legg anywhere," he said. "He seems to have disappeared."

With a cry of mingled rage and fear, the detective dashed downstairs. From room to room he ran, shouting Legg's name and hunting for him everywhere. But it was all in vain. Legg had disappeared as completely and mysteriously as if he had vanished into air.

"I can guess what has happened," said Nelson Lee bitterly. "Foyl and his confederates were watching the house, and while we were all in the attic they slipped into the house, collared Legg, and carried him off."

As he spoke, one of the constables came up and handed him a scrap of paper.

"I found this on the bedroom mantelpiece," he said. "I thought you'd like to see it."

The detective glanced at the slip of paper and saw that it contained six hastily-pencilled words.

And these were the words he read:

"Sold again! Arnold next!—GILBERT FOYL."



## CHAPTER IX.

### A Confession and a Plot.

**B**Y this time the inspector and the doctor had arrived, and the two burglars—who proved to be well-known cracksmen—had been marched off to the police-station. By this time, also, Dack had recovered consciousness, and on being told that his injuries would probably prove fatal, he announced his intention of "making a clean breast of the whole business."

His confession was made in the presence of the doctor, the inspector, Nelson Lee, and Nipper. For the most part, it was the sordid story of a young blackguard who, being hard pressed for money, had been easily persuaded by evil companions to embark on a career of crime. The most startling part of his confession came at the end.

"And now I suppose I'd better tell you who I am," he said. "Dack isn't my name. My real name is Hubert Pryce, and my father is Colonel Pryce, of Langdale Crescent, Hampstead."

"Colonel Pryce!" cried Nelson Lee. "Then your father is the guardian of Miss Jessie Malvern, the young lady to whom Gilbert Foyl was engaged to be married, but who threw him over when he was falsely accused of the murder of Marmaduke Salter?"

Pryce—as we must now call him—nodded his head.

“Yes, my father is Jessie’s guardian,” he said. “But you’re wrong in saying that she threw Foyl over. She didn’t.”

“But she wrote him a letter, telling him that all was over between them.”

Pryce shook his head.

“She didn’t,” he said again. “That letter was forged by me.”

“By you?”

“Yes. As I’ve started on the confession lay, I may as well go the whole hog, though what I’m going to tell you has nothing to do with this morning’s affair.”

He paused for a moment to collect his thoughts.

“When Foyl was arrested,” he began, “Jessie wrote him a letter breathing love and devotion and assuring him of her belief in his innocence. My father and I destroyed that letter, and in its place we sent Foyl a letter, forged by me and signed with Jessie’s name, requesting him not to write to her, or to attempt to communicate with her in any way, until he had cleared himself of the charge against him. Foyl, of course, believed that the letter had come from Jessie, so he never wrote to her. Jessie was heartbroken because he didn’t write, and she wrote to him again and again, imploring him to send her a few lines; but my father and I intercepted all her letters and destroyed them.

“After Foyl had been sentenced,” he continued, “Jessie wrote him another long letter, telling him that in spite of his silence, and in spite of all the evidence against him, she still believed him innocent. She told him that she loved him as much as ever, and would always love him, and again she begged him to write to her.

“That letter,” he concluded, “was also intercepted and destroyed by my father and me. In its place we sent Foyl the letter to which you’ve referred—a letter forged by me and signed with Jessie’s name, telling him that she had done with him for ever and never wished to see or hear from him again.”

“But why did you do this dastardly thing?” asked Nelson Lee. “What did you to gain by keeping these two lovers apart?”

“Money,” said Pryce laconically. “Jessie will have two thousand a year when she comes of age next month, and we wanted to keep the money in the family.

“I see. In other words, you wanted to marry Miss Malvern yourself?”

“That’s it. That’s why we tried to make Foyl think that Jessie had thrown him over, and to make Jessie think that Foyl had forgotten her. In Foyl’s case our plot succeeded, but with Jessie it failed. She still loves Foyl as madly as ever, and although she knows that she can never marry Foyl now, she has told us again and again that she will never, never marry me or anybody else.”

“How does she know that she can never marry Foyl now?” asked Nelson Lee.

“That’s a silly question,” said Pryce. “Have you forgotten that Foyl was sentenced to penal servitude for life? How can she marry a man who is now in prison, and who will never come out until he’s dead?”

The inspector and Nelson Lee exchanged quick glances. It was evident from Pryce’s words that he was unaware that Foyl had been “pardoned” and released from prison three months ago. But there was nothing surprising in this. So far as the outside public was concerned—not counting those who have figured in these pages—there were not three people who knew that Foyl was now at liberty.

“Shall I tell him?” suggested the inspector.

Before Nelson Lee could reply, the doctor interposed with an ultimatum to the effect that "all this talking" was very bad for his patient, and he "really must forbid any further discussion at present." The detective and Nipper, therefore, left the room, accompanied by the inspector, and after a private chat with the latter, Nelson Lee and Nipper started to walk back to Gray's Inn Road.

"Well, it's about time we retired from the detective business, don't you think?" said Nipper as soon as they were alone. "Foyl simply does what he likes with us. Not content with bagging the judge in our own house, he has now carried off Legg from under our very noses, so to speak."

"Yes; it rather knocks the conceit out of us, doesn't it?" said Nelson Lee.

"It wouldn't be so bad," said Nipper, "if we could find the men and set them free. But we can't."

"On the contrary, I think we can," said Nelson Lee quietly. "In fact, after what has happened this morning, I'm more hopeful than ever that all Foyl's prisoners will shortly be set free."

Nipper stared at him in undisguised amazement.

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

"I agree with Hervey that Foyl is not strictly responsible for his actions," said Nelson Lee. "In a sense, he is mad. What has made him mad? Why has he embarked on this insane crusade of vengeance? Partly because of the injustice he has suffered, but mainly because he thought the girl he loved had ceased to care for him. We now know that Miss Malvern didn't throw him over, but loves him as deeply as ever she did."

"We know it, but Foyl doesn't know it," said Nipper.

"Then Foyl must be told," said Nelson Lee. "And when he learns the truth, I have every hope that he will return to the paths of sanity and abandon his crazy vendetta. There will be many difficulties to be surmounted, but with tact and patience I think they can be overcome. At any rate, I shall call on Miss Malvern this morning, and if she is willing to fall in with my plans, I think I may say that the end of the case will be in sight."

"And what are your plans?" asked Nipper.

By the time the detective had explained what he proposed to do they had reached their rooms in Gray's Inn Road. It was then about five in the morning. Four hours later, having meanwhile bathed and changed and breakfasted, the detective chartered a taxi and drove to Langdale Crescent.

In the meantime, in some mysterious way, the news of Hubert Pryce's arrest had reached his father, and the colonel—who was probably implicated in the projected robbery—had hurriedly packed a bag and taken to flight. Neither Jessie nor the servants had heard of Hubert's arrest, and they were under the impression that the colonel had merely gone down to the City. As a matter of fact, he was never heard of again; while, as for Hubert Pryce, he succumbed to his injuries later in the day and thus escaped being brought up for trial.

"Is Colonel Pryce at home?" asked Nelson Lee of the housemaid who answered his ring.

"No, sir," she replied. "He left for the City an hour ago."

"Is Miss Malvern at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then will you please give her this card and ask her if it will be convenient for her to grant me an interview?"

The housemaid took the card, conducted him to the drawing-room, and

left him there. A few minutes later the door opened, and he found himself face to face with the girl on whom all his hopes of success were founded.

One did not need to be a detective to see that Jessie Malvern had suffered much in the last two years. She was still very beautiful—nothing could alter that—but the girlish look had gone from her face, her eyes had lost their natural lustre, and her mouth had a pathetic droop.

"You are famous Mr. Nelson Lee, I see," she said, glancing at the detective's card and holding out her hand. "This is the first time I have had the pleasure of meeting you, but I have a grateful recollection of the work you did two years ago on behalf of a very dear friend of mine."

"It is about that friend that I've called to speak to you this morning," said Nelson Lee, plunging at once, as was his way, into the object of his visit. "Are you aware that Mr. Foyl was released from prison last August?"

"Indeed, no!" she exclaimed in a startled voice. "Why was he released?"

The detective told her, and she literally clasped her hands with joy.

"Of course, I always knew that he was innocent," she said; "but I am delighted to hear that his innocence has been proved before all the world. But why has nothing of this been published in the newspapers?"

"Because, in the first place," said Nelson Lee, "the authorities were not eager to publish the fact that they had made a mistake; and because, in the second place, Mr. Foyl was quite willing that the matter should be hushed up."

"But why?" she asked wonderingly.

In reply to this question the detective told her, fully and frankly, the whole story of Gilbert Foyl's vendetta. Long before he had finished she was crying like a heart-broken child.

"He is mad!" she sobbed, unconsciously echoing Hervoy's words. "The injustice he has suffered has turned his brain. He is, naturally, the kindest and gentlest of men, and he would never have acted in this way if his reason had not been affected. But you will find him, won't you, Mr. Lee, and you will persuade him to release those men and give up his dreadful scheme of revenge?"

"I think you can do that better than I," said Nelson Lee.

"I?" she exclaimed. "But I don't know where he is. Besides"—and the tears began to flow again—"I am nothing to Mr. Foyl now. He has forgotten me. He no longer cares for me."

"On the contrary," said Nelson Lee, "it is because he cares for you—because he loves you—because he thinks he has lost your love—that he has embarked on this war of revenge."

She shook her head.

"He can't think he has lost my love," she said. "I wrote to him, both before and after his trial, but he never answered my letters."

"Because he never received them," said Nelson Lee; and he told her of Hubert Pryce's confession.

Horror, incredulity, amazement, and indignation struggled for the mastery in Jessie's face as she listened to this revelation of the true character of her guardian and his son.

"So that is why Gilbert never answered my letters!" she cried. "That is why he thought I had deserted him! I will never forgive the colonel and Hubert. I shall leave this house at once. I refuse to live another day under the same roof with two such monsters of deceit."

"I don't think you need trouble about that," said Nelson Lee. "I under-

stand that the colonel left for the City an hour ago. I suspect he has heard of his son's arrest and has taken to flight. Hubert is dying, and will certainly never return to this house."

"Then you advise me to remain here for the present?"

"Yes."

"And do nothing?"

"I didn't say that."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"I want you to write to Mr. Foyl and tell him that those letters were forgeries, and that your love for him has not changed."

"But how can I write to him when I do not know where he is?"

"If you are willing to fall in with my plans, I think I can promise that Mr. Foyl will receive your letter."

"What are your plans?"

"I will tell you in a moment. In the meantime, am I right in assuming that Mr. Foyl was never allowed to visit you at this house?"

"Yes. The colonel didn't like him and would never allow him to come to the house."

"Nevertheless, no doubt, you used to meet secretly?"

She nodded.

"What was your favourite trysting-place?"

"As a rule we used to meet each other at a secluded spot on Hampstead Heath, which we christened the Harbour of Refuge!"

"Where is that?"

She described the location of the place.

"I know it," he said. "Well, now, this is my plan. I want you to write a letter to Mr. Foyl, telling him that your love is unchanged: and I want you to say in your letter that you will go to the Harbour of Refuge every evening at six o'clock and wait there for an hour."

"But how am I to address the letter?"

"Simply address it to 'Gilbert Foyl, Esquire,' and I will undertake to see that he receives it."

"But I thought you said you didn't know where he lived."

"I don't."

"Then how can you undertake that he will receive my letter?"

"When Nipper was at Foyl's house," said Nelson Lee, "Foyl told him that Legg was the next on his list, and that Arnold—who was Salter's head clerk—was the next on the list after Legg. I've already told you that Legg was kidnapped this morning; so that, in all probability, within the next few days, Mr. Foyl will endeavour to kidnap Arnold."

"If you write such a letter as I have suggested," he continued, "I will interview Arnold and give him the letter. I will tell him that Foyl is going to kidnap him, and I will explain that he is to allow himself to be kidnapped without offering any resistance. I will further instruct him that when he reaches Foyl's house he is to hand Mr. Foyl your letter."

"When Mr. Foyl reads your letter," he concluded, "I haven't the least doubt what he will do. The very next evening, at six o'clock, he'll turn up at the Harbour of Refuge, and when he hears from your own lips that you are still true to him he'll return to the paths of sanity and abandon his vendetta."

Jessie looked at him with a hint of suspicion in her eyes.

"You're not trying to trap Mr. Foyl, are you?" she asked. "You're not using me as the bait to lure him into the trap? You'll not have a number of police concealed near the Harbour of Refuge, with orders to rush out and arrest Mr. Foyl when he arrives?"

"I don't suppose you wish to insult me," said Nelson Lee, "but I warn

you that you're sailing very close to the wind. Of course, I'm not seeking to trap Mr. Foyl. The police know nothing, and will know nothing of my plans. I shall certainly conceal myself in the neighbourhood of the Harbour of Refuge, but I shall not show myself or take any action unless Mr. Foyl himself comes to me. If he chooses to walk away after he has spoken to you, I give you my word of honour that I shall make no attempt to stop him or to follow him. On the other hand, if he chooses to come to me, I shall be prepared to do the best I can to help him to extricate himself from the consequences of his folly."

Jessie jumped to her feet and impulsively held out her hand.

"Forgive me!" she said. "I was a horrid beast to suspect you. I will write the letter at once."

She sat down at the writing-desk, and for nearly half an hour no sound was heard, save the scratching of her pen. Then she blotted the letter and held it out to Nelson Lee.

"I don't wish to read it," he said, waving it aside. "Please seal it up in an envelope and address it to Mr. Foyl."

She obeyed, and he placed the letter in his pocket-case.

"I will now go and interview Arnold," he said, picking up his hat. "I don't suppose he'll be kidnapped to-day, but if he is, I'll come back here about half-past five this evening, and conduct you to the heath. I'll hide myself near the Harbour of Refuge, and if Foyl hasn't arrived by seven o'clock, I'll escort you back to this house. I'll come again to-morrow evening, and every evening, if necessary, until our plan bears fruit. In the meantime, if the colonel should return—which is most unlikely—leave the house and come to my rooms in Gray's Inn Road."

From Langdale Crescent he drove to Caspian Chambers, Penfold Lane. Though Salter was dead, the business was still carried on in his name; and on making inquiries of one of the clerks, the detective learned that Arnold was still employed there.

"But he's on the sick list at present," said the clerk. "He scalded his hand two days ago, and hasn't been to the office since."

"Can you give me his address?"

"Yes. He lives with his mother at No. 20, Machon Road, West Norwood."

The detective drove to Machon Road, where he found that Arnold had just gone to the doctor's surgery to have his hand dressed. When he came back, the detective told him in the presence of his mother, and after swearing them both to secrecy, the whole story of Gilbert Foyl's vendetta; after which he explained to Arnold what he wished him to do. Arnold was rather frightened at first, when he heard that Foyl intended to kidnap him; but in the end he agreed to carry out Nelson Lee's plan.

"Here's Miss Malvern's letter, then," said the detective, handing him the letter. "Put it in your pocket, and when you go to bed to-night—if you haven't been kidnapped in the meantime—put it in the pocket of your pyjamas. As you never know at what hour of the day or night you may be kidnapped, never let the letter out of your possession for a single moment, until you are able to hand it to Foyl."

After giving Arnold some further instructions, Nelson Lee returned to Gray's Inn Road. Here he told Nipper all that he had done, and had just finished his recital when he was summoned to the telephone.

"Is that Mr. Lee?" asked a woman's voice.

"Yes. That's Mrs. Arnold, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'm speaking to you from Caspian Chambers. About ten minutes after you had left my house, a policeman arrived in a taxicab. He said my son's presence was required at the office in order to inspect some signatures which were believed to be forgeries. My son drove off with the policeman.



and it was not until they had gone that it suddenly dawned on me that this might be a plot on the part of Mr. Foyl to kidnap my son. I at once went for a cab, and drove to Caspian Chambers, where I was told that the whole story was a hoax, and that no policeman had been sent to fetch my son!

The detective glanced across at Nipper.

"I was only just in time," he said. "Foyl, disguised as a policeman, kidnapped Arnold ten minutes after I'd left the house!"

## CHAPTER X

### The End of the Vendetta.

SIX o'clock that evening found Nelson Lee and Nipper crouching behind a clump of bushes on Hampstead Heath. It was a clear and frosty evening and by the light of the stars they could just see Jessie Malvern standing at the foot of a tree, about fifteen or twenty yards from their hiding-place.

"I don't suppose he'll come to-day," said Nelson Lee in a low voice. "His headquarters are evidently a long way from London, and by the time he had taken Arnold there, and Arnold had give him the letter, it would be too late for Foyl to get back to London before seven o'clock."

"It would, if he took Arnold to his house before Arnold gave him the letter," said Nipper. "But Arnold may have found a chance to give Foyl the letter before they reached the house—perhaps even before they left London."

"I hardly think——" began Nelson Lee; then he paused, and signed to Nipper not to move or speak.

He had heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and a moment later a man walked past the bushes—so near that they could have touched him—and strode rapidly towards the tree under which Jessie Malvern was standing.

"Foyl!" whispered Nelson Lee and Nipper in the same breath.

The word had scarcely crossed their lips ere they saw Jessie spring forward to meet the man, with a low cry of delight. The next instant she and Foyl—for such it was—were clasped in each other's arms!

"This is when you disappear," whispered Nelson Lee to Nipper. "You know what you have to do. Go back to the car, drive to Mrs. Banham's, and tell her that Foyl is here; then take her to our rooms, and wait there until we arrive. If we don't arrive by nine o'clock, you know that I have failed."

Nipper dropped on his hands and knees and crawled away. For the next three-quarters of an hour the detective watched the two figures under the tree, talking together in low and earnest tones. Then Foyl turned round and glanced towards the bushes.

"Mr. Lee!" he called out.

Nelson Lee emerged from his hiding-place. Foyl came to meet him, with Jessie clinging to his arm. Dark as it was, the detective was struck with the change in Foyl's appearance. The wild look was gone from his eyes, his face was radiant with happiness, and he seemed to have grown ten years younger in the last three-quarters of an hour.

"He's sane enough now!" muttered Nelson Lee.

Foyl disengaged himself from Jessie, and held out his hands.

"Produce your handcuffs!" he said quietly. "Arrest me! I am ready to take my punishment now—now that I know that Jessie loves me."

"Am I to understand, then," said Nelson Lee, "that you abandon your

schemes of revenge, and are prepared to liberate and compensate the men whom you have kidnaped."

"Of course," said Foyl. "All the same, I must pay the penalty of my folly. Don't hesitate to arrest me. I'll face my punishment without whining."

"I have no power to arrest you, even if I wished to do so," said Nelson Lee. "I'm not a police-detective, and, besides, no warrant has yet been issued for your arrest."

"Then I suppose I'd better go to the nearest police-station and give myself up?"

"I wouldn't do that just yet. Did you come here in a car?"

"Yes. After I'd kidnapped Arnold this morning, I took him in the taxicab to Elstree, where I had a big car waiting for us at a house which I've rented there. He was bound and gagged, of course, but while I was lifting him out of the cab he managed to make me understand that he had a letter for me. I found the letter and read it, with the result that I decided not to go on to Wales to-day."

"Then your headquarters are in Wales?"

"Yes. My house—the house to which I took Nipper—is hidden away in a hollow among the mountains, a few miles on the Welsh side of the border. But to resume. As I was saying, after I'd read Miss Malvern's letter, I decided to remain at Elstree until this evening, when I left Arnold in charge of two of my men, and motored here to keep my appointment."

"Is your car near at hand?"

"Five minutes walk from here."

"Then, before you do anything else," said Nelson Lee, "I should like you to take Miss Malvern and myself, in your car, to my rooms in Gray's Inn Road. A lady is waiting for you there, and after you and Miss Malvern have talked to her, I hope it may not be necessary for you to give yourself up to the police."

Completely mystified, Foyl led the way to where his car was standing. It was a big, powerful touring car, capable of seating six with ease.

"Who is the lady who is waiting for us at your rooms?" whispered Jessie to Nelson Lee, while Foyl was starting the engine.

"Mrs. Banham," he replied. "I have told her everything, and I want you to throw yourself on her mercy and plead with her to forgive Mr. Foyl for having kidnapped her husband. She's already half-inclined to forgive him, and I am trusting to you to convert the other half!"

"If she consents to forgive him," he added, "I've little doubt that her husband will do the same; while Legg will probably be only too glad to accept a couple of hundred pounds as the price of his neutrality. The judge will be a harder nut to crack, but I am not without hope that two such charming women as you and Mrs. Banham will be able to coax him to forego his pound of flesh."

By this time Foyl had started the engine, and a moment later they were on their way to Gray's Inn Road. Nipper opened the door for them, and nodded to Nelson Lee.

"She's upstairs," he whispered, referring, of course, to Mrs. Banham.

The detective turned to Foyl.

"You know your way to my sitting-room, I think," he said grimly.

"It's the room in which you bagged the judge. If you will take Miss Malvern up to that room, Nipper and I will join you in a quarter of an hour."

Fifteen minutes later Nelson Lee and Nipper went up to the sitting-room, and as soon as they opened the door they saw that all was well.

Mrs. Banham and Jessie were sitting on the couch, with their arms

round each other. Both of them had been crying, and there was a suspicious look about Foyl's eyes which suggested that he had been following their example.

"There's no resisting this sweet young thing, Mr. Lee," said Mrs. Banham, as she kissed Jessie's tear-stained but happy face. "He and Mr. Foyl have suffered so terribly in the past that I should be a heartless brute to add to their sufferings. So far as I am concerned, I fully and freely forgive Mr. Foyle for kidnapping my husband; and unless Crawford agrees to do the same, I'll never speak to him again!"

Those who imagine a detective to be a sort of human bloodhound, whose only joy in life is to hunt down evil-doers, will probably fail to understand the thrill of satisfaction with which Nelson Lee heard these words. He had achieved a success which would never figure in the newspapers, which would bring him no fame in the eyes of the public, yet he felt happier at that moment than ever he had felt after tracking down some notorious criminal.

"So that's all right," he said cheerily. "And now, I suppose, the next thing to be done is to tackle the judge and Mr. Legg."

"We're going to do that now," said Mrs. Banham.

"Now?" echoed Nelson Lee, with a note of interrogation in his voice.

"Yes," said Foyl, speaking for the first time. "Mrs. Banham is naturally anxious to go to her husband as soon as possible, while I am equally impatient to make my peace with the judge and Mr. Legg. My car is outside and is quite capable of landing us at Plas Meddyg—that's the name of my house—in time for breakfast. Why, then, shouldn't we start now?"

"But what about poor Arnold?"

"We'll stop at Elstree on the way and either take him with us or send him home, just as he prefers."

"Then the sooner you start the better," said Nelson Lee.

"But you and Nipper will come with us, won't you?" asked Mrs. Banham.

The detective hesitated.

"Please do," pleaded Jessie.

Nelson Lee glanced at Nipper.

"What do you say?" he asked. "Shall we go?"

"I'm going, whether you go or not," declared Nipper. "When I was at Plas Meddyg before, the butler took possession of my watch before he unbound me. He forgot to remember to give it back to me when I left, and I want to speak a few kind words to him."

"Then I suppose I'd better come, too," laughed Nelson Lee. "Just to see that Nipper doesn't spoil the butler with too much kindness."

### Conclusion.

THE rest is soon told.

From Nelson Lee's rooms they motored to Elstree, where Arnold was given his choice between going with them to Plas Meddyg, or being sent home in the taxi-cab. He chose the latter alternative, and was sent rejoicing on his way with a fifty-pound note in his pocket.

When the little party reached Plas Meddyg, the three "prisoners" were taken from their cells and brought into the drawing-room. Seated by Jessie's side, and holding her hand, Foyl told his story in a manly, straightforward fashion, and threw himself on his victims' mercy.

Legg jumped at the offer of five hundred pounds as full compensation

for what he had suffered, and warmly assured Foyl that so far as he was concerned he would "hear no more of the matter."

Mr. Banham was rather inclined at first to insist that the law must take its course, but was finally persuaded by his wife to "let bygones be bygones."

As Nelson Lee had predicted, the judge proved the most obstinate of the three, but even he succumbed at last to the tearful pleading of Jessie and the blandishments of Mrs. Banham.

When Nelson Lee reported all this to Scotland Yard, the authorities shook their official heads and talked gravely about the majesty of the law. As the detective pointed out, however, none of Foyl's victims would prosecute him or give evidence against him, and in the end, on condition that Foyl demolished his "prison," disbanded his "warders," and henceforth conducted himself as a law-abiding citizen, the authorities agreed to take no further action.

And so ended Gilbert Foyl's vendetta. He and Jessie were married a few weeks later, the bride being given away by David Hervey, and the "best man" being Nelson Lee. "The wedding presents," according to the "Times" report, "were numerous and costly, and included valuable gifts from Mr. Crawford Banham, K.C., M.P., and Mr. Justice Meredith."

THE END.

**NEXT WEEK!**

**NEXT WEEK!**

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

*Viva, the Headmaster's daughter, gets caught by the tide, and is in danger of drowning when Dick Clare goes to the rescue.*

## Dick Clare's Heroic Action.

"O H, Dick!" said Viva. "How brave you are! What will my father——"

"You've got a funny idea of bravery if you call me brave," interposed Dick. "The only way to get you ashore without getting wet is to fetch that boat; but that is perfectly simple. It won't take me many minutes to reach it. Is that your book?"

"Yes. I was reading and did not notice the tide until I was cut off from the shore. You have saved me from death."

"Not a bit of it. There are plenty of boats on the shore."

"But no men. No one was there. I should have been drowned."

"Well, you won't be drowned now, which is a good thing for the tuck-shop. I'll bet you spend a fearful lot of money on their chocolate creams, which are rattling good ones. I speak from experience. We'll have some on our way in. Wait a bit while I fetch the boat. Hallo! Aren't these rocks rugged?"

Dick dived in again and swam to the boat, which was about a quarter of a mile distant.

He soon brought her to the rocks, then helped Viva in.

"That's better," he exclaimed. "The colour is coming back to your cheeks. Don't I only wish I had my camera now. There is an expression in your eyes that is positively lovely. Aren't the girls at school jealous of you, Viva?"

"Of course not," she answered, smiling at him.

"I'll bet they are!"

"Aren't you going to row me ashore, Dick?"

"I expect I'll have to," he answered, taking the oars.

"The sea looks so beautiful now, Dick; and a few moments ago I thought it was horrible."

"You had a bad fright, Viva!"

"It was terrible. I thought you had dived to your death, and that my carelessness had caused it. I'd never have forgiven myself if anything had happened to you."

"Look here, Viva, there wasn't the slightest cause for you to be fright-

need about me. There was cause for you to be frightened for yourself. However, that's all over now. Now we've grounded. I must carry you ashore. My clothes are rather wet, but you would get wetter walking in the water."

He lifted her in his arms and bore her to the strand, then having made the boat fast they walked back to the college, and he bought a box of chocolate creams on the way, then they parted just before reaching the college gates.

Dick knew that he was caught, so he walked boldly through the gates, and Vance grinned as he put his name down.

At eight o'clock he was ordered into the Head's study.

"You know the penalty of breaking bounds, Clare?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you wish to say anything for yourself?"

"Why, there's really nothing to be said, sir. I took the risk."

"I shall cane you. It is the rule of this college. It is my duty to cane you. I shall do my duty."

And he did, most thoroughly, as Dick knew to his cost.

"I hope it will not occur again, Clare," sighed the Doctor. "Now, my dear lad, I wish to say that your heroic action will never be forgotten by me or by Viva's mother. To our dying days we shall ever remember how our old friend's son followed in the noble footsteps of his father——"

"I say, sir, please don't talk like that. I was too cowardly to dive from the summit of the cliff. It would have saved time, and——"

"I have been to the cliff. Viva told me exactly what you did. To have done more might have proved fatal to her—and fatal to you. To use one's brain in time of peril is a sign of bravery, and not of cowardice. A brave fireman when rescuing someone from a burning building does not go through the flames if he can reach that person by going round some other way. He remains calm, and acts for the best. The very fact of his remaining calm tends to prove his bravery. I shall say no more to you, Clare; but perhaps some day you may realise the depth of gratitude I and Viva's mother bear towards you. Duty seems very hard at times, my dear lad. It has been very hard for me to-day."

And the Doctor stepped to the window and looked out as Dick left the study.

### The Poaching Expedition.

DICK had reached the end of the passage, then he turned, and, retracing his steps, tapped at the Head's study door.

"Beg pardon, sir!" he exclaimed. "I want to know if you would do me the favour of not mentioning anything about what has happened."

"Do you mean about the punishment, Clare?"

"Oh, no, sir. I don't mind that—at least, not now it's over. I meant about Viva."

"You don't wish me to tell that you dived from the headland and saved my daughter's life?"

"I would be glad if you would not mention it, sir."

"I was certainly going to do so—and in public."

"I hope you will not, sir."

"I certainly shall not if you wish it."

"Indeed I do, sir. I don't want any of the fellows to know, and I don't want the masters to know. Then, again, I don't want my mother to know."

You see, sir, I made her a promise that I would strive to follow in my father's footsteps."

"And you will succeed, my lad."

"I doubt it, sir. I shall get into no end of scrapes."

"I don't doubt that, Clare."

"My sense of duty is nothing like his."

"Of course it is not," said the Doctor, smiling. "In the same manner your strength of character is nothing like his; neither is your physical strength. But you are a boy; he was a man. It is my duty to strengthen your character, and I shall do it, even though I have to cane you again for breaking bounds. I suppose you look up to me?"

"Rather, sir."

"Well, don't you suppose that I got into scrapes when I was your age? And don't you suppose your father did?"

"Why, it really never occurred to me, sir; but I expect you did."

"Quite correct, Clare! I will do as you desire. No one save Viva, her mother, and myself will know from me what you have done."

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed Dick, hurrying away, and when he reached Study No. 7 he did not even tell his chum Tom what had happened.

"Did he whack you?" inquired Tom, who knew that Dick had broken bounds and been caught.

"You bet he did—and hard at that," answered Dick.

"You've got the consolation of knowing that it will do you a lot of good."

"Having a tooth out may do a chap a lot of good, all the same it's jolly unpleasant."

"Well, look here, Dick," exclaimed Melby, who was in the study. "I've got some jolly good news for you. I'm going to give a splendid supper in our dormitory."

"You will about ruin me, Melby, if you keep giving these suppers. Of course, it's jolly liberal of you, but it comes expensive."

"I suppose you think you are funny?"

"Well, I think you are. You got me to pay for the last supper you gave."

"And you wolfed it, which I call jolly greedy—not to say dishonest. But this supper isn't going to cost you anything. You know that sand-pit where all those rabbits are?"

"Keereect!"

"Well, I've got a pistol. It's a splendid weapon. It cost over five pounds when it was new; but I got it cheaper. Now, I'm going to shoot some of those rabbits, and we are going to cook them in the dormitory."

"Oh, my eyes!" gasped Tom.

"What's the matter?" demanded Melby, who detested being thwarted.

"Nothing. How many are you going to shoot?"

"If I shoot three or four it will be quite sufficient. They are wild."

"So will the owner of the ground be if he catches you, and I wouldn't wonder if the Head is the same when you catch it."

"Rot! I'm going to shoot those rabbits, I tell you, and I know where I can sneak a saucepan to boil 'em in. We can borrow some wood and coal. It will be jolly exciting cooking them, and rabbit is awfully good. We often have it at home."

"Do you cook it?" inquired Dick.

"Of course I don't! Our chef does that. She's a splendid cook. We live in jolly good style. Oh, you can laugh, Dick Clare."

"I was only smiling at your female chef, not at your style. However, I shall be quite pleased to help you cook the rabbits—after you have shot them."

"Do you think I can't shoot them?"

"I expect you could, if someone held the rabbit close enough to the muzzle of your fifty-guinea revolver."

"I said it cost five pounds."

"Over five pounds—and that might be fifty, or more. But never mind, Melby, you do your best, and, although I expect it will be jolly bad, you will have the consolation of knowing that it could not possibly be better, seeing it is your best. We will come with you. My only objection is the cruelty of killing harmless little rabbits. It wouldn't be a bad idea for you to go without your dinner and tea that day, so that you may make a splendid rabbit supper."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom. "Wouldn't he eat a mighty breakfast the following morning?"

"You are jolly clever, aren't you?"

"Don't care to blow my own trumpet," said Tom. "Go and ask Foster."

Melby left the room in a huff, and with the fierce determination to shoot a good many rabbits.

"Tom, old chap," exclaimed Dick, "I believe I'm going to get another caning. At any rate, I've got a wheeze that will cause some fun. Leave it all to me. I will let it come as a surprise to you, because you will enjoy it all the more."

The following day was a half-holiday, and the occupants of No. 7 went out together, Melby being armed with a revolver loaded with ball cartridges in five chambers.

The sand-pit, which was their objective, was in a copse, and as they neared it Dick suggested that Melby should crawl forward on his hands and knees, pointing out that Wild West savages frequently did so when stalking game.

Melby thought the idea distinctly good, until he tried it; then he stung his hands with nettles, and sampled some brambles with his knees. It made him very angry.

"You must be a fool to suggest such a ridiculous thing as that, Clare," he snarled, rising. "I've hurt myself!"

"Rather a pity, that," observed Dick. "Still, sportsmen often do hurt themselves, the same as soldiers. If you take my advice you won't bother about it. I'm not going to, and by the expression on Tom's face I don't believe he is bothering about it either. Don't make that row, else you will frighten all the rabbits away. Think you are a savage."

"He's all that," said Tom.

Melby was more determined than ever to shoot rabbits. He crept forward, and, as was always the case, found plenty of rabbits in the sand-pit, which was a regular warren.

Levelling his revolver, he blazed away five shots, and when he opened his eyes again, for he had shut them when firing, he saw no rabbits there.

"Why, you appear to have killed the little lot," exclaimed Dick. "At any rate, I can't see any there. Let's clamber down and see what luck you have had."

"I saw two fall," declared Melby, who had not even seen them run away, because of his closed eyes. "Mind how you come. The sides of the pit are jolly steep. You descend a bit further along. I don't want you dropping on my head."

"I'd prefer that to dropping on my head," said Tom. "He's as daring as robins after worms."



Melby got halfway down, taking his time. He did the other half in no time at all, for, missing his hold, he pitched into a clump of bushes at the bottom. They were blackberry bushes, and they caused him to yell at the top of his voice.

Tom and Dick took longer over the task, but they got down without mishap, and then Melby stepped to the spot where the rabbits had been.

"Who can't shoot rabbits?" he yelled, forgetting his scratches in his excitement. "Ha, ha! Now perhaps you will tell me I'm not a good shot?"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Dick.

"Look! I've shot six rabbits!"

"I call that excellent shooting, don't you, Tom?"

Tom gazed at the six defunct rabbits, and then at Dick.

"Jolly good!" he exclaimed. "Especially with five shots."

"I thought it was a six-chambered revolver," murmured Dick. "But a rabbit more or less doesn't count with Melby."

"I must have shot two of them with one ball," said Melby, who had not heard the chums' whispered remarks. "I noticed two were in my line of fire."

"Was that when you shut your eyes?" inquired Tom.

"Rot! If I had shut my eyes how could I have aimed like that? In talking of my aim, my father always says——"

"Never mind what your father says. Perhaps the old chap takes after you, in which case I would say there's some German blood in his veins. Let's come and look at your rabbits."

Melby picked up one dead rabbit. In its mouth was a piece of paper. He extracted it and read:

"Sportsman Melby, slay me not;  
Nor consign me to the pot!"

Tom read it also, and roared with laughter. The expression on Melby's face was enough to make anyone laugh.

But now Tom saw other papers in other mouths. He extracted the second one, and read it aloud.

"Here comes a bold hunter with his grim gun!  
Oh, rabbits, let's mizzle, or he'll kill each one!"

"Ha, ha, ha! They knew you were coming, Melby. Let's try more poetry. How's this:

"On the sward I lay my dead bones.  
By request, no flowers or headstones."

"Beastly pathetic," said Tom. "Here's another poetical bunny. Ha, ha!

"Valiant Melby, it is rot  
To slay a rabbit with a shot."

"That's obvious from the rabbit's point of view. Here's some 'Moore.'"

"Soon other forms shall roam this dell,  
For Melby's rung my funeral knell."

"That's certainly reminiscent of 'Sweet Evening Bells.' Wait a bit. Here we have the sixth poem.

"The huntsman bold has laid me low.  
I'm shot - I'm shot! Oh, here's a go!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" howled Tom. "I must certainly keep these poems. Jolly good, I call them. I once wrote a poem myself at Foster's instigation. He read it out in public. I remember that day as well as Kaiser Bill will remember his day."

"I consider you are a beastly cad, Tom Hart," said Melby. "It's not sportsmanlike to jape a chum."

"And that chum such a keen sportsman, too," said Dick. "Still, I should say any ordinary rabbit would be able to compose poetry like that."

"I don't know," said Tom. "I know jolly well I couldn't. It would take me about six weeks to get anything to rhyme with dead bones—unless I tried trombones, and that wouldn't be appropriate to a rabbit. You never saw a rabbit playing a trombone. In fact, I never saw rabbits writing poetry before to-day. I expect they are a special breed of bunnies."

"Perhaps you have never looked into the mouth of a dead rabbit," said Dick.

"Yes, I have," declared Tom. "When my pet rabbit died, I'm certain there was no poetry in the little joker's mouth."

"Quite a different case," declared Dick. "He was a tame rabbit, and it stands to reason that a rabbit cooped up in a hutch couldn't get the poetical inspiration of a wild rabbit roaming the forests. Well, Melby, I can't see that you ought to be disappointed. You've got six rabbits with five shots, and that is good enough for the keenest sportsman. I don't believe your father could do better than that, and I'm jolly certain your mother could not. Let's take the rabbits home and cook them. Because you were disappointed with one supper is no reason why you should be foiled with a second one. Pick them up."

"You will have to carry some," snarled Melby. "I suppose Tom will go bragging all over the college that he has played me a trick."

"I jolly well haven't played you a trick."

"You shoved those papers into the rabbits' mouths."

"Never knew the rabbits were here till we came upon them."

"Then Dick Clare did it, and he would be an awful sneak if he told."

"You ought to be a good judge of a sneak," retorted Dick; "and as you know that neither Tom nor I have been guilty of the trick yet, your mind ought to be quite at ease. Don't worry yourself about the matter, Melby. I'll carry one rabbit, but no more."

Tom stuffed a second one under his coat, for it would not do to let Vance see. Boys were not supposed to go shooting rabbits with revolvers. Melby had to stow away four, for he was determined not to leave them. How he was going to cook six rabbits in the dormitory without detection, and in such a manner as would render them edible, never appeared to have occurred to him. He had never cooked one rabbit; but he had the feeling that he could cook six with the greatest ease. There was another little difficulty that had not occurred to him either, but he was destined to discover that later on.

"Do they show?" Melby inquired, buttoning his jacket round them.

"No. You look a bit bulbous," answered Dick—"much as you will look after you have eaten six of the little jokers. He reminds you of the old lady, whose habits induced her to feed upon rabbits."

"You are going to eat some of them," observed Melby.

"I don't know that," said Dick.

## Disaster in the Dormitory.

**W**HEN boys came in late, Vance thought nothing of it. It was a thing that he was quite accustomed to, and he merely booked - or let them off for twopence. But when they came in early he invariably became suspicious. The chums were considerably before their time, and consequently the porter stopped them.

"Now, what's the meaning of this?" he demanded, delighted at being able to assert his authority. "Melby, what have you got under your coat?"

"Nothing," retorted Melby. "I haven't got a single thing, and even if I had it's nothing to do with you. Clare will soon convince you-----"

"No, you don't!" exclaimed Vance. "You've got contrabang." He always called it that.

"There was plenty of bang about it, at any rate," murmured Dick. "If you dodge to the left, I'll dodge to the right."

"And what about Melby?"

"I fancy he will be caught," answered Dick calmly; "but as he will give us all the blame it doesn't matter. He will vow the revolver is mine and the rabbits yours. In reality they are mine, for I bought them in the town and placed them and their poetry in the pit."

While the chums were carrying on this whispered conversation, Melby was assuring Vance that he was mistaken, and that he not only had nothing under his coat, but would not think of doing such a thing. And all the time he was shifting towards the stairs.

Suddenly he made a bolt for them, and a rabbit fell to the floor.

"Well, I'm blowed!" gasped the porter, gazing at the poetical rabbit. Melby did not care. He had escaped. There was no harm in bringing in a dead rabbit, providing it had not been dead for too long. The revolver was a serious thing. That would have got him into grave trouble; but now he was perfectly safe in that respect.

Tom dodged to the left, and Dick tried the right, but Vance came after him in hot pursuit. Dick was halfway up the stairs, and the porter was nearly as far, when Dick wrenched the rabbit from his coat and hurled it full in Vance's face. It hit him on the nose, and greatly surprised him.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he exclaimed again; then he picked up the rabbits.

"Well, I did ought to report the young villains," mused Vance. "Still, I don't want to be too hard on boys. Good, sound rabbits, and nice and plump! What? Haw, haw, haw! No, I don't think I'll report 'em on this occasion. One curried and t'other stewed would do me a treat. They deserve a caning. One of 'em stewed in milk would go down all right. Wonder if I can get cook to do it for me?"

Vance did not want Dick stewed in milk, neither did he want the rabbits caned, but his musings sometimes applied to the chums, and at others to the rabbits, so that they sounded rather mixed.

For a wonder Melby did not blab about his supper, neither did he boast about the rabbits which he had not shot; perhaps because he thought Tom and Dick would contradict his story. Thus, when the boys of his dormitory had gone to bed, and the prefect had been round, Melby lighted up again, and sprang his surprise on the boys.

*(Another grand, long instalment of this rollicking serial will appear next week.)*

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