





*“ Twice the automatic blazed in his face as he closed
in,—the bullets clearing narrowly ”*

THE FALSE FACES

*A CHAPTER FROM THE HISTORY
OF THE LONE WOLF*

BY

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE



GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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THE FALSE FACES

OUT OF NO MAN'S LAND

ON THE muddy verge of a shallow little pool the man lay prone and still, as still as those poor dead whose broken bodies rested all about him, where they had fallen, months or days, hours or weeks ago, in those grim contests which the quick were wont insensately to wage for a few charnel yards of that debatable ground.

Alone of all that awful company this man liv^{ed} and, though he ached with the misery of hunger and cold and rain-drenched garments, was unharmed.

Ever since nightfall and a brisk skirmish had made practicable an undetected escape through the German lines, he had been in the open, alternately creeping toward the British trenches under cover of darkness and resting in deathlike immobility, as he now rested, while pistol-lights and star-shells flamed overhead, flooding the night with ghastly glare and disclosing in pitiless detail that two-hundred-yard ribbon of earth, littered with indescribable abominations, which set apart the combatants. When this happened, the living had no other choice than to ape the dead, lest the least movement, detected by eyes that peered without rest through loopholes in the sandbag parapets, invite a bullet's blow.

Now it was midnight, and lights were flaring less frequently, even as rifle-fire had grown more intermittent . . . as if many waters might quench out hate in the heart of man!

For it was raining hard—a dogged, dreary downpour drilling through a heavy atmosphere whose enervation was like the oppression of some malign and inexorable incubus; its incessant crepitation resembling the mutter of a weary, sullen drum, dwarfing to insignificance the stuttering of machine-guns remote in the northward, dominating even a dull thunder of cannonading somewhere down the far horizon; lowering a vast and shimmering curtain of slender lances, steel-bright, close-ranked, between the trenches and over all that weary land. Thus had it rained since noon, and thus—for want of any hint of slackening—it might rain for another twelve hours, or eighteen, or twenty-four. . . .

The star-rocket, whose rays had transfixed him beside the pool, paled and winked out in mid-air, and for several minutes unbroken darkness obtained while, on hands and knees, the man crept on toward that gap in the British barbed-wire entanglements which he had marked down ere daylight waned, shaping a tolerably straight course despite frequent detours to avoid the unspeakable. Only once was his progress interrupted—when straining senses apprised him that a British patrol was taking advantage of the false truce to reconnoitre toward the enemy lines, its approach betrayed by a nearing *squash* of furtive feet in the boggy earth, the rasp of constrained respiration, a muttered curse when someone slipped and narrowly escaped a fall, the edged hiss of an officer's whisper reprimanding the offender. Incontinently he who crawled dropped flat to the greasy mud and lay moveless.

Almost at the same instant, warned by a trail of sparks

rising in a long arc from the German trenches, the soldiers imitated his action, and, as long as those triple stars shone in the murk, made themselves one with him and the heedless dead. Two lay so close beside him that the man could have touched either by moving a hand a mere six inches; he was at pains to do nothing of the sort; he was sedulous to clench his teeth against their chattering, even to hold his breath, and regretted that he might not mute the thumping of his heart. Nor dared he stir until, the lights fading out, the patrol rose and skulked onward.

Thereafter his movements were less stealthy; with a detachment of their own abroad in No Man's Land, the British would refrain from shooting at shadows. One had now to fear only German bullets in event the patrol were discovered.

Rising, the man slipped and stumbled on in semi-crouching posture, ready to flatten to earth as soon as any one of his many overshoulder glances detected another sky-spearing flight of sparks. But this necessity he was spared; no more lights were discharged before he groped through the wires to the parapet, with almost uncanny good luck, finding the very spot where the British had come over the top, indicated by protruding uprights of a rough wooden scaling ladder.

As he turned, felt with a foot for the uppermost rung, and began to descend, he was saluted by a voice hoarse with exposure, from the black bowels of the trench:

"Blimy! but ye're back in a 'urry! Wot's up? Forget to put perfume on yer pocket-'andkerchief—or wot?"

The man's response, if he made any, was lost in a heavy splash as his feet slipped on the slimy rungs, de-

livering him precipitately into a knee-deep stream of foul water which moved sluggishly through the trench like the current of a half-choked sewer—a circumstance which neither suprised him nor added to his physical discomfort, who could be no more wet or defiled than he had been.

Floundering to a foothold, he cast about vainly for a clue to the other's whereabouts; for if the night was thick in the open, here in the trench its density was as that of the pit; the man could distinguish positively nothing more than a pallid rift where the walls opened overhead.

"Well, sullen, w're's yer manners? Carn't yer answer a civil question?"

Turning toward the speaker, the man replied in good if rather carefully enunciated English:

"I am not of your comrades. I am come from the enemy trenches."

"The 'ell yer are! 'Ands up!"

The muzzle of a rifle prodded the man's stomach. Obediently he lifted both hands above his head. A thought later, he was half blinded by the sudden spotlight of an electric flash-lamp.

"Deserter, eh? You kamerad—wot?"

"Kamerad!" the man echoed with an accent of contempt. "I am no German—I am French. I have come through the Boche lines to-night with important information which I desire to communicate forthwith to your commanding officer."

"Strike me!" his catechist breathed, skeptical.

There was a new sound of splashing in the trench.

A third voice chimed in: "'Ello? Wot's all the row abaht?"

"Step up and tike a look for yerself. 'Ere's a blighter wot sez 'e's com from the Germ trenches with important information for the O. C."

"Bloody liar," the newcomer commented dispassionately. "Mind yer eye. Likely it's just another plyful little trick of the giddy Boche. 'Ere you!" The splashing drew nearer. "Wot's yer gime? Speak up if yer don't want a bullet through yer in'ards."

"I play no game," the man said patiently. "I am unarmed—your prisoner, if you like."

"I like, all right. Mike yer mind easy abaht that. But wot's all this 'important information'?"

"I shall divulge that only to the proper authorities. Be good enough to conduct me to your commanding officer without more delay."

"Wot do yer mike of 'im, corp'ril?" the first soldier enquired. "'Ow abaht an inch or two o' the bay'net to loosen 'is tongue?"

After a moment's hesitation in perplexed silence, the corporal took the flash-lamp from the private and with its beam raked the prisoner from head to foot, gaining little enlightenment from this review of a tall, spare figure clothed in the familiar gray overcoat of the German private—its face a mere mask of mud through which shone eyes of singular brilliance and steadiness, the eyes of a man of intelligence, determination, and courage.

"Keep yer 'ands 'igh," the corporal advised curtly. "Ginger, you search 'im."

Propping his rifle against the wall of the trench, its

butt on the firing-step just out of water, the private proceeded painstakingly to examine the person of the prisoner; in course of which process he unbuttoned and threw open the gray overcoat, exposing a shapeless tunic and trousers of shoddy drab stuff.

"'E 'asn't got no arms—'e 'asn't got nothink, not so much as 'is blinkin' latch-key."

"Very good. Get back on yer post. I'll tike charge o' this one."

Grounding his own rifle, the corporal fixed its bayonet, then employed it in a gesture of unpleasant significance.

"'Bout fice," he ordered. "March. Yer can drop yer 'ands—but don't go forgettin' I'm right 'ere be'ind yer."

In silence the prisoner obeyed, wading down the flooded trench, the spot-light playing on his back, striking sullen gleams from the inky water that swirled about his knees, and disclosing glimpses of coated figures stationed at regular intervals along the firing-step, faces steadfast to loopholes in the parapet.

Now and again they passed narrow rifts in the walls of the trench, entrances to dugouts betrayed by glimmers of candle-light through the cracks of makeshift doors or the coarse mesh of gunnysack curtains.

From one of these, at the corporal's summons, a sleepy subaltern stumbled to attend ungraciously to his subordinate's report, and promptly ordered the prisoner taken on to the regimental headquarters behind the lines.

A little farther on captive and captor turned off into a narrow and tortuous communication trench. Thereafter for upward of ten minutes they threaded a laby-

rinth of deep, constricted, reeking ditches, with so little to differentiate one from another that the prisoner wondered at the sure sense of direction which enabled the corporal to find his way without mis-step, with the added handicap of the abysmal darkness. Then, of a sudden, the sides of the trench shelved sharply downward, and the two debouched into a broad, open field. Here many men lay sleeping, with only waterproof sheets for protection from that bitter deluge which whipped the earth into an ankle-deep lake of slimy ooze and lent keener accent to the abiding stench of filth and decomposing flesh. A slight hillock stood between this field and the firing-line—where now lively fusillades were being exchanged—its profile crowned with a spectral rank of shell-shattered poplars sharply silhouetted against a sky in which star-shells and Verey lights flowered like blooms of hell.

Here the corporal abruptly commanded his prisoner to halt and himself paused and stood stiffly at attention, saluting a group of three officers who were approaching with the evident intention of entering the trench. One of these loosed upon the pair the flash of a pocket lamp. At sight of the gray overcoat all three stopped short.

A voice with the intonation of habitual command enquired: "What have we here?"

The corporal replied: "A prisoner, sir—sez 'e's French—come across the open to-night with important information—so 'e sez."

The spot-light picked out the prisoner's face. The officer addressed him directly.

"What is your name, my man?"

"That," said the prisoner, "is something which—like my intelligence—I should prefer to communicate privately."

With a startled gesture the officer took a step forward and peered intently into that mud-smeared countenance.

"I seem to know your voice," he said in a speculative tone.

"You should," the prisoner returned.

"Gentlemen," said the officer to his companions, "you may continue your rounds. Corporal, follow me with your prisoner."

He swung round and slopped off heavily through the mud of the open field.

Behind them the sound of firing in the forward trenches swelled to an uproar augmented by the shrewish chattering of machine-guns. Then a battery hidden somewhere in the blackness in front of them came into action, barking viciously. Shells whined hungrily overhead. The prisoner glanced back: the maimed poplars stood out stark against a sky washed with wave after wave of infernal light. . . .

Some time later he was conscious of a cobbled way beneath his sodden footgear. They were entering the outskirts of a ruined village. On either hand fragments of walls reared up with sashless windows and gaping doors like death masks of mad folk stricken in paroxysm.

Within one doorway a dim light burned; through it the officer made his way, prisoner and corporal at his heels, passing a sentry, then descending a flight of crazy wooden steps to a dank and gloomy cellar, stone-walled and vaulted. In the middle of the cellar stood a broad table

at which an orderly sat writing by the light of two candles stuck in the necks of empty bottles. At another table, in a corner, a sergeant and an operator of the Signal Corps were busy with field telephone and telegraph instruments. On a meagre bed of damp and mouldy straw, against the farther wall, several men, orderlies and sub-alterns, rested in stertorous slumbers. Despite the cold the atmosphere was a reek of tobacco smoke, sweat, and steam from wet clothing.

The man at the centre table rose and saluted, offering the commanding officer a sheaf of scribbled messages and reports. Taking the chair thus vacated, the officer ran an eye over the papers, issued several orders inspired by them, then turned attention to the prisoner.

"You may return to your post, corporal."

The corporal executed a smart about-face and clumped up the steps. In answer to the officer's steadfast gaze the prisoner stepped forward and confronted him across the table.

"Who are you?"

"My name," said the prisoner, after looking around to make sure that none of the other tenants of the cellar was within earshot, "is Lanyard—Michael Lanyard."

"The Lone Wolf!"

Involuntarily the officer jumped up, almost overturning his chair.

"That same," the prisoner affirmed, adding with a grimace of besmirched and emaciated features that was meant for a smile—"General Wertheimer."

"Wertheimer is not my name."

"I am aware of that. I uttered it merely to confirm

my identity to you; it is the only name I ever knew you by in the old days, when you were in the British Secret Service and I a famous thief with a price upon my head, when you and I played hide and seek across half Europe and back again—in the days of Troyon's and 'the Pack,' the days of De Morbihan and Popinot and . . ."

"Ekstrom," the officer supplied as the prisoner hesitated oddly.

"And Ekstrom," the other agreed.

There was a little silence between the two; then the officer mused aloud: "All dead!"

"All . . . but one."

The officer looked up sharply. "Which——?"

"The last-named."

"Ekstrom? But we saw him die! You yourself fired the shot that——"

"It was not Ekstrom. Trust that one not to imperil his precious carcass when he could find an underling to run the risk for him! I tell you I have seen Ekstrom within this last month, alive and serving the Fatherland as the genius of that system of espionage which keeps the enemy advised of your every move, down to the least considerable—that system which makes it possible for the Boche to greet every regiment by name when it moves up to serve its time in your advanced trenches."

"You amaze me!"

"I shall convince you; I bring intelligence which will enable you to tear apart this web of treason within your own lines and . . ."

Lanyard's voice broke. The officer remarked that he was trembling—trembling so violently that to

support himself he must grip the edge of the table with both hands.

"You are wounded?"

"No—but cold to my very marrow, and faint with hunger. Even the German soldiers are on starvation rations, now; the civilians are worse off; and I—I have been over there for years, a spy, a hunted thing, subsisting as casually as a sparrow!"

"Sit down. Orderly!"

And there was no more talk between these two for a time. Not only did the officer refuse to hear another word before Lanyard had gorged his fill of food and drink, but an exigent communication from the front, transmitted through the trench telephone system, diverted his attention temporarily.

Gnawing ravenously at bread and meat, Lanyard watched curiously the scenes in the cellar, following, as best he might, the tides of combat; gathering that German resentment of a British bombing enterprise (doubtless the work of that same squad which had stolen past him in the gloom of No Man's Land) had developed into a violent attempt to storm the forward trenches. In these a desperate struggle was taking place. Reinforcements were imperatively wanted.

'Activities at the signallers' table became feverish; the commanding officer stood over it, reading incoming messages as they were jotted down and taking such action thereupon as his judgment dictated. Orderlies, dragged half asleep from their nests of straw, were shaken awake and despatched to rouse and rush to the front the troops Lanyard had seen sleeping in the open field. Other

orderlies limped or reeled down the cellar steps, delivered their despatches, and staggered out through a breach in the wall to have their injuries attended to in the field dressing-station in the adjoining cellar, or else threw themselves down on the straw to fall instantly asleep despite the deafening din.

The Boche artillery, seeking blindly to silence the field batteries whose fire was galling their offensive, had begun to bombard the village. Shells fled shrieking overhead, to break in thunderous bellows. Walls toppled with appalling crashes, now near at hand, now far. The ebb and flow of rifle-fire at the front contributed a background of sound not unlike the roaring of an angry surf. Machine-guns gibbered like maniacs. Heavier artillery was brought into play behind the British lines, apparently at no great distance from the village; the very flag-stones of the cellar floor quaked to the concussions of big-calibre guns.

Through the breach in the wall echoed the screams and groans of wounded. The foul air became saturated with a sickening stench of iodoform. Gusts of wet wind eddied hither and yon. Candles flickered and flared, guttered out, were renewed. Monstrous shadows stole out from black corners, crept along mouldy walls, crouched, sprang and vanished, or, inscrutably baffled, retreated sullenly to their lairs. . . .

For the better part of an hour the struggle continued; then its vigour began to wane. The heaviest British metal went out of action; some time later the field batteries discontinued their activities. The volume of firing in the advance trenches dwindled, was fiercely

renewed some half a dozen times, died away to normal. Once more the Boche had been beaten back.

Returning to his chair, the commanding officer rested his elbows upon the table and bowed his head between his hands in an attitude of profound fatigue. He seemed to remind himself of Lanyard's presence only at cost of a racking effort, lifting heavy-lidded eyes to stare almost incredulously at his face.

"I presumed you were in America," he said in dulled accents.

"I was . . . for a time."

"You came back to serve France?"

Lanyard shook his head. "I returned to Europe after a year, the spring before the war."

"Why?"

"I was hunted out of New York. The Boche would not let me be."

The officer looked startled. "The Boche?"

"More precisely, Herr Ekstrom—to name him as we knew him. But this I did not suspect for a long time, that it was he who was responsible for my persecution. I knew only that the police of America, informed of my identity with the Lone Wolf, sought to deport me, that every avenue to an honourable livelihood was closed. So I had to leave, to try to lose myself."

"Your wife . . . I mean to say, you married, didn't you?"

Lanyard nodded. "Lucy stuck by me till . . . the end. . . . She had a little money of her own. It financed our flight from the States. We made a round-

about journey of it, to elude surveillance—and, I think, succeeded.”

“You returned to Paris?”

“No: France, like England, was barred to the Lone Wolf. . . . We settled down in Belgium, Lucy and I and our boy. He was three months old. We found a quiet little home in Louvain——”

The officer interrupted with a low cry of apprehension. Lanyard checked him with a sombre gesture. “Let me tell you. . . .

“We might have been happy. None knew us. We were sufficient unto ourselves. But I was without occupation; it occurred to me that my memoirs might make good reading—for Paris; my friends the French are as fond of their criminals as you English of your actors. On the second of August I journeyed to Paris to negotiate with a publisher. While I was away the Boche invaded Belgium. Before I could get back Louvain had been occupied, sacked . . .”

He sat for a time in brooding silence; the officer made no attempt to rouse him, but the gaze he bent upon the man's lowered head was grave and pitiful. Abruptly, in a level and toneless voice, Lanyard resumed:

“In order to regain my home I had to go round by way of England and Holland. I crossed the Dutch frontier disguised as a Belgian peasant. When I re-entered Louvain it was to find . . . But all the world knows what the blond beast did in Louvain. My wife and little son had vanished utterly. I searched three months before I found trace of either. Then . . . Lucy died in my arms in a wretched hovel near Aerschot.

She had seen our child butchered before her eyes. She herself”

Lanyard's hand, that rested on the table, clenched and whitened beneath its begrimed skin. His eyes fathomed distances immeasurably removed beyond the confines of that grim cellar. But he presently continued:

“Ekstrom had accompanied the army of invasion, had seen and recognized Lucy in passing through Louvain. Therefore she and my son were among the first to be sacrificed. . . . When I stood over her grave I dedicated my life to the extermination of Ekstrom and all his breed. I have since done things I do not like to think about. But the Prussian spy system is the weaker for my work. . . .

“But Ekstrom I could never find. It was as if he knew I hunted him. He was seldom twenty-four hours ahead of me, yet I never caught up with him but once; and then he was too closely guarded. . . . I pursued him to Berlin, to Potsdam, three times to the western front, to Serbia, once to Constantinople, twice to Petrograd.”

The officer uttered an exclamation of astonishment. Lanyard looked his way with a depreciatory air.

“Nothing strange about that. To one of my early training that was easy—everything was easy but the end I sought. . . . En passant I collected information concerning the workings of the Prussian spy system. From time to time I found means to communicate somewhat of this to the Surété in Paris. I believe France and England have already profited a little

through my efforts. They shall profit more, and quickly, when I have told all that I have to tell. . . .

"Of a sudden Ekstrom vanished. Overnight he disappeared from Germany. A false lead brought me back to this front. Two days ago I learned he had been sent to America on a secret mission. Knowing that the States have severed diplomatic relations with Berlin and tremble on the verge of a declaration of war, we can surmise something of the nature of his mission. I mean to see that he fails. . . . To follow him to America, making my way out through Belgium and Holland, pursuing such furtive ways as I must in territory dominated by the Boche, meant much time lost. So I came through the lines to-night. Fortune was kind in throwing me into your hands: I count upon your assistance. As an ex-agent of the Secret Service you are in a position to make smooth my path; as an Englishman, you will advance the interests of a prospective ally of England if you help me to the limit of your ability; for what I mean to do in America will serve that country, by exposing the conspiracies of the Boche across the water, as much as it will serve my private ends."

The officer's hand fell across the table and closed upon the knotted fist of the Lone Wolf.

"As an Englishman," he said simply—"of course. But no less as your friend."

II

FROM A BRITISH PORT

AND one man in his time plays many parts": few more than this same Lanyard. In no way to be identified with the hunted creature who crept into the British lines out of No Man's Land was the Monsieur Duchemin who, ten days after that wintry midnight, took passage for New York from "a British port," aboard the steamship *Assyrian*.

André Duchemin was the name inscribed in the credentials furnished him in recognition of signal assistance rendered the British Secret Service in its task of scotching the Prussian spy system. And the personality he chose to assume suited well the name. A man of modest and amiable deportment, viewing the world with eyes intelligent and curious, his temper reacting from its ways in terms of grave humour, Monsieur Duchemin passed peaceably on his lawful occasions, took life as he found it, made the best of irksome circumstances.

This last idiosyncrasy stood him in good stead. For the *Assyrian* failed to clear upon her proposed sailing date and for a livelong week thereafter chafed alongside her landing stage, steam up, cargo laden and stowed, nothing lacking but the Admiralty's permission to begin her westbound voyage—a permission inscrutably withheld, giving rise to a common discontent which the passengers dissembled to the various best of their abilities, that is to say, in most cases thinly or not at all.

Yet they were none of them unreasonable beings. They had come aboard one and all keyed up to a high nervous pitch, pardonable in such as must commit their lives to the dread adventure of the barred zone, wanting nothing so much as to get it over with, whatever its upshot. And everlasting procrastination required them day after day to steel their hearts anew against that Terror which followed its furtive ways beneath the leaden waters of the Channel!

Alone among them this Monsieur Duchemin paraded successfully a false face of resignation, protesting no predilection whatsoever for a watery grave, no infatuated haste to challenge the Hun upon his chosen hunting-ground. In the fullness of time it would be permitted to him to go down to the sea in this ship. Meanwhile he found it apparently pleasant and restful to explore the winding cobbled ways of that antiquated waterside community, made over by the hand of War into a bustling seaport, or to tramp the sunken lanes that seamed those green old Cornish hills which embosomed the wide harbour waters, or to lounge about the broad white decks of the *Assyrian* watching the diurnal traffic of the haven—a restless, warlike pageant.

Daily, in earliest dusk of dawn, the wakeful might watch the faring forth of a weirdly assorted fleet of small craft, the day patrol, to relieve a night patrol as weirdly heterogeneous. Daily, at all hours, mine-sweepers came and went, by twos and twos, in flocks, in schools; and daily bellowing offshore detonations advertised their success in garnering those horned black seeds of death which the Hun and his kin were sedulous to sow in the

fairways. While daily battleships both great and small rolled in wearily to refit and dress their wounds, or took swift departure on grim and secret errands.

There was, moreover, the not-infrequent spectacle of some minor ship of war—a truculent, gray destroyer as like as not—shepherding in a sleek submarine, like a felón whale armoured and strangely caparisoned in gray-brown steel, to be moored in chains with a considerable company of its fellows on the far side of the roadstead, while its crew was taken ashore and consigned to some dark limbo of oblivion.

¹³And once, with a light cruiser snapping at her heels, a drab Norwegian tramp plodded sullenly into port, a mine-layer caught red-handed, plying its assassin's trade beneath a neutral flag.

Not long after its crew had been landed, volleys of musketry crashed in the town gaol-yard.

One of a group of three idling on the promenade deck of the *Assyrian*, Lanyard turned sharply and stared through narrowed eyelids into the quarter whence the sounds reverberated.

The man at his side, a loose-jointed American of the commercial caste, paused momentarily in his task of masticating a fat dark cigar.

“This way out,” he commented thoughtfully.

Lanyard nodded; but the third, a plumply ingratiate native of Geneva, known to the ship as Emil Dressler, frowned in puzzlement.

“Pardon, Monsieur Crane, but what is that you say—‘this way out’?”

"Simply," Crane explained, "I take the firing to mean the execution of our nootral friends from Norway."

The Swiss shuddered. "It is most terrible!"

"Well, I don't know about that. They done their damnedest to fix it for us to drown somewhere out there in the nice, cold English Channel. I'm just as satisfied it's them, instead, with their backs to a stone wall in the warm sunlight, getting their needin's. That's only justice. Eh, Monsieur Duchemin?"

"It is war," said Lanyard with a shrug.

"And war is . . . No: Sherman was all wrong. Hell's got perfectly good grounds for a libel suit against William Tecumseh for what he up and said about it and war, all in the same breath."

Lanyard smiled faintly, but Dressler pondered this obscure reference with patent distress. Crane champed his cigar reflectively.

"What's more to our purpose," he said presently: "I shouldn't be surprised if this meant the wind-up of our rest-cure here. That's the third mine-layer they've collected this week—two subs, and now this benevolent nootral. Am I right, Monsieur Duchemin?"

"Who knows?" Lanyard replied with a smile. "Even now the mine-sweeping flotilla is coming home, as you see; which means, the neighbouring waters have been cleared. It is altogether a possibility that we may be permitted to depart this night."

Even so the event: as that day's sun declined amid a portentous welter of crimson and purple and gold, the moorings were cast off and the *Assyrian* warped out into mid-channel and anchored there for the night.

Inasmuch as she was to sail as the tide served, some time before sunrise, the passengers were advised to seek their berths at an early hour. Thirty minutes before the steamship entered the danger zone (as she would soon after leaving the harbour) they would be roused and were expected promptly to assemble on deck, with life-preservers, and station themselves near the boats to which they were individually assigned.

For their further comforting they were treated, in the ebb of the chill blue twilight, to boat-drill and final instructions in the right adjustment of life-belts.

A preoccupied company assembled in the dining saloon for what might be its last meal. In the shadow of the general apprehension, conversation languished; expressions of relief on the part of those who had been loudest in complaining at the delays were notably unheard; even Crane, Lanyard's nearest neighbour at table, was abnormally subdued. Reviewing that array of sobered and anxious faces, Lanyard remarked—not for the first time, but with renewed gratitude—that in all the roster of passengers none were children and but two were women: the American widow of an English officer and her very English daughter, an angular and superior spinster.

Avoiding the customary post-prandial symposium in the smoking room, Lanyard slipped away with his cigar for a lonely turn on deck.

Beneath a sky heavily canopied, the night was stark black and loud with clashing waters. A fitful wind played in gusts now grim, now groping, like a lost thing blundering blindly about in that deep darkness. Ashore

a few wan lights, widely spaced, winked uncertainly, withdrawn in vast remoteness; those near at hand, of the anchored shipping, skipped and swayed and flickered in mad mazes of goblin dance. To him who paced those vacant, darkened decks, the sense of dissociation from all the common, kindly phenomena of civilization was something intimate and inescapable. Melancholy as well rode upon that black-winged wind.

At pause beneath the bridge, the adventurer rested elbows upon the teakwood rail and with importunate eyes searched the masked face of his destiny. There was great fear in his heart, not of death, but lest death overtake him before that scarlet hour when he should encounter the man whom he must always think of as "Ekstrom."

After that, nothing would matter: let Death come then as swiftly as it willed. . . .

He was not even middle-aged, on the hither side of thirty; yet his attitude was that of one who had already crossed the great divide of the average mortal span: he looked backward upon a life, never forward to one. To him his history seemed a thing written, lacking the one word *Finis*: he had lived and loved and lost—had arrayed himself insolently against God and Man, had been lifted toward the light a little way by a woman's love, had been thrust relentlessly back into the black pit of his damnation. He made no pretense that it was otherwise with him: remained now merely the thing he had been in the beginning, minus that divine spark which love had once kindled into consuming aspiration toward the right; the Lone Wolf prowled again to-day

and would henceforth forevermore, the beast of prey callous to every human emotion, animated by one deadly purpose, existing but to destroy and be in turn destroyed. . . .

Two decks below, about amidships, a cargo port was thrust open to the night. A thick, broad beam of light leaped out, buffeting the murk, striking evanescent glimmers from the rocking facets of the waters. Deckhands busied themselves rigging out an accommodation ladder. A tender of little tonnage panted nervously up out of nowhere and was made fast alongside. The light raked its upper deck, picking out in passing a group of men in uniforms. Fugitively something resembling a petticoat snapped in the wind. Then several persons moved toward the accommodation ladder, climbed it, disappeared through the cargo port. The wearer of the petticoat did not accompany them.

Lanyard noted these matters subconsciously, for the time altogether preoccupied, casting forward his thoughts along those dim trails his feet must tread who followed his dark star. . . .

Ten minutes later a deck-steward found him, and paused, touching his cap.

"Beg pardon, sir, but all passingers is requested to report immedately in the music room."

Indifferently Lanyard thanked the man and went below, to find the music room tenanted by a full muster of his fellow passengers, all more or less indignantly waiting to be cross-examined by the party of port officials from the tender—the ship's purser standing by together

with the second and third officers and a number of stewards.

Resentment was not unwarranted: already, before being suffered to take up quarters on board the *Assyrian*, each passenger had submitted to a most comprehensive survey of his credentials, his mental, moral, and social status, his past record, present affairs, and future purposes. A formality to be expected by all such as travel in war time, it had been rigid but mild in contrast with this eleventh-hour inquisition—a proceeding so drastic and exhaustive that the only plausible inference was official determination to find excuse for ordering somebody ashore in irons. Nothing was overlooked: once passports and other proofs of identity had been scrutinized, each passenger was conducted to his stateroom and his person and luggage subjected to painstaking search. None escaped; on the other hand, not one was found guilty of flagitious peculiarity. In the upshot the inquisitors, baffled and betraying every symptom of disappointment, were fain to give over and return to their tender.

By this time Lanyard, one of the last to be grilled and passed, found himself as little inclined for sleep as the most timorous soul on board. Selecting an American novel from the ship's library, he repaired to the smoking room, where, established in a corner apart, he became an involuntary and, at first, a largely inattentive, eavesdropper upon an animated debate involving some eight or ten gentlemen at a table in the middle of the saloon—its subject, the recent visitation.

Measures so extraordinary were generally held to indicate an incentive more extraordinary still.

"You can't get away from it," he heard Crane declare: "there's some sort of funny business going on, or liable to go on, aboard this ship. She wasn't held up for a solid week out of pure cussedness. Neither did they come aboard to-night to give us another once-over through sheer voluptuousness. There's a reason."

"And what," a satiric English voice enquired, "do you assume that reason to be?"

"Search me. 'Sfar's I'm concerned the processes of the British Intelligence Office are a long sight past finding out."

"It is simple enough," one of Crane's compatriots suggested: "the *Assyrian* is suspected of entertaining a devil unawares."

"Monsieur means——?" the Swiss enquired.

"I mean, the authorities may have been led to believe some one of us a questionable character."

"German spy?"

"Possibly."

"Or an English traitor?"

"Impossible," asserted another Briton heavily. "There is to-day no such thing in England. Two years ago the supposition might have been plausible. But that breed has long since been stamped out—in England."

"Another guess," Crane cut in: "they've taken considerable trouble to clear the track for us. Maybe it occurred to somebody at the last moment to make sure none of us was likely to pull off an inside job."

"'Inside job?'" Dressler pleaded.

"Planting bombs in the coal bunkers—things like that—anything to crab our getting through the barred zone in spite of mines and U-boats."

"Any such attempt would mean almost certain death!"

"What of it? It's been tried before—and got away with. You've got to hand it to Fritz, he'll risk hell-for-breakfast cheerful any time he gets it in his bean he's serving Gott und Vaterland."

"Granted," said the Englishman. "But I fancy such an one would find it far from easy to secure passage upon this or any other vessel."

"How so? You may have haltered all your traitors, but there's still a-plenty German spies living in England. Even you admit that. And if they can get by your Secret Service, to say nothing of Scotland Yard, what's to prevent their fixing to leave the country?"

"Nothing, certainly. But I still contend it is hardly likely."

"Of course it's hardly likely. Look at these guys to-night—dead set on making an awful example of anybody that couldn't come clean. I didn't notice them missing any bets. They combed me to the Queen's taste; for a while I was sure scared they'd extract my pivot tooth to see if there wasn't something incriminating and degrading secreted inside it. And nobody got off any easier. I say the good ship *Assyrian* has a pretty clean bill of health to go sailing with."

"On the other hand"—yet another American voice was speaking—"no spy or criminal worth his salt would try to ship without preparations thorough enough to insure success, barring accidents."

"Criminal?" drawled the Briton incredulously.

"The enterprisin' burglar keeps a-burglin', even in war time. There have been notable burglaries in London of late, according to your newspapers."

"And you think the thief would attempt to smuggle his loot out of the country aboard such a ship as this?"

"Why not?"

"Scotland Yard to the contrary notwithstanding?"

"If Scotland Yard is as efficient as you think, sir, certainly any sane thief would make every effort to leave a country it was making too hot for him."

"Considerable criminal!" Crane jeered.

"Undeceive yourself, señor." This was a Brazilian, a quiet little dark body who commonly contented himself with a listening rôle in the smoking-room discussions. "There are truly criminals of intelligence. And war conditions are driving them out of Europe."

Of a sudden Lanyard—stretched out at length upon the leather cushions, in full view of these gossips—became aware that he was being closely scrutinised. By whom, with what reason or purpose, he could not surmise; and it were unwise to look up from that printed page. But that sixth sense of his—intuition, what you will—that exquisitely sensitive sentinel admonished that at least one person in the room was watching him narrowly.

Though he made no move other than to turn a page, his glance followed blindly blurring lines of text, and his quickened wits overlooked no shade of meaning or intonation as that talk continued.

"A criminal of intelligence," some one observed, "is a

giddy paradox whose fatuous existence is quite fittingly confined to the realm of fable."

"You took the identical words right out of my mouth," Crane complained bitterly.

"Your pardon, señores: history confutes your incredulity."

"But we are talking about to-day."

"Even to-day—can you deny it?—men attain high places by means which the law would construe as criminal, were they not intelligent enough to outwit it."

"Big game," Crane objected; "something else again. What we contend is no man of ordinary common sense could get his own consent to crack a safe, or pick a pocket, or do second-story work, or pull any rough stuff like that."

"Again you overlook living facts," persisted the Brazilian.

"Name one—just one."

"The Lone Wolf, then."

"Unnatural history is out of my line," Crane objected. "Why is a lone wolf, anyway?"

The Brazilian's voice took on an accent of exasperation. "Señores, I do not jest. I am a student of psychology, more especially of criminal psychology. I lived long in Paris before this war, and took deep interest in the case of the Lone Wolf."

"Well, you've got me all excited. Go on with your story."

"With much pleasure . . . This gentleman, then, this Michael Lanyard, as he called himself, was a distinguished Parisian figure, a man of extraordinary attainment,

esteemed the foremost connoisseur d'art in all Europe. Suddenly, at the zenith of his career, he disappeared. Subsequently it became known that he had been identical with that great Parisian criminal, the Lone Wolf, a superman of thieves who had plundered all Europe with unvarying success for almost a decade."

"Then what made the silly ass quit?"

"According to my information, he won the love of a young woman——"

"And reformed for her sake, of course?"

"To the contrary, señor; Lanyard renounced his double life because of a theory on which he had founded his astonishing success. According to this theory, any man of intelligence may defy society as long as he will, always providing he has no friend, lover, or confederate in whom to confide. A man self-contained can never be betrayed; the stupid police seldom apprehend even the most stupid criminal, save through the treachery of some intimate. This Lanyard proved his theory by confounding not only the utmost efforts of the police but even the jealous enmity of that association of Continental criminals known as the Bande Noire—until he became a lover. Then he proved his intelligence: in one stroke he flouted the police, delivered into their hands the inner circle of the Bande Noire, and vanished with the woman he loved."

"And then——?"

"The rest," said the Brazilian, "is silence."

"It is for to-night, anyway," Crane observed, yawning. "It's bedtime. Here comes the busy steward to put the lights and us out."

There was a general stir; men drained glasses, knocked out pipes, got up, murmured good-nights. Lanyard closed the American novel upon a forefinger, looked up abstractedly, rose, moved toward the door. The utmost effort of exceptional powers of covert observation assured him that, at the moment, none of the company favoured him with especial attention; the author of that interest whose intensity had so weighed upon his consciousness had been swift to dissemble.

On his way forward he exchanged bows and smiles with Crane and one or two others, his gesture completely casual. Yet when he entered the starboard alleyway he carried with him a complete catalogue of those who had contributed to the conversation. With all, thanks to seven days' association, he stood on terms of shipboard acquaintance. Not one, in his esteem, was more potentially mischievous than any other—not even the Brazilian Velasco, though he had been the first to name the Lone Wolf.

It was, furthermore, quite possible that the mention of his erstwhile sobriquet had been utterly fortuitous.

And yet, one might not forget that sensation of being under intent surveillance. . . .

In his stateroom Lanyard stood for several minutes gravely peering into the mirror above the washstand.

The face he scanned was lean and worn in feature, darkly weathered, framed in hair whose jet already boasted an accent of silver at either temple—the face of a man inured to hardship, seasoned in suffering, strong in self-knowledge. The incandescence of an intelligence coldly dispassionate, quick and shrewd, lighted those

dark eyes. Distinctively a face of Gallic cast, three years of long-drawn torment had served in part to erase from it wellnigh all resemblance to both the brilliant social freebooter of ante-bellum Paris and that undesirable alien whom the authorities had sought to deport from the States. Amazing facility in impersonation had done the rest; unrecognisable as what he had been, he was to-day flawlessly the incarnation of what he elected to seem—Monsieur Duchemin, gentleman, of Paris.

Impossible to believe his disguise had been so soon penetrated . . .

And yet, again, that gossip of the smoking room . . .

Police work? Or had Ekstrom's creatures picked up his trail once more?

Beneath that urbane mask of his, a hunted, wild thing poised in question, mistrustful of the very wind, pricked-eared, fangs agleam, eyes grimly apprehensive. . . .

A little sound, the least of metallic clicks, breaking the hush of his solitude, froze the adventurer to attention. Only his glance swerved swiftly to a fastened door in the forward partition—his stateroom being the aftermost of three that might be thrown together to form a suite. The nicked knob was being tried with infinite precaution. On the half turn it checked with a faint repetition of the click. Then the door itself quivered almost imperceptibly to pressure, though it yielded not a fraction of an inch.

Lanyard's eyes hardened. He did not stir from where he stood, but one hand whipped an automatic from his pocket while the other darted out to the switch-box by the head of his berth and extinguished the light.

Instantly a glimmer of light in the forward stateroom showed through a narrow strip of iron grill-work set in the top of the partition for ventilating purposes.

Simultaneously the door-knob was gently released, and with another louder click the light in the adjoining cubicle was blotted out.

Mystified, Lanyard undressed and turned in, but not to sleep—not for a little, at least.

Who might this neighbour be who tried his door so stealthily? Before to-night that room had had no tenant. Apparently one of the passengers had seen fit to shift his quarters. To what end? To keep a jealous eye on the Lone Wolf, perhaps? So much the better, then: Lanyard need only make enquiry in the morning to identify his enemy.

Deliberately closing his eyes, he dismissed the enigma. He possessed in marked degree that attribute of genius, ability to command slumber at will. Swiftly the troubled deeps of thought grew calm; on their placid surface inconsequent visions were mirrored darkly, fugitive scenes from the store of subconscious memory: Crane's lantern-jawed physiognomy, keen eyes semi-veiled by humorously drooping lids, the extreme corner of his mouth bulging round his everlasting cigar . . . grimy lions in Trafalgar Square of a rainy afternoon . . . the octagonal room of L'Abbaye Thélème at three in the morning, a swirl of Bacchanalian shapes . . . Wertheimer's soldierly figure beside the telegraphers' table in that noisome cave at the Front . . . the deck of a tender in darkness swept by a shaft of yellow light which momentarily revealed a group of folk with upturned faces, a petticoat fluttering in its midst. . . .

III

IN THE BARRED ZONE

DAY broke with rather more than half a gale blowing beneath a louring sky. Once clear of the bottleneck mouth of the harbour, the *Assyrian* ran into brutal quartering seas. An old hand at such work, for upward of a decade a steady-paced Dobbin of the transatlantic lanes, she buckled down to it doggedly and, remembering her duty by her passengers, rolled no more than she had to, buried her nose in the foaming green only when she must. For all her care, the main deck forward was alternately raked by stinging volleys of spray and scoured by frantic cascades. More than once the crew of the bow gun narrowly escaped being carried overboard to a man. Blue with cold, soaked to the buff despite oilskins, they stuck stubbornly to their posts. Perched beyond reach of shattering wavecrests, the passengers on the boat-deck huddled unhappily in the lee of the superstructure—and snarled in response to the cheering information that better conditions for baffling the ubiquitous U-boat could hardly have been brewed by an indulgent Providence. Sheeting spindrift contributed to lower visibility: two destroyers standing on parallel courses about a mile distant to port and to starboard were more often than not barely discernible, spectral vessels reeling and dipping in the haze. The ceaseless whistle of wind in the rigging was punctuated by long-

drawn howls which must have filled any conscientious banshee with corrosive envy.

Toward mid-morning rain fell in torrents, driving even the most fearful passengers to shelter within the superstructure. A majority crowded the landing at the head of the main companionway close by the leeward door. Bolder spirits marched off to the smoking room—Crane starting this movement with the declaration that, for his part, he would as lief drown like a rat in a trap as battling to keep up in the frigid inferno of those raging seas. A handful of miserales, too seasick to care whether the ship swam or sank, mutinously took to their berths.

Stateroom 27—adjoining Lanyard's—sportedly obstinately a shut door. Lanyard, sedulous not to discover his interest by questioning the stewards, caught never a glimpse of its occupant. For his own satisfaction he took a covert census of passengers on deck as the vessel entered the danger zone, and made the tally seventy-one all told—the number on the passenger list when the *Assyrian* had left her landing stage the previous evening.

It seemed probable, therefore, that the person in 27 had come aboard from the tender, either with or following the official party. Lanyard was unable to say that more had not left the tender than appeared to sit in inquisition in the music room.

By noon the wind was beginning to moderate, and the sea was being beaten down by that relentlessly lashing rain. Visibility, however, was more low than ever. A fairly representative number descended to the dining saloon for luncheon—a meal which none finished. Mid-

way in its course a thunderous explosion to starboard drove all in panic once more to the decks.

Within two hundred yards of the *Assyrian* a floating mine had destroyed a patrol boat. No more was left of it than an oil-filmed welter of splintered wreckage: of its crew, never a trace. . . .

Imperturbably the *Assyrian* proceeded. Not so her passengers: now the smoking room was deserted even by the insouciant Crane, and the seasick to a woman brought their troubles back to the boat-deck.

Alone the tenant of 27 stopped below. And the riddle of this ostensible indifference to terrors that clawed at the vitals of every other soul on board grew to intrigue Lanyard to the point of obsession. Was the reason brute apathy or sheer foolhardihood? He refused either explanation, feeling sure some darker and more momentous motive dictated this obstinate avoidance of the public eye. Exasperation aroused by failure to fathom the mystery took precedence in his thoughts even to the personal solicitude excited by last night's gossip of the smoking room. . . .

With no other disturbing incident the afternoon wore away, the wind steadily flagging, the waves as steadily subsiding. When twilight closed in there was nothing more disturbing to one's equilibrium than a sea of long and sullen rolls scored by the pelting downpour.

Perhaps as many as ten venturesome souls dined in the saloon, their fellows sticking desperately to the decks and contenting themselves with coffee and sandwiches.

Daylight waned, terrors waxed: passengers instinctively gravitated into little knots and clusters, conversing

guardedly as if fearful lest their normal accents bring down upon them those Apaches of the underseas for signs of whom their frightened glances incessantly ranged over-rail and searched the heaving wastes.

The understanding was tacit that all would spend the night on deck.

Dusk at length blotted out the shadows of their guardian destroyers, and a great and desolating loneliness settled down upon the ship. One by one the passengers grew dumb; still they clung together, but seemingly their tongues would no more function.

With nightfall, the rain ceased, the breeze freshened a trifle, the pall of cloud lifted and broke, giving glimpses of remote, impersonal stars. Later a gibbous moon leered through the flying wrack, checkering the sea with a restless pattern of black and silver. In this ghastly setting the *Assyrian*, showing no lights, a shape of flying darkness pursuing a course secret to all save her navigators, strained ever onward, panting, groaning, quivering from stem to stern . . . like an enchanted thing doomed to perpetual labours, striving vainly to break bonds invisible that transfixed her to one spot forevermore, in the midst of that bleak purgatory of shadow and moonshine and dread. . . .

Sensitive to the eerie influence of the hour, Lanyard interrupted the tour of the decks which he had steadily pursued for the better part of the evening, and rested at the forward rail, looking down over the main deck, its bleached planking dotted with dark shapes of fixed machinery. In the bows the formless, uncouth bulk of the gun squatted in its tarpaulin. Its crew tramped

heavily to and fro, shivering in heavy jackets, hands in pockets, shoulders hunched up to ears. Farther aft an iron door clanged heavily behind a sailor emerging from an alleyway; he approached the ship's bell, with practised hand sounded two double strokes, then turned and sang out in the weird minor traditional in his calling:

"Four bells—and a-a-a!!'s well!"

Even as the wind made free with the melancholy echoes of that assurance, the spell upon the ship was exorcised.

Overhead, from the foremast crow's-nest, a voice screamed, hoarsely urgent:

"Torpedo! 'Ware submarine to port!"

Many things happened simultaneously, or in a span of seconds strangely scant. The gunners sprang to station, whipping away the tarpaulin, while their lieutenant focussed binoculars upon the confused distances of the night. Obedient to his instructions, the long, gleaming tube of steel pivoted smoothly to port.

From the bridge a signal rocket soared, hissing. The whistle loosed stentorian squalls of indignation and distress—one long and four short. Commands were shouted; the engine-room telegraph wrangled madly. The momentum of the *Assyrian* was checked startlingly; her bows sheered smartly off to port.

A rumour of frightened voices and pounding feet came from the leeward boat-deck, where the main body of the passengers was congregated, hidden from Lanyard by the shoulder of the forward deck-house. A number of men ran forward, paused by the rail, stared, and scurried back, yelling in alarm. At this the din swelled to uproar.

Scanning closely the surface of the sea, Lanyard himself descried a silvery arrow of spray lancing the swells, making with deadly speed toward the port bow of the *Assyrian*. But now both screws were churning full speed astern; the vessel lost headway altogether. Then her engines stopped. For a breathless instant she rested inert, like something paralyzed with fright, bows-on to the torpedo, the telegraph ringing frantically. Then the starboard screw began to turn full ahead, the port remaining idle. The bows swung off still more sharply to port. The torpedo shot in under them, vanished for a breathless moment, reappeared a boat's-length to starboard, plunged harmlessly on its unhindered way down the side of the vessel, and disappeared astern.

Amidships terrified passengers milled like sheep, hampering the work of the boat-crews at the davits. Ship's officers raged among them, endeavouring to restore order. Half a mile or so dead ahead a tiny tongue of flame spat viciously in the murk. A projectile shrieked overhead, and dropped into the sea astern. Another followed and fell short.

The U-boat was shelling the *Assyrian*.

The forward gun barked violent expostulation, if without visible effect; the submarine lobbing two more shells at the steamship with an indifference to its own peril astonishing in one of its craven breed, trained to strike and run before counterstroke may be delivered. Its extraordinary temerity, indeed, argued ignorance of the convoying destroyers.

Coincident with the second shot, however, these unleashed searchlights slashed the dark through and

through with their great, white, fanlike blades, till first one then the other picked up and steadied relentlessly upon a toy-boat shape that swam the swells about midway between the *Assyrian* and the destroyer off the port bows.

Simultaneously the quickfirers of the latter went into action, jetting orange flame. In the searchlights' glare, spurts of white water danced all round the submarine. A mutter of gunfire rolled over to the *Assyrian*, abruptly silenced by an imperative deep voice of heavier metal—which spoke but once.

With the lurid unreality of clap-trap theatrical illusion the U-boat vomited a great, spreading sheet of flame . . .

Someone at the rail, near Lanyard's shoulder, uttered a hushed cry of horror.

He paid no heed, his interest wholly focussed upon that distant patch of shining water. As his dazzled vision cleared he saw that the submarine had disappeared.

Unconsciously, in French, he commented: "So that is finished!"

Likewise in French, but in a woman's voice of uncommon quality, deep and bell-sweet, came the protest from the passenger at his side: "But, monsieur, what are we doing? We turn away from them—those poor things drowning there!"

That was quite true: under forced draught the *Assyrian* was heading away on a new course.

"They drown out there in that black water—and we leave them to that!"

Lanyard turned. "The destroyers will take care of

them," he said—"if any survived that explosion with strength enough to swim."

He spoke from the surface of his thoughts and with a calm that veiled profound surprise. The woman by his side was neither the American widow nor her English daughter, but wholly a stranger to the ship's company he knew.

The training of the Lone Wolf had been wasted if one swift glance had failed to comprehend every essential detail: that tall, straight, slender figure cloaked in the folds of a garment whose hood framed a face of singular pallor and sweetness in the moonlight, its shadowed eyes wide with emotion, its lips a little parted. . . .

With a shiver she lifted her hands to her eyes as if to darken the visions of her imagination.

"They die out there," she said, in murmurs barely audible. . . . "We turn our backs on them. . . . You think that right?"

"We play the game by the rules the enemy himself laid down," Lanyard returned. "They would have sunk us without one qualm of pity—would, in all probability, have shelled our boats had any succeeded in getting off. They have done as much before, and will again. It is out of reason to insist that the captain risk his ship in the hope of picking up one or two drowning assassins."

"Risk his ship? How? They are helpless——"

"As a rule, U-boats hunt in pairs; always, when specially charged to sink one certain vessel. It was so with the *Lusitania*, with the *Arabic* as well; I don't doubt it was so in this instance—that we should have

heard from a second submarine had not the destroyers opened fire when they did."

The woman stared. "You think that——?"

"That the Boche had specific instructions to waylay and sink the *Assyrian*? I begin to think that—yes."

This declaration affected the woman curiously; she shrank away a little, as from a blow, her eyes winced, her pale lips quivered. When she spoke, it was, strangely enough, in English so naturally enunciated that Lanyard could not doubt that this was her mother tongue.

"Then you think it is because . . ."

Of a sudden she wilted, clinging to the rail and trembling wildly.

Lanyard shot a glance aft. The disorder among the passengers was measurably less, though excitement still ran so high that he felt sure they were as yet unnoticed. On impulse he stepped nearer.

"Pardon, mademoiselle," he said quietly; "you are excusably unstrung. But all danger is past; and there is still time to regain your stateroom unobserved. If you will permit me to escort you . . ."

He watched her narrowly, but she showed no surprise at this suggestion of intimacy with her affairs. After a brief moment she pulled herself together and dropped a hand upon the arm he offered. In another minute he was helping her over the raised watersill of the door.

Like all the ship the landing and main companionway were dark; but below, on the promenade deck, the second doorway aft on the starboard side stood ajar, affording a glimpse of a dimly lighted stateroom.

With neither hesitation nor surprise—for he was

already satisfied in this matter—Lanyard conducted the woman to this door and stopped.

Her hand fell from his arm. She faltered on the threshold of Stateroom 27, eyeing him dubiously.

“Thank you, monsieur . . . ?”

There was just enough accent of enquiry to warrant his giving her the name: “Duchemin, mademoiselle.”

“Monsieur Duchemin . . . Please to tell me how you knew this was my stateroom?”

“I occupy Stateroom 29. There was no one in 27 till after the tender came out last night. Furthermore, your face was strange, and I have come to know all others on board during our week’s delay in port.”

The light was at her back; he could distinguish little of her shadowed features, but fancied her a bit discountenanced.

In a subdued voice she said, “Thank you,” once more, a hand resting significantly on the door-knob. But still he lingered.

“If mademoiselle would be so good as to tell me something in return——?”

“If I can . . . ”

“Then why, mademoiselle, did you try my door last night?”

“It was neither locked nor bolted on my side. I wished to make sure——”

“So one fancied. Thank you. Good-night, mademoiselle . . . ?”

She was impervious to his hint. “Good-night, Monsieur Duchemin,” she said, and closed the door.

Now Lanyard's quarters opened not on this alleyway fore-and-aft but on a short and narrow athwartship passage. And as he turned away he saw out of the corner of an eye a white-jacketed figure emerge from this passageway and move hurriedly aft. Something furtive in the round of the fellow's shoulders challenged his curiosity. He called quietly:

"Steward!"

There was no answer. By now the white jacket was no more than a blur moving in that deep gloom. He cried again, more loudly:

"I say, steward!"

He could hardly see, but fancied that the man quickened his steps: in another instant he vanished altogether.

Smothering an impulse to give chase, the adventurer swung alertly into the narrow passage and opened the door to Stateroom 29. The room was dark, but as he fumbled for the switch, the door in the forward partition was thrust open and the girl's slight figure showed, tensely poised against the light behind her.

"Monsieur Duchemin!" she cried, in a voice sharp with doubt.

Lanyard turned the switch. "Mademoiselle," he said, and coolly crossed to the port, drawing the light-proof curtains.

"This door was locked all day—locked when the firing alarmed me and I went out to the deck."

"And on my side, mademoiselle, it was locked and bolted when last I was here, shortly before dinner."

"Whoever unfastened it entered my room during my absence and tampered with my luggage."

"You have missed something?"

Gaze intent to his she nodded. He shrugged and cast shrewdly round his quarters for some clue to the enigma. His glance fastened on a leather bellows-bag beneath the berth. Dropping to his knees he pulled this out, and looked up with a quizzical grimace, his forefinger indicating the lock, which was uncaught.

"I left this latched but not locked," he said. "Perhaps I, too, have lost something."

Opening the bag out flat, he sat back on his heels, with practised eye inspecting its neat arrangement of intimate things.

"Nothing has been taken, mademoiselle," he announced gravely. "But something—I think—has been generously added. I seem to have an anonymous admirer on board."

Bending forward, he rummaged beneath a sheaf of shirts and brought forth a small jewel-box of grained leather, with a monogram stamped on the lid—"C. B."

"The lock is broken," he observed, and handed it up to the woman. "As to its contents, mademoiselle herself knows best . . ."

The woman opened the box.

"Nothing is missing," she said in a thoughtful voice.

"I am relieved." Lanyard closed the bag, thrust it back beneath the berth, and got upon his feet. "But you are quite sure——?"

"My jewels are all in order," she affirmed, without meeting his gaze.

"And you miss nothing else?"

"Nothing."

Was there an accent of hesitation in this response?

"Then, I take it, the thief was disappointed."

Now she glanced quickly at his eyes. "Why do you say that?"

"If the thief had found what he sought, he would never have presented it to me, mademoiselle would never again have seen her jewels. Failing in his object, after breaking that lock, and interrupted by your unexpected return, he planted the case with me, hoping to have me suspected. I am fortunately able to prove the best of alibis. . . . So then," said Lanyard, smiling, "it would appear that, though we met ten minutes ago for the first time—and I have yet to know mademoiselle by name—we are allies in a common cause."

"My name is Brooke—Cecelia Brooke," she said quietly—"if it matters. But why 'allies'?"

"It appears we own a common enemy. Each of us possesses something which that one desires—you a secret, I a good name. (Duchemin, indeed, I have always held to be an excellent name.) I shall not hesitate to call on you if my treasure is again violated. May I venture to hope mademoiselle will prove as ready to command my services?"

"Thank you. I fancy, however, there will be no need."

She moved irresolutely toward the communicating door, paused in its frame, eyeing him speculatively from under level brows. He detected, or imagined, a tremor of impulse toward him, as though she faltered on the verge of some grave confidence. If so, she curbed her tongue in

time. Her gaze dropped, fixed itself abstractedly on the door . . . "This must be fastened," she said, in a tone of complete disinterest.

"I will speak to the chief steward immediately."

"Don't trouble." She roused. "It doesn't matter, really, for to-night. I shall leave what valuables I have in the purser's care and stop on deck till daybreak."

He gave a gesture of bewilderment. "You abandon your seclusion—leave your secret unguarded?"

"Why not?" She shrugged slightly with a little *moue* of discontent. "If, as you assume, I had a secret, it was that for certain reasons I did not wish my presence on board to become known. But it seems it has become known: my secret is no more. So I need no longer risk being cut off from the boats in the event of any accident."

Momentarily her gravity was dissipated by a smile at once delightful and provocative.

"Once more, monsieur—good-night!"

After some moments Lanyard, with a start, found himself staring blankly at a blankly incommunicative communicating door.

IV

IN DEEP WATERS

FOLLOWING this abrupt introduction to his interesting neighbour, Lanyard went back to his deck-chair and, bundling himself up against the cold, settled down to ponder the affair and await developments in a spirit of chastened resignation. That a dénouement would duly unfold he was quite satisfied; that he himself must willy-nilly play some part therein he was too well persuaded.

Not that he wished to meddle. If this Miss Cecelia Brooke (as she named herself) fostered any sort of intrigue, he wanted nothing so fervently as to be left altogether out of it. But already he had been dragged in, without wish or consent of his; whoever coveted her secret—whatever that was, more precious to her than jewels—harboured designs upon his own as well. It was his duty henceforth to go warily, overlooking no circumstance, however trifling and inconsiderable it might appear. The slenderest thread may lead to the heart of the most intricate maze—and the heart of this was become Lanyard's immediate goal, for there his enemy lay perdu.

It was never this man's fault to underrate an enemy, least of all an unknown; and he entertained wholesome respect for Secret Service operators—picked men, as a rule, the meanest no mean antagonist. And this business, he fancied, had all the flavour of Secret Service work—

one of those blind duels, desperate and grim affairs of masked combatants feinting, thrusting, guarding in the dark, each with the other's sword ever feeling for his throat, fighting for life itself and making his own rules as the contest swayed.

But what was this Brooke girl doing in that galley? What conceivable motive induced her to dabble those slender hands in the muck and blood of Secret Service work?

Lanyard was fain to let that question rest. After all, it was no concern of his. There she was, up to her pretty eyebrows in some dark, bad business; and it was not for him to play the gratuitous ass, rush in unasked, and seek to extricate her. . . .

Through endless hours he sat brooding, vision blindly focussed upon the misty, shimmering mystery of that night.

Ekstrom! . . . Slowly in his understanding intuition shaped the conviction that it was Ekstrom whom he was fighting now, Ekstrom in the guise of one of his creatures, some agent of the Prussian spy system who had contrived to smuggle himself aboard this British steamship.

Out of those nine in the smoking room the previous night, then, he must beware of one primarily, perhaps of more.

Four he was disposed, with reservations, to reckon negligible: Baron von Harden, head of a Netherlands banking house, a silent body whose acute mental processes went on behind a pallid screen of flabby features; Julius Becker, a theatrical manager of New York, whose

right name ended in ski; Bartlett Putnam, late chargé d'affaires of the American embassy in Madrid; Edmund O'Reilly, naturalized citizen of the United States, interested in the manufacture of motor tractors somewhere in Michigan.

Of the other five, two were English: Lieutenant Thackeray, a civilly reticent gentleman whose right arm rested in a black silk sling, making a flying trip to visit a married sister in New York; Archer Bartholomew, Esq., solicitor, a red-cheeked, bright-eyed, white-haired, brisk little Cockney, beyond the military age.

There remained Dressler, the stout, self-satisfied Swiss, whose fawning manner was possibly accounted for by his statement that he journeyed to New York to engage in the trade of restaurateur in partnership with his brother; Crane, long and awkward and homely, of saturnine cast, slow of gesture and negligent as to dress, his humorous sense clouding a power of shrewd intelligence; and Señor Arturo Velasco, of Buenos Aires, middle-aged, apparently extremely well-to-do, a thoughtful type, more self-contained than most of his countrymen.

One of these probably . . . But which? . . .

Nor must he permit himself to forget that the *Assyrian* carried fifty-nine other male passengers, in addition to her complement of officers, crew, and stewards, that any one of these might prove to be Potsdam's cat's-paw.

Awesome pallor tinged the eastern horizon, gaining strength, spread in imperceptible yet rapid gradations toward the zenith. Stars faded, winked out, vanished. Silver and purple in the sea gave place to livid gray. Almost visibly the routed night rolled back over the

western rim of the world. Shafts of supernal radiance lanced the formless void between sky and sea. Swollen and angry, the sun lifted up its enormous, ensanguined portent. And the discountenanced moon withdrew hastily into the immeasurable fastnessness of a cloudless firmament, yet failed therein to find complete concealment. Keen, sweet airs of dawn raked the decks, now to port, now to starboard, as the *Assyrian* twisted and writhed on her corkscrew way.

Passengers whose fears had become sufficiently numb to permit them to drowse, stirred in their chairs, roused blinking and blear-eyed, arose and stretched cramped, cold bodies. Others lay listless, enervated by the sleepless misery of that night. Crane found Lanyard awake and marched him off for coffee and cigarettes in the smoking room.

Later, starting out for a turn around the decks, they passed a deck-chair sheltered in a jog where the engine-room ventilating shaft joined the forward deck-house, in which Miss Brooke lay cocooned in wraps and furs, her profile, turned aside from the sea, exquisitely etched against the rich blackness of a fox stole. She slept as quietly as the most carefree, a shadowy smile touching her lips.

Crane's stride faltered. He whistled low.

"In the name of all things wonderful! how did that get on board?"

Lanyard mentioned the girl's name. "She has the stateroom next to mine—came off that tender, night before last."

"And me sore on that darn' li'l boat because it brought

aboard all the nose-y Johnnies! Ain't it the truth, you never know your luck?"

The American ruminated in silence till another lap of their walk took them past the girl again.

"Funny," he mused, "if that's why they held us up . . ."

"Comment, monsieur?"

"Oh, I was just wondering if it was on that young lady's account they kept us kicking our heels back there so long."

"I am still stupid," Lanyard confessed.

"Why, she might be a special messenger, you know—something like that—the British Government wanted to smuggle out of the country without anybody suspecting."

"Monsieur is a romantic."

"You can't trust me," Crane averred unblushingly.

When they passed the chair again it was empty.

At breakfast Lanyard saw the girl from a distance: their places were separated by the width of the saloon. She had no neighbours at her table, did not look up when Lanyard entered, finished her meal some time before he did, and retired immediately to her stateroom, in whose seclusion she remained for the rest of the day.

That second day was altogether innocent of untoward incident. At least superficially the life of the ship settled into the groove of "business as usual." Only the company of the *Assyrian's* faithful convoys was an ever-present reminder of peril.

And in the middle of the afternoon she passed close by a derelict, a torpedoed tramp, deep down by the stern,

her bows helplessly high in air and crimson with rust, the melancholy haunt of a great multitude of gulls.

More than slightly to Lanyard's surprise he received no quiet invitation to the captain's quarters to be interrogated concerning the burglary in Stateroom 27. Apparently, the young woman had contented herself with reporting merely that the communicating door had carelessly been left unfastened.

For his own part, neither seeking nor avoiding individual members of the smoking-room group, Lanyard permitted himself to be drawn into their company, and sat among them amiably receptive. But this profited him scantily; there was no further talk of the Lone Wolf; he was not again aware of that covert surveillance.

But when—the evening chill driving him below to don a fur-lined topcoat—the Brooke girl, coming up the companionway, acknowledged his look of recognition with the most distant of nods, he accepted the apparent rebuff without resentment. He understood. She was playing the game. The enemy was watching, listening. After that he was studious to refrain from seeming either to avoid or to seek her neighbourhood; and if he did keep a sharp eye on her, it was so circumspectly as to mock detection. To the best of his observation she found no friends on board, contracted no new acquaintances, kept herself to herself within walls of inexorable reserve.

Dawn, ending the second night at sea, found the *Assyrian* pursuing a course still devious, and now alone; the destroyers had turned back during the night. The

western boundary of the barred zone lay astern. Ahead, at the end of a brief interval of time, the ivory towers of New York loomed, a-shimmer with endless sunlight, glorious in golden promise. Accordingly, the spirits of the passengers were exalted. The very ship seemed to grin in self-complacence; she had won safely through.

Unremitting vigilance was none the less maintained. No hour of the twenty-four found either gun, forward or aft, wanting a full working crew on the keen *qui vive*. The life boats remained on outswung davits; boat drills for passengers as well as crew were features of the daily programme. Regulations concerning light and smoking on deck after dark were rigidly enforced. Fuel was never spared in the effort to widen the blue gulf between the steamship and those waters wherein she had so nearly met her end. By day a hunted thing, racing frantically toward a port of refuge in the West, all her stout fabric labouring with titanic pulsations, shying in panic from the faintest suspicion of smoke upon the horizon, the *Assyrian* slipped into the grateful obscurity of night like a snake into a thicket, made herself akin to its densest shadows, strained hopelessly not to be out-distanced by its fugitive mantle.

And the benison of unseasonably clement weather was hers; day after shining day, night after placid night, the Atlantic revealed a singularly gracious humour, mirrored the changeful panorama of the heavens in a surface little flawed. So that the most squeamish voyagers, as well as those most beset with fears, slept sweetly in the comfort of their berths.

Lanyard, however, never went to bed without first

securing his door so that it might be opened by force alone; and never slept without a pistol beneath his pillow.

But the truth is, he slept little. For the first time in his history he learned what it meant to will sleep to come and have his will defied. He lay for hours staring wide-eyed into darkness, hearkening to the steady throbbing of the engines, unable to dismiss the thought that their every revolution brought him so much nearer to America, so much the nearer to his hour with Ekstrom. In vain he sought to fatigue his senses by over-indulgence in his weakness for gambling. Day-long sessions at poker and auction in the smoking room—where he found formidable antagonists, principally in the persons of Crane, Bartlett Putnam, Velasco, Bartholomew, Julius Becker and Baron von Harden—served only to forward his financial fortunes; his luck was phenomenal; he multiplied many times that slender store of English bank-notes with which he had embarked upon this adventure. But he left each exhausting sitting only to toss upon a wakeful pillow or to roam uneasily the dark and desolate decks, a man haunted by ghosts of his own raising, haggard by passions of his own nurturing. . . .

About two o'clock on the third night (the first outside the danger zone, when every other passenger might reasonably be expected to be in his berth) Lanyard lay in a deck-chair deep in shadows, wondering if it were worth while to go below and woo sleep in his stateroom. By way of experiment he shut his eyes. When after a moment he opened them again he was no longer alone.

Some distance away, at the rail, the woman of State-

room 27 was standing with her back to Lanyard, looking intently forward, unquestionably ignorant of his presence.

Without moving, he watched in listless incuriosity till he saw her straighten and stand away from the rail as if bracing herself against some crisis.

A man was coming aft from the entrance to the main companionway, impatience in his stride—a tall man, of good carriage, muffled almost to the heels in a heavy ulster, a steamer-cap well forward over his eyes. But the light was poor, the pale shine of the aged moon blending trickily with the swaying shadows; Lanyard was unable to place him among the passengers. There was a suggestion of Lieutenant Thackeray—but that one was handicapped by one shell-shattered arm, whereas this man had the use of both.

He demonstrated that promptly, taking the girl into them. She yielded herself gladly, with a hushed little cry, hiding her face in the bosom of his ulster, clinging to him.

This, then, was an assignation prearranged! Miss Cecelia Brooke had a lover aboard the *Assyrian*, a lover whom she denied by day but met in stealth by night!

And yet, after that first, swift embrace, their conduct became oddly unloverlike. The man released her of his own initiative, held her by the shoulders at arm's length. There was irritation in his manner. He seemed tempted to shake the young woman.

"Celia! what madness!"

So much, at least, Lanyard overheard; the rest was a mumble into the hand which the girl placed over the man's lips. She cried breathlessly: "Hush! not so loud!"

And then she remembered to guard her own voice. In an undertone she spoke passionately for a moment. The man interrupted in a tone of profound vexation. She drew away, as if hurt, caught him up as he hesitated for a word, returned, clung to the lapels of his coat, her accents rapid and pitiful, eloquent of explanation, entreaty, determination. The man lifted his hands to her wrists, broke her grasp, cut her brusquely short, put her forcibly from him. She sobbed softly. . . .

Thus swiftly the scene suffered disillusioning transition. The pretty fiction of lovers meeting in secret was no more. Remained a man annoyed to the verge of anger, a woman desperately importunate.

The wind, sweeping aft, carried broken snatches of their communications:

" . . . all I have . . . could not let you go . . . "

"Insanity!"

"I was desperate . . ."

" . . . drive me mad with your nonsense . . ."

Lanyard sat up, scraping his chair harshly on the deck. Stricken mute, the pair at the rail moved only to turn his way the pallid ovals of their faces.

Heedless of the prohibition, he struck a vesta, cupped its flame in his hands, bending his face close and deliberately lighting a cigarette. Appreciably longer than necessary he permitted the flare to reveal his features. Then he blew it out, rose, sauntered to the rail, cast the cigarette into the sea, went aft and so below, satisfied that the girl must have recognised him and so knew that her secret was safe.

But it was in an oddly disgruntled humour that he turned in—he who had been so ready to twit Crane with his fantastic speculations concerning the English girl, who had himself been the readiest to endue her with the romantic attributes becoming a heroine of her country's Secret Service! What if he must now esteem her in the merciless light of to-night's exposure, as the most pitiable of all human spectacles, a poor lovesick thing sans dignity, sans pride, sans heed for the world's respect, a woman pursuing a man weary of her?

He resented unreasonably the unreasonable resentment which the affair inspired in him.

What was it to him? He who had struck off all fettering bonds of common human interests, who had renounced all common human emotions, who had set his hand against all mankind that stood between him and that vengeful purpose to which he had dedicated his life! He, the Lone Wolf, the heartless, soulless, pitiless beast of prey!

God in Heaven! what was any woman to him?

ON THE BANKS

UNACCOUNTABLY enough in his esteem, and more and more to Lanyard's exasperation, the evil flavour of that overnight incident lasted; it tintured distastefully his first waking thoughts; and through all that fourth day at sea his mood was dark with irrational depression.

And the fifth day and the sixth were like unto the fourth.

Constantly he caught himself on watch for the young woman, wondering how she would comport herself toward him, unwilling witness though he had been to that shabby scene.

But, save distantly at meal times, he saw nothing of her.

And though he knew that she was much on deck after midnight, he was studious to keep out of her way. The tedium of stopping in a stuffy stateroom, when the spell of restlessness was on him, waiting for the sounds of his neighbour's return before he might venture forth, was nothing; anything were preferable to figuring as the innocent bystander at another encounter between the Brooke girl and her reluctant lover. . . .

Then that happened which lent the business another complexion altogether. Its second phase, of close development, drew toward an end. Subtle underlying forces began to stir in their portentous latency.

The rapiers which thus far had merely touched, shivering lightly against each other, measuring each its opponent's strength, feeling out his skill, fell apart, then re-engaged in sharp and deadly play. Steel met steel and, clashing, struck off sparks whose fugitive glimmerings lightened measurably the murk. . . .

On the sixth night out, at eleven o'clock as a matter of routine, the smoking room was closed for the night, terminating an uncommonly protracted and, in Lanyard's esteem, irksome sitting at cards. Well tired, he went immediately to his quarters, undressed, stretched out in his berth, and switched off the light.

Incontinently he found himself bedevilled by thoughts that would not rest.

For upward of an hour he lay moveless, seeking oblivion in that very effort to preserve immobility, while the *Assyrian*, lunging heavily on her way, moaned and muttered tedious accompaniment to the chant of the working engines.

Despairing at length, and fretted by the closeness of his quarters, he got up, dressed sketchily, and was shrugging into his fur-lined coat when he heard the door to the adjoining stateroom open and close, stealth in the sound of it.

At that he hung up his overcoat, and threw himself down with a book on the lounge seat beneath the port. The novel was dull enough in all conscience; for that matter no tale within the compass of the cunningest weaver of words could have enthralled his temper at that time.

He read and read again page after page, but without intelligence.

Between his eyes and the type-blackened paper mirages of the past trembled and wavered; old faces, old scenes, old illusions took unsubstantial form, dissolved, blended, faded away: a saddening show of shadows.

His heavy eyelids drooped; slumber's drowsy vestments trailed lazily athwart the sea of consciousness. . . .

A slight noise startled him, either the shutting of the door to Stateroom 27, or the sound of the book dropping from his relaxed grasp. He sat up and consulted his watch. The hour was half after twelve.

The ship's bell sounded remotely a single, doleful stroke.

He might have dozed five minutes or fifteen—long enough at least to leave its tantalising effect of sleep desperately desirable, mockingly elusive, almost grasped, whisked beyond grasping. And with this he was aware of something even less tangible, a sense of something amiss, of something vaguely wrong, as of an evil spirit stalking furtively through the darkened labyrinth of the ship . . . as impalpable and ineluctable as miasmatic exhalations of a morass. . . .

Lanyard passed a hand across his forehead. Had he been dreaming, then? Was this merely the reaction from some bitter nightmare? He could not remember.

On sheer impulse he stood up, extinguished the light, opened the door. As he did this he noted that a light burned in Stateroom 27, visible through the ventilating grille. So the girl must have returned while he slept.

Or had she neglected to turn the switch when she went out? He could not be certain.

On the threshold he paused a little, attentive to the familiar rumour of the ship by night: the prolonged sloughing of riven waters down the side, gnashing of swells hurled back by the bows, sibilance of draughts in alleyways, groaning of frames, a thin metallic rattle of indeterminate origin, the crunching grind of the steering gear, the everlasting deep-throated diapason of the engines, somewhere aft in that tier of staterooms a persistent human snore . . . nothing unusual, no alarming discordance. . . .

Yet the feeling that mischief was afoot would not be still.

Lanyard moved down to the junction of the thwartship passage with the fore-and-aft alleyway.

Here he commanded a view of the promenade-deck landing and the main companionway, all in darkness but for a feeble glimmer of reflected starlight through the open deck port on the far side of the vessel. Beyond this the rail was stencilled against the dull face of the sea with its far lifting and falling horizon; within, no more was visible than the dimmed whiteness of the forward partition, the dense, indefinite mass of balusters winding up to the boat-deck, and the flat plane of the tiled landing.

On this last, near the mouth of the port alleyway, half obscured by the intervening balusters, something moved, something huge, black, and formless swayed and writhed strangely, and in the strangest silence, like a dumb, tormented misshapen brute transfixed to one spot from

which its most anguished efforts might not avail to budge it.

Lanyard ran forward, rounded the well of the companionway, and pulled up.

Now the nature of the thing was revealed. Blackly silhouetted against the square of the doorway two human figures were close-locked and struggling desperately, straining, resisting, thrusting, giving, recovering . . . and all with never a sound more than the deadened thump of a shifting foot or the rasp of hard-won breathing.

For several seconds the spectator could not distinguish one contestant from the other. Then a change in the fortunes of war enabled him to make out that one was a woman, the other, and momentarily more successful, a man. Slender and youthful and strong, she fought with the indomitable fury of a pantheress. He on his part had won this much temporary advantage—had broken the woman's clutch upon his throat and was bending her back over his hip, one hand fumbling at her windpipe, the other imprisoning her two wrists.

Yet she was far from being vanquished. Even as Lanyard moved toward the pair, she drove a savage knee into the man's middle and, as he checked instantaneously with a grunt of pained surprise, regained her footing and planted both elbows against his chest, striving frantically to free her hands.

Simultaneously Lanyard took the fellow from behind, wound an arm around his neck, jerked his head sharply back, twisted his forearm till he released the woman's wrists, and threw him with a force that must have jarred his every bone.

The woman staggered back against the partition, panting and sobbing beneath her breath. The man rebounded from his fall with astonishing agility, and flew back at Lanyard. An object in his right hand gave off the dull gleam of polished steel.

Lanyard, his automatic in his stateroom, in the pocket of the overcoat where he had deposited it when meaning to go out on deck, lacked any means of defense other than his two hands; but his one-time fame as an amateur pugilist had been second only to his fame as a *connaissanceur d'art*; and to one whose youth had been passed in association with the Apaches of Paris, some mastery of *la savate* was an inevitable accomplishment.

A lightning coup de pied planted a heel against one of the man's shins, and his onslaught faltered in a gust of curses. Then the point of his jaw received the full force of Lanyard's right fist with all the ill will imaginable behind it. The man reared back, reeled into the black mouth of the alleyway, fell heavily.

Even so, he demonstrated extraordinary vitality and appetite for punishment. He had no more gone down than the adventurer, peering into the gloom, saw him struggle up on his knees. Instantly Lanyard made toward him, intent on finishing this work so well begun, but in his second stride tripped over a heavy body hidden in the shadows, and pitched headlong. Falling, he was conscious of a flashing thing that sped past his cheek, immediately above his shoulder. There followed an echoing thud against the forward partition.

Picking himself up smartly, Lanyard crept several paces down the alleyway, flattening against the wall, straining.

his vision, listening intently, rewarded by neither sign nor sound of his antagonist.

That one must have been swift to advantage himself of Lanyard's tumble. If he had not vanished into thin air, or gone to earth in some untenanted stateroom thereabouts, he found in the close blackness of that narrow passage a cloak of positive invisibility to cover his escape.

And there is little wisdom in stalking an armed man whom one cannot see, with what little light there is at one's own back.

So Lanyard went back to the landing, stepping carefully over the obstacle which had both thrown him and saved his life—the supine body of a third man, motionless; whether dead or merely insensible, he did not stop to investigate. His immediate concern was for the woman.

As he came upon her now, she stood en profile to the partition, tugging strongly at something embedded in the woodwork close by her side, between her waist and armpit. At the sound of his approach she looked up with a tremor of apprehension quickly calmed.

“Monsieur Duchemin! If you please——”

Lanyard, in no way surprised to recognise the voice of Miss Cecelia Brooke, stepped closer. “What is it?” he enquired; and then, bending over to look, found that her cloak was pinned to the partition by the blade of a heavy knife buried a full half of its considerable length.

“He threw it as you fell,” the girl explained. “I was in the direct line.”

“Permit me, mademoiselle . . . ”

He laid hold of the haft of the weapon and with some difficulty withdrew it.

"Who was it?" he asked, weighing the knife in his palm and examining it as closely as he could without the aid of light.

There was no reply. Directly her cloak was freed, the girl had moved hastily away to the body over which Lanyard had stumbled. He heard an imploring whisper—"Please!"—and looked up to see her on her knees.

"Who, then, is this?" he demanded, joining her.

"Lionel—Lieutenant Thackeray. Please—O please!—tell me he is not dead."

Her voice broke; he saw her slender body convulsed with racking emotions. Kneeling, Lanyard made a hasty and superficial examination, necessarily no more under the conditions.

"His heart beats," he announced—"he breathes. I do not think him seriously injured." He made as if to get up. "I will get a light—a flash-lamp from my stateroom—or, better still, the ship's surgeon——"

Her hand fell upon his arm. "Please, no! Not that—not now. Later, if necessary; but now—surely, you can help me carry him to his stateroom."

"You know the number?"

"It's close by—30."

"Find it, and light up. No—leave this to me; I can carry him without assistance."

The girl rose and disappeared. Lanyard passed his arms beneath the Englishman's body, gathered him into them, and struggled to his feet: no inconsiderable task.

Light gushed from an open doorway, the third aft from the landing. Staggering, the adventurer entered and deposited the body upon the berth. Immediately the

girl closed and bolted the door, then passed between him and the berth to bend over the unconscious man. He lay in deep coma, limbs a-sprawl, unpleasant glints of white between his half-closed eyelids, his breathing stertorous through parted lips. Free of its sling, his wounded arm dangled over the edge of the berth. In putting him down, Lanyard had remarked that its sleeve had been slit to the shoulder, and that its bandages were undone. Now, in amazement, he saw the arm was firm and muscular, with an unbroken skin, never a sign of any injury in all its length.

Gently the girl lifted the lieutenant's head to the light, discovering a hideously bruised swelling at the base of the skull, blood darkly matting the close-clipped hair.

She requested without looking round: "Water, please—and a towel."

Obediently Lanyard ran hot and cold water into the hand-basin in equal proportions.

"Would it not be well now to call the ship's surgeon?" he suggested diffidently.

"Is that necessary? I am something of a nurse. This is simply a bad contusion—no worse, I believe. He was struck down from behind, a cowardly blow in the dark, as he started to go up on deck. I had been waiting for him. When he didn't come I suspected something was wrong. I came down, found him lying there, that brute kneeling over him."

She spoke coolly enough, in contrast with the high excitement that inflamed her eyes as she turned away from the berth.

"Monsieur Duchemin, are you armed?"

"I have this," he said, exhibiting the knife thrown by the would-be murderer—a simple trench dagger, without distinguishing marks of any sort.

"Then take this, please." Extracting an automatic pistol from a holster belted beneath Thackeray's coat, she proffered it. "You won't mind staying here a moment, standing guard, while I fetch a dressing from my room?"

Before he could utter a word of protest she had slipped out into the alleyway, shutting the door behind her.

When several minutes had passed the adventurer found himself beset by increasing concern. This long delay seemed not only inconsistent with her solicitude, but indicated a possibility that the girl had braved unwisely the chance of a resumption of hostilities on the part of her late and as yet anonymous assailant.

Darkening the room as a matter of common-sense precaution, Lanyard, pistol in hand, stepped out into the alleyway in time to see the girl in the act of rising from her knees on the landing, near the spot where Thackeray had fallen. The light of her flash-lamp was blotted out as she came hurriedly aft.

Perplexed, he turned back and switched on the light as she entered.

Her eyes challenged his almost defiantly.

"Was I long?" she asked, breathless. "I dropped something . . ."

Lanyard bowed without speaking. Instinctively he knew that she was lying; and divining this in his attitude, she coloured and, disconcerted, turned away. For a moment, while she busied herself arranging on a convenient chair an assortment of first-aid accessories, he

fancied that her half-averted face wore a look of sullen chagrin, with its compressed lips, downcast eyes, and faintly gathered brows.

But directly she needed assistance, and requested it of him in a subdued and impersonal manner, showing a countenance devoid of any incongruous emotion.

Lanyard, lifting the lieutenant's head and heavy torso, helped turn him face downward on the berth, then stood aside, thoughtfully watching the girl's deft fingers sop absorbent cotton in an antiseptic wash and apply it to the injury.

After a little, he said: "If mademoiselle has no more immediate use for me——"

"Thank you, monsieur. You have already done so very much!"

"Then, if mademoiselle will supply the name of this assassin——"

"I know it no more than you, monsieur!" She glanced up at him, startled. "What do you mean to do?"

"Why, naturally, lodge an information with the captain concerning this outrage——"

"Oh, please, no!"

At a loss, Lanyard shrugged eloquently.

"Not yet, at all events," she hastened to amend. "Let Lionel judge what is best to be done when he comes to."

"But, mademoiselle, who can say when that will be?" He pointed out the ugly, ragged abrasion in the young Englishman's scalp exposed by the cleansing away of the clotted blood. "No ordinary blow," he commented; "something very like a slung-shot or a loaded cane did

that work. If I may venture again to advise—unless mademoiselle is herself a surgeon——”

Her colour faded and she caught her breath sharply. “You think it as serious as all that?”

“I do not know. Such a blow might easily fracture the skull, possibly bring about a concussion of the brain. Regard, likewise, his laborious breathing. I most assuredly advise consulting competent authority.”

She did not immediately answer, turning back undivided attention to her task; but he noticed that her hands were tremulous, however, dextrously they finished dressing and bandaging the hurt; and deep distress troubled the handsome eyes she turned to his when she rose.

“You are right,” she murmured—“unquestionably right, monsieur. We must have the surgeon in . . . ”

But when Lanyard advanced a hand toward the bell-push, to call the steward, she interposed in quick alarm:

“No—if you please, a moment; I must have time to think!” Her slender fingers writhed together in her agony of doubt and irresolution. “If only I knew what to do . . . ”

Lanyard was dumb. There was, indeed, nothing helpful he could offer, who was without a solitary tangible or trustworthy clue to the nature of this strange business.

He owned himself sadly mystified. In the light—or, rather, the shadow—of this latest development, his revised suspicions seemed unwarranted to the point of impertinence; unless, of course, one assumed the unknown assailant to be a rejected lover or wronged husband. And somehow one did not, in the presence

of this clear-eyed, straight-limbed, courageous young Englishwoman, so wanting in self-consciousness.

And yet . . . what the deuce was she to this man whom, indisputably, she followed against his wish?

And what conceivable chain of circumstances linked their fortunes with his, and that double burglary of the first night out with this murderous assault of to-night?

Nor was to-night's work, considered by itself, lacking in questionable features.

Why had Thackeray carried that sound arm in a sling? How had its bandages come to be unwrapped? Not in struggles before being placed hors de combat, for he had never had a chance to resist. Had his assailant, then, unwrapped it subsequently? If so, with what end in view?

Why had this Miss Cecelia Brooke, surprising the thug at his work, joined battle with him so bravely and so madly without calling for help?

What hidden motive excused this singular hesitation to summon the surgeon, this reluctance to inform the officers of the ship?

What duplicity was that which the girl had paraded concerning her procrastination when Lanyard had surprised her on her knees out there on the landing?

If this were what Lanyard had first inclined to think it, Secret Service intrigue, surely it was weirdly intricate when an English girl hesitated to safeguard an Englishman by taking into her confidence the officers of a British ship, British manned!

Nevertheless, and however much he might wonder and doubt, Lanyard would never question her. Never of

his own volition would he probe more deeply into this mystery, take one farther step into the intricacies of its maze.

So, in silence, he waited, passively courteous, at her further service if she had need of him, content if she had not, tolerant of her tacit prayer for time in which to think a way out of her difficulties.

After some few moments he grew uncomfortably aware that he had become the object of a speculative regard not at all unfavourable.

He indulged in a mental gesture of resignation.

Then what he had feared befell, not altogether as he had apprehended, but in the girl's own fashion, if without material difference in the upshot.

"I am afraid," said she in an even voice, so quietly pitched as to be inaudible to any eavesdropper. "This becomes a task greater than I had dreamed, more than my wits can cope with. Monsieur Duchemin . . ."

She hesitated. He bowed slightly. "If mademoiselle can make any use of my poor abilities, she has but to command me."

"We—I have much to thank you for already, monsieur, much more than I can ever hope to reward adequately——"

"Reward?" he echoed. "But, mademoiselle——!"

"Please don't misunderstand." She flushed a little, very prettily. "I am simply trying to express my sense of obligation, not only for what you have already done, but for what I mean to ask you to do."

Again he bowed, without comment, amiably receptive.

She resumed with perceptible effort: "I can trust you——"

"You must make sure of that before you do," he warned her, smiling.

"I am sure," she averred gravely.

"You know nothing concerning me, mademoiselle—pardon! For all you know I may be the greatest rogue in Christendom. And I must tell you in all candour, sometimes I think I am."

"What I may or may not know concerning you, Monsieur Duchemin, is immaterial as long as I know you are what you have proved yourself to me, a gentleman, considerate, generous, brave, and—not inquisitive."

He was frankly touched. If this were flattery, tone and manner robbed it of fulsomeness, rendered it subtle beyond the coarser perceptions of the man. He knew himself for what he was, knew himself unworthy; and that part of him which was unaffectedly French, whether by accident of birth or influence of environment, and so impulsive and emotional, reacted in spontaneous gratitude to this implicit acceptance of him for what he strove to seem to be.

"Mademoiselle is gracious beyond my deserts," he protested. "Only let me know how I may be of use . . ."

"In three ways: Continue to be lenient in your judgments, and ask me no more questions than you must because . . . I may not answer . . ." Her hands worked together again. She added unhappily, in a faint voice: "I dare not."

That, too, moved him, since he had been far from lenient in his judgments. He responded the more readily: "All that is understood, mademoiselle."

"Please go at once back to your stateroom, and as quietly as possible. There is a bare chance you were not recognised, that nobody knows who came to my aid to-night. If you can slip away without attracting attention, so much the better for us, for all of us. You may not be suspected."

"Trust me to use my best discretion."

"Lastly . . . take and keep this for me, till I ask you for it again. Hide it as secretly as you can. It may be sought for, is certain to be if you are believed to be in my confidence. It must not be found. And I may not want it again before we land in New York."

She extended a hand on whose palm rested a small and slender white cylinder, no longer and little thicker than the toy pencil that dangles from a dance-card: a tight roll of plain white paper enclosed in a wrapping of transparent oiled silk, gummed fast down its length and, at either end, sealed with miniature blobs of black wax.

"Will you do this for me, Monsieur Duchemin? I warn you, it may cost you your life."

He took it, his temper veering to the whimsical. "What is life?" he questioned. "A prelude—perhaps an overture to that great drama, Death. Who knows? Who cares?"

She heard him in a stare. "You place no value on life?"

"Mademoiselle," he said, "I have lived nearly thirty years in this world, three years in the theatre of war,

seldom far from the trenches of one front or another. I tell you, I know death too well . . . ”

He shrugged and put the roll of paper away in a pocket.

“You understand it must not be taken from you under any circumstance? As a last resort, it must be destroyed rather than yielded up.”

“It shall be,” he said quietly. “Is there anything more?”

She shook her head, thoughtfully knuckling her underlip.

“How can I communicate with you in event of necessity after we get to New York?” she asked.

“I shall stop for a week or two at the Hotel Knickerbocker.”

“If anything should happen”—with a swift glance of anxiety toward the motionless figure in the berth—“if anything should prevent my calling for it within a week after our arrival, you will be good enough to deliver it to—” She caught herself up quickly, the unuttered words trembling on her lip. “I will write down the address of the person to whom you will deliver it, and slip it underneath the door between our rooms—first making certain you are there to receive it—if I do not ask you to return the—thing—before we land.”

“That shall be as you will.”

“When you have memorized the address you will destroy it?”

“Depend on that.”

“I think that is all. Thank you, Monsieur Duchemin—and good-night.”

She extended her hand. He saluted it punctiliously with fingertips and lips.

"If you will put out the light, mademoiselle, it may aid me to get away unseen."

She nodded and offered him Thackeray's pistol. "Take this. O, I have another with me."

Lanyard accepted the weapon and, when she had darkened the room, opened the door, slipped out, and closed it behind him so noiselessly that the girl could not believe he was gone.

Nothing hindered his return to Stateroom 29.

Fully two minutes after he had locked himself in he heard the distant clamour of the annunciator, calling a steward to Stateroom 30.

UNDER SUSPICION

HE SAT for a long time on the edge of his berth, elbow on knee, chin in hand, unstirring, gaze fixed upon that little cylinder of white paper resting in the hollow of his palm, in profoundest concentration pondering the problems it presented: what it was, what possession of it meant to Michael Lanyard, what safe disposition to make of it pending welcome relief from this unsought and most unwelcome trust.

This last question alone bade fair to confound his utmost ingenuity.

As for what it was, Lanyard was well satisfied that he now held the true focus of this conspiracy, a secret of the first consequence, far too momentous to the designs of England to be entrusted, though couched in the most cryptic cipher ever mind of man devised, even to cables or mails which England herself controlled.

Solely to prevent this communication from reaching America, Lanyard believed, Germany had sown mines broadcast in all the waters which the *Assyrian* must cross, and had commissioned her U-boats, without fail and at whatever cost, to sink the vessel if by any accident she won safely through the mine-fields.

In the effort to steal this secret, German spies had sailed on the *Assyrian* knowing well the double risk they ran, of being shot like rats if found out, of being drowned

like neutrals if the ship went down through the efforts of their compatriots.

It was the zeal of Potsdam's agents, seeking the bearer of this secret, which had caused the rifling of Miss Brooke's luggage when she fell under suspicion, thanks to her clandestine way of coming aboard; and through the same agency young Thackeray had been all but murdered when suspicion, for whatever reason, shifted to him.

To insure safe transmission of this communication, England had held the *Assyrian* idle in port, day after day, while her augmented patrols scoured the seas, hunting down ruthlessly every submarine whose periscope dared peer above the surface, and while her trawlers innumerable swept the channels clear of mines.

To prevent its theft, Lieutenant Thackeray had invented the subterfuge of the "wounded" arm, amid whose splints and bandages (Lanyard never doubted) the cylinder had been secreted.

Finally, it was as a special agent, deep in her country's confidence, that this English girl had smuggled herself aboard at the last moment, bringing, no doubt, this very cylinder to be transferred to the keeping of Lieutenant Thackeray or, perhaps, another confrère, should she find reason to think herself suspected, her trust endangered.

Nothing strange in that; women had served their countries in such capacities before; the secret archives of European chancelleries are replete with their records. Lanyard himself remembered many such women, brilliant mondaines from many lands domiciled in that Paris of the so-dead yesterday to serve by stealth their respec-

tive governments; but never, it was true, a woman of the caste of Cecelia Brooke; unless, indeed, this were an actress of surpassing talent, gifted to hoodwink the most skeptical and least susceptible of men.

And yet . . .

Lanyard's train of thought faltered. New doubt of the girl began to shadow his meditations. Contradictory circumstances he had noted intruded, uninvited, to challenge overcredulous conclusions concerning her.

Would any secret agent worth her salt invite suspicion by making such a conspicuously furtive embarkation, by such ostentatious avoidance of her fellow passengers, by surrounding herself with an atmosphere of such palpable mystery? Would such an one confess she had a "secret" to an utter stranger, as she had to Lanyard that first night out? Would she, under any conceivable circumstances, entrust to that same stranger that selfsame secret upon whose inviolate preservation so much depended?

And would she make love-trysts on the decks by night?

Would a brother-agent take her in his arms, then reprove her with every symptom of vexation for her "madness," her "insanity," her "nonsense" that was like to "drive me mad"?—Thackeray's own words!

Vainly Lanyard cudgelled his wits for some plausible reading of this riddle.

Was this Brooke girl possibly (of a sudden he sat bolt upright) a Prussian agent infatuated with this young Englishman and by him beloved in spite of all that forbade their passion?

Did not this explanation reconcile every apparent

inconsistency in her conduct, even to the entrusting to a stranger of the stolen secret, the purloined paper she dared not keep about her lest it be found in her possession?

Lanyard's eyes narrowed. Visibly his features hardened. If this surmise of his were any way justified in the outcome, he promised Miss Cecelia Brooke an hour of most painful penitence.

Woman or not, she need not look for mercy from him, who must ever be merciless in his dealings with Ekstrom's crew.

To be made that one's tool!

The very thought was intolerable . . .

As for himself, possession of this paper meant that pitfalls were digged for his every step.

If ever the British found cause to suspect him, his certain portion would be to face a firing squad in dusk of early day.

If, on the other hand, these Prussian agents on board the *Assyrian* ever got wind of the fact that the cylinder was in his care, his fate was apt to be a knife between his ribs the first time he was caught alone and—with his back to the assassin.

Two courses, then, were open to him: the most sensible and obvious, to go straightway to the captain of the *Assyrian*, report all that he knew or surmised, and turn over the paper for safekeeping; one alternative, to hide the cylinder so absolutely that the most drastic search would overlook it, yet so handily that he could rid himself of it at an instant's notice.

But the first course involved denunciation of the

Brooke girl. And what if she were innocent? What if, after all, these doubts of her were the specious spawn of facts misinterpreted, misconstrued? What if she proved to be all she seemed? Could he, even though what he had warned her he might be, the greatest rogue unhung, be false to a trust reposed in him by such a woman?

As to that, there was no question in his mind; he would never betray her, lacking irrefutable conviction that she was an employee of the Prussian spy system.

Then how to hide the paper?

Kneeling, Lanyard drew from beneath the berth his bellows-bag, selected from its contents a black japanned tin case containing a rather elaborate though compact trench medicine kit, the idle purchase of an empty afternoon in London. Extracting from its fittings a small leather-covered case, he replaced the kit, relocked and shoved the bag back beneath the berth.

Then, standing over the hand-basin, he opened the leather-covered case. Its velvet-lined compartments held a hypodermic syringe and needle, and a glass phial of twenty-four one-thirtieth grain morphia tablets.

Uncorking the phial, he shook out all the tablets, replaced three, then slid the paper cylinder into the tube; it fitted precisely, concealed by the label of the manufacturing chemist, leaving room for six more tablets. Lanyard inserted four on top of the cylinder, moistening the lowermost slightly to make it stick, recorked the phial, and returned it to its compartment.

Next he dissolved three morphia tablets in a little water in the bottom of a glass, filled the syringe with the strong solution, fitted on the needle, squirted most of

the contents down the waste-pipe, and consigned the remaining tablets to the same innocuous fate.

Finally he replaced needle and syringe in the case, let the glass which had held the solution stand without rinsing, and put the open case upon the shelf above the basin.

A light tapping sounded on the panels of his door.

"Well? Who's there?"

"Your steward, sir. Captain Osborne's compliments, an' 'e'd like to see you in 'is room as soon as convenient, sir."

"You may say I will come at once."

"'Nk you, sir."

A summons to have been expected as a sequel to the surgeon's report after attending Lieutenant Thackeray; none the less, Lanyard had not expected it so soon.

Authority, he reflected, ran true to form afloat as well as ashore; it was prompt enough when required to apply a pound or so of cure. Surely the officers, at least the captain, must have been advised why this voyage was apt to prove exceptionally hazardous; and surely in the light of such information it had been wiser to set armed watches on every deck by night, rather than permit the lives of passengers to be imperilled through the possible activities of Prussian agents among them incogniti.

And now that he was reminded of it, was not this, perhaps, but a device of the enemy's to decoy him from the comparative safety of his stateroom?

It was with a hand in his jacket pocket, grasping Thackeray's automatic, that he presently left the room.

The alleyway, however, was deserted except for his steward; who, as he appeared, turned and led the way up to the boat-deck.

Rounding the foot of the companionway, Lanyard contrived a hasty glance down the port alleyway. The door to Stateroom 30 was on the hook; a light burned within. Outside a guard was stationed, a sailor with a cutlass: the first application of the pound of cure!

At the heels of his guide, he approached a door in the deck-house, devoted to officers' accommodations, beneath the bridge. Here the steward knocked discreetly. A heavy voice grumbling within was stilled for a moment, than barked a sharp invitation to enter. The steward turned the knob, announced dispassionately "Monseer Duchemin," and stood aside. Lanyard entered a well-lighted room, simply but comfortably furnished as the captain's office and sitting room; sleeping quarters adjoined, the head of a berth with a battered pillow showing through a door a foot or so ajar.

Four persons were present; the notion entered Lanyard's head that a fifth possibly lurked in the room beyond, spying, eavesdropping: not a bad scheme if Thackeray had an associate on board whose identity it was desirable to keep under cover.

The door closed gently behind him as he stood politely bowing, conscious that the four faces turned his way were distinguished by a singular variety of expression.

Miss Cecelia Brooke was nearest him, beside a chair from which she had evidently just risen, her pretty young face rather pale and set, a scared look in her candid eyes.

Beyond her, the captain sat with his back to a desk: