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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—At Troyon's, a Paris inn, the youth Marcel Troyon, afterwards to be known as Michael Lanyard, is caught stealing by Burke, an expert thief, who takes the boy with him to America and makes of him a finished cracksman.

CHAPTER II—After stealing the Omber jewels and the Huysman war plans in London Lanyard returns to Troyon's for the first time in many years because he thinks Roddy, a Scotland Yard man, is on his trail. On arrival he finds Roddy already installed as a guest.

CHAPTER III—At a dinner a conversation between Comte de Morbihan, M. Bannon and Mlle. Bannon about the Lone Wolf, a celebrated cracksman who works alone, puzzles and alarms him as to whether his identity is only guessed or known.

CHAPTER IV—To satisfy himself that Roddy is not watching him, Lanyard dresses and goes out, leaving Roddy apparently asleep and snoring in the next room, then comes back stealthily, to find a girl in his room.

CHAPTER V—The girl turns out to be Mlle. Bannon, who explains her presence by saying that she was sleep-walking.

CHAPTER VI—In his apartment near the Trocadero he finds written on the back of a twenty-pound note, part of his concealed emergency hoard, an invitation from The Pack to the Lone Wolf to join them.

CHAPTER VII—Lanyard attempts to dispose of the Omber jewels, but finds that The Pack has forbidden the buyers to deal with him. He decides to meet The Pack.

CHAPTER VIII—De Morbihan meets him and takes him before three masked members of The Pack.

CHAPTER IX—He recognizes Popinot, apache, and Wertheimer, English mobsman, but the third, an American, is unknown to him. He refuses alliance with them.

CHAPTER X—On his return to his room he is attacked in the dark, but knocks out his assailant.

CHAPTER XI—He gives the unconscious man, who proves to be the mysterious American, a hypodermic to keep him quiet, discovers that Roddy has been murdered in his bed with the evident intention of fastening the crime on him, and changing the appearance of the unconscious American to resemble his own, starts to leave the house.

CHAPTER XII—In the corridor he encounters Lucia Bannon, who insists on leaving with him.

CHAPTER XIII — Having no money Lucia is obliged to take refuge with Lanyard in the studio of an absent artist friend of his. He locks her in a room alone and retires to get some rest himself.

CHAPTER XIV—After sleep Lanyard finds his viewpoint changed. He tells Lucia who he is.

CHAPTER XV—Mutual confessions follow. She is Lucy Shannon, not Bannon, and has been used as a tool by Bannon, the crook. The American murderer of Roddy was Bannon's secretary. Both men are members of The Pack and out to get Lanyard.

CHAPTER XVI—Lanyard tells Lucy that he means to reform and she agrees to go with him to return the London loot. A newspaper wrapped in a brick is thrown through the skylight.

CHAPTER XVII—A bullet follows the brick. The paper has an account of the total destruction by fire of Troyon's.

CHAPTER XVIII—They start out on their errand of restoration and Lanyard silences a German spy.

CHAPTER VII — Cazalet goes with Drinkwater to the library where the murder was committed, shows him a secret passage he knew of as a boy, and leads the way through it.

CHAPTER XX—Lanyard burglariously returns the Omber jewels.

CHAPTER XXI—They go to the home of M. Ducroy, minister of war, to return the Huysman papers in return for safe conduct out of France. On coming out Lanyard finds Lucy gone.

CHAPTER XXII—Lanyard turns taxi chauffeur.

CHAPTER XXIII—He finds Lucy, who dismisses him, leaving him to think that she is in league with The Pack.

CHAPTER XXIV—Lanyard carries a fare in his taxi.

After some time he returned to the garden and quartered it with the thoroughness of a pointer beating a covert. But he did this hopelessly, bitterly aware that the outcome would be precisely what it eventually was—that is to say, nothing.

He was kneeling beside the bench—scrutinizing the turf round about with microscopic attention by aid of his flash-lamp, seeking some sign of struggle to prove she had not left him willingly; and finding none—when a voice brought him momentarily out of his distraction.

He looked up wildly, to discover Ducroy standing over him, his stout person chastely swathed in a quilted dressing-gown with trousers, his expression one of stupefaction.

"Well, monsieur—well?" the minister of war demanded irritably. "What—I repeat—are you doing there?"

Lanyard essayed response, choked up, and gulped. He rose and stood swaying, showing a stricken face, but for the moment couldn't speak.

"Eh?" Ducroy insisted, with an accent of exasperation. "Why do you stand glaring at me like that—eh? Come, monsieur; what ails you? I have arranged everything, I say. Where is mademoiselle?"

Lanyard made a broken gesture.

"She is gone," he muttered forlornly.

Instantly the countenance of the stout Frenchman was lighted with a gleam of eager interest—romance lover that he was—and he stepped nearer, peering closely into the face of the adventurer.

"Gone?" he echoed. "Mademoiselle? Your sweetheart, eh?"

Lanyard assented with a disconsolate nod and sigh. Impatiently Ducroy caught him by the sleeve.

"Come!" he insisted, tugging—"come at once into the house. Now, monsieur—now at length you enlist all one's sympathies! Come, I say! Is it your desire that I catch my death of cold?"

Indifferently Lanyard suffered himself to be led away. He was, indeed, barely conscious of what was happening. All his being was possessed by the thought that she had forsaken him.

CHAPTER XXII.

Enigma.

Lanyard had found no reason to believe that Lucy had left him otherwise than voluntarily, or that their adventures at the homes of Mme. Omber and M. Ducroy had been noted by spies of the Pack. The testimony of his own wits assured him that they hadn't been followed at any time subsequent to leaving the Rue des Acacias; their way had been too long and purposely too involved, and his vigilance too lively for that. Left to herself there in the garden for a quarter-hour, she had been free to think independently for almost the first time since she had descended from the studio.

Then, horror overmastering her, she had fled the garden—wildly, blindly, he didn't doubt—and probably had sought refuge in some obscure hotel till morning. What then? She had neither money nor any friends in Paris, but had mentioned some personal jewelry she planned to pawn.

That would be her first move, then, to a pawnbroker's, where he must seek her—not to force himself again upon her, but to follow at a distance and watch over her, to ward off any attempt on Bannon's part to interfere.

The government pawnshop had its attraction for Lanyard as well; he was there before the doors were open for the day—was the first to enter; and fortified by loans negotiated on his watch, cigarette case, and a ring or two, retired to a nearby cafe which commanded a view of the entrance to the establishment on the Rue des Blancs-Manteaux and settled himself against a day-long vigil.

It wasn't easy; drowsiness buzzed in his brain and weighted his eyelids; now and again, involuntarily, he nodded over his glass of black coffee. And when evening came and the doors of the pawnshop were closed for the night he rose and stumbled off, telling himself that possibly he had napped a little without his knowledge and thus had missed her visit.

Engaging obscure lodgings close by the Rue des Acacias, he slept till nearly noon of the following day, then rose to put into execution a design which had sprung full-winged from his brain at the moment of awakening.

He had his car and a chauffeur's license of long standing in the name of Pierre Lamier—was free, in short, to cruise at will the streets of Paris without lawful let or hindrance. And with the aid of a few judicious selections from the stock of a second-hand clothing shop and of a few other purchases at a chemist's, he felt tolerably sure that it would need keen eyes—whether the Pack's or the prefecture's—to identify Pierre Lamier with either Michael Lanyard or the Lone Wolf.

By the close of the third day he reluctantly conceded that she must have managed to escape from Paris without his aid.

Then he began to suspect that Bannon had fled Paris as well, for the most diligent investigation he was able to pursue unchallenged failed to unearth the least clue to the movements of the American subsequent to the fire at Troyon's.

Now, toward midnight of that same third day, Lanyard was driving slowly westward on the Boulevard de la Madeleine when a limousine of familiar aspect rounded a corner half a block ahead and, drawing up in front of Viel's, discharged four passengers.

The first was Wertheimer, and at sight of his rather striking figure, arrayed for the evening in apparel from Bond street, Lanyard slackened speed.

Turning as he alighted, the Englishman offered his hand to a young woman. She jumped down to the sidewalk in radiant attire and temper, laughing like a delighted child.

Involuntarily Lanyard stopped his car, and a chauffeur driving immediately to the rear, swerving out to escape collision, shot past, cursing him liberally, while a sergent de ville scowled darkly and uttered an imperative word.

Lanyard pulled himself together somehow and drove on.

The girl was just then passing into the restaurant through the revolving door, Wertheimer attending her, while De Morbihan had alighted from the car and was lending a solicitous arm to Bannon.

But to these last Lanyard paid little attention. Quite automatically he passed Viel's, rounded the Madeleine, and turned up the Boulevard Malesherbes. Paris and all its brisk midnight traffic swung by without claiming a tithe of his attention—he was mainly conscious of lights that reeled dizzily round him, like a multitude of staring, malicious, mocking eyes.

At the junction with the Boulevard Haussmann a second sergent de ville roused him with a warning about careless driving. He went more sanely thereafter, but with a heart of utter wretchedness—his eyes still wore a dazed expression, and now and again he shook his head impatiently, as though to rid it of a swarm of tormenting thoughts.

So it seemed he had all along been her dupe; that all the while he had been ostentatiously shielding her from harm and diffidently showing her every evidence of his devotion she had been laughing in her sleeve and planning to return with her report of a fool self-hoodwinked to the service she had pretended to despise.

A great anger welled in his bosom.

Turning round, he made back to the Boulevard de la Madeleine, and on one pretext and another contrived to haunt the neighborhood of Viel's until the party came out, something after one o'clock.

It was evident they had supped merrily; the girl showed every sign of the gayest humor; Wertheimer seemed a bit exhilarated, De Morbihan was plainly much amused, and even Bannon—bearing heavily on the Frenchman's arm—was chuckling appreciatively. The party piled back into De Morbihan's limousine and were driven up the Avenues des Champs-Elysees, pausing at the Elysee Palace hotel to drop Bannon and the girl—his daughter?—whoever she was!

Whither it went thereafter Lanyard didn't trouble to ascertain. He drove morosely home and went to bed, though not to sleep for many hours—bitterness of disillusion ate like an acid into his heart.

CHAPTER XXIII.

No Solution.

Because his money was fast ebbing and motives of prudence alone—if none more worthy—forbade an attempt to replenish his pocketbook by revisiting the little place in the Rue Roget and realizing on the treasures there, he had determined to have a taximeter fitted to his car and ply for hire until time or chance should settle the question of his future.

Already, indeed, he had complied with the police regulations, received permission to convert his machine into a taxicab, and arranged to have the clock installed.

Leaving his car before noon at the designated depot, he received the promise that it would be ready for him at four o'clock. Returning at that hour, he learned that it couldn't be ready before six. Facing wearily two hours with nothing to do, and too bored and restless to wile them away in a cafe, he idled listlessly hither and yon along streets and boulevards—indifferent, in the black melancholy oppressing him, whether or not he were recognized.

In the course of his wanderings he found himself turning from the Rue St. Honore through the Place Vendome to the Rue de la Paix.

Before one corner window Lanyard paused involuntarily.

In that window there was a mirror, set at an angle to one side, and suddenly Lanyard caught its presentment of himself—a gaunt and hungry apparition, with a wolfish air he had never worn when rejoicing in the sobriquet of wolf, his eyes staring with predacious luster.

And lest some passer-by be struck by this betrayal, he turned and moved on hastily.

Half-way across the Boulevard des Capucines, to the east of the Opera, he leaped for his life from a murderous-minded taxicab, found himself temporarily marooned upon one of those isles of safety which the Parisian calls "thank-Gods," and stood waiting until an opening should offer in the congestion of traffic and permit him to gain the farther sidewalk.

Presently the policeman in the middle of the boulevard signaled with his little white wand, and the stream of east-bound vehicles checked and began to close up to the right of the crossing, upon which they encroached jealously. A taxicab on the outside, next the island, overshot the mark, and, obedient to a curt word from the sergent, pulled up sharply and began to back into place. Before Lanyard could move round it, its window had drawn opposite him and he was staring in, transfixed by a casual glance.

There was sufficient light to enable him to see clearly the face of the passenger—its pale oval and the eyes whose gaze clung to his with an effect of confused fascination.

She sat quite motionless until one white-gloved hand moved uncertainly toward her bosom.

That brought him to; unconsciously lifting his cap, he stepped back a pace and started to move on.

But at that she bent quickly forward and unlatched the door. It swung wide to him.

Hardly knowing what he was doing, he accepted the mute invitation, stepped into the cab, took the empty seat beside her, and closed the door.

Almost at once the block was lifted, and the car moved on with a jerk, the girl sinking back into her corner with a suggestion of breathlessness, as though the effort she made to seem composed had been almost too much for her strength.

Her face, turned to Lanyard in the half-light, appeared immobile, expressionless; only her eyes were alert with anticipation. But she said nothing.

On his part, Lanyard felt himself hopelessly confounded, in the grasp of emotions that would scarcely suffer him to speak. A great wonder obsessed his mind that she should have opened the door to him no less than that he should have entered through it. Dimly he understood that both had acted without premeditation, and he asked himself: "Was she already regretting that momentary weakness—or whatever it had been?"

"Why did you do that?" he heard himself demand abruptly, and felt that his voice sounded harsh, strained, unnatural.

She stiffened slightly, with a nervous movement of her shoulders.

"Because I saw you."

"Did you want to talk to me, perhaps?" he prompted.

"I was surprised; I had hoped—believed—you had left Paris."

She surveyed his costume with a curious glance, perplexed.

"Why are you dressed that way? Is it a disguise?"

"A pretty good one—as a matter of fact, the national costume of one in my present station in life."

"But you are wrong. I recognized you instantly, didn't I? And those others—they're as keen-witted as I—certainly! Oh, you should not have stopped in Paris!"

"I couldn't go without knowing what had become of you."

"I was afraid of that," she confessed.

"Then why—"

She Unlatched the Door.

"Oh, I know what you're going to say! Why did I run away from you?" Then, since he said nothing, she continued unhappily: "I can't tell you. I mean, I don't know how to tell you!"

She kept her face averted, sat gazing blankly out of the window; but when he remained mute and unresponsive—in point of fact not knowing what to say—she turned to look inquiringly at him, and the glare of a passing lamp showed him her countenance profoundly distressed, her mouth tense, brows knitted, eyes clouded with perplexity and appeal.

And of a sudden, seeing her so tormented and so piteous, his indignation ebbed, and with it all his doubts of her; dimly he divined that there was something behind this dark fabric of mystery and inconsistency that, however inexplicable it might seem to him, excused all her apparent faithlessness and instability of character and purpose. He couldn't look upon this girl and listen to her voice and believe that she wasn't at heart as sound and sweet and tender and loyal as any that ever breathed!

A wave of tenderness and compassion swept his heart, and he realized that he didn't matter, that nothing mattered so long as she was spared one slightest pang of self-reproach.

He said very gently: "I wouldn't have you distress yourself on my account, Miss Shannon. I quite understand there must be things I can't understand—that you must have had your reasons for acting as you did."

"Yes," she said evenly, but again with eyes averted—"I had; but they're not easy, they're impossible to explain to you."

"Yet—when all's said and done—I've no right to exact any explanation."

"Ah, but how can you say that, remembering what we've been through together?"

"You owe me nothing," he insisted, "whereas I owe you everything, even unquestioning faith. Even though I fail, I have this to thank you for—this one not ignoble impulse my life has known."

"You mustn't say that; you mustn't think it. I don't deserve it. You wouldn't say it—if you knew—"

"Perhaps I can guess enough to satisfy myself."

She gave him a swift, sidelong look of challenge, instinctively on the defensive.

"Why," she almost gasped, "what do you think—"

"Does it matter what I think?"

"It does, to me. I wish to know!"

"Well," he conceded reluctantly, "I think that, when you had a chance to think things over calmly, while you waited for me there in the garden, you decided it would be better to—to use your best judgment and—extricate yourself from an embarrassing entanglement—"

"But you were wrong!" she protested vehemently—"quite, quite wrong! I ran away from myself—not from you—and with another motive, too—one that I can't explain."

"You ran away from yourself—not from me?" he repeated, puzzled.

"Don't you understand? Why make it so hard for me? Why make me say outright what pains me so?"

"Oh, I beg of you—"

"But if you won't understand otherwise—I must tell you, I suppose." She checked herself, breathless, flushed, and trembling. "You remember our talk after dinner that night—how I asked you, what if you were to find out you'd been mistaken in me, that I had deceived you; and how I told you it would be impossible for me ever to marry you?"

"I remember," he assented gravely.

"It was because of that," she said, "I ran away; because I hadn't been talking idly when I said what I did; because you were mistaken in me, because I was deceiving you, because I could never marry you, and because—suddenly—I came to know that, if I didn't leave you then and there, I might never find the strength to leave you, and only greater suffering and unhappiness could come of it. I had to go, as much for your sake as for mine."

"You mean me to understand that you found you were beginning to—to care a little for me?"

She made an effort to speak, but in the end answered him only with a dumb inclination of her head.

"And you ran away, then, because love wasn't possible between us?"

Again, silently, she bowed her head.

"Because I had been a criminal, I presume!"

"You've no right to say that—"

"What else can I think? You tell me you were afraid I might induce you to become my wife—something which, for some incomprehensible reason, you claim is impossible. What other explanation can I infer? What other explanation is needed? It's ample, it covers everything, and I've no warrant to complain—God knows!"

"But!—" she began, when he cut her short.

"There's one thing I don't understand at all!" he protested. "If that were so, if it was your repugnance for criminal association—why did you go back to Bannon?"

She started and glanced at him furtively, a frightened glance.

"You knew that?"

"I saw you—last night—followed you from Viel's to the Elysee Palace hotel."

"And you thought," she flashed in a vibrant voice—"you thought I was in such company of my own choice!"

"You didn't seem altogether downcast," he countered. "Do you wish me to understand he had recaptured you—that you were with him against your will?"

"No," she said slowly. "No; I returned to him voluntarily, knowing perfectly what I was about."

"Through fear of him—"

"No. I can't claim that."

"Rather than me—"

"You'll never understand," she told him a little wearily. "It was a matter of duty. I had to go back—I had to!"

Her voice trailed off brokenly into a little sob. But as, moved beyond his strength to resist, Lanyard put forth a hand to take the white-gloved one resting on the cushion beside her, she withdrew it with a swift gesture of denial.

"No!" she cried. "Please! You mustn't do that. You only make it harder."

"But you love me!"

"I can't. It's impossible. I would, but may not!"

"Why?"

"I can't tell you."

"If you love me, you must tell me."

She was silent, the white hands working nervously with her handkerchief.

"Lucy!" he insisted—"you must say what stands between you and my love. It's true, I have no right to ask, as I had no right to speak to you of love. But when we have said what we have said—we can't stop there. You will tell me, dear?"

She shook her head. "It—it's impossible," she declared in a choking voice.

"You leave me no alternative," he said in a voice he hardly knew for his own, so dull and hollow was it in his hearing—"I can only think one thing."

"Think what you must," she said lifelessly; "it doesn't matter, so long as you renounce me and put me out of your heart and—leave me."

Without other response he leaned forward and tapped the glass, signaling the driver to stop. And as the cab swerved sharply in toward the curb he laid hold of the door-latch.

"Lucy," he pleaded, "don't let me go believing—"

She seemed suddenly infused with a cold, implacable hostility.

"I tell you," she said cruelly, "I don't care what you think, so long as you go!"

The face she now showed him was ashen, its mouth was hard, her eyes blazed feverishly.

And then, as still he hesitated, the cab pulled up, and the driver, leaning back, unlatched the door and threw it open.

With a curt, resigned inclination of the head Lanyard rose and got out.

Immediately the girl grasped the speaking-tube, the door slammed, the cab drew away, and left him standing with the pose, the gesture of one who has just heard sentence of death pronounced on him.

When he roused to know his surroundings he found himself standing on a corner of the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.

It was bitter cold in the wind sweeping down from the west, and it had grown very dark. Only in the sky above the Bois a long reef of crimson light hung motionless, against which the leafless trees of the avenue lifted their gnarled, weird silhouettes.

While he watched the crimson ebbed swiftly and gave way to mauve, to violet, to black.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Apostate.

When there was no more light in the sky a profound sigh escaped Lanyard's lips, and with a slight nod toward the place where the light had been, and the gesture of one who recognizes and signifies submission to an omen, he turned and tramped heavily back across town.

At one stage of his journey he turned aside and, more through habit than desire or design, entered a cheap eating-place and consumed his evening meal without the slightest comprehension of what he ate or whether the food were good or poor.

When he had finished he fled the place like a haunted man.

Quite without purpose he sought the machine shop where he had left his car.

He had no plans; but it was in his mind, a murderous thought, that before another day dawned he might come face to face with Bannon.

Meanwhile he would go to work. He could think out his problems while driving his cab as well as in seclusion; and whatever he ultimately decided to do, he could accomplish little before midnight; finally, it was quite within the bounds of possibility that his car would prove a valuable asset to whatever course of action he might elect to pursue.

Toward seven o'clock, with his machine in perfect running order, he mounted to the seat and took to the streets in reckless humor—the temper of a beast of prey.

The barrier was down—once more the Lone Wolf was on the prowl.

But for the present he controlled himself and acted perfectly his temporary role of taxi-bandit, fellow to those thousand that infest Paris. People hailed him from sidewalks and restaurants half a dozen times in the course of the next three hours; he took them up, carried them to their several destinations, received payment, and acknowledged their gratuities with perfunctory thanks—all thoroughly in character and all with little conscious thought.

He saw but one thing, the face of Lucy Shannon, white, tense, glimmering wanly in shadows—the face with which she had dismissed him.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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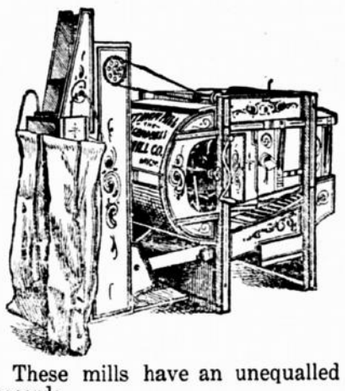

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