(Copyright, by Louis Joseph Vance.)

He took a stride toward the door, then hung there in hesitation, frowning absently at the woman, who, without moving, laughed quietly and eyed Lanyard with a twinkle of malicious diversion.

The adventurer returned her stare with one of thoughtful appraisal; from the first he had recognized in her a character of uncommon tolerance and amiability.

"Pardon, madame, but—" he began abruptly; then checked himself in constrained appreciation of his impudence.

"If that's permission to interrupt your reverie," Mme. Omber remarked, "I don't mind telling you you're the strangest burglar I ever heard of!"

Footfalls became audible on the stairway—the hasty, scuffling sounds of slippered feet.

"Is that you, Sidonie?" madame called.

The voice of the maid replied: "Yes, madame—coming!"

"Well—don't, just yet. Wait there till I call you."

"Very good, madame."

The woman returned complete attention to Lanyard.

"Now, monsieur of two minds, what is it you wish?"

"Why did you do that?" the adventurer asked, nodding toward the reception hall.

"Tell Sidonie to wait instead of calling for help? Because—well, because you interest me strangely. I've a curious notion you're in desperate quandary and about to throw yourself on my mercy."

"I am," Lanyard admitted tersely.

"Ah! Now this does begin to grow interesting! Would you mind telling me why?"

"Because, madame, I have done you a great service, and feel I can count upon your gratitude."

The Frenchwoman's eyebrows lifted at this. "Doubtless monsieur knows what he's talking about—"

"Listen, madame. I am in love with a young woman, an American, a stranger, and friendless in Paris. If anything happens to me tonight, if I am arrested or assassinated—"

"Is that likely?"

"Quite likely, madame. I have enemies among the Apaches and in my own profession as well. I have reason to suspect that some of these are in this neighborhood tonight. I may possibly not escape them. In that event, this young lady of whom I speak will need a protector."

"And why must I interest myself in her fate, pray?"

"Because, madame, of this service I have done you. Recently, in London, you were robbed—"

The woman started and colored with excitement. "You know something of my stolen jewels?"

"Everything, madame; it was I who stole them."

"You? You are, then, that Lone Wolf?"

"I was, madame."

"Why the past tense?" the woman demanded, eying him with a gathering frown.

"Because I am done with thieving."

She threw back her head and laughed, but without mirth. "A likely story, monsieur! Have you reformed since I caught you here—"

"Does it matter when? I take it that proof, visible, tangible proof of my sincerity, more than a meaningless date, would be needed to convince you."

"No doubt about that monsieur—the Lone Wolf!"

"Could you wish better proof than that of restoration of your stolen property?"

"Are you trying to bribe me to let you off with an offer to return my jewels?'

"I'm afraid emergency reformation wouldn't persuade you—"

"You do well to be so afraid."

"But if I can prove I've already restored your jewels—"

"But you cannot."

"If madame will do me the favor to open her safe she will find them there—conspicuously placed."

"What nonsense—"

"Am I in error in assuming that madame didn't return from England until quite recently?"

"But today, in fact—"

"And you haven't troubled to investigate your safe since returning?"

"It had not occurred to me—"

"Then why not test my assertion before denying it?"

With an incredulous shrug Mme. Omber terminated a puzzled scrutiny of Lanyard's countenance and turned to the safe.

"But to have done what you declare you have," she argued, "you must have known the combination—since it appears you haven't done any breaking open."

The sequence of the combination ran glibly off Lanyard's tongue. And at this, with every evidence of excitement, at length beginning to hope—more than to believe—the woman set herself to open the strongbox. Within a minute she had succeeded, and the morocco-bound jewel box was in her hand.

A hasty examination assured her its treasure was intact.

"But why—" she stammered, pale with emotion—"why, monsieur, why?"

"Because I had decided to leave off stealing for a livelihood."

"When did you bring these jewels here?"

"Four or five nights since."

"And then—repented. eh?"

"I own it."

"But came here again tonight to steal a second time what you had stolen once?"

"That's true, too."

"But I interrupted you—"

"Pardon, madame—not you, but my better self. I came to steal—I could not."

"Monsieur—you do not conceive. I fail to fathom your motives, but—"

A sudden shock of heavy feet trampling the parquetry of the reception hall, accompanied by a clash of violently excited voices, silenced her and brought Lanyard instantly to the face-about.

Above that loud wrangle—of which neither had received the least warning, so completely had their argument absorbed them—Sidonie's accents were audible, clear against the grumble of two voices of heavier timbre—"Madame—madame!"—a cry of protest.

"What is it?" Mme. Omber demanded of Lanyard.

He uttered the word, "Police!" as he turned and threw himself into the recess of the window.

But on wrenching it open the voice of an invisible picket, posted on the lawn, saluted him with a harsh warning; and when, involuntarily, he stepped out upon the balcony, a flash of flame split the gloom below, a report rang loud in the quiet of the park, and a bullet slapped viciously the stone facing at one side of the window.

CHAPTER XXX.

Many Things Happen Fast.

Incontinently—with as little ceremony as though the bullet had lodged in himself—Lanyard tumbled backward into the room, while to a tune of heavy boots clattering through the salons, two sergents de ville lumbered valiantly into the library and pulled up at sight of Mme. Omber, erect and composed beside her safe, and of Lanyard picking himself up from the floor by the open window.

Behind them Sidonie trotted, wringing her hands.

"Madame!" she bleated — "they wouldn't listen to me, madame—I couldn't stop them!"

"All right, Sidonie. Go back to the hall. I'll call you when I need you. Good morning, messieurs!"

One sergent advanced with a halting salute and a superfluous question: "Mme. Omber—" But the other waited on the threshold, barring the way.

Lanyard measured the two speculatively—the spokesman was old and fat, ripe for pensioning, little apt te prove seriously effective in a rough-and-tumble, but the second was young, sturdy, and broad-chested, with the poise of an athlete. Furthermore, he carried, in addition to his sword, a pistol naked in his hand. And his clear blue eyes, meeting the adventurer's, lit up with a glimmer of invitation.

For the present, however, Lanyard wasn't taking any. He met that challenge with a look of blank noncomprehension, folded his arms, lounged against the desk, and watched Mme. Omber acknowledge, none too cordially, the sergent's query.

"I am Mme. Omber—yes. What can I do for you?"

The sergent gaped.

"Pardon!" he stammered, then laughed as one who tardily appreciates a joke. "It is well we are here in time, madame," he added—"though it would seem you have not had great trouble with this miscreant. Where is the woman?"

He moved a pace toward Lanyard—handcuffs jingled in his grasp.

"A moment, if you please!" madame interposed. "Woman? What woman?"

Pausing, the sergent explained in a tone of surprise:

"His accomplice, naturally! Such were our instructions—to proceed at once to madame's home, enter quietly by way of the servants' entrance—which would be open—and arrest a burglar with his female accomplice."

Again the stout sergent moved toward Lanyard; again Mme. Omber stopped him.

"One moment, if you please!"

Her eyes, dense with mystification and suspicion, questioned Lanyard's, who, with a significant nod toward the jewel case still in her hands, gave her a look of dumb entreaty.

After brief hesitation, "It is a mistake," madame declared; "there is no woman in this house that I know of who has no right to be here. But you say you received a message? I sent none!"

The fat sergent shrugged. "That is not for me to dispute, madame. I have only my information to go by."

He glared sullenly at Lanyard, who returned a placid smile which, despite what little hope was to be derived from madame's irresolute manner, masked a vast amount of trepidation. He felt tolerably sure Mme. Omber had not summoned the police on prior knowledge of his presence in the library. This meant, then, a new form of attack on the part of the Pack. He must certainly have been followed—or else the girl had been caught attempting to steal away and the information extracted from her by force majeure. Moreover, he could hear two more pairs of feet tramping through the salons.

Pending the introduction of these last, Mme. Omber said nothing more.

And, unceremoniously enough, the newcomers shouldered their way into the library—two men in citizen's clothing—one pompous body of otherwise undistinguished appearance, promptly identified by the sergents de ville as the commissaire of that quarter, the other, a puffy mediocrity, known to Lanyard at least (if no one else seemed to recognize him) as Popinot.

At this confirmation of his darkest fears the adventurer abandoned hope of any aid from Mme. Omber and began to take unostentatious stock of his chances of escaping by his own efforts.

But he was altogether unarmed, thanks to his precipitate action in drawing the teeth of madame's revolver, and the odds were heavy—four against one, all four no doubt under arms, and two at least—the sergents de ville—men of sound military training.

"Mme. Omber?" inquired the commissaire, saluting that lady with immense dignity. "One trusts that this intrusion may be pardoned, the circumstances remembered. In an affair of this nature, involving this repository of so historic treasures—"

"That is quite well understood, monsieur le commissaire," madame replied distantly. "And this monsieur is, no doubt, your aid?"

"Pardon!" Monsieur le commissaire hastened to make his companion known. "M. Popinot, agent de la surete, who lays these informations."

With a profound obeisance to Mme. Omber, Popinot strode dramatically over to face Lanyard and explore his lineaments with his small, keen, shifty eyes of a pig—a scrutiny which the adventurer suffered with superficial imperturbability.

"It is he!" Popinot announced with a gesture. "Messieurs, I call upon you to arrest this man, M. Michael Lanyard, self-styled the Lone Wolf."

He stepped back a pace, expanding his chest in a vain effort to eclipse his

Lanyard Fought Blindly, Madly, Viciously.

abdomen, and glanced round triumphantly at his respectful auditors.

"Accused," he added with intense relish, "of the murder of Inspector Roddy of Scotland Yard at Troyon's, and of setting fire to that establishment—"

"For this, Popinot," Lanyard interrupted in an undertone, "I shall some time cut off your ears!" He turned to Mme. Omber: "Accept, if you please, madame, my sincere regrets—but this accusation happens to be one of which I am altogether innocent."

Instantly, from his passive pose, Lanyard straightened up, and the heavy brass and mahogany humidor whereon his right hand had been resting seemed fairly to leap from its place on the desk as, with a sweep of his arm, he sent it spinning point-blank at the younger sergent.

Before that one, wholly unprepared, could more than gasp, it caught him a blow like a kick just below the breastbone. He reeled, and the breath left him in one mighty gust; he sat down abruptly—blue eyes wide with a look of aggrieved surprise—clapped both hands to his middle, blinked, turned pale, and keeled over on his side.

But Lanyard hadn't waited to note results. He was too busy. The fat sergent, with a snarl, had leaped upon his arm and was struggling to hold it still long enough to snap a handcuff round the wrist, while the commissaire had started with a bellow of rage and two hands extended, itching, for the adventurer's throat.

The first received a half-arm jab on the point of his chin that jarred his teeth, and without in the least understanding how it happened, found himself being whirled around and laid prostrate in the commissaire's path. The latter tripped, fell and planted two hard knees, with the bulk of his weight atop them, on the zenith of the sergent's rotundity.

At the same time Lanyard, leaping toward the doorway, noticed that Popinot was tugging at a revolver in his hip pocket.

Followed a vivid flash, then complete darkness; with a well-aimed kick—an elementary movement of la savate—Lanyard had dislodged the light switch, knocking its porcelain box from the wall, thus breaking the connection and causing a short circuit which extinguished every light in the house.

With his way thus apparently cleared, the police in confusion, darkness abetting him, Lanyard plunged on; but in midstride, as he crossed the threshold, his ankle was caught and jerked from under him by the still prostrate younger sergent.

His momentum took him to the floor with a crash—and may have spared him a worse mishap, for in the same breath he heard the report of a pistol and knew that Popinot had fired at his fugitive shadow.

As he brought one heel down with crushing force on the sergent's wrist, freeing his foot, he was dimly conscious of the voice of the commissaire shouting a frantic prayer to Popinot to cease firing in the dark. Then the pain-maddened sergent crawled to his knees, lunged blindly forward, knocked the adventurer back in the act of rising, and fell on top of him.

Hampered by two hundred pounds of fighting Frenchman, Lanyard felt that the cause was lost, yet battled on—and would while breath was in him.

With a heave, a twist, and a squirm he slipped from under, and swinging a fist at random, hurt his knuckles against the mouth of the sergent. Momentarily the latter relaxed his hold, and Lanyard struggled to his knees, only to go down as the indomitable sergent grappled a second time.

Now, however, as they fell, Lanyard was on top, and transferring both hands to his antagonist's left forearm, he wrenched it up and around. There was a cry of pain, and he jumped clear of one no longer to be reckoned with.

Nevertheless, as he had feared, the delay caused by the struggle had proved ruinous. He had only found his feet when someone unknown hurled himself bodily through the gloom and wrapped his arms round Lanyard's thighs. And as both went down, two other bodies piled up on top.

For the next minute or two Lanyard fought blindly, madly, viciously, striking and kicking at random. For all that—even with one sergent hors de combat—they were three to one; and though with the ferocity of sheer desperation he shook them all off, at one time, and gained a few yards more, it was only again to be overcome and borne down, crushed beneath the weight of the three.

His wind was going, his strength leaving him. He mustered up every ounce of energy, all his wit and courage, for one final effort; fought like a cat, tooth and nail; toiled once more to his knees, with two antagonists clinging to him like wolves to the flanks of a stag; shook one off, regained his feet, swayed; and in one final flash of ferocity dashed both fists repeatedly into the face of him who still clung to him.

That one was Popinot; he knew instinctively that this was so, and a fierce joy filled him as he felt the man's clutches relax and fall away and guessed how brutal was the damage he had done that fat, foul countenance.

Then, free, he made off, running, stumbling, reeling, gained the reception hall, flung open the door, and heedless of the picket who had fired at him from below the window, threw himself bodily down the steps and away.

Three shots sped him through that intricate tangle of the night-bound park. But all flew wide; and the pursuit—what little there was—blundered off at haphazard and lost itself.

He came to the wall, crept along in shelter of its deeper shadow until he found a tree with a low-swung branch that jutted out over the street, climbed this, edged outward, and dropped to the sidewalk.

A shout from the direction of the nearest gate greeted his appearance. He turned and dashed off. Running feet for a time pursued him, and once he heard the rumble of a motor. But he recovered quickly, regained his wind, and ran well, with long, steady, ground-consuming strides, and doubled, turned, and twisted in a manner to wake the envy of the most subtle fox.

The pursuit failed once more. In time he felt warranted in slowing down to a rapid walk.

Weariness was now a heavy burden upon him, and his spirit numbed with desperate desire for rest; but his pace did not flag nor his purpose falter from its goal.

It was a long walk to which he set himself and, as soon as he felt confident of freedom from espionage, a direct one. He plodded without faltering to the one place where he could feel sure of finding his beloved, if she lived and were free. He knew that she had not forgotten, and in his heart he knew that she would never again of her own will fail him.

Nor had she, when—weary and spent from that heart-breaking climb up the merciless acclivity of the Butte Montmartre—he staggered rather than walked past the sleepy verger and found his way through the crowding shadows to the softly luminous heart of the cathedral of the Sacre-Coeur, and found her kneeling, her head bent upon hands resting across the back of the little chair before her, a slight and timid figure lost and lonely in the long ranks of empty chairs that filled the body of the nave.

Slowly, almost fearfully, he went to her, and silently slipped into the chair by her side.

She knew, without looking up, that it was he.

After a little her hand stole out to his, closed round his fingers and drew him forward with a gentle, insistent pressure. He knelt then with her, hand in hand—filled with the wonder of it, that he to whom religion had been nothing should have been brought to this by the magic of a woman's love.

He knelt for a long time, for many minutes, his somber gaze questioning the golden shadows and the ancient mystery of the farther choir and distant shining altar—and there was no more doubt in his heart but that, whatever should ensue of this, the restless spirit of the Lone Wolf was laid at last.

But in time he remembered how urgent was their plight; and remembering, found courage to break in upon her devotions.

"We must go," he said gently. "We haven't much time, and we must be out of Paris before dawn if we're to live to see another sundown. I think that will be all right—I've a standing arrangement with the minister of war."

She rose quietly, with a serenely radiant face.

"I knew you would be here," he said slowly—"I knew it well."

"I knew you would come here for me," she told him in turn—"I knew you must. I was praying that you might be spared to me, my dearest."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Wings of the Morning.

About half past six Lanyard left the dressing room assigned him in the barracks at Port Aviation and, waddling quaintly in the heavy wind-proof garments provided at the instance of Ducroy, made his way between two hangars to the practice field.

Now the eastern skies were pulsing fitfully with promise of dawn; but within the vast inclosure of the aerodome the gloom of night lingered so stubbornly that two huge searchlights had been pressed into the service of those engaged in tuning up the motor of the Parrott biplane.

In their intense, white, concentrated glare—that rippled oddly upon the wrinkled, oily garments of the dozen or so mechanics busy about the machine—the under sides of those wide, motionless planes hung against the dark with an effect of impermanence—as though they were already afloat and needed but a breath to send them winging skyward.

At one side a number of young and keen-faced Frenchmen, officers of the corps, were lounging, overlooking the preparations with alert and intelligent interest.

On the other, all the majesty of Mars was incarnate in the rotund person of M. Ducroy, posing valiantly in fur-lined coat and shining top-hat while he chatted with an officer of tall, athletic figure who wore an air of uncommon efficiency together with his aviating uniform.

As Lanyard drew near, this man brought his heels together smartly, saluted the minister of war and strode off toward the flying machine.

"Captain Vauquelin informs me he will be ready to start in five minutes, monsieur," Ducroy announced. "You are just in time."

"And mademoiselle?" the adventurer asked, peering anxiously around.

Almost immediately the girl came forward from the shadows with a smile apologetic for the strangeness of her attire.

She had donned, over her street dress, a simple leather garment which enveloped her completely and buttoned tight round wrists and ankles. Her small hat, too, had been replaced by a leather helmet-cap which left only her eyes, nose, mouth and chin exposed, and even these were soon to be hidden by a heavy veil for protection against spattering oil.

"Mademoiselle is not nervous—eh?" Ducroy inquired politely.

Lucy smiled brightly.

"I? Why should I be, monsieur?"

"I trust mademoiselle will permit me to commend her courage. Pardon! I have one last word for the ear of Captain Vauquelin."

Lifting his hat, the Frenchman joined the group near the machine.

Lanyard stared unaffectedly at the girl's face, unable to disguise his wonder at the high spirits advertised by her rekindled color and brilliant eyes.

"Well?" she demanded gayly. "Don't tell me I don't look like a fright! I know I do!"

"I daren't tell you how you look to me," Lanyard replied soberly. "But I will say this, that for sheer, downright pluck, you—"

"Thank you, monsieur! And you?"

He glanced with a deprecatory smile at the flimsy-looking contrivance to which they were presently to intrust their lives.

"Somehow," said he doubtfully, "I don't feel in the least upset or exhilarated. It seems little out of the average run of life—all in the day's work!"

"I think," she replied, "that you're very like the other lone wolf, the fictitious one—Lupin, you know—a bit of a humbug. If you're not nervous, why keep staring hither and yon—as if you were rather expecting somebody—as if you wouldn't be surprised to see Popinot or De Morbihan pop out of the ground—or Ekstrom!"

"Hum!" he said gravely, "I don't mind telling you now, that's precisely what I am afraid of."

"Nonsense!" the girl cried in open contempt. "What could they do?"

"Please don't ask me," Lanyard begged seriously. "I might try to tell you."

"But don't worry, please!" Fugitively her hand touched his arm. "We're ready."

It was true enough. Ducroy was moving toward them again.

"All is prepared!" he announced in sonorous accents.

In a sober silence they approached the machine.

Vauquelin kept himself aloof while Lanyard and a young officer helped the girl to a seat on the right of the pilot's and strapped her in. When the adventurer had been similarly secured in the place on the left the two sat, imprisoned, some six feet above the ground.

Lanyard found his perch comfortable enough. A broad band of webbing furnished support for his back, another crossed his chest by way of provision against forward pitching, there were rests for his feet and cloth-wound grips fixed to struts on either side for his hands.

He smiled at Lucy across the empty seat, and was surprised at the clearness with which her answering smile was visible. But he wasn't to see it again for a long and weary time; almost immediately she began to adjust her veil.

The morning had grown much lighter within the last few minutes.

A wait ensued of seemingly interminable duration. A swarm of mechanics, assistants and military aviators buzzed round their feet like bees.

The sky was now pale to the eastern horizon. A fleet of heavy clouds was drifting off into the south, leaving in their wake thin veil of mist that bade fair soon to disappear before the rays of the sun. The atmosphere seemed tolerably clear and not unseasonably cold.

The light grew stronger still—features of distant objects defined themselves; traces of color warmed the winter landscape.

After some time their pilot, wearing his wind-mask, appeared and began to climb to his perch. With a cool nod for Lanyard and a civil bow to his

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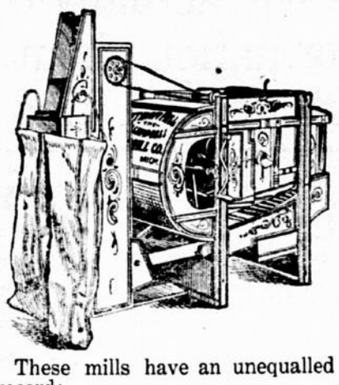

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