The Box with Broken Seals

E. Phillips Oppenheim

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THE BOX WITH BROKEN SEALS

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E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

1919

CHAPTER I

James Crawshay, Englishman of the type usually described in transatlantic circles as "some Britisher," lolled apparently at his ease upon the couch of the too-resplendent sitting room in the Hotel Magnificent, Chicago. Hobson, his American fellow traveler, on the other hand, betrayed his anxiety by his nervous pacing up and down the apartment. Both men bore traces in their appearance of the long journey which they had only just completed.

"I think," Crawshay decided, yawning, "that I shall have a bath. I feel gritty, and my collar--heavens, what a sight! Your trains, Hobson, may be magnificent, but your coal is filthy. I will have a bath while your friend, the policeman, makes up his mind whether to come and see us or not."

His companion treated the suggestion with scant courtesy.

"You will do nothing of the sort," was his almost fierce objection. "We've got to wait right here until Chief of Police Downs comes along. There's something crooked about this business, something I don't understand, and the sooner we get to the bottom of it, the better."

The Englishman pacified himself with a whisky and soda which a waiter had just brought in. He added several lumps of ice and drained the contents of the tumbler with a little murmur of appreciation.

"It will be confoundedly annoying," he admitted quietly, "if we've had all this journey for nothing."

Hobson moistened his dry lips with his tongue. The whisky and soda and the great bucket of ice stood temptingly at his elbow, but he appeared to ignore their existence. He was a man of ample build, with a big, clean-shaven face, a square jaw and deep-set eyes, a man devoted to and wholly engrossed by his work.

"See here, Crawshay," he exclaimed, "if that dispatch was a fake, if we've been brought here on a fool's errand, they haven't done it for nothing. If they've brought it off against us, you mark my words, we're left--we're bamboozled--we're a couple of lost loons! There's nothing left for us but to sell candy to small boys or find a job on a farm."

"You're such a pessimist," the Englishman yawned.

"Pessimist!" was the angry retort. "I'll just ask you one question, my son. Where's Downs?"

"I certainly think," Crawshay admitted, "that under the circumstances he might have been at the station to meet us."

"He wouldn't even talk through the 'phone," Hobson pointed out. "I had to explain who we were to one of his inspectors. No one seemed to know a goldarned thing about us."

"They sent for him right away when you explained who you were," Crawshay reminded his companion.

Hobson found no comfort whatever in the reflection.

"Of course they did," he replied brusquely. "There's scarcely likely to be a chief of police of any city in the United States who wouldn't get a move on when he knew that Sam Hobson was waiting for a word. I haven't been in the Secret Service of this country for fifteen years for nothing. He'll come fast enough as soon as he knows I'm waiting, but all the same, what I want to know is, if that dispatch was on the square, why he wasn't at the station to meet us, and if it wasn't on the square, how the hell do we come out of this?"

Their conversation was interrupted by the tinkle of the telephone which stood upon the table between them, the instrument which both men had been watching anxiously. Hobson snatched up the receiver.

"Police headquarters speaking? Right! Yes, this is Sam Hobson. I'm here with Crawshay, of the English Secret Service. We got your dispatch.--What's that?--Well?--Chief Downs is on the way, eh?--Just started? Good! We're waiting for him."

Hobson replaced the receiver upon the instrument.

"Downs is coming right along," he announced. "I tell you what it is, Mr. Crawshay," he went on, recommencing his walk up and down the apartment, "I don't feel happy to be so far away from the coast. That's what scares me. Chicago's just about the place they'd land us, if this is a hanky-panky trick. We're twenty hours from New York, and the _City of Boston_ sails to-morrow at five o'clock."

The Englishman shook himself and rose from his recumbent position upon the sofa. He was a man of youthful middle-age, colourless, with pleasant face, a somewhat discontented mouth, but keen grey eyes. He had been sent out from Scotland Yard at the beginning of the war to assist in certain work at the English Embassy. So far his opportunities had not been many, or marked with any brilliant success, and it seemed to him that the gloom of failure was already settling down upon their present expedition.

"You don't believe, then, any more than I do, that when a certain box we know of is opened at the Foreign Office in London, it will contain the papers we are after?"

"No, sir, I do not," was the vigorous reply. "I think they have been playing a huge game of bluff on us. That's why I am so worried about this trip. I wouldn't mind betting you the best dinner you ever ate at Delmonico's or at your English Savoy that that box with the broken seals they all got so excited about doesn't contain a single one of the papers that we're after. Why, those blasted Teutons wanted us to believe it! That's why some of the seals were broken, and why the old

man himself hung about like a hen that's lost one of its chickens. They want us to believe that we've got the goods right in that box, and to hold up the search for a time while they get the genuine stuff out of the country. I admit right here, Mr. Crawshay, that it was you who put this into my head at Halifax. I couldn't swallow it then, but when Downs didn't meet us at the depot here, it came over me like a flash that you were right that we were being flimflammed."

"We ought, perhaps, to have separated," the Englishman ruminated. "I ought to have gone to New York and you come here. On the other hand, you must remember that all the evidence which we have managed to collect points to Chicago as having been the headquarters of the whole organisation."

"Sure!" the American admitted. "And there's another point about it, too. If this outsider who has taken on the job for them should really turn out to be Jocelyn Thew, I'd have banked on his working the scheme from Chicago. He knows the back ways of the city, or rather he used to, like a rat. Gee, it would be a queer thing if after all these years one were to get the bracelets on him!"

"I don't quite see," Crawshay remarked, "how such a person as this Jocelyn Thew, of whom you have spoken several times, could have become associated with an affair of this sort. Both the Germans and the Austrians at Washington had the name of being exceedingly particular with regard to the status of their agents, and he must be entirely a newcomer in international matters. From the _dossier_ you handed me, Jocelyn Thew reads more like a kind of modern swashbuckler spoiling for a fight than a person likely to make a success of a secret service job."

"Don't you worry," Hobson replied. "Jocelyn Thew could hold his own at any court in Europe with any of you embassy swaggerers. There's nothing known about his family, but they say that his father was an English aristocrat, and he looks like it, too."

"It was you yourself who called him a criminal, the first time you spoke of him," Crawshay reminded his companion.

"And a criminal he is at heart, without a doubt," the American declared impressively.

"Has he ever been in prison?"

"He has had the luck of Old Harry," Hobson grumbled. "In New York they all believed that it was he who shot Graves, the Pittsburg millionaire. The Treasury Department will have it that he was the head of that Fourteenth Street gang of coiners, and I've a pal down at Baltimore who is ready to take his oath that he planned the theft of the Vanderloon jewels--and brought it off, too! But I tell you this, sir. When the trouble comes, whoever gets nabbed it's never Jocelyn Thew. He's the slickest thing that ever came down the pike."

"He is well off, then?"

"They say that he brought half a million from Mexico," Hobson declared. "How he brought money out of that country, neither I nor anybody else on the Force can imagine. But he did it. I know the stockbroker down-town who handles his investments.--Here's our man

at last!"

The door was opened by the floor waiter, who held it while a thin, dark man, dressed in civilian clothes of most correct cut, passed in. Hobson gripped him at once by the hand.

"Chief Downs," he said, "this is my friend Mr. Crawshay, who is connected with the English Embassy over here. You can shake hands with him later. We're on a job of business, and the first thing before us is to get an answer from you to a certain question. Did you send this dispatch or did you not?"

Hobson handed over to the newcomer the crumpled telegraph form which he had just produced from his pocket. The latter glanced through it and shook his head.

"It's a plant," he announced. "I'm sorry if the use of my name has misled you in any way, but it was quite unauthorised. I know nothing whatever about the matter."

Hobson remained for a moment silent, silent with sick and angry astonishment. Crawshay had glanced towards the clock and was standing now with his finger upon the bell.

"Is it a big thing?" the Chicago man enquired.

"It's the biggest thing ever known in this country," Hobson groaned. "It's what is known as the Number Three Berlin plant."

"You didn't get the stuff at Halifax, then?" Downs asked.

"We didn't," Hobson replied bitterly. "We've sent a representative over to sit on the box with the broken seals till they can open it at the Foreign Office in London, but I never believed they'd find anything there. I'm damned certain they won't now!"

A waiter had answered the bell.

"Don't have our luggage brought up," Crawshay directed. "We are leaving for New York to-night. That's so, isn't it, Hobson?" he added, turning to his companion.

"You bet!" was the grim reply. "I'd give a thousand dollars to be there now."

"The Limited's sold out," the man told them. "There are two or three persons who've been disappointed, staying on here till to-morrow."

"I'll get you on the train," Downs promised. "I can do as much as that for you, anyway. I'll stop and go on to the station with you from here. I'm very sorry about this, Hobson," he continued, fingering the dispatch. "We shall have to get right along to the station, but if there's anything I can do after you've left, command me."

"You might wire New York," Hobson suggested, as he struggled into his overcoat. "Tell 'em to look out for the _City of Boston_, and to hold her up for me if they can. I've got it in my bones that Jocelyn Thew is running this show and that he is on that steamer."

"Those fellows at Washington must have collected some useful stuff," Chief Downs observed, as the three men left the room and stepped into the elevator. "They've been working on their job since before the war, and there isn't a harbour on the east or west coast that they haven't got sized up. They've spent a million dollars in graft since January, and there's a rumour that the new Navy Department scheme for dealing with submarines, which was only adopted last month, is there among the rest."

"Anything else?" Crawshay asked indolently.

The Chief of Police glanced first at his questioner and then at Hobson.

"What else should there be?" he enquired.

"No idea," the Englishman replied. "Secret Service papers of the usual description, I suppose. By-the-by, I hear that this man Jocelyn Thew has stated openly that he is going to take all the papers he wants with him into Germany, and that there isn't a living soul can stop him."

Hobson's square jaw was set a little tighter, and his narrow eyes flashed.

"That's some boast to make," he muttered. "Kind of a challenge, isn't it? What do you say, Mr. Crawshay?"

Crawshay, who had been gazing out of the window of the taxicab, looked back again. His tone was almost indifferent.

"If Chief Downs can get us on the Limited," he said, "and if we catch the _City of Boston_, I think perhaps we might have a chance of making Mr. Jocelyn Thew eat his words."

The Chief smiled. The taxicab had turned in through the entrance gates of the great station.

"I have heard men as well-known in their profession as you, Hobson, and you too, Mr. Crawshay, speak like that about Jocelyn Thew, but when the game was played out they seem to have lost the odd trick. Either the fellow isn't a criminal at all but loves to haunt shady places and pose as one, or he is just the cleverest of all the crooks who ever worked the States. Some of my best men have thought that they had a case against him and have come to grief."

"They've never caught him with the goods, because they've never been the right way about it," Hobson declared confidently.

"And you think you are going to break his record?" Downs asked, with a doubtful smile. "If you find him on the _City of Boston_, you know, the stuff you're after won't be in his pocketbook or in the lining of his steamer trunk."

The three men were hurrying out to the platform now, where the great train, a blaze of light and luxury, was standing upon the track. Captain Downs made his way to where the Pullman conductor was standing and engaged him in a brief but earnest conversation. A car porter was summoned, and in a few moments Crawshay and Hobson found themselves

standing on the steps of one of the cars. They leaned over to make their adieux to Chief Downs. Crawshay added a few words to his farewell.

"I quite appreciate all your remarks about Jocelyn Thew," he said. "One is liable to be disappointed, of course, but I still feel that if we can catch that steamer it might be an exceedingly interesting voyage."

"If you're on time you may do it," was the brief reply. "All the same--"

The gong had sounded and the train was gliding slowly out of the station. Crawshay leaned over the iron gate of the car.

"Go on, please," he begged. "Don't mind my feelings."

Chief Downs waved his hand.

"I'm afraid," he confessed, "that my money would be on Jocelyn Thew."

CHAPTER II

At just about the hour when Crawshay and Hobson were receiving the visit of Chief Downs in the Chicago hotel an English butler accepted with due respect the card of a very distinguished-looking and exceedingly well-turned-out caller at the big, brownstone Beverley house in Riverside Drive, New York.

"Miss Beverley is just back from the hospital, sir," the former announced. "If you will come this way, I will see that your card is sent to her at once."

The caller--Mr. Jocelyn Thew was the name upon the card--followed the servant across the white stone circular hall, with its banked-up profusion of hothouse flowers and its air of elegant emptiness, into a somewhat austere but very dignified apartment, the walls of which were lined to the ceiling with books.

"I will let Miss Beverley have your card at once, sir," the man promised him again, "if you will be so kind as to take a seat for a few moments."

The visitor, left to himself, stood upon the hearthrug with his hands behind his back, waiting for news of the young lady whom he had come to visit. At first sight he certainly was a most prepossessing-looking person. His face, if a little hard, was distinguished by a strength which for the size of his features was somewhat surprising. His chin was like a piece of iron, and although his mouth had more sensitive and softer lines, his dark-blue eyes and jet-black eyebrows completed a general impression of vigour and forcefulness. His figure was a little thin but lithe, and his movements showed all the suppleness of a man who has continued the pursuit of athletics into early middle-life. His hair, only slightly streaked with grey, was thick and plentiful. His clothes were carefully chosen and well tailored. He had the air of a man used to mixing with the best people, to eating and

drinking the best, to living in the best fashion, recognising nothing less as his due in life. Yet as he stood there waiting for his visitor, listening intently for the sound of her footsteps outside, he permitted himself a moment of retrospection, and there was a gleam of very different things in his face, a touch almost of the savage in the clenched teeth and sudden tightening of the lips. One might have gathered that this man was living through a period of strain.

The entrance of the young lady of the house, after a delay of about ten minutes, was noiseless and unannounced. Her visitor, however, was prepared for it. She came towards him with an air of pleasant enquiry in her very charming face--a young woman in the early twenties, of little more than medium height, with complexion inclined to be pale, deep grey eyes, and a profusion of dark brown, almost copper-coloured hair. She carried herself delightfully and her little smile of welcome was wonderfully attractive, although her deportment and manner were a little serious for her years.

"You wish to see me?" she asked. "I am Miss Beverley--Miss Katharine Beverley." "Sometimes known as Sister Katharine," her visitor remarked, with a smile.

"More often than by my own name," she assented. "Do you come from the hospital?"

He shook his head and glanced behind her to be sure that the door was closed.

"Please do not think that my coming means any trouble, Miss Beverley," he said, "but if you look at me more closely you will perhaps recognise me. You will perhaps remember--a promise."

He stepped a little forward from his position of obscurity to where the strong afternoon sunlight found its subdued way through the Holland blinds. The politely interrogative smile faded from her lips. She seemed to pass through a moment of terror, a moment during which her thoughts were numbed. She sank into the chair which her visitor gravely held out for her, and by degrees she recovered her powers of speech.

"Forgive me," she begged. "The name upon the card should have warned me--but I had no idea--I was not expecting a visit from you."

"Naturally," he acquiesced smoothly, "and I beg you not to discompose yourself. My visit bodes you no harm--neither you nor any one belonging to you."

"I was foolish," she confessed. "I have been working overtime at the hospital lately--we have sent so many of our nurses to France. My nerves are not quite what they should be."

He bowed sympathetically. His tone and demeanour were alike reassuring.

"I quite understand," he said. "Still, some day or other I suppose you expected a visit from me?"

"In a way I certainly did," she admitted. "You must let me know presently, please, exactly what I can do. Don't think because I was

startled to see you that I wish to repudiate my debt. I have never ceased to be grateful to you for your wonderful behaviour on that ghastly night."

"Please do not refer to it," he begged. "Your brother, I hope, is well?"

"He is well and doing famously," she replied. "I suppose you know that he is in France?"

"In France?" he repeated. "No, I had not heard."

"He joined the Canadian Flying Corps," she went on, "and he got his wings almost at once. He finds the life out there wonderful. I never receive a letter from him," she concluded, her eyes growing very soft, "that I do not feel a little thrill of gratitude to you."

He bowed.

"That is very pleasant," he murmured. "And now we come to the object of my visit. Your surmise was correct. I have come to ask you to redeem your word."

"And you find me not only ready but anxious to do so," she told him earnestly. "If it is a matter--pardon me--of money, you have only to say how much. If there is any other service you require, you have only to name it."

"You make things easy for me," he acknowledged, "but may I add that it is only what I expected. The service which I have come to claim from you is one which is not capable of full explanation but which will cause you little inconvenience and less hardship. You will find it, without doubt, surprising, but I need not add that it will be entirely innocent in its character."

"Then there seems to be very little left," she declared, smiling up at him from the depths of her chair, "but to name it. I do wish you would sit down, and are you quite sure that you won't have some tea or something?"

He shook his head gravely and made no movement towards the chair which she had indicated. For some reason or other, notwithstanding her manifest encouragement, he seemed to wish to keep their interview on a purely formal basis.

"Let me repeat," he continued, "that I shall offer you no comprehensive explanations, because they would not be truthful, nor are they altogether necessary. In Ward Number Fourteen of your hospital--you have been so splendid a patroness that every one calls St. Agnes's your hospital--a serious operation was performed to-day upon an Englishman named Phillips."

"I remember hearing about it," she assented. "The man is, I understand, very ill."

"He is so ill that he has but one wish left in life," Jocelyn Thew told her gravely. "That wish is to die in England. Just as you are at the present moment in my debt for a certain service rendered, so am I in his. He has called upon me to pay. He has begged me to make all the

arrangements for his immediate transportation to his native country." She nodded sympathetically.

"It is a very natural wish," she observed, "so long as it does not endanger his life."

"It does not endanger his life," her visitor replied, "because that is already forfeit. I come now to the condition which involves you, which explains my presence here this afternoon. It is also his earnest desire that you should attend him so far as London as his nurse."

The look of vague apprehension which had brought a questioning frown into Katharine Beverley's face faded away. It was succeeded by an expression of blank and complete surprise.

"That I should nurse him--should cross with him to London?" she repeated. "Why, I do not know this man Phillips. I never saw him in my life! I have not even been in Ward Fourteen since he was brought there."

"But he," Jocelyn Thew explained, "has seen you. He has been a visitor at your hospital before he was received there as a patient. He has received from various doctors wonderful accounts of your skill. Besides this, he is a superstitious man, and he has been very much impressed by the fact that you have never lost a patient. If you had been one of your own probationers, the question of a fee would have presented no difficulties, although he personally is, I believe, a poor man. As it is, however, his strange craving for your services has become a charge upon me."

"It is the most extraordinary request I ever heard in my life," Katharine murmured. "If I had ever seen or spoken to the man, I could have understood it better, but as it is, I find it impossible to understand."

"You must look upon it," Jocelyn Thew told her, "as one of those strange fancies which comes sometimes to men who are living in the shadowland of approaching death. There is one material circumstance, however, which may make the suggestion even more disconcerting for you. The steamer upon which we hope to sail leaves at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

The idea in this new aspect was so ludicrous that she simply laughed at him.

"My dear Mr. Jocelyn Thew!" she exclaimed. "You can't possibly be in earnest! You mean that you expect me to leave New York with less than twenty-four hours' notice, and go all the way to London in attendance upon a stranger, especially in these awful times? Why, the thing isn't reasonable--or possible! I have just consented to take the chairmanship of a committee to form field hospitals throughout the country, and--"

"May I interrupt for one moment?" her visitor begged.

The stream of words seemed to fall away from her lips. There was a touch of Jocelyn Thew's other manner--perhaps more than a touch. She looked at him and she shivered. She had seen him look like that once before.

"Your attitude is perfectly reasonable," he continued, "but on the other hand I must ask you to carry your thoughts back some little time. I shall beg you to remember that I have a certain right to ask this or any other service from you." "I admit it," she confessed hastily, "but--there is something so outlandish in the whole suggestion. There are a score of nurses in the hospital to any one of whom you are welcome, who are all much cleverer than I. What possible advantage to the man can it be, especially if he is seriously ill, to have a partially-trained nurse with him when he might have the best in the world?"

"I think," he said, "I mentioned that this is not a matter for reasoning or argument. It is you who are required, and no one else. I may remind you," he went on, "that this service is a very much smaller one than I might have asked you, and, so far as you and I are concerned, it clears our debt."

"Clears our debt," she repeated.

"For ever!"

She closed her eyes for several moments. For some reason or other, this last reflection seemed to bring her no particular relief. When she opened them again, her decision was written in her face.

"I consent, of course," she acquiesced quietly. "Is there anything more to tell me?"

"Very little," he replied, "only this. You should send your baggage on board the City of Boston as early as possible to-morrow morning. Every arrangement has been made for transporting Phillips in his bed, as he lies, from the hospital to the boat. The doctor who has been in attendance will accompany him to England, but it is important that you should be at the hospital and should drive in the ambulance from there to the dock. I shall ask very little of you in the way of duplicity. What is necessary you will not, I think, refuse. You will be considered to have had some former interest in Phillips, to account for your voyage, and you will reconcile yourself to the fact that I shall not at any time approach the sick man, or be known as an acquaintance of his on board the ship."

His words disturbed her. She felt herself being drawn under the shadow of some mystery.

"There is something in all this," she said, "which reminds me of the time when Richard was your protege, the time when we met before."

He leaned towards her, understanding very well what was in her mind.

"There is nothing criminal in this enterprise--even in my share of it," he assured her. "What there is in it which necessitates secrecy is political, and that need not concern you. You see," he went on, a little bitterly, "I have changed my role. I am no longer the despair of the New York police. I am the quarry of a race of men who, if they could catch me, would not wait to arrest. That may happen even before we reach Liverpool. If it does, it will not affect you. Your duty is to stay with a dying man until he reaches the shelter of his home. You will leave him there, and you will be free of him and of me."

"So far as regards our two selves," she enquired, "do we meet as strangers upon the steamer?"

He considered the matter for a few moments before answering. She felt another poignant thrill of recollection. He had looked at her like this just before he had bent his back to the task of saving her brother's life and liberty, looked at her like this the moment before the unsuspected revolver had flashed from the pocket of his dress-coat and had covered the man who had suddenly declared himself their foe. She felt her cheeks burn for a moment. There was something magnetic, curiously troublous about his eyes and his faint smile.

"I cannot deny myself so much," he said. "Even if our opportunities for meeting upon the steamer are few, I shall still have the pleasure of a New York acquaintance with Miss Beverley. You need not be afraid," he went on. "In this wonderful country of yours, the improbable frequently happens. I have before now visited at the houses of some whom you call your friends."

"Why not?" she asked him. "I should look upon it as the most natural thing in the world that we were acquainted. But why do you say 'your country'? Are you not an American?"

He looked at her with a very faint smile, a smile which had nothing in it of pleasantness or mirth.

"I have so few secrets," he said. "The only one which I elect to keep is the secret of my nationality."

She raised her eyebrows.

"Then you can no longer," she observed, "be considered what my brother and I once thought you--a man of mysteries--for with your voice and accent it is very certain that you are either English or American."

"If it affords you any further clue, then," he replied, "let me confide in you that if there is one country in this world which I detest, it is England; one race of people whom I abominate, it is the English."

She showed her surprise frankly, but his manner encouraged no further confidence. She touched the bell, and he bowed over her fingers.

"My friend Phillips," he said, in formal accents, as the butler stood upon the threshold, "will never live, I fear, to offer you all the gratitude he feels, but you are doing a very kind and a very wonderful action, Miss Beverley, and one which I think will bring its own reward."

He passed out of the room, leaving Katharine a prey to a curious tangle of emotions. She watched him almost feverishly until he had disappeared, listened to his footsteps in the hall and the closing of the front door. Then she hurried to the window, watched him descend the row of steps, pass down the little drive and hail a taxicab. It was not until he was out of sight that she became in any way like herself. Then she broke into a little laugh.

"Heavens alive!" she exclaimed to herself. "Now I have to find Aunt

Molly and tell her that I am going to Europe to-morrow with a perfect stranger!"

CHAPTER III

Mr. Jocelyn Thew descended presently from his taxicab outside one of the largest and most cosmopolitan hotels in New York--or the world. He made his way with the air of an _habitue_ to the bar, the precincts of which, at that time in the late afternoon, were crowded by a motley gathering. He ordered a Scotch highball, and gently insinuated himself into the proximity of a group of newspaper men with whom he seemed to have some slight acquaintance. It was curious how, since his arrival in this democratic meeting-place, his manners and deportment seemed to have slipped to a lower grade. He seemed as though by an effort of will to have lost something of his natural air of distinction, to be treading the earth upon a lower plane. He saluted the barkeeper by his Christian name, listened with apparent interest to an exceedingly commonplace story from one of his neighbours, and upon its conclusion drew a little nearer to the group.

"Say," he exclaimed confidentially, "if I felt in the humour for it I could hand you boys out a great scoop."

They were on him like a pack of hungry though dubious wolves. He pushed his glass out of sight, accepted one of the drinks pressed upon him, and leaned nonchalantly against the counter.

"What should you say," he began, "to Miss Katharine Beverley, the New York society young lady--"

"Sister Katharine of St. Agnes's?" one of them interrupted.

"Daughter of old Joe Beverley, the multi-millionaire?" another exclaimed.

"Both right," Jocelyn Thew acquiesced. "What should you say to that young woman leaving her hospital and her house in Riverside Drive, breaking all her engagements at less than twenty-four hours' notice, to take a sick Englishman whom no one knows anything about, back to Liverpool on the _City of Boston_ to-morrow?"

"The story's good enough," a ferret-faced little man at his elbow acknowledged, "but is it true?"

Jocelyn Thew regarded his questioner with an air of pained surprise.

"It's Gospel," he assured them all, "but you don't need to take my word. You go right along up and enquire at the Beverley house to-night, and you'll find that she is packing. Made up her mind just an hour ago. I'm about the only one in the know."

"Who's the man, anyway?" one of the little group asked.

"Nothing doing," Jocelyn Thew replied mysteriously. "You've got to find that out for yourself, boys. All I can tell you is that he's an

Englishman, and she has known him for a long time--kind of love stunt, I imagine. She wasn't having any, but now he's at death's door she seems to have relented. Anyway, she is breaking every engagement she's got, giving up her chairmanship of the War Hospitals Committee, and she isn't going to leave him while he's alive. There's no other nurse going, so it'll be a night and day job for her."

"What's the matter with the chap, anyway?" another questioner demanded.

"No one knows for sure," was the cautious reply. "He's been operated upon for appendicitis, but I fancy there are complications. Not much chance for him, from what I have heard."

The little crowd of men melted away. Jocelyn Thew smiled to himself on his way out, as he watched four of them climb into a taxicab.

"That establishes Phillips all right as Miss Beverley's protege," he murmured, as he turned into Fifth Avenue. "And now--"

He stopped short in his reflections. His careful scrutiny of the heterogeneous crowd gathered together around the bar had revealed to him no unfamiliar type save the little man who at that moment was ambling along on the other side of the way. Jocelyn Thew slackened his pace somewhat and watched him keenly. He was short, he wore a cheap ready-made suit of some plain material, and a straw hat tilted on the back of his head. He had round cheeks, he shambled rather than walked, and his vacuous countenance seemed both good-natured and unintelligent. To all appearances a more harmless person never breathed, yet Jocelyn Thew, as he studied him earnestly, felt that slight tightening of the nerves which came to him almost instinctively in moments of danger. He changed his purpose and turned down Fifth Avenue instead of up. The little man, it appeared, had business in the same direction. Jocelyn Thew walked the length of several blocks in leisurely fashion and then entered an hotel, studiously avoiding looking behind him. He made his way into a telephone booth and looked through the glass door. His follower in a few moments was visible, making apparently some aimless enquiry across the counter. Jocelyn Thew turned his back upon him and asked the operator for a number.

"Number 238 Park waiting," the latter announced, a few moments later.

Jocelyn Thew reentered the box and took up the receiver.

"That you, Rentoul?" he asked.

"Speaking," was the guarded reply. "Who is it?"

"Jocelyn Thew. Say, what's wrong with you? Don't go away."

"What is it? Speak quickly, please."

"You seem rather nervy up there. I'm off to Europe to-morrow on the _City of Boston_, and I should like to see you before I go."

There was a moment's silence.

"Why don't you come up here, then?"

"I'd rather not," Jocelyn Thew observed laconically. "The fact of it is, I have a friend around who doesn't seem to care about losing sight of me. If you are going to be anywhere around near Jimmy's, about seven o'clock--"

"That goes," was the somewhat agitated reply. "Ring off now. There's some one else waiting to speak."

Jocelyn Thew paid for his telephone call and walked leisurely out of the hotel with a smile upon his lips. The stimulus of danger was like wine to him. The little man was choosing a cigar at the stall. As he leaned down to light it, Jocelyn Thew's practiced eye caught the shape of a revolver in his hip pocket.

"English," he murmured softly to himself. "Probably one of Crawshay's lot, preparing a report for him when he returns from Chicago."

With an anticipatory smile, he entered upon the task of shaking off his unwelcome follower. He passed with the confident air of a member into a big club situated in an adjoining block, left it almost at once by a side entrance, found a taxicab, drove to a subway station up-town, and finally caught an express back again to Fourteenth Street. Here he entered without hesitation a small, foreign-looking restaurant which intruded upon the pavement only a few yards from the iron staircase by which he descended from the station. There were two faded evergreen shrubs in cracked pots at the bottom of the steps, soiled muslin curtains drawn across the lower half of the windows, dejected-looking green shutters which, had the appearance of being permanently nailed against the walls, and a general air of foreign and tawdry profligacy. Jocelyn Thew stepped into a room on the right-hand side of the entrance and, making his way to the window, glanced cautiously out. There was no sign anywhere of the little man. Then he turned towards the bar, around which a motley group of Italians and Hungarians were gathered. The linen-clad negro who presided there met his questioning glance with a slight nod, and the visitor passed without hesitation through a curtained opening to the rear of the place, along a passage, up a flight of narrow stairs until he arrived at a door on the first landing. He knocked and was at once bidden to enter. For a moment he listened as though to the sounds below. Then he slipped into the room and closed the door behind him.

The apartment was everything which might have been expected, save for the profusion of flowers. The girl who greeted him, however, was different. She was of medium height and dark, with dark brown hair plaited close back from an almost ivory-coloured forehead. Her grey eyes were soft and framed in dark lines. Her eyebrows were noticeable, her mouth full but shapely. Her discontented expression changed entirely as she held out both her hands to her visitor. Her welcome was eager, almost passionate.

"Mr. Thew!" she exclaimed.

He held up his hand as though to check further speech, and listened for a moment intently.

"How are things here?" he asked.

"Quiet," she assured him. "You couldn't have come at a better time. Every one's away. Is there anything wrong?"

"I am being followed," he told her, "and I don't like it--just now, at any rate."

"Any one else coming?" she enquired.

"Rentoul," he told her. "He is in a mortal fright at having to come. They found his wireless, and they are watching his house. I must see him, though, before I go away."

"Going away?" she echoed. "When? When are you going?"

"To-morrow," he replied, "I sail for London."

She seemed for a moment absolutely speechless, consumed by a sort of silent passion that found no outlet in words. She gripped a fancy mat which covered an ornate table by her side, and dragged a begilded vase on to the floor without even noticing it. She leaned towards him. The little lines at the sides of her eyes were suddenly deep-riven like scars. Her eyes themselves were smouldering with fire.

"You are going to England!"

"That is what I propose," he assented. "I am sailing on the _City of Boston_ to-morrow afternoon."

"But the risk!" she faltered. "I thought that you dared not set foot in England."

"There is risk," he admitted. "It is not easy to amuse oneself anywhere without it. I have been offered a hundred thousand pounds to superintend the conveyance of certain documents and a certain letter to Berlin. The adventure appeals to me, and I have undertaken it. Until I found this man following me this afternoon, I really believed that we had put every one off the track. I know for a fact that most of the American officials believe that the papers for which they have searched so long and anxiously are in that trunk with the broken seals which they found at Halifax."

"What about the Englishman, Crawshay, and Sam Hobson?" the girl asked.

"They are not quite so credulous," he replied, "but at the present moment they are in Chicago, and if we get off at four o'clock punctually to-morrow afternoon, I scarcely think I shall be troubled with their presence on the _City of Boston_." "I have been reading about the trunk," the girl said. "Is it really a fake?"

"Entirely," he assured her. "There is not a single document in it which concerns either us or our friends. Everything that is of vital importance will be on the _City of Boston_ to-morrow and under my charge."

She looked at him wonderingly.

"But, Mr. Thew," she exclaimed, "you are clever, I know--even wonderful--but what possible chance have you of getting those things through--on an American steamer, too!"

"I have to take my risks, of course," he admitted coolly, "but the game is worth it. I can't live without excitement, as you know, and it's getting harder and harder to find on this side of the ocean. Besides, there is the money. I can think of several uses for a hundred thousand pounds."

She caught his wrist suddenly and leaned across the table.

"Can I come with you?" she asked breathlessly.

He shook his head.

"I shouldn't advise a sea voyage just now, Nora," he said. "It isn't exactly a picnic, nowadays. Besides, if you come on the _City of Boston_ there will be more than one danger to be faced."

"Danger!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "Have I ever shown myself afraid? Have we any of us--my brother or father or I--hesitated to run any possible risk when it was worth while? This house has been yours, and we in it, to do what you will with. It isn't a matter of danger--you know that. I come or go as you bid me." He met the fierce enquiry of her eyes without flinching. Only his tone was a little kinder as he answered her.

"I think, Nora," he said, "that you had better stay."

There was a timid but persistent knocking at the door, and, in response to Nora's invitation, a fat and bloated man entered the room hurriedly. He sank into a chair and mopped the perspiration from his forehead. Jocelyn Thew watched him with an air of contemptuous amusement.

"You seem distressed, Rentoul," he remarked. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"But it is terrible, this!" the newcomer declared. "Anything gone wrong, indeed! Listen. The police have made themselves free of my house. My beautiful wireless--it was only a hobby--it has gone! They open my letters. They will ruin me. Never did I think that this would arrive! There has been some terrible bungling!"

"And you," Jocelyn Thew retorted, "seem to have been the arch bungler."

"I? But what have I done?" Rentoul demanded, wringing his hands. "I have always obeyed orders. Even a hint has been enough. I have spent a great deal of money--much more than I could afford. What have I done wrong?"

"You have talked too much, for one thing," was the cold reply, "but we haven't time for recriminations now. How did you get here?"

"I came in my car. You will perhaps say that it was not wise, but I could not have stood the subway. My nerves are all rotten." Jocelyn Thew's tone and gesture were smoothly disdainful.

"You are quite right," he agreed. "You have lost what you call your nerve. You had better send for the newspaper men, give them plenty of champagne, and explain what a loyal American citizen you are. Have you

burnt everything?"

"Every scrap of paper in the house which concerns a certain matter is burnt," Rentoul declared.

"It would be!"

"But I am in the right," the agitated man protested vigorously. "For five years we have worked and with good result. It is finished with us now for the present. There is no one who would dare to continue. Five long years, mind you, Mr. Jocelyn Thew. That is worth something, eh?"

"Whatever it may be worth," was the somewhat grim reply, "will be decided within the next fortnight. That doesn't concern you, though."

"You are not staying over here now that the war has come?"

"Not I! But listen. There is no need for you to know where I am going, and I am not going to tell you. There is no need for you to remember that you ever knew me in your life. There is no need for you to remember any of the work in which you have been engaged. Your propaganda has developed a few strong men in this country and discovered a good deal of pulp. You are part of the pulp. There is only one other thing. If you should be heard of, Rentoul, shall we say telephoning, or calling upon the police here, offering to sell--No, by God, you don't!" The man's furtive tug at his hip pocket was almost pathetic in its futility. Jocelyn Thew had him by the throat, holding him with one hand well away from him, a quivering mass of discoloured, terrified flesh.

"Now you know," he continued coolly, "why I sent for you, Rentoul. Now you know why I rather preferred to see you here to coming to your Fifth Avenue mansion. I don't like traps--I don't like traitors."

"I give you my word," the breathless man began, "my word of honour--"

"Neither would interest me," the other interrupted grimly. "You are to be trusted just as far as you can be seen, just as far as your own safety and welfare depend upon your fidelity. You needn't be so terrified," he went on as, leaning over, he took the revolver from Rentoul's pocket, drew out the cartridges and threw it upon the table. "You've earned any ugly thing that might be coming to you, but I should think it very probable that you will be able to go on over-feeding your filthy carcass for a few more years. First of all, though, perhaps you had better tell me exactly why you have an appointment with Mr. Harrison, from Police Headquarters, at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning?"

Rentoul was white to the lips.

"I wanted to explain about the wireless," he faltered.

"That sounds very probable," was the contemptuous reply. "What else?"

"Nothing!"

Jocelyn Thew shrugged his shoulders. His victim cowered before him. For the first time the girl moved. She came a little nearer, and there was fury in her eyes as she looked down upon the terrified man.

"We could keep him here," she whispered. "Ned Grimes and some of the others will be in soon. There are plenty of ways of getting rid of him for a time."

"It wouldn't be worth while," Thew said simply. "One doesn't commit crimes for such carrion."

Rentoul had struggled into a sitting posture. He was dabbing feebly at his forehead with an overperfumed handkerchief.

"I wanted to make peace at Headquarters," he whined. "I want to be left alone. I should not have told them anything."

"That may or may not be," Jocelyn Thew replied. "All that I am fairly sure of is that you will keep your mouth shut now. You know," he went on, his voice growing a shade more menacing, "that I never threaten where I do not perform. I may not be over here myself, but there will be a few men left in New York, and one word from your lips--even a hint--and your life will pay the forfeit within twenty-four hours. You will be watched for a time--you and a few others of your kidney--watched until the time has gone by when anything you could say or do would be of account."

"Have you anything more to say to me?" the man stammered. "I feel faint."

His persecutor threw open the door.

"Nothing! Get into your car and drive home. Keep out of sight and hearing for a time. You are no particular ornament nor any use to any country, but remember that everything you have done, you have done when the country of your birth was in trouble and the country of your adoption was at peace. The situation is altered. The country of which you are a naturalised citizen is now at war. You had better remember it, and decide for yourself where your duty lies."

They listened to his heavy footsteps as he descended the stairs. Then the girl turned to her companion.

"Mr. Thew," she began, "you are not a German or an Austrian, yet you are doing their work, risking your life every day. Is it for money?"

"No," he replied, "in a general way it is not for money."

"What is it, then?" she asked curiously.

He stood looking out across the roofs and at the distant skyscrapers. She watched him without speaking. She knew very well that his eyes saw nothing of the landscape. He was looking back into some world of his own fancy, back, perhaps, into the shadows of his own life, concerning which no word that she or any one else in the city had ever heard had passed his lips.

CHAPTER IV

The two men--Crawshay and Sam Hobson--still a little breathless, stood at the end of the dock, gazing out towards the river. Around them was a slowly dispersing crowd of sightseers, friends and relations of the passengers on board the great American liner, ploughing her way down the river amidst the shrieks and hoots of her attendant tugs. Out on the horizon, beyond the Statue of Liberty, two long, grey, sinister shapes were waiting. Hobson glanced at them gloomily.

"Guess those are our destroyers going to take the _City of Boston_ some of the way across," he observed. "To think, with all this fuss about, that she must go and start an hour before her time!"

"It's filthy luck," the Englishman muttered.

The crowd grew thinner and thinner, yet the two men made no movement towards departure. It seemed to Crawshay impossible that after all they had gone through they should have failed. The journey in the fast motor car, after a breakdown of the Chicago Limited, rushing through the night like some live monster, tearing now through a plain of level lights, as they passed through some great city, vomiting fire and flame into the black darkness of the country places. It was like the ride of madmen, and more than once they had both hung on to their seats in something which was almost terror. "How are we going?" Crawshay had asked perpetually.

"Still that infernal half-hour," was the continual reply. "We are doing seventy, but we don't seem to be able to work it down."

A powerful automobile had taken them through the streets of New York, and lay now a wreck in one of the streets a mile from the dock. They had finished the journey in a taxicab, and the finish had been this--half an hour late! Yet they lingered, with their eyes fixed upon the disappearing ship.

"I guess there's nothing more we can do," Hobson said at last grudgingly. "We can lay it up for them on the other side, and we can talk to her all the way to Liverpool on the wireless, but if there is any scoop to be made the others'll get it--not us."

"If only we could have got on board!" Crawshay muttered. "It's no use thinking of a tug, I suppose?"

The American shook his head.

"She's too far out," he replied gloomily. "There's nothing to be hired that could catch her."

Crawshay's hand had suddenly stolen to his chin. There was a queer light in his eyes. He clutched at his companion's arm.

"You're wrong, Hobson," he exclaimed. "There is! Come right along with me. We can talk as we go."

"Are you crazy?" the American demanded.

"Not quite," the other answered. "Hurry up, man."

"Where to?" "To New Jersey. I've got Government orders, endorsed by your own Secretary of War. It's a hundred to one they won't listen to me, but we've got to try it."

He was already dragging his companion down the wooden way. His whole expression had changed. His face was alight with the joy of an idea. Already Hobson, upon whom the germ of that idea had dawned, began to be infected with his enthusiasm.

"It's a gorgeous stunt," he acknowledged, as he followed his companion into a taxicab. "If we bring it off, it's going to knock the movies silly."

Katharine, weary at last of waving her hand to the indistinct blur of faces upon the dock, picked up the great clusters of roses which late arrivals had thrust into her arms at the last moment, and descended to her stateroom upon the saloon deck. She spent only a few minutes looking at the arrangement of her things, and then knocked at the door of the stateroom exactly opposite. A thick-browed, heavy-looking man, sombrely and professionally dressed, opened the door.

"Are you wanting me, Doctor Gant?" she asked.

The doctor shook his head.

"The patient is asleep," he announced in a whisper.

Katharine stepped inside and stood looking down upon the pale, almost ghastly face of the man stretched at full length upon the bed.

"Why, I remember him perfectly," she exclaimed. "He was in Number Three Ward for some time. Surely he was a clerk at one of the drygoods stores down-town?"

The doctor nodded.

"Very likely."

"I remember the case," Katharine continued,--"appendicitis, followed by pneumonia, and complicated by angina pectoris."

"You have it precisely."

Katharine's eyes were full of perplexity.

"But the man is in very poor circumstances," she remarked. "How on earth can he afford a trip like this? He was on the free list at the hospital."

The doctor frowned.

"That is not my business," he said. "My fees are paid, and the steamer tickets appear to be in order. He probably has wealthy friends."

Katharine looked down once more at the sleeping man. His face was insignificant, his expression peevish, his features without the animation of any high purpose.

"I really cannot understand," she murmured, "how he became a friend--a

friend--"

"A friend of whom?" the doctor enquired.

Katharine reflected and shook her head.

"Perhaps I was indiscreet," she confessed. "I dare say you know as much about him as I do. At what time would you like me to come and help you change the bandages?"

"I shall change them alone," the doctor replied.

"I prefer to."

Katharine glanced up in surprise.

"Surely you are not in earnest?" she asked. "What else am I here for? I suppose you realise that I am fully qualified?"

The doctor unbent a little.

"I am perfectly well aware of that. Miss Beverley," he said, "and it may be that there are times when I shall be glad of your help, and in any case," he went on, "I shall have to ask you to take a share in the night watching. But the surgical part of the case has been a great responsibility, and I couldn't afford to have the slightest thing in the world happen to one of my bandages."

Katharine nodded.

"You are thinking of Nurse Lynn," she observed. "But really I am very careful."

"I am sure of it," the doctor acknowledged, "but so long as I am here, with nothing else to do and a very heavy fee if by any chance I bring my man through, I may just as well see to these things myself. At any moment I might need your help, and I am very happy, Miss Beverley, to think that I shall have some one like you to fall back upon. My great hope," he went on, "is that we may get him across without a touch of the angina."

"Will he ever get well?" she asked.

The doctor shook his head doubtfully.

"One can never tell," he said. "It is just one of these cases which are very close to the borderland. With luck he may pull through, may even become a fairly strong man again, but he doesn't look as though he had much of a physique. Sometime or other the day will come when life or death for him will depend entirely upon his will."

She nodded and moved away. "My stateroom is just opposite, if you want me at any time, doctor," she said.

He bowed and closed the door after her. Katharine made her way into her cabin, sat on her steamer trunk and looked around a little helplessly. The confusion of thought in which she had come on board was only increased by this introduction to doctor and patient. A presentiment of strange and imminent happenings kept her seated there

long after the dressing bugle had sounded.

The _City of Boston_ was four hours out of harbour, with her course set direct for Liverpool. The passengers, of whom there were only a very moderate number, had taken possession of their staterooms, examined their lifebelts, eaten their first meal, and were now, at eight o'clock on a fine June evening, mostly strolling about the deck or reclining in steamer chairs. There was none of the old-time feeling that a six-days' holiday was before them, a six-days' freedom from all anxiety and care. Even in these first few hours of their enterprise a certain strain of suppressed excitement was almost universally noticeable. There was no escaping from grim facts, and the facts were brought home to them all the time by those two businesslike destroyers flying the Stars and Stripes, and whose decks were swept continually by a deluge of green salt water. Amongst the few people who conversed there was but one subject of conversation, a subject which every one affected to treat lightly, and yet which no one managed to discuss without signs of anxiety.

"This thing will get on all our nerves before we are over," Brand, a breezy newspaper man from the West, observed. "What with boat drill three times a day, and lifebelt parade going on all the time on the deck, one doesn't get a chance to forget that we are liable to get a torpedo in our side at any moment."

"Oh, these little gnats of Uncle Sam's will look after us!" a more cheerful _confrere_ observed. "Come into the smoking room and I'll buy you a drink."

A good deal of courage seemed to be sought in that direction, and presently, although the afterglow of the sunset was still brilliant, the decks were almost deserted. On the starboard side, only a man and a woman remained, and gradually, as though with a certain unwillingness, they drifted closer together. The woman, who wore a black and white check coat over her blue serge steamer dress, and a small black hat from which she had pushed back the veil, was leaning over the side of the steamer, her head supported by her hand, looking steadily into the mass of red and orange clouds. The man, who was smoking a cigar, with both hands in his ulster pockets, seemed as though he would have passed her, but without turning her head she held out her hand and beckoned him to her side.

"I was beginning to wonder whether you were an absentee," Katharine remarked.

"I have been making friends with the captain," Jocelyn Thew replied.

"Please arrange my chair," she begged. "I should like to sit down."

He did as he was asked, arranging her rugs with the care of an old traveler. All his movements were very deliberate, even the searching way in which his eyes swept the long row of empty chairs on either side of them, and the care with which he fastened two open portholes above their heads. Finally he accepted her invitation and sat by her side.

"I have seen you once before," she observed, "just before we started."

"Yes?" he murmured.

"You were standing on the upper deck," she continued, "a little away from the others. You had your glasses glued to your eyes and you watched the dock. You had the air of one looking for a late arrival. Do you know of any one who has missed the boat?"

"I think so."

"A friend?"

"No, an enemy," he answered equably.

She turned her head a little. It was obvious that he was speaking the truth.

"So you have enemies?"

"A great many," he acknowledged, "one in particular just now. Perhaps," he went on, "I should say an opponent."

"If that is so," she remarked, after a moment's pause, "you should be glad that he missed the boat."

Jocelyn Thew smiled.

"I am," he admitted. "It was part of my plan that he should miss it."

She moved uneasily in her chair.

"So you haven't finished with adventures yet?"

"Not just yet."

There was a brief silence. Then she turned her head a little, leaning it still on the back of the chair but watching him as she spoke.

"I have seen my patient," she told him. "I have also had some conversation with the doctor."

"Well?"

"I am beginning to think," she continued, "that you must be a philanthropist."

"Why?"

"You hinted," she went on, "that your friend was in poor circumstances. You did not tell me, though, that you were paying the whole expenses of this trip, just so that the man should see his home and his family before he died."

"I told you that the care of him was a charge upon me," Jocelyn Thew reminded her. "That amounts to the same thing, doesn't it? I was clever enough, anyhow, to get a good nurse at a small fee."

"I am not at all sure," she replied, "that I shall not charge you something outrageous. You are probably a millionaire."

"Whatever you charge me," he promised, "I shall try to pay."

The two journalists, refreshed and encouraged by their libation, strolled past arm in arm.

"Queer sort of voyage, this, for a man on the point of death," the Westerner observed. "They brought a chap on here, an hour before we sailed, in an ambulance, with a doctor and a hospital nurse. Had to be carried every foot of the way."

"What's wrong with him?" the other enquired.

"He was only operated upon for appendicitis a fortnight ago, and they say that he has angina pectoris amongst other complications. They brought him straight from the hospital. Seems he's crazy to get back to England to die."

The two men passed out of hearing. Jocelyn flicked the ash from the cigarette which he had lighted.

"Sounds a queer sort of story, the way they tell it," he observed, glancing at his companion.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied. "Men have done this sort of thing before--but it isn't often," she went on, "that a man has done it for the sake of another man."

He smiled.

"You have the old-fashioned idea of man's devotion to woman. Can't you believe that there may be ties between two men stronger even than between a man and the woman he loves?"

"I can believe that," she assented, "but the men must have something in common. I should find it hard to believe, for instance, that they existed between you and the man downstairs."

He shrugged his shoulders very slightly.

"You forget," he observed, "that a man does not look at his best after such an illness as Phillips has had. You find him, perhaps, a little insignificant. You are probably aware of his vocation and station in life."

"I am."

"And these things," he went on, "make it difficult for you to believe that there is any great tie between us two. Yet it is the exception which proves the rule, you know. I will not say that your patient has ever saved my life or performed any immortal action, yet believe me he has courage and a grit you would scarcely believe in, and I am speaking seriously when I tell you that not only I but others are under deep obligations to him."

He rose to his feet with the air of one who has closed the subject. Katharine also threw off her rugs.

"You are going to walk?" she asked. "Please take me with you. I don't know why, but I feel restless this evening."

They paced side by side up and down the deck, pausing now and then to watch the destroyers and indulging in a very spasmodic conversation. At their fourth promenade, as they reached the stern extremity of their deck, the woman paused, and, holding to the railing with one hand, looked steadily back towards New York. The colour was fading slowly from the sky now, but it was still marvellously clear.

"Are you homesick for what lies beneath those clouds?" he enquired lightly.

She took no immediate account of his words. Her eyes were fixed upon one spot in that distant curtain of sky. Suddenly she pointed with her finger.

"What's that?" she asked. "No, the mast's dipping now--you can't see. There--the other side."

He followed her outstretched finger, and slowly his fine black eyebrows grew closer and closer together. Far away, at a certain spot in the clear evening sky, was a little speck of black, hidden every now and then by the mast of the ship as she rolled, but distinctly there all the time, a little smudge in an amber setting, too small for a cloud, yet a visible and tangible object. Katharine felt her companion's arm tighten upon hers, and she saw his face grow like a piece of marble.

"It's a seaplane," he muttered, "coming from the New Jersey coast."

Through that mysterious agency by means of which news travels on board ship as though supernaturally conveyed, the deck was crowded in a very few moments by practically every passenger and most of the officers. Every form of telescope and field-glass was directed towards the now clearly visible seaplane. Speculations were everywhere to be heard.

"Come to warn us of a submarine," was the first suggestion.

"They'd use the wireless," was the prompt reminder.

"But seaplanes can spot the submarines under the sea," one of the journalists reminded the bystanders. "They're a better escort than any destroyer."

"She can't come all the way across the Atlantic, though," Brand observed.

"It's some new device of Uncle Sam's they are testing, perhaps," his friend suggested. "Gee! You can hear her now quite plainly. There are two of them in the car--a pilot and an observer. Wonder what the captain thinks about it."

The captain on the bridge was talking to his chief officer. Fragments of their conversation were apparently overheard, for it was soon rumoured around that the captain had expressed his opinion that this was simply part of some maneuvres they were carrying out from the New Jersey Aviation Station. Jocelyn Thew watched the blue fire about the mast.

"I wonder whether that's she talking to us," he observed. "One would have to be pretty nippy with one's fingers to work aboard on one of

those small things."

"Do you suppose she is bringing us a message?" Katharine asked.

He shook his head.

"They could do that by wireless from the shore," he replied. "Hullo, we're slowing down!"

The little crowd was now bubbling over with excitement. The speed of the steamer had, without a doubt, been slackened, and a boat was being lowered. Brand and his companion, immensely happy, were already dotting down their notes for the wireless. The seaplane was gently skimming the water almost alongside, and barely fifty yards away. The pilot and his companion were clearly visible. The passengers lined the whole length of the steamer, leaning over to watch the _denouement_ of this strange scene.

"It's a newspaper scoop," one man suggested.

The idea was not favourably entertained.

"No newspaper would be allowed to make use of a Government seaplane," Brand pointed out. "Apart from that, they wouldn't dare to stop a steamer out here."

"There's the boat!" some one else exclaimed, pointing to one of the ship's lifeboats which had shot out towards the plane. "She must be going to pick one of the men up!"

The steamer was merely drifting now, and its strange visitor had alighted upon the water, rushing along a little way in front and leaving two long, milky paths of white foam behind. Both the pilot and the passenger were drenched by every wave. They watched the latter as he was taken off, and their eyes followed the return of the lifeboat. Almost immediately afterwards the plane, increasing its speed, rushed across the surface of the water and rose again.

"Prettiest sight I ever saw in my life," Brand declared enthusiastically.

"We live in wonderful times," his friend agreed, looking longingly at the wireless office. "I guess we must get a look at this chap, anyway," he added. "He's the first man who has overtaken an American liner so far from land like this before."

The man who clambered a few minutes later up the ladder of the steamer had not the appearance of one who has performed a heroic action. His clothes had shrunk upon his body, and the sea water was oozing from him in all directions. His face was blue with cold and almost unrecognisable. Nevertheless, Jocelyn Thew, who was one of the most eager of the sightseers, attained a certain measure of conviction as he shut up his glasses with a snap and turned to his companion.

"An Englishman," he observed.

"Do you know him?" she asked curiously.

"I can't go so far as that," he admitted, "but--"

"But he was the man for whom you were looking before the steamer started," she declared confidently.

"Seems a little rough luck to be caught up like this out in the ocean," he grumbled. "I don't know that the man's likely to do me any particular harm," he added, "but I'd just as soon he wasn't on board."

Meanwhile, the captain had hurried his belated passenger into his room, and the ship saw no more of him that night. By degrees the excitement simmered down. Jocelyn escorted his companion to the gangway and bade her good night.

"I am not at all sure," she protested, "that I am ready to go down yet."

"You must show a little interest in your patient," he insisted.

"But the doctor has already as good as told me to keep away."

"Gant is a peculiar fellow," he told her. "By this time he has probably changed his mind and needs your help. Besides, I am anxious to hear what they say in the smoking room concerning this extraordinary visitor."

She looked around. They were absolutely alone.

"Who is he," she asked, "and what does his coming mean to you?"

"His name is Crawshay," Jocelyn replied. "He is an ex-Scotland Yard man who came over here to work for the English Secret Service."

"What does he want here?" she whispered, a little hoarsely.

Jocelyn raised his cap as he turned away.

"Me," he answered. "He'll probably be disappointed, though."

CHAPTER V

Crawshay found himself a popular hero when at a few minutes before eleven o'clock the next morning he made his appearance on deck. With little regard to the weather, which was fine and warm, he was clad in a thick grey suit and a voluminous overcoat. The fact that his borrowed hat was several sizes too large for him detracted a little from the dignity of his appearance, a misfortune for which he endeavoured to atone by a distinct aloofness of manner. The newspaper men, however, were not to be denied.

"Say, Mr. Crawshay," Brand began, stopping him as soon as he had emerged from the companionway, "I'd like to shake hands with you. My name's Brand. I'm a newspaper man."

Crawshay shook hands, although he showed no particular enthusiasm

about the proceeding.

"And I am Clark, of the Minneapolis _Record_" the small, dark man, who was generally by Brand's side, added. "Put it there, sir."

Crawshay put it there with an incipient reluctance which the two men were not slow to note.

"Kind of shock to you yesterday, no doubt," Brand began. "It was a fine, plucky thing to do, sir. Ever flown before?"

"Never," Crawshay confessed. "The sensation was--er--entirely new to me. I found the descent upon the water most uncomfortable." "Soaked your shore clothes, eh?" Brand observed.

"I was not attired for the proceeding," Crawshay admitted. "I was, in fact, very inappropriately dressed. I was wearing a thin flannel suit, which was completely ruined, and I do not think that I shall ever be warm again."

Mr. Brand glanced longingly at his wrist watch and sighed.

"I make it a rule, sir," he said, "never to drink before twelve o'clock, but there is no rule without an exception. If you think that a double jigger of gin, with a little lemon and--"

"Stop!" Crawshay begged. "I have no sympathy with the weird compounds produced by your bartenders. As a matter of fact, I take nothing at all except with my meals. I am going to sit in this sunshine and try and recover my normal temperature."

"There are a few of the boys on board," Brand continued insinuatingly, "who would like to join in our little chat, if you wouldn't mind their stepping round."

"I have no desire for a chat with any one," Crawshay objected. "I came up on deck to rest. Kindly ask me what you want to know and leave me alone for a time."

"Then what in thunder sent you here after an American liner on a seaplane?" Brand demanded. "That's about the long and short of what we're aching to know, I think."

"You've hit it, Ned, as usual," Mr. Clark, of the Minneapolis _Record_, acquiesced. Crawshay drew his rug about him a little peevishly.

"My name," he said, "is Charles Reginald Crawshay."

"We got that from the captain," Brand replied. "Very nice name, too."

"I have been attached," Crawshay went on, "to the British Embassy at Washington."

"You don't say!" Brand murmured.

"I am returning home," Crawshay continued, "because I intend to join the British Army, I was unfortunate enough to miss the boat, and being in company with a person of authority and influence, he suggested,

partly in joke, that I should try to persuade one of the pilots of your new seaplanes at Jersey to bring me out. He further bet me five hundred dollars that I would not attempt the flight. I am one of those sort of people," Crawshay confessed meditatively, "who rise to a bet as to no other thing in life. I suppose it comes from our inherited sporting instincts. I accepted the bet and here I am."

"In time to save the British Army, eh?" Brand observed.

"In time to take my rightful place amongst the defenders of my country," was the dignified rebuke. "Incidentally, I have won a hundred pounds."

"Would you do it again for the same money?" Clark asked guilefully.

The Englishman coughed.

"I must confess," he said, "that it is not an experience I am anxious to repeat."

Brand rose to his feet.

"Well, sir," he concluded, "I offer you my congratulations on your trip. We shall just dot a few words together concerning it for the New York newspapers. Anything you'd like to add?"

Crawshay stroked his upper lip.

"You can say," he pronounced with dignity, "that I found the trip most enjoyable. And by-the-by, you had better put a word in about the skill of the pilot--Lieutenant T. Johnson, I believe his name was. I have no experience in such matters, and I found him once or twice a little unsympathetic when I complained of bumps, but the young man did his best--of that I am convinced."

Mr. Brand's tongue slowly crept round the outside of his mouth. He met the eye of his friend Mr. Clark and indulged in a wink. He had the air of a man who felt relieved by the operation.

"We are very much obliged to you, Mr. Crawshay," he declared. "You have done something to brighten this trip, anyway."

"A little later," Crawshay announced, "either just before your luncheon or dinner hour, if you and your friends would meet me in the smoking room, I should be delighted to remember in the customary fashion that I have won a rather considerable wager."

"Come, that's bully," Brand declared, with a little real feeling in his tone. "I tell you, Clark," he added, as they made their way along the deck to the writing room, "you've got to prick these damned Britishers pretty hard, but they've generally got a bit of the right feeling somewhere tucked away. He'll have a swollen head for the rest of this voyage, though." Crawshay watched the two men disappear, out of the corner of his eye. Then he rose to his feet and commenced a little promenade about the sunny portion of the deck. After two or three turns he found himself face to face with Jocelyn Thew, who had just issued from the companionway.

"Good morning, Mr. Late Passenger!" the latter exclaimed.

Crawshay paused and looked him up and down.

"Do I know you, sir?" he asked.

"I am not so sure that you do," Jocelyn replied, "but after yesterday the whole world knows Mr. Reginald Crawshay."

"Very kind of you, I am sure," Crawshay murmured. "What I did really wasn't worth making a fuss about."

"You had an uncomfortable ride, I fear?" Jocelyn continued.

"I was most unsuitably attired," Crawshay hastened to explain. "If, instead of asking me very absurd questions at the aerodrome, they had provided me with some garments calculated to exclude the salt water, I should be able to look back upon the trip with more pleasurable feelings."

"Pity you had to make it, wasn't it?" Jocelyn observed, falling into step with him.

"I scarcely follow you, Mr.--Ought I to know your name? I have a shocking memory."

"My name is Jocelyn Thew."

"Mr. Jocelyn Thew," Crawshay concluded.

"I mean that it was a pity you missed the boat, you and Hobson, wasn't it? What was the weather like in Chicago?" "Hot," Crawshay replied. "I was hotter there than I ever expect to be again in this world."

"A long, tiring journey, too, from Halifax."

"Not only that, sir," Crawshay agreed, "but a dirty journey. I like to travel with the windows down--cold water and fresh air, you know, for us English people--but the soft coal you burn in your engines is the most appalling uncleanly stuff I have ever met."

"Still, you got here," Jocelyn reminded him.

"I got here," Crawshay agreed with an air of satisfaction.

"And you can take a bath three times a day, if you feel like it, on board," Jocelyn continued. "I'm afraid you won't find much else to do."

"One can never tell," Crawshay sighed. "I have started on ocean trips sometimes which promised absolutely nothing in the way of entertainment, and I have discovered myself, before the end of the journey, thoroughly interested and amused."

"Nothing like looking on the bright side of things," Jocelyn observed.

Crawshay turned his head and contemplated his companion for a few moments. Jocelyn Thew, notwithstanding his fine, slim figure, his well-cut clothes and lean, handsome face, carried always with him some nameless, unanalysable air of the man who has played the explorer, who

has peered into strange places, who has handled the reins which guide the white horse of life as well as the black horse of death.

"I am quite sure," he said, in a tone of kindly approval, "that I shall find you a most interesting companion on this trip. You and I must have a little further conversation together. I have won a considerable sum of money, I may say, by my--er--exploit, and I have invited some of these newspaper fellows to take a drink with me before luncheon in the smoking room. I hope you will join us?"

"I shall be delighted," Jocelyn accepted. "A drink with a friend, and a little mutual toast, is always a pleasure."

Crawshay paused. They were standing outside the entrance to the captain's cabin.

"I quite agree with you," he said. "Exercise your ingenuity, Mr. Jocelyn Thew, and think out a toast that we can both drink sincerely. You will excuse me? I am going in to talk to the captain for a few minutes. There are a few matters concerning my personal comfort which need his attention. I find the purser," he added, dropping his voice, "an excellent fellow, no doubt, but just a trifle unsympathetic, eh?"

"I have no doubt you are right," Jocelyn agreed. "We will meet again, then, just before one o'clock."

CHAPTER VI

Crawshay knocked at the door of the captain's room, received a stentorian invitation to enter, and sank a little plaintively into a vacant easy-chair. The purser, who had been in close confabulation with his chief, hastily took his leave.

"Good morning, sir," the visitor said languidly.

"Good morning, Mr. Crawshay," the captain replied. "Feeling a little stronger this morning, I hope?"

Crawshay sighed.

"The memory of that experience," he began, settling down in his chair,--

"Well, well, you ought to have got over that by this time," the captain interrupted. "What can I do for you, Mr. Crawshay? I have been yarning with the purser a little longer than usual, this morning, and I have some rounds to do."

"I must not stand in the way of your daily avocation," the newcomer said gloomily. "I really dropped in chiefly to see if by any chance you had had a wireless message about me."

"Not a word."

"No message, eh? Now, do you know, that seems to me exceedingly

strange," Crawshay ruminated.

"I don't see why it should," was the somewhat brusque reply. "I have no doubt that the New York papers have some wonderful headlines--'How an Englishman catches the steamer!' or 'An English diplomatist, eager to fight'--and all that sort of thing. But apart from the spectacular side of it, I don't suppose they consider your adventure of national interest."

"On the contrary, it is the development of a new era," Crawshay replied, with dignity. "Just consider what actually happened. I miss the steamer, owing to the breakdown of the Chicago Limited and a subsequent automobile accident. I arrive at the dock whilst you are in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty. What do I do? What no one else has ever done before! I fly after you! Romance has never pictured such a thing. I am a pioneer, Captain."

The Captain grinned.

"You've been pretty sorry for yourself ever since," he observed.

"I must confess that I made up my mind to the heroic deed in a rash moment," Crawshay acknowledged. "I am a person of strong and unconquerable impulses. You see, that exceedingly disagreeable American policeman who was sent up to Halifax on a fool's errand with me, and who subsequently led me on another to Chicago, bet me five hundred dollars, as we stood upon the dock, that I couldn't catch that steamer. Now if there is one thing," he went on, crossing his legs, "which excites my interest more than another, it is a bet."

"That and your accent," the captain said, smiling, "are two of your most prominent British traits, Mr. Crawshay." The latter took out his eyeglass and polished it.

"I have others," he retorted, "but never mind. I understood you to say, I think, that you have heard nothing by wireless about me?"

"Not a word."

The captain glanced at his clock and showed some signs of impatience. His visitor, however, remained blandly imperturbable.

"I see that you have only one operator in the wireless room," he remarked.

"How do you know that?"

"I happened to be walking by last night, and I glanced in."

"We are short-handed," the captain explained.

"Quite naturally," Crawshay replied. "Now with reference to this young man, I watched him coming down the steps from his office this morning. You may be surprised to hear, Captain, that I found him unprepossessing--in fact I might almost say that I took a dislike to him."

"I am sure he would be very much disturbed if he knew your opinion," was the faintly sarcastic reply. "He happens to be a young man with

exceptionally good credentials."

"Credentials," Crawshay observed blandly, "in which I have no faith--no faith whatever."

The captain turned his head suddenly. There was a new expression in his face as he looked keenly at his visitor.

"What do you mean, Mr. Crawshay?"

"Nothing much. I see you have been smoking a pipe, Captain. You will forgive me if I light one of these perfectly damnable cigarettes which are all I have been able to buy on board.--Thank you.--I talk better when I smoke."

"It seems to me that you talk a great deal of nonsense," the captain declared bluntly.

"Intermingled at times," the other insisted, "with a word or two of sense. Now I am going to repeat that I have very little faith in this wireless operator of yours. At three o'clock this morning--I don't wish to tie myself down, Captain, so I will say in the vicinity of that hour--he received a message--a long one, I should imagine. I put it to you, sir--was that dispatch for you?"

"No," the captain admitted, "I had no message at that hour or since."

"Very-well, then," Crawshay continued, loosening a little muffler at his throat, "I suppose you can ascertain from the purser if any message was delivered to any one of your passengers?"

"I certainly can," the captain admitted, "but to tell you the truth, sir, I scarcely see how this concerns you."

"I am endeavouring," his visitor replied, with a little wave of his hand, "to justify my statement. Enquire of the purser, I beg you. It will do no harm."

The captain shrugged his shoulders, touched the bell and despatched his steward for Mr. Dix, the purser, who, happening to be on the deck outside, made an immediate appearance.

"Mr. Dix," the captain asked him, "can you tell me if you have received any wireless message intended for any one of the passengers at or since three o'clock this morning?" "Not one, sir."

Crawshay's smile was beatific and triumphant. He relit his cigarette which had gone out, and, crossing his legs, made himself a little more comfortable.

"Very well, then," he said, "what I should like to know is, what became of that message which made very pretty illuminations around your conductor, or whatever you call it, for at least a quarter of an hour this morning?"

"The message may merely have been an intercepted one," the purser pointed out. "It may not have been fur us at all."

"I had an idea," Crawshay persisted, with bland and officious

precision, "that even intercepted messages, especially in time of war, were referred to some person of authority on board. Apart from that, however, the message I refer to was written down and delivered to one of your passengers. I happened to see your operator leave his office with an envelope in his hand."

"At three o'clock in the morning?" the captain observed incredulously.

"At about a quarter of an hour past that time," the other assented.

"And what on earth were you doing about on deck?"

"I have strange habits," Crawshay confessed. "On board ship I indulge them. I like to sleep when I feel like it, and to wander about when I feel inclined. After my extraordinary, my remarkable experience of yesterday, I was not disposed for slumber." "It appears to me, sir," the purser intervened, "that on board this ship you seem to do a great deal of walking about, considering you have only been with us for a little more than twelve hours."

"Liver," Crawshay explained confidentially. "I suffer intensely from my liver. Gentle and continual exercise is my greatest help."

The captain turned towards his junior officer.

"Mr. Dix," he suggested, "perhaps it will clear this little matter up if we send for Robins. You might just step out yourself and bring him round."

Crawshay extended an eager hand.

"I beg that you will do nothing of the sort," he pleaded.

"But why not?" the captain demanded. "You have made a definite charge against a wireless operator on the ship. He ought to be placed in the position to be able to refute it if he can."

"There is no doubt," Crawshay agreed, "that in course of time he will be given that opportunity. At present it would be indiscreet."

"And why?"

"Because there will be other messages, and one is driven to the conclusion that it would be exceedingly interesting to lay hands on one of these messages, no record of which is kept, of which the purser is not informed, and which are delivered secretly to--"

"Well, to whom?" the captain demanded.

"To a passenger on board this steamer."

The captain shook his head. His whole expression was one of disapproval.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "If Robins has failed in his duty, which I still take the liberty of doubting, I must cross-question him at once."

Crawshay assumed the air of a pained invalid whose wishes have been

thwarted.

"You must really oblige me by doing nothing of the sort," he begged. "I am sure that my way is best. Besides, you make me feel like an eavesdropper--a common informer, and that sort of thing, you know."

"I am afraid that I cannot allow any question of sentiment to stand between me and the discipline of my ship," was the somewhat uncompromising reply.

Crawshay sighed, and with languid fingers unbuttoned his overcoat and coat. Then, from some mysterious place in the neighbourhood of his breast pocket, he produced an envelope containing a single half-sheet of paper.

"Read that, sir, if you please," he begged.

The captain accepted the envelope with some reluctance, straightened out its contents, read the few words it contained several times, and handed back the missive. He stood for a moment like a man in a dream. Crawshay returned the envelope to his pocket and rose to his feet.

"Well, I'll be getting along," he observed. "We'll have another little chat, Captain, later on. I must take my matutinal stroll, or I know how I shall feel about luncheon time. Besides, there are some exuberant persons on board who are expecting me to offer them refreshment about one o'clock, out of my winnings, and, attached to your wonderful country as I am, Captain, I must admit that cocktails do not agree with me." "One has to get used to them," the captain murmured absently.

"I am most unfortunate, too, in the size of my feet," Crawshay continued dolefully, looking down at them. "If there is one thing I thoroughly dislike, it is being on board ship without rubber overshoes--a product of your country, Captain, which I must confess that I appreciate more than your cocktails. Good morning, sir. I hope I haven't kept you from your rounds. Dear me!" he added, in a tone of vexation, as he passed through the door, "I believe that I have been sitting in a draught all the time. I feel quite shivery."

He shambled down the deck. The purser lingered behind with an enquiring expression in his eyes, but his chief did not take the hint.

"Dix," he said solemnly, as he put on his cap and started out on his rounds, "I was right. This is going to be a very queer voyage indeed!"

CHAPTER VII

Crawshay walked slowly along the deck until he found a completely sheltered spot. Then he summoned the deck steward and superintended the arrangement of his deck chair, which was almost hidden under a heap of rugs. He had just adjusted a pair of spectacles and was preparing to settle down when Katharine, in her nurse's uniform, issued from the companionway and stood for a moment looking about her. Crawshay at once raised his cap.

"Good morning, Miss Beverley," he said. "You do not recognise me, of course, but my name is Crawshay. I had the pleasure of meeting you once at Washington."

"I remember you quite well, Mr. Crawshay," she replied, glancing with some amusement at his muffled-up state. "Besides, you must remember that you are the hero of the ship. I suppose I ought to congratulate you upon your wonderful descent upon us yesterday."

"Pray don't mention it," Crawshay murmured. "The chance just came my way. I--er--" he went on, gazing hard at her uniform, "I was not aware that you were personally interested in nursing."

"That shows how little you know about me, Mr. Crawshay." "I have heard," he admitted, "of your wonderful deeds of philanthropy, also that you entirely support a large hospital in New York, but I had no idea that you interested yourself personally in the--er--may I say most feminine and charming avocation of nursing?"

"I have been a probationer," she told him, "in my own hospital, and I am at the present moment in attendance upon a patient on board this steamer."

"You amaze me!" he exclaimed. "You--did I understand you to say that you were in personal attendance upon a patient?"

"That is so, Mr. Crawshay."

"Well, well, forgive my astonishment," he continued. "I had no idea. At any rate I am glad that your patient's state of health permits you to leave him for a time."

Her expression became a little graver.

"As a matter of fact," she sighed, "my patient is very ill indeed, I am afraid. However, the doctor shares the responsibility with me, and he is staying with him now for half an hour."

"May I, in that case," he begged, "share your promenade?"

"With pleasure," she acquiesced, without enthusiasm. "You will have to take off some of your coats, though."

"I am suffering from chill," he explained. "I sometimes think that I shall never be warm again, after my experience of yesterday."

He divested himself, however, of his outside coat, arranged his muffler carefully, thrust his hands into his pockets, and fell into step by her side. "I am interested," he observed, "in illness. What exactly is the matter with your charge?"

"He has had a bad operation," she replied, "and there are complications."

"Dear me! Dear me!" Crawshay exclaimed, in a shocked tone. "And in such a state he chooses to make a perilous voyage like this?"

"That is rather his affair, is it not?" she said drily.

"Precisely," her companion agreed. "Precisely! I should not, perhaps, have made the remark. Sickness, however, interests me very much. I have the misfortune not to be strong myself, and my own ailments occupy a good deal of my attention."

She looked at him curiously.

"You suffer from nerves, don't you?" she enquired.

"Hideously," he assented.

"And yet," she continued, still watching him in a puzzled fashion, "you made that extraordinary voyage through the air to catch this steamer. That doesn't seem to me to be at all the sort of thing a nervous person would do."

"It was for a bet," he explained confidentially. "The only occasion upon which I forget my nerves is when there is a bet to be lost or won. At the time," he went on, "my deportment was, I think, all that could have been desired. The sensations of which I was undoubtedly conscious I contrived to adequately conceal. The after-shock, however, has, I must admit, been considerable."

"Was it really so terribly important," she enquired, "that you should be in London next week?"

"The War Office made a special point of it," he assured her. "Got to join up, you know, directly I arrive."

"Do you think," she enquired after a brief pause, "that you will enjoy soldiering better than pseudo-diplomacy? I don't exactly know how to refer to your work. I only remember that when we were introduced I was told that you had something to do with the Secret Service."

They were leaning over the side of the steamer, and she glanced curiously at his long, rather sunken face, at the uncertain mouth, and at the eyes, carefully concealed behind a pair of green spectacles. He seemed, somehow, to have aged since they had first met, a year ago, in Washington.

"To tell you the truth," he confided, "I am a little tired of my job. Neither fish nor fowl, don't you know. I took an observation course at Scotland Yard, but I suppose I am too slow-witted for what they call secret-service work over here."

"America wouldn't provide you with many opportunities, would it?" she observed.

"You are quite right," he replied. "I am much more at home upon the Continent. The Secret Service in America, as we understand it, does not exist. One finds oneself continually in collaboration with police inspectors, and people who naturally do not understand one's point of view. At any rate," he concluded, with a little sigh, "if I have any talents, they haven't come to the front in Washington. I don't believe that dear old Sir Richard was at all sorry to see the last of me."
"And you think you will prefer your new profession?"

"Soldiering? Well, I shall have to train up a bit and see. Beastly

ugly work they seem to make of it, nowadays. I don't mind roughing it up to the extent of my capacity, but I do think that the advice of one's medical man should be taken into consideration."

She laughed at him openly.

"Do you know," she said, "I can't picture you campaigning in France!"

"To tell you the truth I can't picture it myself," he confessed frankly. "The stories I have heard with reference to the absence of physical comforts are something appalling. By-the-by," he went on, as though the idea had suddenly occurred to him, "I can't think how your patient can rest, anyhow, after an operation, on beds like there are on this steamer. I call it positively disgraceful of the company to impose such mattresses upon their patrons. My bones positively ache this morning."

"Mr. Phillips has his own mattress," she told him, "or rather one of the hospital ones. He was carried straight into the ambulance from the ward."

"Mr.--er--Phillips," Crawshay repeated. "Have I ever met him?"

"I should think not."

"He is, of course, a very great friend of yours?"

"I don't know why you should suppose that."

"Come, come," he remonstrated, "I suppose I am an infernally curious, prying sort of chap, but when one thinks of you, a society belle of America, you know, and, further, the patroness of that great hospital, crossing the Atlantic yourself in charge of a favoured patient, one can't help--can one?"

"Can one what?" she asked coolly.

"Scenting a romance or a mystery," he replied. "In any case, Mr. Phillips must be a man of some determination, to risk so much just for the sake of getting home."

She turned and recommenced their promenade.

"I wonder whether you realise that it isn't etiquette to question a nurse about her patient," she reminded him.

"I'm sure I am very sorry," he assured her. "I didn't imagine that my questions were in any way offensive. I told you from the first that I was always interested in invalids and cases of illness."

She turned her head and looked at him. Her glance was reproving, her manner impatient.

"Really, Mr. Crawshay," she said, "I think that you are one of the most inquisitive people I ever met."

"It really isn't inquisitiveness," he protested. "It's just obstinacy. I hate to leave a problem unexplained."

"Then to prevent any further misunderstanding, Mr. Crawshay," she concluded, a little coldly, "let me tell you that there are private reasons which make any further questioning on your part, concerning this matter, impertinent."

Crawshay lifted his cap. He had the air of a man who has received a rebuff which he takes in ill part.

"I will not risk your further displeasure, Miss Beverley," he said, stopping by his steamer chair. "I trust that you will enjoy the remainder of your promenade. Good morning!"

He summoned the deck steward to arrange his rugs, and lay back in his steamer chair, eating broth which he loathed, and watching Jocelyn Thew and Katharine Beverley through spectacles which somewhat impaired his vision. The two had strolled together to the side of the ship to watch a shoal of porpoises go by.

"I see that you are acquainted with our hero of the seaplane," Jocelyn Thew remarked.

She nodded.

"I met him once at Washington and once at the polo games."

"Tell me what you think of him?"

She smiled.

"Well," she confessed, "I scarcely know how to think of him. I must say, though, that in a general way I should think any profession would suit him better than diplomacy."

"You find him stupid?"

"I do," she admitted, "and in a particularly British way."

Jocelyn glanced thoughtfully across at Crawshay, who was contemplating his empty cup with apparent regret.

"You will not think that I am taking a liberty, Miss Beverley, if I ask you a question?"

"Why should I? Is it so very personal?"

"As a matter of fact, it isn't personal at all. I was only going to ask you if you would mind telling me what our friend Mr. Crawshay was talking to you about just now?" "Are you really interested?" she asked, with an air of faint surprise. "Well, if you must know, he was asking questions about my patient. He appears to be something of a hypochondriac himself, and he is very interested in illnesses."

"He has the air of one who takes care of himself," Jocelyn observed, with a faint smile. "However, one mustn't judge. He may be delicate."

"I think he is an old woman," she remarked carelessly.

"He rather gives one that impression, doesn't he?" Jocelyn agreed. "By-the-by, there wasn't much you could tell him about your patient,

was there?"

"There really isn't anything at all," she replied. "I just mentioned his condition, and as Mr. Crawshay still seemed curious, I reminded him that it was not etiquette to question a nurse about her patients."

"Most discreet," Jocelyn declared. "As a matter of fact," he went on, "I have scarcely thought it worth while to mention it to you, because I knew exactly the sort of answer you would make to any too curious questions, but there is a reason, and a very serious reason, why my friend Phillips wishes to avoid so far as possible all manner of notice and questions."

"You call him your friend Phillips," she remarked, "yet you don't seem to have been near him since we started."

"Nor do I intend to," he replied. "That is the other point concerning which I wish to speak to you. You may think it very extraordinary, and I offer no explanation, but I do not wish it known to--say, Mr. Crawshay, or any other casual enquirer, that I have any acquaintance with or interest in Phillips."

"The subject is dismissed," she promised lightly. "I am not in the least an inquisitive person. I understand perfectly, and my lips are sealed."

His little smile of thanks momentarily transformed his expression. Her eyes became softer as they met his.

"Now please walk with me for a little time," she begged, "and let us leave off talking of these grizzly subjects. You've really taken very little notice of me so far, and I have been rather looking forward to the voyage. You have traveled so much that I am quite sure you could be a most interesting companion if you wished to be."

He obeyed at once, falling easily into step with her, and talking lightly enough about the voyage, their fellow passengers, and other trifling subjects. Her occasional attempts to lead the conversation into more serious channels, even to the subject of his travels, he avoided, however, with a curious persistency. Once she stopped short and forced him to look at her.

"Mr. Jocelyn Thew," she complained, "tell me why you persist in treating me like a child?"

Then for the first time his tone became graver.

"I want to treat you and think of you," he said, "in the only way that is possible for me."

"Explain, please," she begged.

He led her again to the side of the ship. The sea had freshened, and the spray flew past them like salt diamonds.

"Since it has pleased you to refer to the subject, Miss Beverley," he said seriously, "I will explain so far as I am able. I suppose that I have committed nearly every one of the crimes which our abbreviated dictionary of modern life enumerates. If the truth were known about

me, and I were judged by certain prevailing laws, not only my reputation but my life might be in serious danger. But there is one crime which I have not committed and which I do not intend to commit, one pain which I have avoided all my life myself, and avoided inflicting upon others. I think you must know what I refer to."

"I can assure you that I do not," she told him frankly. "In any case I hate ambiguity. Do please tell me exactly what you mean."

"I was referring to my attitude towards your sex," he replied.

There was a faint twinkle in her eyes.

"That sounds so ponderous," she murmured. "Don't you like us, then?"

"There are circumstances in my life," he said, "which prevent my even considering the subject."

She turned and looked him full in the eyes. Her very sweet mouth was suddenly pathetic, her eyes were full of gentle resentment.

"I do not believe," she said firmly, "that you have done a single thing in life of which you ought to be ashamed. I do not believe one of the hard things you have said about yourself. I am not a child. I am a woman--twenty-six years old--and I like to choose my own friends. I should like you to be my friend, Mr. Thew."

He murmured a few words entirely conventional. Nothing in his expression responded in the least to the appeal of her words. His face had grown like granite. He turned to the purser, who was strolling by. As though unconsciously, the finer qualities of his voice had gone as he engaged the latter in some trivial conversation.

CHAPTER VIII

That night at dinner time a stranger appeared at the captain's table. A dark, thick-browed man, in morning clothes of professional cut, was shown by one of the saloon stewards to a seat which had hitherto been vacant. Crawshay, whose place was nearly opposite, leaned across at once with an air of interest.

"Good evening, Doctor," he said.

"Good evening, sir," was the somewhat gruff reply.

"Glad to see that you are able to come in and join us," Crawshay continued, unabashed. "You are, I believe, the physician in attendance on Mr. Phillips. I am very interested in illnesses. As a matter of fact, I am a great invalid myself."

The doctor contented himself with a muttered monosyllable which was not brimful of sympathy.

"This is a very remarkable expedition of yours," Crawshay went on. "I am a man of very little sentiment myself--one place to me is very much

like another--so I do not understand this wild desire on the part of an invalid to risk his life by undertaking such a journey. It is a great feat, however. It shows what can be accomplished by a man of determination, even when he is on the point of death." "Who said that my patient was on the point of death?" the doctor demanded brusquely.

"It is common report," Crawshay assured him. "Besides, as you know, the New York press got hold of the story before you started, and the facts were in all the evening papers."

"What facts?"

"Didn't you read them? Most interesting!" Crawshay continued. "They all took the same line, and agreed that it was an absolutely unprecedented occurrence for a man to embark upon an ocean voyage only a few days after an operation for appendicitis, with double pneumonia behind, and angina pectoris intervening. Almost as unusual," Crawshay concluded with a little bow, "as the fact of his being escorted by the most distinguished amateur nurse in the world, and a physician of such distinction as Doctor--Doctor--Dear me, how extraordinary! For the moment I must confess that your name has escaped me."

The heavy-browed man leaned forward a little deliberately towards his _vis-a-vis_. His was not an attractive personality. His features were large and of bulldog type. His forehead was low, and his eyes, which gave one the impression of being clear and penetrating, were concealed by heavy spectacles. His hands only, which were well-shaped and cared for, might have indicated his profession.

"My name," he said, "is Gant--Doctor James H. Gant. You are not, I presume, a medical man yourself?"

Crawshay shook his head.

"A most admirable profession," he declared, "but one which I should never have the nerve to follow."

"You do not, therefore, appreciate the fact," Doctor Gant continued, "that a medical man, especially one connected with a hospital of such high standing as St. Agnes's, does not discuss his patient's ailments with strangers."

"No offence, Doctor--no offence," Crawshay protested across the table. "Mine is just the natural interest in a fellow sufferer of a man who has known most of the ailments to which we weak humans are subject."

"I suppose, as we have the pleasure of your company this evening," the captain intervened, "Miss Beverley will be an absentee?"

"Miss Beverley at the present moment is taking my place," the doctor replied. "She insisted upon it. Personally, I am used to eating at all times and in all manner of places."

There was a brief silence, during which Crawshay discussed the subject of inoculation for colds in the head with his neighbour on the other side, and the doctor showed a very formidable capacity for making up for any meals which he might have missed by too rigid an attention to his patient. The captain presently addressed him again.

"Have you met our ship's doctor yet?" he enquired.

"I have had that honour," Doctor Gant acknowledged. "He was good enough to call upon me yesterday and offer his assistance should I require it."

"A very clever fellow, I believe," the captain observed.

"He impressed me some," the other confessed. "If any further complications should arise, it will be a relief for me to consult him."

The subject of the sick man dropped. Crawshay walked out of the saloon with the captain and left him at the bottom of the stairs.

"I'll take the liberty of paying you a short call presently, Captain, if I may," he said. "I just want to fetch my wraps. And by-the-by, did I tell you that I have been fortunate enough to find a pair of rubbers that just fit me, at the barber's? One of the greatest blessings on board ship, Captain, believe me, is the barber's shop. It's like a bijou Harrod's or Whiteley's--anything you want, from an elephant to a needle, you know. In about ten minutes, Captain, if I shan't be disturbing you."

The captain found the purser on deck and took him into his cabin.

"I saw you speaking to Doctor Gant in the gangway," the former observed. "I wonder what he really thinks about his patient?"

"I think I can tell you that, sir, without betraying any confidences," the purser replied. "Unless a miracle happens, there'll be a burial before we get across. Poor fellow, it seems too bad after such an effort."

The captain nodded sympathetically.

"After all, I can understand this hankering of a man to die in his own country," he said. "I had a brother once the same way. They brought him home from Australia, dying all the way, as they believed, but directly he set foot in England he seemed to take on a new lease of life--lived for years afterwards." "Is that so?" the purser remarked. "Well, this fellow ought to have a chance. It's a short voyage, and he has his own doctor and nurse to look after him."

"Let's hope they'll keep him alive, then. I hate the burial service at sea."

The captain turned aside and filled his pipe thoughtfully.

"Dix," he continued, "as you know, I am not a superstitious man, but there seems to be something about this trip I can't fathom."

"Meaning, sir?"

"Well, there's this wireless business, first of all. We shall close it up in about thirty-six hours, you know, and in the meantime I have been expecting half a dozen messages, not one of which has come through."

"Young fellow of the highest character, Robins," the purser remarked drily.

"That may be," the captain agreed, "and yet I can't get rid of my premonition. I wouldn't mind laying you anything you like, Dix, that we don't sight a submarine, and shouldn't, even if we hadn't our guns trained."

"That's one comfort, anyway. Being a family man, sir--"

"Yes, I know all about your family, Dix," the captain interrupted irritably, "but just at the present moment I am more interested in what is going on in my ship. I begin to believe that Mr. Crawshay's voyage through the air wasn't altogether a piece of bravado, after all."

The purser smiled a little incredulously. "He sent round this evening to know if I could lend him some flannel pyjamas," he said,--"says all the things that have been collected together for him are too thin. That man makes me tired, sir."

"He makes me wonder."

"How's that, sir?"

"Because I can't size him up," the captain declared. "There isn't a soul on board who isn't laughing at him and saying what a sissy he is. They say he has smuggled an extra lifebelt into his cabin, and spends half his time being seasick and the other half looking out for submarines."

"That's the sort of fellow he seems to me, anyway," the purser observed.

"I can't say that I've quite made up my mind," the captain pronounced. "I suppose you know, Dix, that he was connected with the Secret Service at the English Embassy?"

"I didn't know it," Dix replied, "but if he has been, Lord help us! No wonder the Germans have got ahead of us every time!"

"I don't think he was much of a success," the other continued, "and as a matter of fact he is on his way back to England now to do his bit of soldiering. All the same, Dix, he gave me a turn the other day."

"How's that, sir?"

"Showed me an order, signed by a person I won't name," the captain went on, lowering his voice, "requesting me to practically run the ship according to his directions--making him a kind of Almighty boss."

Mr. Dix opened his lips and closed them again. His eyes were wide open with astonishment. There was an indecisive knock at the door, which at a gesture from the captain he opened. Wrapped in a huge overcoat, with a cap buttoned around his ears and a scarf nearly up to his mouth, Crawshay stood there, seeking admittance.

* * * * *

"I am exceedingly fortunate to find you both here," the newcomer observed, as he removed his cap. "Captain, may I have a few minutes' conversation with you and Mr. Dix?"

"Delighted," the captain acquiesced, "so long as you don't keep me more than twenty minutes. I am due on the bridge at nine o'clock."

"I will endeavour not to be prolix," Crawshay continued, carefully removing his rubbers, unfastening his scarf and loosening his overcoat. "A damp night! I fear that we may have fog."

"This all comes off the twenty minutes," the captain reminded him.

Crawshay smiled appreciatively.

"Into the heart of things, then! Let me tell you that I suspect a conspiracy on board this boat."

"Of what nature?" the captain asked swiftly.

"It is my opinion," Crawshay said deliberately, "that the result of the whole accumulated work of the German Secret Service, compiled since the beginning of the war by means of Secret Service agents, criminals, and patriotic Germans and Austrians resident in the States, is upon this ship."

"Hell!" the purser murmured, without reproof from his chief.

"It was believed," Crawshay continued, "that these documents, together with a letter of vital importance, were on the steamer which conveyed the personnel of the late German Ambassador to Europe. The steamer was delayed at Halifax and a more or less complete search was made. I was present on behalf of the English Embassy, but I did not join personally in the search. You have all heard that the seals of a tin chest belonging to a neutral country had been tampered with. The chiefs of my department, and the head of the American Secret Service, firmly believe that the missing papers are in that chest and will be discovered when the chest is opened in London. That is not a belief which I share."

"And your reasons, Mr. Crawshay?" the captain asked.

"First, because Hobson and I were decoyed to Chicago by a bogus telegram, evidently with the idea that we should find it impossible to catch or search this steamer. Secondly, because there is on board just the one man whom I believe capable of conceiving and carrying out a task as difficult as this one would be."

"Who is he?" the captain demanded.

"A very inoffensive, well-mannered and exceedingly well-informed individual who is travelling in this steamer under, I believe, his own name--Mr. Jocelyn Thew."

"Jocelyn Thew!" the captain murmured.

"Thew!" the purser repeated.

"Now I tell you that I have definite suspicions of this man," Crawshay

continued, "because I know that for some reason or other he hates England, although he has the appearance of being an Englishman. I know that he has been friendly with enemy agents in New York, and I know that he has been in recent communication with enemy headquarters at Washington. Therefore, as I say, I suspect Mr. Jocelyn Thew. I also suspect Robins, the wireless operator, because I am convinced that he has received messages of which he has taken no record. I now pass on to the remainder of my suspicions, for which I frankly admit that I have nothing but surmise. I suspect Mr. Phillips, Doctor Gant and Miss Katharine Beverley."

The last shock proved too much for the captain. For the first time there was distinct incredulity in his face.

"Look here, Mr. Crawshay," he protested, "supposing you are right, and that you are on the track of a conspiracy, how do you account for a physician from the finest hospital in New York and one of the best-known young ladies in America being mixed up in it?"

Crawshay acknowledged the difficulties of the supposition.

"As regards the physician," he said thoughtfully, "I must confess that I am without information concerning him, a fact which increases my suspicion of Robins, for I should have had his _dossier_, and also that of the man Phillips, by wireless twenty-four hours ago."

"What about Miss Beverley then?" the captain enquired. "Her family is not only one of the oldest in America, but they are real Puritan, Anglo-Saxon stock, white through and through. She has a dozen relatives in Congress, who have all been working for war with Germany for the last two years. She also has, as she told me herself, a brother and four cousins fighting on the French front--the brother in the Canadian Flying Corps, and the cousins in the English Army."

"There I must confess that you have me," Crawshay admitted. "What you say is perfectly true. That is one of the mysteries. No plot would be worth solving, you know, if it hadn't a few mysteries in it."

"If you will allow me a word, Mr. Crawshay," the purser intervened, "I think you will have to leave Doctor Gant and his patient and Miss Beverley out of your speculations. I have our own ship doctor's word for it that Mr. Phillips' condition is exactly as has been stated. Mr. Jocelyn Thew may or may not be a suspicious character. Anything you suggest in the way of watching him can be done. But as regards the other three, I trust that you will not wish their comfort interfered with in any respect."

"Beyond the search to which every one on board will have to be subjected," Crawshay replied, "I shall not interfere in any respect with the three people in question. Mr. Jocelyn Thew, however, is different. He is a man who has led a most adventurous life. He seems to have travelled in every part of the globe, wherever there was trouble brewing or a little fighting to be done."

"Why do you connect him with the present enterprise?" the captain asked.

"Because," Crawshay answered, "the wireless message of which your man Robins took no record, and concerning which you have kept silence at

my request, was delivered to Mr. Jocelyn Thew. Because, too," he went on, "it is my very earnest belief that at somewhere in the small hours of this morning there will be another message, and Mr. Jocelyn Thew will be on deck to receive it."

The captain knocked out the ashes of his pipe a little apprehensively.

"If half what you suspect is true, Mr. Crawshay," he said, "you will forgive my saying so, but Jocelyn Thew is not a man you ought to tackle without assistance."

There was a peculiar glitter in Crawshay's deep-set eyes. For a single moment a new-born strength seemed to deepen the lines in his face--a transforming change.

"You needn't worry, Captain," he remarked coolly. "I am not taking too many chances, and if our friend Mr. Jocelyn Thew should turn out to be the man I believe him to be, I would rather tackle him alone."

"Why," Mr. Dix demanded, "should anything in the shape of violence take place? The ship can be searched, every article of baggage ransacked, and every passenger made to run the gauntlet."

Crawshay smiled.

"The search you speak of is already arranged for, Mr. Dix," he said; "long cables from my friend Hobson have already reached Liverpool--but the efficacy of such a proposed search would depend a little, would it not, upon whether we reach Liverpool?" "But if we were submarined," the captain pointed out, "the papers would go to the bottom."

Crawshay leaned forward and whispered one word in the captain's ear. The latter sat for a moment as though paralysed.

"What's to prevent that fellow Robins bringing her right on to our track?" Crawshay demanded. "That is the reason I spent last night listening for the wireless. It's the reason I'm going to do the same to-night."

The captain sprang to his feet.

"We'll run no risks about this," he declared firmly. "We'll dismantle the apparatus. I'd never hold up my head again if the _Von Blucher_ got us!"

Crawshay held out his hand.

"Forgive me, Captain," he said, "but we want proof. Leave it to me, and if things are as I suspect, we'll have that proof--probably before to-morrow morning," he added, glancing at the chart.

There was a call down the deck, a knock at the door. The captain took up his oilskins regretfully.

"You will remember," Crawshay enjoined, "that little mandate I showed you?"

The captain nodded grimly.

"I am in your hands," he admitted. "Don't forget that the safety of the ship may be in your hands, too!"

"Perhaps," Crawshay whispered, "even more than the safety of the ship."

CHAPTER IX

Robins, the wireless operator, bent closer over his instrument, and the blue fires flashed from the masthead of the steamer, cutting their way through the darkness into the black spaces beyond. The little room was lit by a dull oil light, the door was fast-closed and locked. Away into the night sped one continual message.

"Steamship _City of Boston_, lat.... long.... lying four points to northward of usual course. Reply."

A time came when the young man ceased from his labours and sat up with a yawn. He stretched out his hand and lit a cigarette, walked to the little round window which commanded the deck, gazed out of it steadily, and turned back once more to his chair before the instrument. Then something happened. A greater shock than any that lay in the blue lightning which he had been generating was awaiting him. His right hand was suddenly gripped and held on to the table. He found himself gazing straight down the black bore of a small but uncommonly ugly-looking revolver. A voice which seemed remarkable for its convincing qualities, addressed him.

"If you speak a word, Robins, move, or show signs of any attempt to struggle, I shall shoot you. I have the right and the power." Robins, a young man of nerve, whose name stood high on an official list of those who might be relied upon for any desperate enterprise, sat like a numbed thing. Dim visions of the face of this man, only a few feet away from his own, assailed him under some very different guise. It was Crawshay the man, stripped for action, whose lean, strong fingers were gripping the butt of that revolver, and whose eyes were holding him like gimlets.

"Now, if you are wise, answer me a few questions," Crawshay began. "I'd have brought the captain with me, but I thought we might do better business alone. You've been advertising the ship's whereabouts. Why?"

"I've only been giving the usual calls," the young man muttered.

"Don't lie to me," was the grim reply. "Your wireless was supposed to be silent from yesterday midday except for the purpose of receiving calls. I ask you again, why and to whom were you advertising our whereabouts and course?"

Robins looked at the revolver, looked at Crawshay, and was dimly conscious of a damp feeling about his forehead. Nevertheless, his lips were screwed together, and he remained silent.

"Come," Crawshay went on, "we'll have a common-sense talk. I am an

agent of the British Secret Service. I have unlimited powers upon this ship, power to put a bullet through your head if I choose, and not a soul to question it. The game's up so far as you are concerned. You have received messages on this steamer of which you have kept no record, but which you have delivered secretly to a certain passenger. Of that I may or may not speak later on. At present I am more interested in your operations of to-night. You are signalling the information of our whereabouts for some definite reason. What is it? Were you trying to pick up the _Blucher?_"

"I wasn't trying to pick up anybody," the young man faltered.

Crawshay's fingers gripped him by the shoulder. His very determined-looking mouth had suddenly become a ring of steel.

"If you don't give me a different answer in ten seconds, Robins, I'll blow your brains all over the cabin!"

The young man broke.

"I was trying to pick up the _Blucher_," he acknowledged.

"That's exactly what I thought," Crawshay muttered. "That's the game, without a doubt. What are you? An Englishman?"

"I am not!" was the almost fierce reply. "Blast England!"

Crawshay looked into the black eyes, suddenly lit with an ugly fire, and nodded.

"I understand," he said. "Robins, your name, eh? Any relation to the young Sinn Feiner who was shot in Dublin a few months ago?"

"Brother."

"That may save your life later on," Crawshay observed coolly. "Now you can do one of three things. You can come with me to the captain, be put in irons and shot as soon as we land--or before, if the _Blucher_ finds us; or you can send the message which I shall give you; or you can end your days where you sit."

"What message?" the young man demanded.

"You will send out a general call, as before, repeating the latitude and longitude with a difference of exactly three points, and you will repeat the altered course, only you will substitute the word 'south' for the word 'north.'"

The young man's eyes suddenly gleamed as he turned towards the instrument, but Crawshay smiled with grim understanding.

"Let me tell you that I understand the wireless," he said impressively. "You will give the message exactly as I have told you or we finish things up on the spot. I think you had better. It's a matter of compulsion, you know--in fact I'll explain matters to Mr. Jocelyn Thew, if you like."

The young man's eyes were round with amazement.

"Jocelyn Thew!" he repeated.

"Precisely. You needn't look so terrified. It isn't you who have given away. Now what are you going to do?"

The young man swung round to his instrument. Crawshay released his hand, stepping a little back.

"You are going to send the message, then?"

"Yes!" was the sullen reply.

"Capital!" Crawshay exclaimed, cautiously subsiding into a chair. "Now you'll go on every ten minutes until I tell you to stop."

Robins bent over his task, and again the crackling waves broke away from their prison. Once his finger hesitated. He glanced surreptitiously at Crawshay. "Four degrees south," Crawshay repeated softly.

The night wore on. Every ten minutes the message was sent. Then there followed a brief silence, spent generally by Robins with his head drooped upon his clasped arms; by Crawshay in unceasing vigil. Just as the first faint gleam of daylight stole into the little turret chamber, came the long-waited-for reply. The young man wrote down the few lines and passed them over. Crawshay, who had risen to his feet, glanced at them, nodded, and thrust the paper into his pocket.

"That seems quite satisfactory," he said coldly. "Now ask the _Blucher_ her exact course?"

Robins sat for a moment motionless. He felt Crawshay's presence towering over him, felt again the spell of his softly-spoken command.

"Don't waste any time, please. Do as I tell you."

Robins obeyed. In less than a quarter of an hour he handed over another slip of paper. Crawshay thrust it into his pocket.

"That concludes our business," he said. "Now let me see if I remember enough of this apparatus to put it out of action."

He bent over the instrument, removed some plugs, turned some screws, and finally placed in his pocket a small concealed part of the mechanism. Then he turned towards Robins.

"You can leave here now," he directed. "I shall lock the place up."

Robins had in some measure recovered himself. He was a quiet, hollow-eyed young person, with thick black hair and a thin frame, about which the uniform of the ship hung loosely. "You are the man who boarded the steamer from a seaplane, aren't you, and pretended afterwards to be such a ninny?"

"I am," Crawshay acknowledged.

"How did you get on to this?"

Crawshay raised his eyebrows.

"Sorry," he replied, "that is a matter concerning which I fear that you will have to restrain your curiosity."

"How did you get in here?"

"By means of a duplicate key which I obtained from the purser. I hid in your bunk there and drew the curtains. Quite a comfortable mattress, yours. You'll have to change your sleeping quarters, though."

"What is going to happen to me?" the young man enquired.

"Probably nothing extreme. You were philosophical enough to accept the situation. If," Crawshay went on more slowly, "you had falsified a single word of those messages, your end would have been somewhat abrupt and your destination according to your past life. As it is, you can go where you choose now and report to the captain later on in the morning, after I have had a talk with him."

"My kit is all in here."

Crawshay laid his hand upon the operator's shoulder in peremptory fashion.

"Then you will have to do without it for the present," he replied coolly. "Outside."

The young man turned on his heel and disappeared without a word. Crawshay glanced once more at the dismantled instrument, then followed Robins on to the deck, carefully locking the door behind him. A grey, stormy morning was just breaking, with piles of angry clouds creeping up, and showers of spray breaking over the ship on the weather side. He chose a sheltered spot and stood for a few moments breathing in the strong salt air. Notwithstanding his success, he was unaccountably depressed. As far as he could see across the grey waste of waters, there was no sign of any passing ship, but the eastern horizon was blurred by a low-hanging bank of sinister-looking clouds. Suddenly a voice rang out, hailing him. It was the captain descending from the bridge.

"Come and have a cup of coffee with me in my room, Mr. Crawshay," he invited.

Crawshay felt himself suddenly back again in the world of real happenings. His depression passed as though by magic. After all, he had won the first trick, and the next move was already forming up in his mind.

CHAPTER X

The captain sank into his easy-chair a little wearily. It had been a long and rather trying vigil. His steward filled two cups with coffee and at a sign from his master withdrew.

"Any news?"

"I have been compelled," Crawshay announced, stirring his coffee, "to dismantle your wireless."

"The devil you have!"

"Also, to speak words of wisdom to young Robins. I detected him signalling our location to the _Blucher_."

The captain set down his coffee cup.

"Mr. Crawshay," he said, "this is a very serious accusation."

"It isn't an accusation at all--it's a fact," Crawshay replied. "Luckily, he hadn't picked her up when I got there. He signalled our exact location and our course a dozen times or more, without response. Then I took a hand in the game."

"Exactly what happened?" the captain enquired.

"Well, I borrowed a key from Mr. Dix, and whilst the young man was down at his supper I concealed myself in his bunk. I listened to him for a short time, and then I intervened."

"Did he make any trouble?"

"He had no chance," Crawshay explained, a little grimly. "I was first off the mark. On this piece of paper," he added, smoothing it out, "you will find Robins' calculations as to our whereabouts, which I took as being correct. These, you understand, were not picked up. Lower down you will see the message which he sent under my superintendence later on--"

"Superintendence?" the captain interrupted.

"At the point of my revolver," Crawshay explained. "This message was picked up by the _Blucher_."

The captain scanned the calculations eagerly.

"Wish you'd given us a little more room," he muttered. "However, it will be all right unless we get fog. We might blunder into one another then."

"This little incident," Crawshay continued, crossing his legs, "confirms certain impressions with which I came on board. I think that the scheme was to get the documents on board this steamer, and then, in order to avoid the inevitable search at Liverpool, I fancy it was arranged that the _Blucher_ should be on the lookout for us and take over the messenger, whoever he may be, and the documents. It's a straightforward, simple little scheme, which we have now to look at from our own point of view. In the first place, the _Blucher_ is now very much less likely to capture us. In the second place, I would suggest that in case the _Blucher_ should happen to blunder across us, we make the search at once instead of in Liverpool."

"What, search every one on board?" the captain asked.

"Suspected persons only."

"Exactly who are they?" "First and foremost, Mr. Jocelyn Thew."

"And afterwards?"

Crawshay hesitated.

"Mr. Phillips and his entourage."

"What, the man who is supposed to be dying?"

"I will admit," Crawshay said, "that this is more or less guesswork, but I suspect every one with whom Jocelyn speaks."

"Great heavens, you are not thinking of Miss Beverley!" the captain exclaimed.

"I fail utterly to understand her acquaintance with Jocelyn Thew," Crawshay confided. "I do not propose, however, that you interfere with these people for the moment. What I do ask is that Jocelyn Thew's effects are searched, and at once."

"It's a thing that's never happened before on any steamer I've commanded," the captain said reluctantly, "but if it has to be done, I will do it myself."

"What chance of fog is there?" his companion enquired.

"We shall get some within twenty-four hours, for certain. It's coming up from the west now."

"Then the sooner you make a start with Mr. Jocelyn Thew, the better," Crawshay suggested. "I don't think there's one chance in a hundred that he'd have those documents in any place where we should be likely to find them by any ordinary search, but you can never tell. The cleverest men often adopt the most obvious methods."

The captain yawned.

"I'll have two hours' sleep," he decided, "then Dix and I will tackle the job. I don't suppose you want to be in it?" "I should prefer not," Crawshay replied. "I'll follow your example," he added, rising to his feet.

The habits of Mr. Jocelyn Thew on shore were doubtless most regular, but on board ship he had developed a proclivity for sleeping until long after the first breakfast gong. About half-past eight that morning, he was awakened from a sound sleep by a tap on his door, and instead of the steward with his hot water, no less a person entered than the captain, followed by the purser. Jocelyn sat up in his bunk and rubbed his eyes.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "Anything wrong?"

The captain undid the catch of the door and closed it behind him.

"Are you sufficiently awake to listen to a few words from me on a subject of importance, Mr. Thew?" he asked.

"Certainly," was the prompt reply.

"Very well, then," the captain proceeded, "I shall commence by taking you into my confidence. There is an impression on the part of the British and American Secret Services that an attempt is being made to convey documents of great importance, and containing treasonable matter, to Europe by some one on board this ship."

Jocelyn Thew, who was attired in silk pyjamas of very excellent quality, swung himself out of the bunk and sat upon the side of it. The captain was an observant man and of somewhat luxuriant tastes himself, and he fully appreciated the texture and quality of the suspected man's night apparel. "This sounds remarkably interesting," Jocelyn said. "Very kind of you, Captain, I am sure, to come and tell me about it."

"My visit," the captain continued, a little drily, "had a more definite object. It is my duty to explain to you that the circumstances of this voyage are unprecedented. We are going to take liberties with our passengers which in normal times would not be dreamed of."

Jocelyn Thew pushed the knob with his left hand and let some cold water run into his basin. Then he dabbed his eyes for several moments with his fingers.

"Yes, I seem to be awake," he remarked. "Tell me about these liberties, Captain?"

"To begin with, I am going to search your stateroom and baggage--or rather they are going to be searched under my supervision. Your trunk from the hold has already been brought up and is in the gangway."

"It seems to me," Jocelyn said, sitting, as Mr. Dix expressed it afterwards, like a tiger about to spring, "that you've been listening to that crazy loon, Crawshay."

"I am not at liberty," the captain rejoined, "to divulge the source from which my information came. I am only able to acquaint you with my intentions, and to trust that you will offer no obstruction."

"The obstruction which I could offer against the captain of a ship and his crew would be a waste of energy," Jocelyn observed, with fine sarcasm. "At the same time, I protest most bitterly against my things being touched. Any search you deemed necessary could be undertaken at Liverpool by the Customs officers in the usual way. I consider that this entrance into my stateroom on the high seas, and this arbitrary resolve of yours to acquaint yourself with the nature of my belongings is indefensible and a gross insult."

"I am sorry that you take it this way, Mr. Thew," the captain regretted. "Any complaints you feel it right to make can be addressed to the company's agents in Liverpool. At present I must proceed with what I conceive to be my duty. Do you care to hand Mr. Dix your keys?"

"I will see Mr. Dix damned first!" Jocelyn assured him.

The captain shrugged his shoulders, called to the steward, who was waiting outside, and the search commenced. They opened drawers, they

turned up the carpet. They invited Jocelyn Thew to sit upon the couch whilst they ripped open the bed, and they invited him to return to the bed whilst they ripped up the couch. His personal belongings, his dressing-case and his steamer trunk were gone through with painstaking care. His trunk, which was then dragged in, was ransacked from top to bottom. In due course the search was concluded, and except that his wearing apparel seemed chosen with extraordinary care and taste, nothing in any way suspicious was discovered. The captain made haste to acknowledge the fact.

"Well, Mr. Thew," he announced, "I have done my duty and you are out of it with a clean sheet. Have you any objection to answering a few questions?" "Every objection in the world," Jocelyn Thew replied.

The purser ventured to intervene.

"Come, Mr. Thew," he said, "you're an Englishman, aren't you?"

A light flashed in Thew's eyes.

"I shall break the promise I made to the captain just now," he declared, "and answer that one question, at any rate. I thank God I am not!"

Both men were a little startled. Jocelyn's cold, clear voice, his manner and bearing, were all so essentially Saxon. The captain, however, recovered himself quickly.

"If the tone of your voice is any index to your feelings, Mr. Thew," he said, "you appear to have some grudge against England. In that case you can scarcely wonder at the suspicions which have attached themselves to you."

"Suspicions!" Jocelyn repeated sarcastically. "Well, present my compliments to the wonderful Mr. Crawshay! I presume that I am at liberty now to take my bath?"

"In one moment, Mr. Thew. Even though you do not choose to answer them, there are certain questions I intend to ask. The first is, are you prepared to produce the Marconigram which you received last evening?"

"How do you know that I received one?"

"The fact has come to my knowledge," the captain said drily.

"You had better ask the operator about it."

"The operator is at the present moment under arrest," was the terse reply. If the news were a shock to Thew, he showed it in none of the ordinary ways. His face seemed to fall for a moment into harder lines. His mouth tightened and his eyes flashed.

"Under arrest?" he repeated. "More of Crawshay's tomfoolery, I suppose?"

"More of Mr. Crawshay's tomfoolery," the captain acknowledged. "Robins is accused of having received a Marconigram of which he took no note, and which he handed to a passenger. He is also accused of attempting

to communicate with an enemy raider."

A peculiar smile parted Jocelyn's lips.

"You seem to wish to make this steamer of yours the _mise-en-scene_ of a dime novel, Captain," he observed. "I accept the part of villain with resignation--but I should like to have my bath."

"You don't propose to tell me, then," his questioner persisted, "the contents of that message?"

"I have no recollection of having received one," Jocelyn replied coolly. "You are making me very late for breakfast."

They left him with a brusque word of farewell, to which he did not reply. Jocelyn, in a dark-green silk dressing gown, with a huge sponge and various silver-topped bottles, departed for the bathroom. The captain and the purser strolled up on deck.

"What do you make of that fellow, Dix?" the former asked.

The purser coughed.

"If you ask me, sir," he replied, "I think that Mr. Crawshay has got hold of the wrong end of the stick."

CHAPTER XI

Katharine came on deck that morning in a somewhat disturbed frame of mind. It was beginning to dawn upon her that her position as sick nurse to Mr. Phillips was meant to be a sinecure. She was allowed to sit by the sick man's side sometimes whilst the doctor took a promenade or ate a meal in the saloon, but apart from that, the usual exercise of her duties was not required from her. She was forced to admit that there was something mysterious about the little stateroom, the suffering man, and the doctor who watched him speechlessly night and day.

She was conscious presently that Crawshay, who had been walking up and down the deck, had stopped before the chair on which she lay extended. She greeted him without enthusiasm.

"Are you taking one of your health constitutionals, Mr. Crawshay?" she enquired.

"Not altogether," he replied. "May I sit down for a moment?"

"Of course! I don't think any one sits in that chair."

He took his place by her side, deliberately removed his muffler and unfastened his overcoat. It struck her, from the first moment she heard his voice, that his manner was somehow altered. She was altogether unprepared, however, for the almost stern directness of his first question. "Miss Beverley," he began, "will you allow me to ask you how long you have known Mr. Jocelyn Thew?"

She turned her head towards him and remained speechless for a moment. It seemed to her that she was looking into the face of a stranger. The little droop of the mouth had gone. The half-vacuous, half-bored expression had given place to something altogether new. The lines of his face had all tightened up, his eyes were hard and bright. She found herself quite unable to answer him in the manner she had intended.

"Are you asking me that question seriously, Mr. Crawshay?"

"I am," he assured her. "I have grave reasons for asking it."

"I am afraid that I do not understand you," she replied stiffly.

"You must change your attitude, if you please, Miss Beverley," Crawshay persisted. "Believe me, I am not trying to be impertinent. I am asking a question the necessity for which I am in a position to justify."

"You bewilder me!" she exclaimed.

"That is simply because you looked upon me as a different sort of person. To tell you the truth, I should very much have preferred that you continued to look upon me as a different sort of person during this voyage, but I cannot see my way clear to keep silence on this one point. I wish to inform you, if you do not know it already, that Mr. Jocelyn Thew is a dangerous person for you to know, or for you to be associated with in any shape or form." She would have risen to her feet but he stopped her.

"Please look at me," he begged.

She obeyed, half against her will.

"I want you to ask yourself," he went on, "whether you do not believe that I am your well-wisher. What I am saying to you, I am saying to save you from a position which later on you might bitterly regret."

She was conscious of a quality in his tone and manner entirely strange to her, and she found any form of answer exceedingly difficult. The anger which she would have preferred to have affected seemed, in the face of his earnestness, out of place.

"It seems to me," she said, "that you are assuming something which does not exist. I am not on specially intimate terms with Mr. Jocelyn Thew. I have not talked to him any more than to any other casual passenger."

"Is that quite honest?" he asked quietly. "Isn't it true that Jocelyn Thew is interested in your mysterious patient?"

She started.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," he replied. "I happen also to have very grave suspicions concerning the presence on this ship of Mr. Phillips and his doctor."

Her fingers gripped the side of her deck chair. She leaned a little towards him.

"What concern is all this of yours?" she demanded.

"Never mind," he answered. "I am risking more than I should like to say in telling you as much as I have told you. I cannot believe that you would consciously associate yourself with a disgraceful and unpatriotic conspiracy. That is why I have chosen to risk a great deal in speaking to you in this way. Tell me what possible consideration was brought to bear upon you to induce you to accept your present situation?"

Katharine sat quite still. The thoughts were chasing one another through her brain. Then she was conscious of a strange thing. Her companion's whole expression seemed suddenly to have changed. Without her noticing any movement, his monocle was in his left eye, his lip had fallen a little. He was looking querulously out seaward.

"I don't believe," he declared, "that the captain has any idea about the weather prospects. Look at those clouds coming up. I don't know how you are feeling, Miss Beverley, but I am conscious of a distinct chill."

Jocelyn Thew had come to a standstill before them. He was wearing no overcoat and was bare-headed.

"I guess that chill is somewhere in your imagination, Mr. Crawshay," he observed. "You are pretty strong in that line, aren't you?"

Crawshay struggled to his feet.

"I have some ideas," he confessed modestly. "I spend my idle moments, even here, weaving a little fiction."

"And recounting it, I dare say," Jocelyn ventured.

"I am like all artists," Crawshay sighed. "I love an audience. I must express myself to something. I will wish you good evening, Miss Beverley. I feel inclined to take a little walk, in case it becomes too rough later on."

He shuffled away, once more the perfect prototype of the _malade imaginaire_. Jocelyn Thew watched him in silence until he had disappeared. Then he turned and seated himself by the girl's side.

"I find myself," he remarked ruminatively, "still a little troubled as to the precise amount of intelligence which our friend Mr. Crawshay might be said to possess. I wonder if I might ask; without your considering it a liberty, what he was talking to you about?"

"About you," she answered.

"Ah!"

"Warning me against you."

"Dear me! Aren't you terrified?"

"I am not terrified," she replied, "but I think it best to tell you that he also has suspicions, absurd though it may seem, of Phillips and the doctor."

"Why not the purser and captain, while he's about it?" Jocelyn said coolly. "Every one on this boat seems to have got the nerves. They searched my stateroom this morning."

"Searched your stateroom?" she repeated. "Do you mean while you were out?"

"Not a bit of it," he replied. "They dragged me up at half-past eight this morning--the captain, purser and a steward--fetched up my trunk and searched all my possessions."

"What for?" she asked, with a sudden chill.

He smiled at her reassuringly. "Something they didn't find! Something," he added, after a slight pause, "which they never will find!"

Towards midday, Jocelyn Thew abandoned a game of shuffleboard, and, leaning against the side of the vessel, gazed steadily up at the wireless operating room. The lightnings had been playing around the mast for the last ten minutes without effect. He turned towards one of the ship's officers who was passing.

"Anything gone wrong with the wireless?" he enquired.

"The operator's ill, sir," was the prompt reply. "We've only one on board, as it happens, so we are rather in a mess."

Jocelyn strolled away aft, considering the situation. He found Crawshay seated in an elaborate deck chair and immersed in a novel.

"I hear the wireless has gone wrong," he remarked, stopping in front of him.

Crawshay glanced up blandly.

"What's that?" he demanded. "Wireless? Why, it's been going all the morning."

"There has been no one there to take the messages, though. If anything happens to us, we shall be in a nice pickle."

Crawshay shivered.

"I wish you people wouldn't suggest such things," he said, a little testily. "I was just trying to get all thought of this most perilous voyage out of my mind, with the help of a novel here. From which do you seriously consider we have most to fear," he went on, "mines, submarines, or predatory vessels of the type of the _Blucher_?"

"The latter, I should think," Jocelyn replied. "They say that submarines are scarcely venturing so far out just now."

There was a brief silence. Jocelyn Thew was apparently engaged in

trying to fit a cigarette into his holder.

"Specially hard luck on you," he remarked presently, "if anything happened when you've taken so much trouble to get on board."

"It would be exceedingly annoying," Crawshay declared, with vigour, "added to which I am not in a state of health to endure a voyage in a small boat. I have been this morning to look at our places, in case of accident. I find that I am expected to wield an oar long enough to break my back."

Jocelyn Thew smiled. The other man's peevishness seemed too natural to be assumed.

"I expect you'll be glad enough to do your bit, if anything does happen to us," he observed.

"By-the-by," Crawshay asked, "I wonder what will become of that poor fellow downstairs--the man who is supposed to be dying, I mean--if trouble comes?"

"I heard them discussing it at breakfast time," Jocelyn Thew replied. "I understand that he has asked specially to be allowed to remain where he is. There would of course be not the slightest chance of saving his life. The doctor who is with him--Gant, I think his name is--told us that anything in the shape of a rough sea, even, would mean the end of him. He quite understands this himself." Crawshay assented gravely.

"It seems a little brutal but it is common sense," he declared. "In times of great stress, too, one becomes primitive, and the primitive instinct is for the strong to save himself. I am not ashamed to confess," he concluded, "that I have secured an extra lifebelt."

Jocelyn glanced, for a moment scornfully down at the man who had now picked up his novel again and was busy reading. Crawshay represented so much the things that he despised in life. It was impossible to treat or consider him in any way as a rival to be feared. He passed down the deck and made his way below to the doctor's room. He found the latter in the act of starting off to see a patient.

"I came around to ask after Robins, the young Marconi man," Jocelyn explained. "I hear that he was taken ill last night."

The doctor looked at his questioner keenly.

"That is so," he admitted.

"What's wrong with him?"

"I have not thoroughly diagnosed his complaint as yet," was the careful reply. "I can tell you for a certainty, though, that he will not be able to work for two or three days."

"It seems very sudden," Jocelyn Thew persisted.

"As a matter of fact, I had some slight acquaintance with him, and I always thought that he was a remarkably strong young fellow."

The doctor, who had completed his preparations for departure, picked up his cap and politely showed his visitor out. "You wouldn't care," the latter suggested, "to let me go down and have a look at him? I can't call myself a medical man, but I know something about sickness and I am quite interested in young Robins."

"I don't think that I shall need a second opinion at present, thank you," the doctor rejoined, a little drily. "If you wish to see him later on, you must get permission from the captain. Good morning, Mr. Thew."

Jocelyn Thew strolled thoughtfully away, found a retired spot upon the promenade deck behind a boat, lit a very black cigar, and, drawing his field-glasses from his pocket, searched the horizon carefully. There was no sign of any passing steamer, not even the faintest wisp of black smoke anywhere upon the horizon. It was Wednesday to-day, and they had left New York on Saturday. He drew a sheet of paper from his pocket and made a few calculations. It was the day and past the time upon which things were due to happen....

The day wore on very much as most days do on an Atlantic voyage in early summer. The little handful of passengers, who seemed for the moment to have cast all anxieties to the winds, played shuffleboard and quoits, lunched with vigorous appetites, drank tea out on deck, and indulged in strenuous before-dinner promenades. The sun shone all day, the sea remained wonderfully calm. Not a trace of any other steamer was visible from morning until early nightfall, and Jocelyn Thew walked restlessly about with a grim look upon his face. At dinner time the captain hinted at fog, and looked doubtfully out of the open porthole at the oily-looking waste of waters.

"Another night on the bridge for me, I think," he remarked.

Jocelyn Thew leaned forward in his place.

"By-the-by, Captain," he asked, "now that the shipping is so reduced, do you alter speed for fog?"

The captain filled his glass from the jug of lemonade which, was always before him.

"Do we alter our speed, eh?" he repeated. "You must remember," he went on, "that we have Miss Beverley on board. We couldn't afford to give Miss Beverley a fright."

Jocelyn accepted the evasion with a slight bow. Katharine, who had come in to dine a little late and seemed graver than usual, smiled at the captain.

"Am I the most precious thing on this steamer?" she asked.

"Gallantry," the captain replied, "compels me to say yes!"

"Only gallantry? Have we such a wonderful cargo, then?"

"There are times," was the cautious reply, "when not even the captain knows exactly what he is carrying."

"You remind me," Jocelyn Thew observed, "of a voyage I once made from

Port Elizabeth to New York, with half-a-dozen I.D.B's on board, and as many detectives, watching them day and night."

The captain nodded.

"What happened?" he enquired.

"Oh, the detectives arrested the lot of them, I think, got hold of them on the last day." The captain rose from his place.

"Queer thing," he remarked, "but the law generally does come out on top."

Jocelyn followed his example a few minutes later, and Katharine purposely joined him on the way out. She led her companion to the corner where her steamer chair had been placed, and motioned him to sit by her side. They were on the weather side of the ship, with a slight breeze in their faces and a canopy over their heads which deadened sound. She leaned a little forward.

"Smoke, please." she begged. "I mean it--see."

She lit a cigarette and he followed suit.

"Not a cigar?"

He shook his head.

"I keep them for my hard thinking times."

"Then you were thinking very hard this morning?"

"I was," he admitted.

"And gazing very earnestly out of those field-glasses of yours."

"Quite true."

"Mr. Thew," she said abruptly, "it is my impression, although for some reason or other I am scarcely allowed to go near him, that Mr. Phillips is dying."

"One knew, of course, that there was that risk," Jocelyn Thew reminded her.

"I do not think that he can possibly live for twenty-four hours," she continued. "I was allowed to sit with him for a short time early this morning. He is beginning to wander in his mind, to speak of his wife and a sum of money." Jocelyn's fine eyebrows came a little closer together.

"Well?"

"Nothing in his appearance or speech indicate the man of wealth or even of birth. I begin to wonder whether I know the whole truth about this frantic desire of his to reach England before he dies?"

"I think," Jocelyn Thew said thoughtfully, "that you have been talking again to Mr. Crawshay."

"Yes," she admitted, "and he has been warning me against you."

"I suppose," Jocelyn ruminated, "the man has a certain amount of puppy-dog intelligence."

"I do not understand Mr. Crawshay at all," she confessed. "My acquaintance with him before we met on this steamer was of the slightest, but his manner of coming certainly led one to believe that he was a man of courage and determination. Since then he has crawled about in an overcoat and rubber shoes, and groaned about his ailments until one feels inclined to laugh at him. Last night he was different again. He was entirely serious, and he spoke to me about you."

"Do you need to be warned against me?" he asked grimly. "Have I ever sailed under false colours?"

"Don't," she begged, looking at him with a little quiver of the lips and a wonderfully soft light in her eyes. "You have never deceived me in any way except, if at all, as regards this voyage. I made up my mind this evening that I would ask you, if you cared to tell me, to take me into your confidence about this man who is dying down below, and his strange journey. I need scarcely add that I should respect that confidence."

"I am sorry," he answered. "You ask an impossibility."

"Then there is some sort of conspiracy going on?" she persisted. "Let me ask you a straightforward question. Is it not true that you have made me an unknowing participator in an illegal act?"

"It is," he admitted. "I was very sorry to have to do so but it was necessary. Without your assistance, I should never have been allowed to bring Phillips across the Atlantic."

"What difference do I make?" she asked.

"You lend an air of respectability and credibility to the whole thing," he told her. "You are a person of repute, of distinguished social position, and the object of a good deal of admiration in your own country. The doctor who accompanies you comes from your own hospital. No one would believe it possible that either of you could be concerned in any sort of conspiracy. If that ass Crawshay had not got on board, I am convinced that there would never have been a breath of suspicion."

She shivered a little.

"Is it quite kind to bring me into an affair of this sort?" she asked.

"It is a world," he declared cruelly, "in which we fight always for our own hand or go under. I am fighting for mine, and if I have occasionally to sacrifice a friend as well as an enemy, I do not hesitate."

"What has the world done to you," she demanded, "that you should speak so bitterly?" "Better not ask me that."

"How will the man Phillips' death affect your plans?"

"It will make very little difference either way," he assured her. "We rather expected him to die."

"And you won't take me any further into your confidence?"

"No further. Your task will be completed at Liverpool. So long as you leave this steamer in company with the doctor and the ambulance, if Phillips is still alive, you will be free to return home whenever you please."

"Very well," she said. "You see, I accept my position. I shall go through with what I have promised, whatever Mr. Crawshay may say. Won't you in return treat me, if not as a confederate, as a friend?"

He turned and looked at her, met the appealing glance of her soft eyes for a moment and looked suddenly away.

"I do not belong to the ranks of those, Miss Beverley, from whom it is well for you to choose your friends."

"But why should I not make my own choice?" she insisted. "I have always been my own mistress. I have lived with my own ideas, I have declined to be subject to any one's authority. I am an independent person. Can't you treat me as such?"

"There are facts," he said, "which can never be ignored. You belong to the world of wealthy, gently born men and women who comprise what is called Society. I belong, and have belonged all my life, to a race of outcasts." "Don't!" she begged.

"It is true," he repeated doggedly.

"But what do you mean by outcasts?"

"Criminals, if you like it better. I have broken the law more than once. There is an unexecuted warrant out against me at the present moment. You may even see me marched off this steamer at Liverpool between two policemen."

"But why?" she asked passionately. "Why? What is the motive of it all? Is it money?"

"I am not in need of money," he told her, "but I have a great and sacred use for all I can lay my fingers on. If I succeed in my present enterprise, I shall receive a hundred thousand pounds."

"I value Jerry's life and future at more than that," she declared. "Will you make a fresh start, Mr. Jocelyn Thew, with twice that sum of money to your credit?"

He shook his head, but there was a curious change creeping into his face. For the first time she saw how soft a man's dark-blue eyes may sometimes become. The slight trembling of his parted lips, too, seemed to unlock all the cruel, hard lines of his face. He had suddenly the appearance of a person of temperament--a poet, even a dreamer.

"I could not take money from you, Miss Beverley," he said, "or from any other woman in the world."

"Upon no conditions?" she whispered softly.

"Upon no conditions," he repeated.

The breeze had dropped, and twilight had followed swiftly upon the misty sunset. There was something a little ghostly about the light in which they sat. "I am stifled," she declared abruptly. "Come and walk."

They paced up and down the deck once or twice in silence. Then he paused as they drew near their chairs.

"Miss Beverley," he said, "in case this should be the last time that we talk confidentially--so that we may put a seal, in fact, upon the subject of which we have spoken to-night--I would like to tell you that you have made me feel, during this last half-hour, an emotion which I have not felt for many years. And I want to tell you this. I am a lawbreaker. When I told you that there was a warrant out against me at the present moment, I told you the truth. The charge against me is a true one, and the penalty is one I shall never pay. I must go on to the end, and I shall do so because I have a driving impulse behind, a hate which only action can soothe. But all my sins have been against men and the doings of men. You will understand me, will you not, when I say that I can neither take your money, nor accept your friendship after this voyage is over? You, on your side, can remember that you have paid a debt."

She sank a little wearily into her chair and looked out through the gathering mists. It seemed part of her fancy that they gathered him in, for she heard no sound of retreating footsteps. Yet when she spoke his name, a few moments later, she found that she was alone.

CHAPTER XII

Throughout the night reigned an almost sepulchral silence, and when the morning broke, the _City of Boston_, at a scarcely reduced speed, was ploughing her way through great banks of white fog. The decks, the promenade rails, every exposed part of the steamer, were glistening with wet. Up on the bridge, three officers besides the captain stood with eyes fixed in grim concentration upon the dense curtains of mist which seemed to shut them off altogether from the outer world. Jocelyn Thew and Crawshay met in the companionway, a few minutes after breakfast.

"I can see no object in the disuse of the hooter," Crawshay declared querulously. "Nothing at sea could be worse than a collision. We are simply taking our lives in our hands, tearing along like this at sixteen knots an hour."

"Isn't there supposed to be a German raider out?" the other enquired.

"I think it is exceedingly doubtful whether there is really one in the Atlantic at all. The English gunboats patrol these seas. Besides, we are armed ourselves, and she wouldn't be likely to tackle us."

Jocelyn Thew had leaned a little forward. He was listening intently. At the same time, one of the figures upon the bridge, his hand to his ear, turned in the same direction.

"There's some one who doesn't mind letting their whereabouts be

known," he whispered, after a moment's pause. "Can't you hear a hooter?"

Crawshay listened but shook his head.

"Can't hear a thing," he declared laconically. "I've a cold in my head coming on, and it always affects my hearing."

Jocelyn Thew stepped on tiptoe across the deck as far as the rail and returned in a few minutes.

"There's a steamer calling, away on the starboard bow," he announced. "She seems to be getting nearer, too. I wonder we don't alter our course."

"Well, I suppose it's the captain's business whether he chooses to answer or not," Crawshay remarked. "I shall go down to my cabin. This gazing at nothing gets on my nerves."

Jocelyn Thew returned to his damp vigil. Leaning over the wet wooden rail, he drew a little diagram on the back of an envelope and worked out some figures. Then he listened once more, the slight frown upon his forehead deepening. Finally he tore up his sketch and made his way to the doctor's room. The doctor was seated at his desk and glanced up enquiringly as his visitor entered.

"I just looked in to see how young Robins was getting on," Jocelyn explained.

"I am afraid he is in rather a bad way," was the grave reply.

"What is the nature of his illness?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. His manner became a little vague.

"I must remind you, Mr. Thew," he said, "that a doctor is not always at liberty to discuss the ailments of his patients. On board ship this custom becomes more, even, than mere etiquette. It is, in fact, against the regulations of the company for us to discuss the maladies of any passenger upon the steamer."

"I recognise the truth of all that you say," Jocelyn Thew agreed, "but it happens that I know the young man and his people. Naturally, therefore, I take an interest in him, and I am sure they would think it strange if, travelling upon the same steamer, I did not make these very ordinary enquiries."

"You know his people, do you?" the doctor repeated. "Where does he come from, Mr. Thew?"

"Somewhere over New Jersey way," was the glib reply, "but I used to meet his father often in New York. There can be no mystery about his

illness, can there, doctor--no reason why I should not go and see him?"

"I have placed the young man in quarantine," was the brief explanation, "and until he is released no one can go near him."

"Something catching, eh?"

"Something that might turn out to be catching."

Jocelyn Thew shrugged his shoulders and accepted what amounted almost to a little nod of dismissal. He ascended the staircase thoughtfully and came face to face with Katharine Beverley, issuing from the music room. She greeted him with a little exclamation of relief.

"Mr. Thew," she exclaimed, "I have been looking for you everywhere. Doctor Gant thinks," she added, lowering her voice, "that if you wish to see his patient alive, you had better come at once." "There is a change in his condition, then?"

"Yes," she told him gravely.

He stood for a moment thinking rapidly. The girl shivered a little as she watched the change in his face. Her hospital training had not lessened her awe and sympathy in the face of death, and it was so entirely obvious that Jocelyn Thew was considering only what influence upon his plans this event might have. Finally he turned and descended the stairs by her side.

"I am not at all sure that it is wise of me to come," he said. "However, if he is asking for me I suppose I had better."

They made their way into the commodious stateroom upon the saloon deck, which had been secured for the sick man. He lay upon a small hospital bed, nothing of him visible save his haggard face, with its ill-grown beard. His eyes were watching the door, and he showed some signs of gratification at Jocelyn's entrance. Gant, who was standing over the bed, turned apologetically towards the latter.

"It's the money," he whispered. "He is worrying about that. I was obliged to send for you. He called out your name just now, and the ship's doctor was hanging around."

The newcomer drew a stool to the side of the bed, opened a pocketbook and counted out a great wad of notes. The dying man watched him with every appearance of interest.

"Five thousand dollars," the former said at last. "That should bring in about eleven hundred and fifty pounds. Now watch me, Phillips."

He took an envelope from his pocket, thrust the notes inside, gummed down the flap, and, drawing a fountain pen from his pocket, wrote an address. The dying man watched him and nodded feebly.

"These," Jocelyn continued, "are for your wife. The packet shall be delivered to her within twelve hours of our landing in Liverpool. You can keep it under your pillow and hand it over to Miss Beverley here. You trust her?"

The man on the bed nodded feebly and turned slightly towards Katharine. She bent over him.

"I shall see myself," she promised, "that the money is properly delivered."

Phillips smiled and closed his eyes. It was obvious that he had no more to say. Jocelyn Thew stole softly out, followed, a moment later, by Katharine.

"The doctor thinks I am better away," she whispered. "He won't speak again. Poor fellow!"

Jocelyn stepped softly up the stairs and drew a little breath of relief as they reached the promenade deck without meeting any one. Both seemed to feel the desire for fresh air, and they stepped outside for a moment. There were tears in Katharine's eyes.

"Of course," she said, a little timidly, "I don't understand this at all, but it is terribly tragic. Do you think that he would have lived if he had not undertaken the journey?"

"It was absolutely impossible," her companion assured her. "He was a dying man from the moment the operation was finished."

"Will he be buried at sea?"

"I think not. He was exceedingly anxious to be buried at his home near Chester. It isn't a pleasant thing to talk about," Jocelyn went on, "but they brought his coffin on board with him. It's lying in the companionway now, covered over with a rug."

She shivered.

"It's a horrible day altogether," she declared, looking out into the seemingly endless banks of mist.

"Entirely my opinion, Miss Beverley," a voice said in her ear. "I find it most depressing--and unhealthy. And listen.--Do you hear that?"

They all listened intently. Again they could hear the hooting of a steamer in the distance.

"Between ourselves," Crawshay went on confidentially, "the captain seems to me rather worried. That steamer has been following us for hours. She is evidently waiting for the fog to lift, to see who we are."

"How does she know about us?" Katharine asked. "We haven't blown our hooter once."

"We don't need to," was the fractious reply. "That's where we are being over-careful. She can hear our engines distinctly."

"Who does the captain think she is, then?"

Crawshay's voice was dropped to a mysterious pitch, but though he leaned towards the girl, his eyes were fixed upon her companion.

"He doesn't go as far as to express a definite opinion, but he thinks that it might be that German raider--the _Blucher_, isn't it? She can steal about quite safely in the fog, and she can tell by the beat of the engines whether she is near a man-of-war or not."

Not a muscle of Jocelyn's face twitched, but there was a momentary gleam in his eyes of which Crawshay took swift note. He glanced aft to where the two seamen were standing by the side of their guns.

"If it really is the German raider," he remarked, "they might as well fire off a popgun as that thing. She is supposed to be armed with four six-inch guns and two torpedo tubes."

Crawshay nodded.

"So I told the captain. We might have a go at a submarine, but the raider would sink us in two minutes if we tried to tackle her. What a beastly voyage this is!" he went on, in a depressed tone. "I can't get over the fact that I risked my life to get on board, too."

Jocelyn Thew, with a little word of excuse, had swung around and disappeared. Katharine looked at her companion curiously.

"Do you believe that it really is the raider, Mr. Crawshay?" she enquired.

He hesitated. In Jocelyn's absence his manner seemed to undergo some subtle change, his tone to become crisper and less querulous.

"We had some reason to hope," he said cautiously, "that she was on a different course. It is just possible, however, that in changing it she might have struck this bank of fog and preferred to hang about for a time."

"What will happen if she finds us?"

"That depends entirely upon circumstances."

"I have an idea," Katharine continued, "that you know more about this matter than you feel inclined to divulge."

"Perhaps," he admitted. "Nowadays, every one has to learn discretion."

"Is it necessary with me?" "It is necessary with any friend of Mr. Jocelyn Thew," he told her didactically.

"What a suspicious person you are!" she exclaimed, a little scornfully. "You are just like all your countrymen. You get hold of an idea and nothing can shake it. Mr. Jocelyn Thew, I dare say, possesses a past. I know for a fact that he has been engaged in all sorts of adventures during his life. But--at your instigation, I suppose--they have already searched his person, his stateroom, and every article of luggage he has. After that, why not leave him alone?"

"Because he is an extremely clever person."

"Then you are not satisfied yet?"

"Not yet."

"Am I, may I ask, under suspicion?" she enquired, with faint sarcasm.

"I should not like to say," he replied glibly, "that you were altogether free from it."

She laughed heartily.

"I should not worry about the army if I were you," she advised. "I am quite sure that secret-service work is the natural outlet for your talents."

"I shouldn't be surprised," he confided, "if headquarters didn't insist upon my taking it up permanently. It will depend a little, of course, upon what success I have during this voyage."

She laughed in his face and turned away.

"I will tell you what I find so interesting about you, Mr. Crawshay," she said. "You must be either very much cleverer than you seem, or very much more foolish. You keep me continually guessing as to which it is."

CHAPTER XIII

Towards six o'clock that evening, without any apparent change in the situation, Captain Jones descended from the bridge and signalled to Crawshay, whom he passed on the deck, to follow him into his room. The great ship was still going at full speed through a sea which was as smooth as glass.

"Getting out of it, aren't we?" Crawshay enquired.

The captain nodded. His hair and beard were soaked with moisture, and there were beads of wet all over his face. Otherwise he seemed little the worse for his long vigil. In his eyes, however, was a new anxiety.

"Another five miles," he confided, "should see us in clear weather."

"Steamer's still following us, isn't she?"

"Sticking to us like a leech," was the terse reply. "She is not out of any American port. She must have just picked us up. She isn't any ordinary cargo steamer, either, or she couldn't make the speed."

"I've worked it out by your chart," Crawshay declared, "and it might very well be the Blucher. I don't think I made the altered course wide enough, and she might very well have been hanging about a bit when she struck the fog and heard our engines."

The captain lit a pipe. "I am not in the habit, as you may imagine, of discussing the conduct of my ship with any one, Mr. Crawshay," he said, "but you come to me with very absolute credentials, and it's rather a comfort to have some one standing by with whom one can share the responsibility. You see my couple of guns? They are about as

useful as catapults against the _Blucher_, whereas, on the other hand, she could sink us easily with a couple of volleys."

"Just so," Crawshay agreed. "What about speed, Captain?"

"If our reports are trustworthy, we might be able to squeeze out one more knot than she can do," was the doubtful reply, "but, you see, she'll follow us out of this last bank of fog practically within rifle range. I've altered my course three or four times so as to get a start, but she hangs on like grim death. That's what makes me so sure that it's the _Blucher_."

"Want my advice?" Crawshay asked.

"That's the idea," the captain acquiesced.

"Stoke her up, then, and drive full speed ahead. Take no notice of any signals. Make for home with the last ounce you can squeeze out of her."

"That's all very well," Captain Jones observed, "but there will be at least half an hour during which we shall be within effective range. She might sink us a dozen times over."

"Yes, but I don't think she will."

"Why not?"

"If the theory upon which I started this wild-goose chase is correct," Crawshay explained, "there is something on board this ship infinitely more valuable than the ship itself to Germany. That is why I think that she will strain every nerve to try and capture you, of course, but she will never sink you, because if she did she would lose everything her Secret Service have worked for in Germany ever since, and even before the commencement of the war."

"It's an idea," the captain admitted, with a gleam in his eyes.

"It's common sense," Crawshay urged. "When I left Halifax, I was ready to take twenty-five to one that we'd been sold. I wouldn't mind laying twenty-five to one now that what we are in search of is somewhere on board this steamer. If that is so, the _Blucher_ will never dare to sink you, because there will still remain the chance of the person on board who is in charge of the documents getting away with them at the other end, whereas down at the bottom of the Atlantic they would be of no use to any one."

"I see your point of view," the other agreed.

"Then you'd better take my tip," Crawshay continued. "There isn't a passenger on board who didn't know the risk they were running when they started, and I'm sure no one will blame you for not surrendering your ship like a dummy directly you're asked. They're a pretty sporting lot in the saloon, you know. All those newspaper men are real good fellows."

The captain's face brightened.

"Next to fighting her," he soliloquised, stroking his beard,--

"The idea of fighting her is ridiculous," Crawshay interrupted. "Look here, you haven't any time to lose. Send to the engineer and let him give it to them straight down below. I'll give a tenner apiece to the stokers, if we get clear, and if my advice turns out wrong, I'll see you through it, anyway."

"We can leg it at a trifle over nineteen knots," Captain Jones declared, as he picked up his cap, "and, anyway, anything's better than having one of those short-haired, smooth-tongued, blustering Germans on board."

He hurried off, and Crawshay followed him on deck to watch developments. Already, through what seemed to be an opening in the walls of fog, there was a vision in front of clear blue sea on which a still concealed sun was shining. Soon they passed out into a new temperature of pleasant warmth, with a skyline ahead, hard and clear. The passengers came crowding on deck. Every one leaned over the starboard rail, looking towards the place whence the sound of the hooting was still proceeding. Suddenly a steamer crept out of the fog mountain and drew clear, barely half a mile away. The first glimpse at her was final. She had cast off all disguise. Her false forecastle was thrown back, and the sun glittered upon three exceedingly formidable-looking guns, trained upon the _City of Boston_. A row of signals, already hoisted, were fluttering from her mast.

"It's the _Blucher_, by God!" Sam West muttered.

"We're nabbed!" his little friend groaned.

"Wonder what they'll do with us."

Every eye was upturned now to the mast for the answering signals. To the universal surprise, none were hoisted. The captain stood upon the bridge with his glass focussed upon the raider. He gave no orders, only the black smoke was beginning to belch now from the funnels, and little pieces of smut and burning coal blew down the deck. Jocelyn Thew, who was standing a little apart, frowned to himself. He had seen Crawshay and the captain come out of the latter's cabin together.

The blue lightnings were playing now unchecked about the top of the Marconi room. Another more imperative signal flew from the pirate ship. A minute later there was a puff of white smoke, a loud report, and a shell burst in the sea, fifty yards ahead. Crawshay edged up to where Jocelyn Thew was standing.

"This is a damned unpleasant affair," he said.

"It is," was the grim reply.

"You know it's the _Blucher_?"

"No doubt about that."

"What on earth are we up to?" Crawshay continued, in a dissatisfied tone. "We haven't even replied to her signals."

"It appears to me," Jocelyn Thew pronounced irritably, "that we are going to try and get away. I never heard of such lunacy. They can blow

us to pieces if they want to."

Crawshay shivered.

"I think," he protested, "that some one ought to remonstrate with the captain. Look, there's another shell coming! Damned ugly things!"

There was another puff of white smoke, and this time the projectile fell within a steamer's length of them, sending a great fountain of water into the air. "They are giving us plenty of warning," Jocelyn Thew observed coolly. "I suppose we shall get the next one amidships."

"I find it most upsetting," his companion declared. "I am going down to the cabin to get my lifebelt."

He turned away. Presently there was another line of signals, more shots, some across the bows of the steamer, some right over her, a few aft. Nevertheless, the _City of Boston_ stood on her course, and the distance between the two steamers gradually widened. Katharine, who had come up on deck, stood by Jocelyn Thew's side.

"Is this really the way that they shoot," she asked, "or aren't they trying to hit us?"

"They are not trying," he told her. "If they were, every shot they fired at this range would be sufficient to send us to the bottom."

"Why aren't they trying?" she persisted.

"There's a reason for that, which I can't at the moment explain," was the gloomy reply. "They want to capture us, not sink us! What I can't understand, though, is how the captain here found that out."

"How is it that you are so well-informed?" Katharine asked curiously.

"You had better not enquire, Miss Beverley. It's just as well not to know too much of these things. Here's Mr. Crawshay," he added. "Perhaps he'll tell you."

Crawshay appeared, hugging his lifebelt, on which he seated himself gingerly.

"Can't imagine what the captain's up to," he complained. "A chap who understands those little flags has just told me that they've threatened to blow us to pieces if we go on.--Here comes another shell!" he groaned. "Two to one they've got us this time!--Ugh!"

They all ducked to avoid a shower of spray. When they stood upright again, Katharine studied the newcomer for a minute critically. There was a certain air of strain about most of the passengers. Even Jocelyn Thew's firm hand had trembled, a moment ago, as he had lowered his glasses. Crawshay, seated upon his lifebelt, with a mackintosh buttoned around him, his eyeglass firmly adjusted, his mouth querulous, was not exactly an impressive-looking object. Yet she wondered.

"Give me your hand," she asked suddenly.

He obeyed at once. The fingers were cool and firm.

"Why do you pretend to be afraid?" she demanded. "You aren't in the least."

"Amateur theatricals," he replied tersely, "coupled with a certain amount of self-control. I am a cool-tempered fellow at most times.--Jove, this one's meant for us, I believe!"

They all ducked instinctively. The shell, however, fell short. Crawshay measured the distance between the two steamers with his eyes.

"Dashed if I don't believe we're giving them the slip!" he exclaimed. "I wonder why in thunder they're letting us off like this! The captain must have known something."

Jocelyn Thew turned around and looked reflectively at the speaker. For a single moment Crawshay's muscles tingled with the apprehension of danger. There was a smouldering light in the other's eyes, such a light as might gleam in the tiger's eyes before his spring. Crawshay's hand slipped to his hip pocket. So for a moment they remained. Then Jocelyn Thew shrugged his shoulders, and the tense moment was past.

"There seems to be some one on this ship," he said quietly, "who knows more than is good for him."

CHAPTER XIV

The _City of Boston_ passed through the danger zone in safety, and dropped anchor in the Mersey only a few hours later than the time of her expected arrival. Towards the close of a somewhat uproarious dinner, during which many bottles of champagne were emptied to various toasts, Captain Jones quite unexpectedly entered the saloon, and, waving his hand in response to the cheers which greeted him, made his way to his usual table, from which he addressed the little company.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have an announcement to make to which I beg you will listen with patience. Both the English and the American police, whether with reason or not, as we may presently determine, have come to the conclusion that a large number of very important documents, collected in America by the agents of a foreign power, have been smuggled across the Atlantic upon this ship, in the hope that they may eventually reach Germany. In a quarter of an hour's time, a number of plainclothes policemen will be on board. I am going to ask you, as loyal British and American subjects, to subject yourselves, without resistance or complaint, to any search which they may choose to make. I may add that my own person, luggage and cabin will be the first object of their attention." The captain, having delivered his address, left the saloon again amidst a little buzz of voices. There had probably never been a voyage across the Atlantic in which a matter of forty passengers had been treated to so many rumours and whispers of strange happenings. Sam West got up and spoke a few words, counselling the ready assent of every one there to submit to anything that was thought necessary. He briefly commented upon their unexplained but fortuitous escape from the raider, and heaped congratulations upon their captain. Very soon after he had resumed his

seat, the shrill whistle of a tug alongside indicated the arrival of visitors. A steward passed back and forth amongst the passengers with a universal request--all were asked to repair to their staterooms. Twenty-seven exceedingly alert-looking men thereupon commenced their task.

Seated upon the couch in her room, with a cup of coffee by her side and a cigarette between her lips, Katharine listened to the conversation which passed in the opposite room, the one which had been tenanted by Phillips. For some reason, the end of the voyage, instead of bringing her the relief which she had expected, had only increased her nervous excitement. She was filled with an extraordinary prescience of some coming crisis. She found herself trembling as she listened to Doctor Gant's harsh voice and the smooth accents of his interlocutor.

"Well, that completes our search of your belongings, Doctor Gant," the latter's voice observed. "Now I want to ask a few questions with reference to the Mr. Phillips who I understand died the day before yesterday under your charge." "That is so," Doctor Gant agreed. "He had no luggage, as we only made up our minds to undertake the journey with him at the last moment. The few oddments he used on the voyage, we burned."

"And the body, I understand,--"

"You can examine it at once, if you will," the doctor interrupted. "We have purposely left the coffin lid only partly screwed down. I should like to say, however, that before arranging the deceased for burial, I asked the ship's doctor to make an examination with me of the coffin and the garments which I used. He signed the certificate, and he will be ready to answer any questions."

"That seems entirely satisfactory," the detective confessed. "I will just have the coffin lid off for a few moments, and will see the doctor before I leave the ship."

The men left the room together and were absent some ten minutes. Presently the detective returned to Katharine's room, and with him came Crawshay. Katharine had discarded the nurse's costume which she had usually worn on board ship, and was wearing the black tailor-made suit in which she had expected to land. In the dim light, her pallor and nervous condition almost startled Crawshay.

"You will forgive my intrusion," he said. "I have just been explaining your presence here to Mr. Brightman, the detective, and I don't think he will trouble you for more than a few minutes."

"Please treat me exactly as the others," she begged.

The search proceeded for a few moments in silence. Then the detective looked up from the dressing case which he was examining. In his hand he held the envelope addressed to Mrs. Phillips.

"Do you mind telling me what this is, Miss Beverley?" he asked.

"It is a roll of bills," she replied, "that belonged to Mr. Phillips. I promised to see them handed over to his wife."

Brightman glanced at the address and balanced the envelope on the palm of his hand.

"It is against the law," he told her, "for a passenger to be the bearer of any sealed letter."

Katharine shrugged her shoulders.

"I am very sorry," she said, "but the packet which you have did not come from America at all. It was sealed up on board this ship at the time when I accepted the charge of its delivery. There is no letter or communication of any sort inside."

"You will not object," the detective enquired, "to my opening it?"

She frowned impatiently.

"I can assure you," she repeated, "that I saw the notes put inside an empty envelope. Mr. Crawshay will tell you that my word is to be relied upon."

"Implicitly, Miss Beverley," Crawshay pronounced emphatically, "but under the circumstances I think no harm would be done if you allowed our friend just to glance inside. The notes can easily be sealed up in another envelope."

"Just as you like," she acquiesced coolly. "You will find nothing but bills there."

Brightman tore open the envelope and glanced inside as though he did not intend further to disturb it. Suddenly his face changed. He shook out the contents upon the little table. They all three looked at the pile of papers with varying expressions. In Katharine's face there was nothing but blank bewilderment, in Crawshay's something of horror, in the detective's a faint gleam of triumph. He pressed his finger down on the heading of the first sheet of paper.

"I am not much of a German scholar," he observed. "How do you translate that, Mr. Crawshay?"

Crawshay was silent for several moments. Then in a perfectly mechanical tone he read out the heading:

"'List of our agents in New York and district who may be absolutely trusted for any enterprise.'"

There was another dead silence, a silence, on Katharine's part, of complete mental paralysis. Crawshay's face had lost all its smooth petulance. He was like a man who had received a blow.

"But I don't understand," Katharine faltered at last. "That packet has not been out of my possession, and I saw the notes put into it."

"By whom?" Crawshay demanded.

"By Mr. Phillips," she declared steadfastly, "by Mr. Phillips and Doctor Gant together."

The detective turned the envelope over in his hand.

"The bills seem to have disappeared," he observed.

"They were in that envelope," Katharine persisted. "I have never seen those papers before in my life."

Brightman's face remained immovable. One by one he slipped the papers back into the envelope, thrust them into his breast pocket, and, turning round, locked the door.

"You must forgive me if the rest of our investigations may seem unnecessarily severe, Miss Beverley," he said.

Katharine sank back upon the sofa. She was utterly bewildered by the events of the last few minutes. The search of her belongings was now being conducted with ruthless persistence. Her head was buried in her hands. She did not even glance at the contents of her trunk, which were now overflowing the room. Suddenly she was conscious of another pause in the proceedings, a half-spoken exclamation from the detective. She looked up. From within the folds of an evening gown he had withdrawn a small, official-looking dispatch box of black tin, tied with red tape, and with great seals hanging from either end.

"What is this?" he asked.

Katharine stared at it with wide-open eyes.

"I have never seen it before," she declared.

There was another painful, significant silence. Crawshay bent forward and examined the seals through his glass.

"This," he announced presently, "is the official seal of a neutral Embassy. You see how the packet is addressed?"

"I see," the detective admitted, "but, considering the way in which we have found it, you are not suggesting, I hope, that we should not open it?"

"Opened it certainly must be," Crawshay admitted, "but not by us in this manner. When you have finished your search, I should be glad if you will bring both packets with you to the captain's room."

Brightman silently resumed his labours. Nothing further, however, was found. The two men stood up together.

"Miss Beverley," Brightman began gravely,--

Crawshay laid his hand upon the man's arm.

"Wait for a moment," he begged. "I wish to have a few words with you outside. We shall be back before long, Miss Beverley."

The two men disappeared. Katharine, with a sinking of the heart, heard the key turn on the outside of her stateroom. She watched the lock slip into its place with an indescribable sense of humiliation. She had been guilty--of what?

She lost count of time, but it was certain that only a few minutes

could have passed before a strange thing happened. The sight of that lock, which seemed somehow to shut her off from the world of reasonable, honest men and women, had fascinated her. She was sitting watching it, her chin resting upon her hands, something of the horror still in her eyes, when without sound, or any visible explanation, she saw it glide back to its place. The door was opened and closed. Jocelyn Thew was standing in her stateroom.

"You?" she exclaimed.

"I am not disappointed in you, I am sure," he said softly. "You will keep still. You will not say a word. I have risked the whole success of a great enterprise to come and say these few words to you. I am ashamed and sorry for what you are suffering, but I want to tell you this. Nothing serious will happen--nothing serious can happen to you. Everything is not as it seems. Will you believe that? Look at me. Will you believe that?"

She raised her eyes. Once more there was that change in his face which had seemed so wonderful to her. The blue of his eyes was soft, his mouth almost tremulous. She answered him almost as though mesmerised.

"I will believe it," she promised.

As silently and mysteriously as he had come, he turned and left her. She watched the latch. She saw the lock creep silently once more into its place. She heard no movement outside, but Jocelyn Thew had gone.

During the few remaining minutes of her solitude, Katharine felt a curious change in the atmosphere of the little disordered stateroom, in her own dazed and bruised feelings. She seemed somehow to be playing a part in a little drama which had nothing to do with real life. All her fears had vanished. She rose from her place, smoothed her disordered hair carefully, bathed her temples with eau-de-cologne, adjusted her hat and veil, and, turning on the reading lamp, opened a novel. She actually managed to read a couple of pages before there was a knock at the door and the two men reappeared. She laid down her book and greeted them quite coolly.

"Well, have you come to pronounce sentence upon me?" she asked.

"Our authority scarcely goes so far," Brightman replied. "I am going on shore now, Miss Beverley, to fetch the consul of the country to which this packet is addressed. It will be opened in his presence. In the meantime, Mr. Crawshay has given his parole for you. You will therefore be free of the ship, but it will be, I am afraid, my duty to ask you to come with me to the police station for a further examination, on my return."

"I am sure I shall like to come very much," she said sweetly, "but if you go on asking me questions forever, I am afraid you won't come any nearer solving the problem of how that box got into my trunk, or how those bills got changed into those queer-looking little slips of papers. However, that of course is your affair."

The detective departed with a stiff bow. Crawshay, however, lingered.

"Aren't you going with your friend?" she asked him.

He ignored the question.

"Miss Beverley," he said, "you will forgive me saying that I find the present position exceedingly painful."

"Why?" she demanded. "I don't see how you are suffering by it."

"It was at my instigation," he went on, "that suspicion was first directed against your travelling companions. I am convinced that the first idea was to get these documents off the ship upon the person of Phillips, if alive, or in his coffin if dead. The instigators of this abominable conspiracy have taken fright and have made you their victim. Certainly," he went on, "it was a shrewd idea. I myself suggested to Brightman that your things might remain undisturbed. But for the finding of that envelope, your trunk would certainly not have been opened. You see the position I have placed myself in. I am driven to ask you a question. Did you know of the presence of those papers and dispatch box amongst your belongings?"

"I had no idea of it," she answered fervently.

He drew a little breath of relief.

"You realise, of course," he went on, "that there is only one man who could have placed them there?"

"And who is that?" she enquired.

"Jocelyn Thew."

"And why do you single him out?"

"Because," Crawshay told her patiently, "we had evidence in America to show that he was working with our enemies. It is true that he has not been associated to any extent with the German espionage system in America, but he has been well-known always as a reckless adventurer, ready to sell his life in any doubtful cause, so long as it promised excitement and profit. It was known to us that he had come into touch with a certain man in Washington who has been looking after the interests of his country in America. It was to shadow Jocelyn Thew that I came on this steamer. His friends cleverly fooled Hobson and me, and landed us in Chicago too late, as they thought, to catch the boat. That is why I made that somewhat melodramatic journey after you on the seaplane. Do please consider this matter reasonably, Miss Beverley. It was perfectly easy for him to slip across and place these things in your luggage as soon as he found that his original scheme was likely to go wrong. You were the one person on the steamer whom he reckoned would be safe from suspicion. You were part of his plot from the very first, and no more than that."

"I cannot believe this," she said slowly.

Crawshay's face darkened.

"It is no business of mine, Miss Beverley," he declared, "but if you will forgive my saying so, you must be infatuated by this man. The evidence is perfectly clear. You are a prominent citizeness of a great country, and you have been made an accessory to an act of treason against that country. Yet, with plain facts in my hands, it seems

impossible for me to shake your faith in this person. What is the reason of it? What hold had he upon you that he should have induced you to leave your work and your home and betray your country?"

"He has no hold upon me at all," she replied indignantly. "Since you are so persistent, I will tell you the truth. I once saw him do a splendid thing, a deed which saved me from great unhappiness."

"There we have it then at last!" Crawshay exclaimed eagerly. "You are under obligations to him."

"I certainly am," she acknowledged.

"And he has taken advantage of it," Crawshay continued, "to make you his tool."

"Whatever he has done," she replied, "rests between Jocelyn Thew and me. I am not in the least disposed to excuse myself or to beg for mercy from you. If you represent the law, directly or indirectly, I do not ask for any favours. I shall be perfectly ready to go to your police station whenever I am sent for." There was a knock at the door. They both turned around. In reply to Katharine's mechanical "Come in," Jocelyn Thew entered.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "was I mistaken or did I hear my name?"

"We were speaking of you," Crawshay admitted, turning towards him, "but I do not think that either Miss Beverley or I have anything to say to you at the moment."

"That's rather a pity," was the cool reply, "because you may not see me again. I was looking for Miss Beverley, in fact, to say good-by. We are docking in half an hour, and those who have been searched can go on shore, if they like to leave their hold luggage. As I have been searched twice in the most thorough and effective fashion, I have my pass out."

"You mean that you are going away altogether to-night?" Katharine exclaimed.

"Only so far as the Adelphi," he told her. "I have some friends to see who live near Liverpool, so I shall probably stay there for two or three days."

"I was coming to look for you on deck presently," Crawshay intervened, "but if your departure is so imminent, I will say what I have to say to you here."

"That would seem advisable," Jocelyn Thew agreed.

"I think it is only right that you should know, sir," Crawshay continued, "that a very serious position has arisen here in which Miss Beverley is unfortunately involved. Incriminating documents have been found in her luggage, placed there obviously by some unscrupulous person, who was in search of a safe hiding-place."

"Is this true?" Jocelyn Thew asked, looking past Crawshay to Katharine.

"I am afraid that it is," she assented.

"The person who placed them there," Crawshay proceeded, the anger gathering in his tone, "may believe for the present that he has been able to escape from his dangerous position by this dastardly attempt to incriminate a woman. He may, on the other hand, find that his immunity will last but a very short time."

Jocelyn Thew nodded in calm acquiescence.

"I am at a loss," he said, "to account for your somewhat melodramatic tone, but I really do not think that Miss Beverley has very much to fear."

"There I agree with you," Crawshay declared. "She has not so much to fear as the criminal who is responsible for what has happened. He may think that he has escaped by saddling his crime upon a woman's shoulders. On the other hand, he may discover that this attempt, which only aggravates his position, will turn out to be futile."

Jocelyn Thew held out his hand towards Katharine.

"Really," he said, "the tone of this conversation takes one back to the atmosphere of the dear old Drury Lane melodrama. I feel, somehow or other," he went on, looking into Katharine's eyes, "that our friend here has cast me for the part of the villain and you for the injured heroine. I am wondering whether I dare ask you for a farewell greeting?"

Katharine did not hesitate for a moment. Her shapely, ringless hand was grasped firmly by his brown, lean fingers. She felt the pressure of a signet ring, the slight tightening of his grip as he leaned a little towards her. Again she was conscious of that feeling of exuberant life and complete confidence which had transformed her whole and humiliating situation so short a time ago.

"The injured heroine is always forgiving," she declared,--"even though she may have nothing to forgive. Good-by, Mr. Thew, and good fortune to you!"

CHAPTER XV

The morning--grey, slightly wet--broke upon Liverpool docks, the ugliest place in the ugliest city of Europe. A thin stream of people descended at irregular intervals down the gangway from the _City of Boston_ to the dock, and disappeared in various directions. Amongst the first came a melancholy little procession--a coffin carried by two ship's stewards, with Doctor Gant in solitary attendance behind. After the passengers came a sprinkling of the ship's officers, all very smart and in a great hurry. Then there was a pause of several hours. About midday, two men--Brightman and a stranger--came down the covered way into the dock and boarded the steamer. They were shown at once into the captain's room, where Crawshay and Captain Jones were awaiting them.

"This," Brightman said, introducing his companion, "is Mr. Andelsen. I was

fortunate enough to find him on the point of leaving for London."

Mr. Andelsen shook hands and accepted a chair. Upon the table in front of the captain was the sealed dispatch box. Crawshay had a suggestion to make.

"I think," he said, "that Miss Beverley should be here herself when this is opened."

"I have no objection," Brightman assented.

The captain rang for his steward and sent down a message. Mr. Andelsen--a tall, thin man, dressed in a sombre grey suit--handled the seals for a moment, looked at the address of the box, and shook his head.

"I could not take upon myself the responsibility of opening this," he declared. "It is certainly the seal of the Embassy of my country, but the box is addressed specifically to our Foreign Secretary at the Capital."

"We quite appreciate that," Crawshay admitted. "The captain, I believe, is not asking you to break it. We simply wish you to be present while we do so, in order to prove that no disrespect is intended to your country, and in order that you yourself may have an opportunity of taking a note of the contents."

"So long as it is understood that I am only here as a witness," the consul acquiesced, a little doubtfully, "I am quite willing to remain."

Katharine was presently ushered in. She was dressed for landing in a smart tailor-made suit, and her appearance was entirely cheerful. Crawshay stepped forward and handed her a chair.

"Dear me," she said, "this all seems very formidable! Am I under arrest or anything?"

"The captain is about to open the dispatch box found in your trunk, Miss Beverley," Crawshay explained, "in the presence of Mr. Andelsen here, who represents the country whose seals are attached. I have already expressed my opinion that this box has been surreptitiously placed amongst your belongings, and although, of course, our chief object was to gain possession of it, I regret very much the position in which you are placed."

"You are very kind, Mr. Crawshay," she rejoined, without much feeling. "It is certainly a fact that I never saw the box before it was dragged out of my trunk yesterday."

The captain broke the seals, untied the tape, and with a chisel and hammer knocked the top off the box. They all, with the exception of Katharine, gathered around him breathlessly as he shook out the contents on to the table. They were all sharers in the same shock of surprise as the neatly folded packets of ordinary writing paper were one by one disclosed. Crawshay seized one and dragged it to the light. The captain kept on picking them up and throwing them down again. Brightman mechanically followed his example.

"The whole thing's a bluff!" Crawshay exclaimed. "These sheets of paper are all blank! There isn't any trace even of invisible ink."

The consul rose to his feet with a heavy frown.

"This is a very obvious practical joke," he said angrily. "It seems a pity that I should have been compelled to miss my train to town."

"A practical joke!" the captain repeated. "If it is I'm damned if I understand the point of it!"

"Give me the envelope which held the notes," Crawshay demanded.

The captain unlocked his safe and produced it. Crawshay glanced through some of the documents hastily.

"These are all bogus, too!" he exclaimed. "There are no such streets as this in New York--no such names. The whole thing's a sell!"

"But what the--what in thunder does it all mean?" the captain demanded, pulling himself up as he glanced towards Katharine.

Brightman, who had scarcely spoken a word, leaned across the table.

"Probably," he said drily, "it means that some one a little cleverer than us has got away with the real stuff whilst we played around with this rubbish."

"But how?" Crawshay expostulated. "Not a soul has left this ship who hasn't been searched to the skin. The luggage in the hold is going out trunk by trunk, after every cubic foot has been ransacked. We have had a guard at every gangway since we were docked."

There was a knock at the door. The ship's doctor entered. He glanced at the little company and hesitated.

"I beg your pardon, Captain," he said, "could I have a word with you?"

The captain moved towards the threshold.

"Ship's business, Doctor?"

"It's just a queer idea of mine about these papers," the doctor confessed. "It's perhaps scarcely worth mentioning--"

"You'd better come in and tell us about it," the captain insisted. "That's what we're all talking about at the present moment."

Crawshay closed the door behind the newcomer, whose manner was still to some extent apologetic.

"It's really rather a mad idea," the latter began, "and I understand you found a part of what you were searching for, at any rate. But you know the man Phillips, who'd been operated upon for appendicitis--your patient, Miss Beverley, who died during the voyage?"

"What about him?" the captain demanded.

"Just one thing," the Doctor continued. "There was no doubt whatever that he had been operated upon for appendicitis, there was no doubt about the complications, there was no doubt about his death. I helped Doctor Gant--who seemed a very reasonable person, and who is known to me as one of the physicians at Miss Beverley's hospital--in various small details, and at his request I went over the clothing of the dead man and even knocked

the coffin to see that it hadn't a double bottom. Doctor Gant appeared to welcome investigation in every shape and form, and yet, now that it's all over, there is one curious thing which rather bothers me."

"Get on with it, man," the captain admonished. "Can't you see that we're all in a fever about this business?"

The doctor produced from his pocket a small strip of very fine quality bandaging.

"It's just this," he explained. "They left this fragment of bandaging in the stateroom. Phillips was bound up with it around the wound, as was quite natural, but it isn't ordinary stuff, you see. It's made double like a tube, with silk inside. He must have had a dozen yards of this around his leg and side, which of course was not disturbed. It's a horrible idea to a layman, I know," he went on, turning apologetically to Katharine,--

"Captain, will you send at once for the steward," Crawshay interrupted, "who carried the coffin out?"

The captain sent a message to the lower deck. Katharine was leaning a little forward, intensely interested.

"Perhaps, Miss Beverley, you can throw some light upon this?" the former enquired--"in your capacity as nurse, I mean."

She shook her head.

"I am sorry that I cannot," she replied. "As a matter of fact, I was never allowed to touch the bandages. Doctor Gant did all that himself."

"Have you ever seen any bandaging of this sort?" Brightman asked, showing her the fragment which he had taken from the doctor's fingers.

"Never."

Crawshay drew a little breath between his teeth. He was on the point of speech when a steward knocked at the door. The captain called him in.

"Harrison," he asked, "were you one of the stewards who was looking after Doctor Gant?"

"Yes, sir," the man replied.

"You helped to carry the coffin out, didn't you?"

"That's so, sir. We were off at six o'clock this morning."

"Was there a hearse waiting?"

The steward shook his head.

"There was a big motor car outside, sir. We put the coffin in that and the doctor drove off with it--said he was to take it down to the place where the man had lived, for burial."

"Do you know where that was?"

"No idea, sir."

The captain glanced towards Brightman.

"Do you want to ask the man any questions?"

"Questions? No, sir!" the detective replied bitterly. "We've been done--that's all there is about it. Never mind, they've only got six hours' start. We'll have that car traced, and--"

"Does any one know what time Mr. Jocelyn Thew left the steamer?" Crawshay interrupted.

"He got away last night," the steward replied. "There were three or four of them went up to the Adelphi to sleep. Some of them came back for their baggage this morning, but I haven't seen Mr. Jocelyn Thew."

Katharine rose to her feet. Her tone and expression were impenetrable.

"Am I still suspect?" she asked.

Crawshay glanced at Brightman, who shook his head.

"There is no charge against you. Miss Beverley," he admitted stiffly. "So far as I am concerned, you are at liberty to leave the ship whenever you please."

She held out her hand to the captain.

"I can't make up my mind, Captain," she said, smiling at him delightfully, "as to what sort of a voyage I have had on this steamer, but I do congratulate you on that escape from the raider. Good-by!"

Crawshay walked with her along the deserted deck as far as the gangway.

"I am afraid I cannot offer my escort any further, Miss Beverley," he regretted. "I must have a little conversation with Brightman here."

"Of course," she answered. "I quite understand. Perhaps we may meet in London. It seems a pity, doesn't it," she went on sympathetically, "that that wonderful voyage of yours was taken for nothing? Some one on this ship has been very clever indeed."

"Some one has," Crawshay replied bitterly, "and you and I both know who it is, Miss Beverley. But," he went on, holding the gangway railing as she turned to descend, "it's only the first part of the game that's over. Our friend has won on the sea, but I have an idea that we shall have him on land. We shall have him yet, and we'll catch him red-handed if I have anything to do with it. Will you wish us luck?"

She turned and looked at him. Her lips parted as though she were about to speak. Instead she broke into a little laugh, and, turning away, descended the gangway. From the dock she looked up again at Crawshay.

"Do come and look me up if you are in town," she begged. "I shall stay at Claridge's, and I shall be interested to hear how you get on."

CHAPTER XVI

The _City of Boston_ docked in Liverpool on Sunday night. On Tuesday, at five o'clock in the afternoon, Crawshay, who had been waiting at Euston Station for a quarter of an hour or so, almost dragged Brightman out of the long train which drew slowly into the station.

"We'll take a taxi somewhere," the former said. "It's the safest place to talk in. Any other luggage?"

"Only the bag I'm carrying," the detective replied. "I have got some more stuff coming up, if you want me to keep on this job."

"I think I shall," Crawshay told him. "I want to hear how you got on. I gathered from your first telegram that you were on the track. Where did you mean to stay?"

"I've no choice."

"The Savoy, then," Crawshay decided. "Jocelyn Thew is staying there, and you may be able to keep an eye on him. Here we are. Taxi?--Savoy!--Now, Brightman."

"You don't want me to make a long story of it, sir," Brightman observed, as they drove off.

"Just the things that count, that's all."

"Well, we got on the track of the car all right," the detective began, "and traced it to a small village called Frisby, the other side of Chester, and to the house of a Mrs. Phillips, a woman in poor circumstances who had just removed from Liverpool. She was the widow, all right. She showed us letters, and plenty of them, from her husband in New York. It appears that Gant alone had brought the coffin, which was left at the cemetery, and the funeral will have taken place t his afternoon. Mrs. Phillips was full of his praises, and it seems that he had paid her over the whole of the money you spoke about--five thousand dollars."

"There was no chicanery so far, then," Crawshay observed. "The man was dead, of course?"

"Absolutely," Brightman declared, "and his death seems to have taken place exactly according to the certificate. Here comes the point, however. With the aid of the local police and the doctor whom we called in, the bandage around the wound was removed. We found in its place a perfectly fresh one, bought in Liverpool, not in the least resembling the silk-lined fragment which the ship's doctor brought into the cabin."

Crawshay looked gloomily out of the window.

"Well, I imagine that that settles the question of how the papers got into England," he sighed.

"Our job, I suppose," the detective reminded him, "is to see that they don't get out again."

"Precisely!"

"In a sense," Brightman continued, "that is a toughish job, isn't it, because whoever has them now can make as many copies as he chooses, and one set would be certain to get through."

"As against that," Crawshay explained, "some of the most valuable documents are signed letters, of which only the originals would be worth anything. There are also some exceedingly complicated diagrams of New York harbours, a plan of all the battleships in existence and projected, a wonderful submarine destroyer, and a new heavy gun. These things are very complicated, and to carry conviction must be in the original. Besides that," he added, dropping his voice, "there is the one most important thing of all, but of which as yet no one has spoken, and of which I dare scarcely speak even to you."

"Is it in the shape of a drawing?" Brightman asked.

"It is not," was the whispered reply. "It is a letter, written by the greatest man in one of the greatest countries in the world, to the greatest personage in Europe. There is a secret reward offered of half a million dollars for the return of that letter alone."

"The affair seems worth looking into," Brightman remarked, stroking his little black moustache.

"I can promise you that the governments on both sides will pay handsomely," Crawshay assured him. "I have had my chance but let it slip. You know I had my training at Scotland Yard, but out in the States I found that I simply had to forget all that I knew. Their methods are entirely different from ours, and you see what a failure I have made of it. I have let them get away with the papers under my very nose."

"I can't see that you were very much to blame, Mr. Crawshay," the detective observed. "It was a unique trick, and very cleverly worked out."

They had turned off the main thoroughfare and were now brought to a standstill in the courtyard leading to the Savoy. Suddenly Crawshay gripped his companion by the arm and directed his attention to a man who was buying some roses in the florist's shop.

"You see that man?" he said. "Watch him carefully. I'll tell you why when we get inside."

The eyes of Mr. Brightman and Jocelyn Thew met over the gorgeous cluster of red roses which the girl was in the act of removing from the window, and from that moment the struggle which was to come assumed a different character. Brightman's thin mouth seemed to have tightened until the line of red had almost disappeared. There was a flush upon his sallow cheeks. The hand which was gripping his walking stick went white about the knickles. But in Jocelyn Thew there was no change save a little added glitter in the eyes. There was nothing else to indicate that the recognition was mutual.

"Well, what about him?" Brightman asked, as their taxicab moved on. "What does he call himself?"

"Mr. Jocelyn Thew is his name," Crawshay replied. "He was on the steamer. It is he, and not Gant, whom we have to make for. The plot which we have to unravel, which Gant and Phillips, and, unwittingly, Miss Beverley carried through, was of his scheming."

"Mr. Jocelyn Thew," the detective repeated as they passed through the swing doors. "So that is how he calls himself now!"

"You know him?"

"Know him!" Brightman repeated bitterly. "The last time I saw him I could have sworn that I had him booked for Sing Sing prison. He got out of it, as he always has done. Some one else paid. It was the greatest failure I had when I was in the States. So he is in this thing, is he?"

"He is not only very much in it," Crawshay replied, "but he is the brains of the whole expedition. He is the man to whom Gant delivered those documents some time last night."

They found two easy-chairs in the smoking room and ordered cocktails. Mr. Brightman sat forward in his chair. He was one of those men whose individuality seems to rise to any call made upon it. He was indifferently dressed, by no means good-looking, and he had started life as a policeman. Just now, however, he seemed to sink quite naturally into his surroundings. Nothing about his appearance seemed worthy of note except the determination of his very dogged mouth.

"I accepted your commission a short time ago, Mr. Crawshay," he said, "with the interest which one always feels in Government business of a remunerative character. I tell you now that I would have taken it on eagerly if there had not been a penny hanging to it. I can't tell you exactly why I feel so bitterly about him, but if I can really get my hands on to the man who calls himself Jocelyn Thew, it will be one of the happiest days of my life."

"You really know something about him, then? He really is a bad lot?" Crawshay asked eagerly.

"The worst that ever breathed," Brightman declared, "the bravest, coolest, best-bred scoundrel who ever mocked the guardians of the law. Mind you, I am not saying that he hasn't done other things. He has travelled and fought in many countries, but when he comes back to civilisation he can't rest. The world has to hear of him. Things move in New York underground. The moment he takes rooms at the Carlton-Ritz, things happen in a way that they have never happened before, and we know that there's genius at the back of it all, and Jocelyn Thew smiles in our faces. I tell you that if anything could have kept me in America, although I very much prefer Liverpool, the chance of laying my hands on this man would have done it."

Through the swing doors, almost as Brightman had concluded his speech, came Jocelyn Thew. He was dressed in light tweeds, carefully fashioned by an English tailor. His tie and collar, his grey Homburg hat with its black band, his beautifully polished and not too new brown shoes, were exactly according to the decrees of Bond Street. He seemed to be making his way to the bar, but at the sight of them he paused and strolled across the room towards them.

"Getting your land legs, Mr. Crawshay?" he enquired.

"Pretty well, thank you. You finished your business in Liverpool quickly, I see."

"More urgent business brought me to London. I dined and spent last evening,

by-the-by, with Doctor Gant--the doctor who was in attendance upon that poor fellow who died on the way over."

"A very ingenious gentleman," Crawshay observed drily.

"Ah! you appreciate that, do you?" Jocelyn Thew replied, with a faint smile. "You should go and cultivate his acquaintance. He is staying over at the Regent Palace Hotel."

"One doesn't always attach oneself to the wrong person, Mr. Thew."

"Even the stupidest people in the world," Jocelyn Thew agreed, "can scarcely make mistakes all the time, can they? By the way," he went on, turning towards the detective, "is it my fancy or have I not had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Brightman in America? I fancied so when I saw him board the steamer in the Mersey on Sunday, but it did not fall to my lot to receive the benefit of his offices."

"I was just telling Mr. Crawshay that I had had the pleasure of professional dealings with you," Brightman said drily. "I was also lamenting the fact that they had not ended according to my desires."

"Mr. Brightman was always ambitious," the newcomer observed, with gentle satire. "He is, I am sure, a most persevering and intelligent member of his profession, but he flies high."

"I am much obliged for your commendation," Brightman said bluntly. "As regards professions, I was just explaining to Mr. Crawshay that you were almost at the top of the tree in yours."

"If you have discovered my profession," Jocelyn Thew replied, "you have succeeded where my dearest friends have failed. Pray do not make a secret of it, Mr. Brightman."

"I have heard you called an adventurer," was the prompt reply.

"It is a term with which I will not quarrel," Jocelyn declared. "I certainly am one of those who appreciate adventures, who have no pleasure in sitting down in these grey-walled, fog-hung cities, and crawling about with one's nose on the pavements like a dog following an unclean smell. No, that has not been my life. I have sought fortune in most quarters of the globe, sometimes found it and sometimes lost it, sometimes with one weapon in my hand and sometimes with another. So perhaps you are right, Mr. Brightman, when you call me an adventurer."

"These very uncomfortable times," Crawshay remarked, "rather limit the sphere in which one may look for stirring events."

"You are wrong, believe me," Jocelyn Thew replied earnestly. "The stories of the Arabian Nights would seem tame, if one had the power of seeing what goes on around us in the most unsuspected places. But we are digressing. Mr. Brightman and I were speaking together. It occurred to me, from what he said, that he has not quite the right idea as to my aspirations, as to the place I desire to fill in life. I shall try to give him an opportunity to form a saner judgment."

"It will give me the utmost pleasure to accept it," the detective confessed, with ill-concealed acerbity.

Jocelyn Thew sighed lightly. He had seated himself upon the arm of a neighbouring easy-chair and was resting his hand upon the head of a cane he was carrying.

"If our friend Brightman here has a fault," he said, "in the execution of his daily duties, it is that he brings to bear into his task a certain amount of prejudice, from which the mind of the ideal detector of crime should be free. Now you would scarcely believe it, Mr. Crawshay, I am sure, to judge from his amiable exterior, but Mr. Brightman is capable of very strong dislikes, of one of which, alas! I am the object. Now this is not as it should be. You see what might happen, supposing Mr. Brightman were engaged to watch a little coterie, or, in plainer parlance, a little gang of supposed misdemeanants. If by any possible stretch of his imagination he could connect me with them, I should be the one he would go for all the time, and although I perhaps carry my fair burden of those peccadilloes to which the law, rightly or wrongly, takes exception, still, in this particular instance I might be the innocent one, and in Mr. Brightman's too great eagerness to fasten evil things upon me, the real culprit might escape.--Thank you, Mr. Crawshay," he added, accepting the cocktail which the waiter had presented. "Let us drink a little toast together. Shall we say 'Success to Mr. Brightman's latest enterprise, whatever it may be!'"

Crawshay glanced at his companion.

"I think we can humour our friend by drinking that toast, Brightman," he said.

"I shall drink it with great pleasure," the detective agreed.

They set down their empty glasses. Jocelyn Thew rose regretfully to his feet.

"I fear," he said, "that I must tear myself away. We shall meet again, I trust. And, Mr. Brightman, a word with you. If you are in town for a holiday, if you have no business to worry you just at present, why not practise on me for a time? Watch me. Find out the daily incidents of my life. See what company I keep, where I spend my spare time--you know--and all the rest of it. I can assure you that although I am not the great criminal you fancy me, I am a most interesting person to study. Take my advice, Mr. Brightman. Keep your eye upon me."

They watched him on the way to the door--a little languid but exceedingly pleasant to look upon, exceedingly distinguished and prepossessing. A look of half unwilling admiration crept into Brightman's face.

"Whatever that man really may be," he declared, "he is a great artist."

The swing door leading from the room into the cafe was pushed open, and a woman entered. She stood for a moment looking around until her eyes fell upon Jocelyn Thew. Crawshay suddenly gripped the detective's arm.

"Is there anything for us in this, my friend?" he whispered. "Watch Jocelyn Thew's face!"

CHAPTER XVII

For a few seconds Jocelyn Thew was certainly taken aback. His little start, his look of blank astonishment, were coupled with a certain loss of poise which Crawshay had been quick to note. But, after all, the interlude was brief enough.

"Exactly what does this mean, Nora?" he demanded.

Her vivid brown eyes were fastened upon his face, eager to understand his attitude, a little defiant, a little appealing. There was nothing to be gathered from his expression, however. After that first moment he was entirely himself--well-mannered, unemotional, cold.

"I came over on the _Baltic_," she explained, "I guessed I'd find you here. Fourteenth Street was getting a little sultry. The old man hopped it to San Francisco the day you left."

"Sit down," he invited.

They found places on a lounge and were served with cocktails. The girl sipped hers disapprovingly.

"Rum stuff, this," she declared. "I guess I'll have to get my shaker out."

"You are staying here, then?" he enquired.

"Why not?" she replied, with a faint note of truculence in her tone. "You know I'm not short of money, and I guessed it was where I should find you."

He raised his eyebrows.

"That is very nice and companionable of you," he said, "and naturally I shall be very glad to be of any assistance possible whilst you are over here, but I hope you will remember, Nora, that I did not encourage you to come."

"I'm wise enough about that," she admitted. "I never expected you to care two pins whether you ever saw me again or not, and I know quite well," she went on hastily, "that I haven't any right to follow you, or anything of that sort. But honestly, Mr. Thew, we were being watched down there, and New York wasn't exactly healthy."

He nodded.

"Yes," he assented, "no doubt you are right. They have awkward methods of cross-examination there, although I don't think they'd get much out of you, Nora."

"I'd no fancy to have them try," she admitted. "Besides, I've never had that trip to Europe that uncle and I were always talking about, and it seemed to me that if I wanted to see the old country whole, now or never was the time. You may all be a German colony over here by next year."

"I have no right or any desire," he told her quietly, "to interfere in any way with your plans, but I must warn you that just at present I am living in the utmost jeopardy. I have no friends to whom I can introduce you, nor any of my own time or attentions to offer. Unless you choose to exercise tact, I might find your presence here not only embarrassing but a positive hindrance to my plans."

"I guess I can lie close," she replied, looking at him through half-closed eyes. "Just how am I to size that up, though?"

He looked at her appraisingly, a little cruelly. The effect of her beautiful figure was almost ruined by the cheap and unbecoming clothes in which she was attired. Her hat, with its huge hatpins and ultra-fashionable height, was hideous. She exuded perfumes. Her silk stockings and suede shoes were the only reasonable things about her. The former she was displaying with some recklessness as she leaned back upon the settee.

"I once told you," he said calmly, "that there was no woman in the world for whom I felt the slightest affection."

"Well?"

"That is no longer the case."

Her eyes glittered.

"Who is she?"

"It is not necessary for you to know," he answered coldly. "She happens, however, to be concerned in the business which I have on hand. She has been of great assistance to me, and she may yet be the means of helping me to final success. I cannot afford to have her upset by any false impressions."

She looked at him almost wonderingly.

"If you're not the limit!" she exclaimed. "Nothing matters to you except to succeed. You tell me in one breath that you care for a woman for the first time in your life, and in the next you speak of using her as your tool!"

"You perhaps find that incomprehensible," he observed. "I do not blame you. At present, however, I have only one object in life, and that is to succeed in the business I have on hand. Whatever I may find it necessary to do to attain my ends, I shall do."

She had gone a little pale, and her white teeth were holding down her full under lip.

"Buy me another cocktail," she demanded.

He obeyed, and she drank it at a gulp.

"So you are not going to be nice to me?" she asked in a low tone.

"That depends upon what you call nice," he answered. "I am rather up against a blank wall. Even if I succeed, I remain in this country at very considerable personal danger. I am not sure that even for your sake, Nora, it is well for you to associate with me. Why not go home? You'll find some of your people still there--and an old sweetheart or two, very likely."

"It isn't a very warm welcome," she remarked, a little wistfully.

"You have taken me by surprise," he reminded her. "I had not the slightest idea of your coming."

"I know that," she sighed. "I suppose I ought not to have hoped for

anything more. You've never been any different to me than to any of the others. You treat us all, men and women, just alike. You are gracious or cold, just according to how much we can help. I sometimes wonder, Mr. Jocelyn Thew, whether you have a heart at all."

For a single moment he looked at her kindly. His hand even patted hers. It was a curious revelation. He was a kindly ordinary human being.

"Ah, Nora," he said, "I am not quite so bad as that! But for many years I have had a great, driving impulse inside me, and at the back of it the most wonderful incentive in all the world. You know what that is, Nora--or perhaps you don't. To a woman it would be love, I suppose. To a man it is hate."

She drew a little further away from him, as though something which had flamed in his eyes for a moment had frightened her.

"Yes," she murmured, "you are like that."

Jocelyn Thew was himself again almost at once.

"Since we understand one another, Nora," he said, a little more kindly, "let me tell you that I am really very glad to see you, although you did give me rather a shock just now. I want you, if you will, to turn your head to the left. You see those two men--one seated in the easy-chair and the other on its arm?"

"I see them."

"They are the two men," he continued, "who are out to spoil my show if they can. You may see them again under very different circumstances."

"I shan't forget," she murmured. "The dark one looks like Brightman, the detective you were up against in that Fall River business--the man who believed that you were the High Priest of crime in New York."

"You have a good memory," he remarked. "It is the same man."

"And the other," she continued, with a sudden added interest in her tone--"Why, that's the Englishman who had me turned off from the hotel in Washington. Don't you remember, I went there for a month on trial as telephone operator, just before the election? You remember why. That Englishman was always dropping in. Used to bring me flowers now and then, but I felt certain from the first he was suspicious. He got me turned off just as things were getting interesting."

"Right again," Jocelyn Thew told her. "His name is Crawshay. He is the man who was sent out from Scotland Yard to the English Embassy. He crossed with me on the steamer. We had our first little bout there."

"Who won?"

"The first trick fell to me," he acknowledged grimly.

"And so will the second and the third," she murmured. "He may be brainy, though he doesn't look it with that monacle and the peering way he has, but you're too clever for them all, Jocelyn Thew. You'll win."

He smiled very faintly.

"Well," he said, "this time I have to win or throw in my chips. Now if you like we'll have some lunch, and afterwards, if you'll forgive my taking the liberty of mentioning it, you had better buy some clothes."

"You don't like this black silk?" she asked wistfully. "I got it at a store up-town, and they told me these sort of skirts were all the rage over here."

"Well, you can see for yourself they aren't," he remarked, a little drily. "London is a queer place in many ways, especially about clothes. You're either right or you're wrong, and you've got to be right, Nora. We'll see about it presently."

They left the room together. Crawshay looked after them with interest.

"This affair," he told his companion, "grows hourly more and more interesting. You've been up against Jocelyn Thew, you tell me. Well, I am perfectly certain that that girl, whose coming gave him such a start, was a young woman I had turned away from an hotel in Washington. She was in the game then--more locally, perhaps, but still in the same game. I used to sit and talk to her in the afternoons sometimes. Finest brown eyes I ever saw in my life. I wonder if there is anything between her and Jocelyn Thew," he added, looking through the door with a faintly disapproving note in his tone,--a note which a woman would have recognised at once as jealousy.

"If you ask me, I should say no," the other answered. "I've kept tabs on Jocelyn Thew for a bit, and I've had his _dossier_. There's never been a woman's name mentioned in connection with him--don't seem as though he'd ever moved round or taken a meal with one all the time he was in New York. To tell you the truth, Mr. Crawshay, that's just what makes it so difficult to get your hands on a man you want. Nine times out of ten it's through the women we get home. The man who stands clear of them has an extra chance or two--Say, what time this evening?"

"Come to my rooms at 178, St. James's Street, at seven o'clock," Crawshay directed. "I've a little investigation to make before then."

CHAPTER XVIII

Crawshay took a taxicab from the Savoy to Claridge's Hotel, sent up his card and was conducted to Katharine Beverley's sitting room on the first floor. She kept him waiting for a few moments, and he felt a sudden instinct of curiosity as he noticed the great pile of red roses which a maid had only just finished arranging. When she came in, he looked towards her in surprise. She appeared to have grown thinner, and there were dark rims under her eyes. Her words of greeting were colourless. She seemed almost afraid to meet his steady gaze.

"I ought to apologise for calling in the morning," he said, "but I ventured to do so, hoping that you would come out and have some lunch with me."

"I really don't feel well enough," she replied. "London is not agreeing with me at all."

"You are ill?" he exclaimed, with some concern.

She looked at the closed door through which the maid had issued.

"Not exactly ill. I have some anxieties," she answered. "It is kind of you to keep your promise and come. Please tell me exactly what happened? You know how interested I am."

"I have unfortunately nothing to report but failure," he replied. "Everything seems to have happened exactly as the doctor on the ship suggested. The detectives at Liverpool were quite smart. We were able to trace the car without much difficulty, and the body of

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