

***LOUIS JOSEPH
VANCE***

INVESTIGATION



***THE LONE
WOLF
COLLECTION***

Louis Joseph Vance

The Lone Wolf Collection

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I TROYON'S

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It must have been Bourke who first said that even if you knew your way about Paris you had to lose it in order to find it to Troyon's. But then Bourke was proud to be Irish.

Troyon's occupied a corner in a jungle of side-streets, well withdrawn from the bustle of the adjacent boulevards of St. Germain and St. Michel, and in its day was a restaurant famous with a fame jealously guarded by a select circle of patrons. Its cooking was the best in Paris, its cellar second to none, its rates ridiculously reasonable; yet Baedeker knew it not. And in the wisdom of the cognoscenti this was well: it had been a pity to loose upon so excellent an establishment the swarms of tourists that profaned every temple of gastronomy on the Rive Droit.

The building was of three storeys, painted a dingy drab and trimmed with dull green shutters. The restaurant occupied almost all of the street front of the ground floor, a blank, non-committal double doorway at one extreme of its plate-glass windows was seldom open and even more seldom noticed.

This doorway was squat and broad and closed the mouth of a wide, stone-walled passageway. In one of its two substantial wings of oak a smaller door had been cut for the convenience of Troyon's guests, who by this route gained the courtyard, a semi-roofed and shadowy place, cool on the hottest day. From the court a staircase, with an air of leading nowhere in particular, climbed lazily to the second storey and thereby justified its modest pretensions; for the two upper floors of Troyon's might have been plotted by a nightmare-ridden architect after witnessing one of the first of the Palais Royal farces.

Above stairs, a mediaeval maze of corridors long and short, complicated by many unexpected steps and staircases and turns and enigmatic doors, ran every-which-way and as a rule landed one in the wrong room, linking together, in all, some two-score bed-chambers. There were no salons or reception-rooms, there was never a bath-room, there wasn't even running water aside from two hallway taps, one to each storey. The honoured guest and the exacting went to bed by lamplight: others put up with candlesticks: gas burned only in the corridors and the restaurant — asthmatic jets that, spluttering blue within globes obese, semi-opaque, and yellowish, went well with furnishings and decorations of the Second Empire to which years had lent a mellow and somehow rakish dinginess; since nothing was ever refurbished.

With such accommodations the guests of Troyon's were well content. They were not many, to begin with, and they were almost all middle-aged bourgeois, a caste that resents innovations. They took Troyon's as they found it: the rooms suited them admirably, and the tariff was modest. Why do anything to disturb the perennial peace of so discreet and confidential an establishment? One did much as one pleased there, providing one's bill was paid with tolerable regularity and the hand kept supple that operated the cordon in the small hours of the night. Papa Troyon came from a tribe of inn-keepers and was liberal-minded; while as for Madame his wife, she cared for nothing but pieces of gold....

To Troyon's on a wet winter night in the year 1893 came the child who as a man was to call himself Michael Lanyard.

He must have been four or five years old at that time: an age at which consciousness is just beginning to recognize its individuality and memory registers with capricious irregularity. He arrived at the hotel in a state of excitement involving an almost abnormal sensitiveness to impressions; but that was soon drowned deep in dreamless slumbers of

healthy exhaustion; and when he came to look back through a haze of days, of which each had made its separate and imperative demand upon his budding emotions, he found his store of memories strangely dulled and disarticulate.

The earliest definite picture was that of himself, a small but vastly important figure, nursing a heavy heart in a dark corner of a fiacre. Beside him sat a man who swore fretfully into his moustache whenever the whimpering of the boy threatened to develop into honest bawls: a strange creature, with pockets full of candy and a way with little boys in public surly and domineering, in private timid and propitiatory. It was raining monotonously, with that melancholy persistence which is the genius of Parisian winters; and the paving of the interminable strange streets was as black glass shot with coloured lights. Some of the streets roared like famished beasts, others again were silent, if with a silence no less sinister. The rain made incessant crepitation on the roof of the fiacre, and the windows wept without respite. Within the cab a smell of mustiness contended feebly with the sickening reek of a cigar which the man was forever relighting and which as often turned cold between his teeth. Outside, unwearying hoofs were beating their deadly rhythm, *cloppetty-clop....*

Back of all this lurked something formlessly alluring, something sad and sweet and momentous, which belonged very personally to the child but which he could never realize. Memory crept blindly toward it over a sword-wide bridge that had no end. There had been (or the boy had dreamed it) a long, weariful journey by railroad, the sequel to one by boat more brief but wholly loathsome. Beyond this point memory failed though sick with yearning. And the child gave over his instinctive but rather inconsecutive efforts to retrace his history: his daily life at Troyon's furnished compelling and obliterating interests.

Madame saw to that.

It was Madame who took charge of him when the strange man dragged him crying from the cab, through a cold, damp place gloomy with shadows, and up stairs to a warm bright bedroom: a formidable body, this Madame, with cold eyes and many hairy moles, who made odd noises in her throat while she undressed the little boy with the man standing by, noises meant to sound compassionate and maternal but, to the child at least, hopelessly otherwise.

Then drowsiness stealing upon one over a pillow wet with tears ... oblivion....

And Madame it was who ruled with iron hand the strange new world to which the boy awakened.

The man was gone by morning, and the child never saw him again; but inasmuch as those about him understood no English and he no French, it was some time before he could grasp the false assurances of Madame that his father had gone on a journey but would presently return. The child knew positively that the man was not his father, but when he was able to make this correction the matter had faded into insignificance: life had become too painful to leave time or inclination for the adjustment of such minor and incidental questions as one's parentage.

The little boy soon learned to know himself as Marcel, which wasn't his name, and before long was unaware he had ever had another. As he grew older he passed as Marcel Troyon; but by then he had forgotten how to speak English.

A few days after his arrival the warm, bright bed-chamber was exchanged for a cold dark closet opening off Madame's boudoir, a cupboard furnished with a rickety cot and a broken chair, lacking any provision for heat or light, and ventilated solely by a transom over the door; and inasmuch as Madame shared the French horror of draughts and so kept her boudoir hermetically sealed nine months of the year, the transom didn't mend matters much. But that closet formed the boy's sole refuge, if a precarious one, through several years; there alone was he ever safe from

kicks and cuffs and scoldings for faults beyond his comprehension; but he was never permitted a candle, and the darkness and loneliness made the place one of haunted terror to the sensitive and imaginative nature of a growing child.

He was, however, never insufficiently fed; and the luxury of forgetting misery in sleep could not well be denied him.

By day, until of age to go to school, he played apprehensively in the hallways with makeshift toys, a miserable, dejected little body with his heart in his mouth at every sudden footfall, very much in the way of femmes-de-chambre who had nothing in common with the warm-hearted, impulsive, pitiful serving women of fiction. They complained of him to Madame, and Madame came promptly to cuff him. He soon learned an almost uncanny cunning in the art of effacing himself, when she was imminent, to be as still as death and to move with the silence of a wraith. Not infrequently his huddled immobility in a shadowy corner escaped her notice as she passed. But it always exasperated her beyond measure to look up, when she fancied herself alone, and become aware of the wide-eyed, terrified stare of the transfixed boy....

That he was privileged to attend school at all was wholly due to a great fear that obsessed Madame of doing anything to invite the interest of the authorities. She was an honest woman, according to her lights, an honest wife, and kept an honest house; but she feared the gendarmerie more than the Wrath of God. And by ukase of Government a certain amount of education was compulsory. So Marcel learned among other things to read, and thereby took his first blind step toward salvation.

Reading being the one pastime which could be practiced without making a noise of any sort to attract undesirable attentions, the boy took to it in self-defence. But before long it had become his passion. He read, by stealth, everything that fell into his hands, a weird mélange of newspapers,

illustrated Parisian weeklies, magazines, novels: cullings from the débris of guest-chambers.

Before Marcel was eleven he had read "Les Misérables" with intense appreciation.

His reading, however, was not long confined to works in the French language. Now and again some departing guest would leave an English novel in his room, and these Marcel treasured beyond all other books; they seemed to him, in a way, part of his birthright. Secretly he called himself English in those days, because he knew he wasn't French: that much, at least, he remembered. And he spent long hours poring over the strange words until; at length, they came to seem less strange in his eyes. And then some accident threw his way a small English-French dictionary.

He was able to read English before he could speak it.

Out of school hours a drudge and scullion, the associate of scullions and their immediate betters, drawn from that caste of loose tongues and looser morals which breeds servants for small hotels, Marcel at eleven (as nearly as his age can be computed) possessed a comprehension of life at once exact, exhaustive and appalling.

Perhaps it was fortunate that he lived without friendship. His concept of womanhood was incarnate in Madame Troyon; so he gave all the hotel women a wide berth.

The men-servants he suffered in silence when they would permit it; but his nature was so thoroughly disassociated from anything within their experience that they resented him: a circumstance which exposed him to a certain amount of baiting not unlike that which the village idiot receives at the hands of rustic boors — until Marcel learned to defend himself with a tongue which could distil vitriol from the vernacular, and with fists and feet as well. Thereafter he was left severely to himself and glad of it, since it furnished him with just so much more time for reading and dreaming over what he read.

By fifteen he had developed into a long, lank, loutish youth, with a face of extraordinary pallor, a sullen mouth, hot black eyes, and dark hair like a mane, so seldom was it trimmed. He looked considerably older than he was and the slightness of his body was deceptive, disguising a power of sinewy strength. More than this, he could care very handily for himself in a scrimmage: la savate had no secrets from him, and he had picked up tricks from the Apaches quite as effectual as any in the manual of jiu-jitsu. Paris he knew as you and I know the palms of our hands, and he could converse with the precision of the native-born in any one of the city's several odd argots.

To these accomplishments he added that of a thoroughly practised petty thief.

His duties were by day those of valet-de-chambre on the third floor; by night he acted as omnibus in the restaurant. For these services he received no pay and less consideration from his employers (who would have been horrified by the suggestion that they countenanced slavery) only his board and a bed in a room scarcely larger, if somewhat better ventilated, than the boudoir-closet from which he had long since been ousted. This room was on the ground floor, at the back of the house, and boasted a small window overlooking a narrow alley.

He was routed out before daylight, and his working day ended as a rule at ten in the evening — though when there were performances on at the Odéon, the restaurant remained open until an indeterminate hour for the accommodation of the supper trade.

Once back in his kennel, its door closed and bolted, Marcel was free to squirm out of the window and roam and range Paris at will. And it was thus that he came by most of his knowledge of the city.

But for the most part Marcel preferred to lie abed and read himself half-blind by the light of purloined candle-ends. Books he borrowed as of old from the rooms of guests or

else pilfered from quai-side stalls and later sold to dealers in more distant quarters of the city. Now and again, when he needed some work not to be acquired save through outright purchase, the guests would pay further if unconscious tribute through the sly abstraction of small coins. Your true Parisian, however, keeps track of his money to the ultimate sou, an idiosyncrasy which obliged the boy to practise most of his peculations on the fugitive guest of foreign extraction.

In the number of these, perhaps the one best known to Troyon's was Bourke.

He was a quick, compact, dangerous little Irishman who had fallen into the habit of "resting" at Troyon's whenever a vacation from London seemed a prescription apt to prove wholesome for a gentleman of his kidney; which was rather frequently, arguing that Bourke's professional activities were fairly onerous.

Having received most of his education in Dublin University, Bourke spoke the purest English known, or could when so minded, while his facile Irish tongue had caught the trick of an accent which passed unchallenged on the Boulevards. He had an alert eye for pretty women, a heart as big as all out-doors, no scruples worth mentioning, a secret sorrow, and a pet superstition.

The colour of his hair, a clamorous red, was the spring of his secret sorrow. By that token he was a marked man. At irregular intervals he made frantic attempts to disguise it; but the only dye that would serve at all was a jet-black and looked like the devil in contrast with his high colouring. Moreover, before a week passed, the red would crop up again wherever the hair grew thin, lending him the appearance of a badly-singed pup.

His pet superstition was that, as long as he refrained from practising his profession in Paris, Paris would remain his impregnable Tower of Refuge. The world owed Bourke a living, or he so considered; and it must be allowed that he made collections on account with tolerable regularity and

success; but Paris was tax-exempt as long as Paris offered him immunity from molestation.

Not only did Paris suit his tastes excellently, but there was no place, in Bourke's esteem, comparable with Troyon's for peace and quiet. Hence, the continuity of his patronage was never broken by trials of rival hostelries; and Troyon's was always expecting Bourke for the simple reason that he invariably arrived unexpectedly, with neither warning nor ostentation, to stop as long as he liked, whether a day or a week or a month, and depart in the same manner.

His daily routine, as Troyon's came to know it, varied but slightly: he breakfasted abed, about half after ten, lounged in his room or the café all day if the weather were bad, or strolled peacefully in the gardens of the Luxembourg if it were good, dined early and well but always alone, and shortly afterward departed by cab for some well-known bar on the Rive Droit; whence, it is to be presumed, he moved on to other resorts, for he never was home when the house was officially closed for the night, the hours of his return remaining a secret between himself and the concierge.

On retiring, Bourke would empty his pockets upon the dressing-table, where the boy Marcel, bringing up Bourke's petit déjeuner the next morning, would see displayed a tempting confusion of gold and silver and copper, with a wad of bank-notes, and the customary assortment of personal hardware.

Now inasmuch as Bourke was never wide-awake at that hour, and always after acknowledging Marcel's "bon jour" rolled over and snored for Glory and the Saints, it was against human nature to resist the allure of that dressing-table. Marcel seldom departed without a coin or two.

He had yet to learn that Bourke's habits were those of an Englishman, who never goes to bed without leaving all his pocket-money in plain sight and — carefully catalogued in his memory....

One morning in the spring of 1904 Marcel served Bourke his last breakfast at Troyon's.

The Irishman had been on the prowl the previous night, and his rasping snore was audible even through the closed door when Marcel knocked and, receiving no answer, used the pass-key and entered.

At this the snore was briefly interrupted; Bourke, visible at first only as a flaming shock of hair protruding from the bedclothes, squirmed an eye above his artificial horizon, opened it, mumbled inarticulate acknowledgment of Marcel's salutation, and passed blatantly into further slumbers.

Marcel deposited his tray on a table beside the bed, moved quietly to the windows, closed them, and drew the lace curtains together. The dressing-table between the windows displayed, amid the silver and copper, more gold coins than it commonly did — some eighteen or twenty louis altogether. Adroitly abstracting en passant a piece of ten francs, Marcel went on his way rejoicing, touched a match to the fire all ready-laid in the grate, and was nearing the door when, casting one casual parting glance at the bed, he became aware of a notable phenomenon: the snoring was going on lustily, but Bourke was watching him with both eyes wide and filled with interest.

Startled and, to tell the truth, a bit indignant, the boy stopped as though at word of command. But after the first flash of astonishment his young face hardened to immobility. Only his eyes remained constant to Bourke's.

The Irishman, sitting up in bed, demanded and received the piece of ten francs, and went on to indict the boy for the embezzlement of several sums running into a number of louis.

Marcel, reflecting that Bourke's reckoning was still some louis shy, made no bones about pleading guilty. Interrogated, the culprit deposed that he had taken the money because he needed it to buy books. No, he wasn't

sorry. Yes, it was probable that, granted further opportunity, he would do it again. Advised that he was apparently a case-hardened young criminal, he replied that youth was not his fault; with years and experience he would certainly improve.

Puzzled by the boy's attitude, Bourke agitated his hair and wondered aloud how Marcel would like it if his employers were informed of his speculations.

Marcel looked pained and pointed out that such a course on the part of Bourke would be obviously unfair; the only real difference between them, he explained, was that where he filched a louis Bourke filched thousands; and if Bourke insisted on turning him over to the mercy of Madame and Papa Troyon, who would certainly summon a sergent de ville, he, Marcel, would be quite justified in retaliating by telling the Préfecture de Police all he knew about Bourke.

This was no chance shot, and took the Irishman between wind and water; and when, dismayed, he blustered, demanding to know what the boy meant by his damned impudence, Marcel quietly advised him that one knew what one knew: if one read the English newspaper in the café, as Marcel did, one could hardly fail to remark that monsieur always came to Paris after some notable burglary had been committed in London; and if one troubled to follow monsieur by night, as Marcel had, it became evident that monsieur's first calls in Paris were invariably made at the establishment of a famous fence in the rue des Trois Frères; and, finally, one drew one's own conclusions when strangers dining in the restaurant — as on the night before, by way of illustration — strangers who wore all the hall-marks of police detectives from England — catechised one about a person whose description was the portrait of Bourke, and promised a hundred-franc note for information concerning the habits and whereabouts of that person, if seen.

Marcel added, while Bourke gasped for breath, that the gentleman in question had spoken to him alone, in the

absence of other waiters, and had been fobbed off with a lie.

But why — Bourke wanted to know — had Marcel lied to save him, when the truth would have earned him a hundred francs?

"Because," Marcel explained coolly, "I, too, am a thief. Monsieur will perceive it was a matter of professional honour."

Now the Irish have their faults, but ingratitude is not of their number.

Bourke, packing hastily to leave Paris, France and Europe by the fastest feasible route, still found time to question Marcel briefly; and what he learned from the boy about his antecedents so worked with gratitude upon the sentimental nature of the Celt, that when on the third day following the Cunarder Carpathia left Naples for New York, she carried not only a gentleman whose brilliant black hair and glowing pink complexion rendered him a bit too conspicuous among her first-cabin passengers for his own comfort, but also in the second cabin his valet — a boy of sixteen who looked eighteen.

The gentleman's name on the passenger-list didn't, of course, in the least resemble Bourke. His valet's was given as Michael Lanyard.

The origin of this name is obscure; Michael being easily corrupted into good Irish Mickey may safely be attributed to Bourke; Lanyard has a tang of the sea which suggests a reminiscence of some sea-tale prized by the pseudo Marcel Troyon.

In New York began the second stage in the education of a professional criminal. The boy must have searched far for a preceptor of more sound attainments than Bourke. It is, however, only fair to say that Bourke must have looked as far for an apter pupil. Under his tutelage, Michael Lanyard learned many things; he became a mathematician of considerable promise, an expert mechanic, a connoisseur

of armour-plate and explosives in their more pacific applications, and he learned to grade precious stones with a glance. Also, because Bourke was born of gentlefolk, he learned to speak English, what clothes to wear and when to wear them, and the civilized practice with knife and fork at table. And because Bourke was a diplomatist of sorts, Marcel acquired the knack of being at ease in every grade of society: he came to know that a self-made millionaire, taken the right way, is as approachable as one whose millions date back even unto the third generation; he could order a dinner at Sherry's as readily as drinks at Sharkey's. Most valuable accomplishment of all, he learned to laugh. In the way of by-products he picked up a working acquaintance with American, English and German slang — French slang he already knew as a mother-tongue — considerable geographical knowledge of the capitals of Europe, America and Illinois, a taste that discriminated between tobacco and the stuff sold as such in France, and a genuine passion for good paintings.

Finally Bourke drilled into his apprentice the three cardinal principles of successful cracksmanship: to know his ground thoroughly before venturing upon it; to strike and retreat with the swift precision of a hawk; to be friendless.

And the last of these was the greatest.

"You're a promising lad," he said — so often that Lanyard would almost wince from that formula of introduction — "a promising lad, though it's sad I should be to say it, instead of proud as I am. For I've made you: but for me you'd long since have matriculated at La Tour Pointue and graduated with the canaille of the Santé. And in time you may become a first-chop operator, which I'm not and never will be; but if you do, 'twill be through fighting shy of two things. The first of them's Woman, and the second is Man. To make a friend of a man you must lower your guard. Ordinarily 'tis fatal. As for Woman, remember this, m'lad: to let love into your life you must open a door no mortal hand can close. And God

only knows what'll follow in. If ever you find you've fallen in love and can't fall out, cut the game on the instant, or you'll end wearing stripes or broad arrows — the same as myself would, if this cursed cough wasn't going to be the death of me.... No, m'lad: take a fool's advice (you'll never get better) and when you're shut of me, which will be soon, I'm thinking, take the Lonesome Road and stick to the middle of it. 'He travels the fastest that travels alone' is a true saying, but 'tis only half the truth: he travels the farthest into the bargain.... Yet the Lonesome Road has its drawbacks, lad — it's *damned* lonely!"

Bourke died in Switzerland, of consumption, in the winter of 1910 — Lanyard at his side till the end.

Then the boy set his face against the world: alone, lonely, and remembering.

II RETURN

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His return to Troyon's, whereas an enterprise which Lanyard had been contemplating for several years — in fact, ever since the death of Bourke — came to pass at length almost purely as an affair of impulse.

He had come through from London by the afternoon service — via Boulogne — travelling light, with nothing but a brace of handbags and his life in his hands. Two coups to his credit since the previous midnight had made the shift advisable, though only one of them, the later, rendered it urgent.

Scotland Yard would, he reckoned, require at least twenty-four hours to unlimber for action on the Omber affair; but the other, the theft of the Huysman plans, though not consummated before noon, must have set the Chancelleries of at least three Powers by the ears before Lanyard was fairly entrained at Charing Cross.

Now his opinion of Scotland Yard was low; its emissaries must operate gingerly to keep within the laws they serve. But the agents of the various Continental secret services have a way of making their own laws as they go along: and for these Lanyard entertained a respect little short of profound.

He would not have been surprised had he ran foul of trouble on the pier at Folkestone. Boulogne, as well, figured in his imagination as a crucial point: its harbour lights, heaving up over the grim grey waste, peered through the deepening violet dusk to find him on the packet's deck, responding to their curious stare with one no less insistently inquiring.... But it wasn't until in the gauntlet of the Gare du Nord itself that he found anything to shy at.

Dropping from train to platform, he surrendered his luggage to a ready facteur, and followed the man through the crush, elbowed and shouldered, offended by the pervasive reek of chilled steam and coal-gas, and dazzled by the brilliant glare of the overhanging electric arcs.

Almost the first face he saw turned his way was that of Roddy.

The man from Scotland Yard was stationed at one side of the platform gates. Opposite him stood another known by sight to Lanyard — a highly decorative official from the Préfecture de Police. Both were scanning narrowly every face in the tide that churned between them.

Wondering if through some fatal freak of fortuity these were acting under late telegraphic advice from London, Lanyard held himself well in hand: the first sign of intent to hinder him would prove the signal for a spectacular demonstration of the ungentle art of not getting caught with the goods on. And for twenty seconds, while the crowd milled slowly through the narrow exit, he was as near to betraying himself as he had ever been — nearer, for he had marked down the point on Roddy's jaw where his first blow would fall, and just where to plant a coup-de-savate most surely to incapacitate the minion of the Préfecture; and all the while was looking the two over with a manner of the most calm and impersonal curiosity.

But beyond an almost imperceptible narrowing of Roddy's eyes when they met his own, as if the Englishman were struggling with a faulty memory, neither police agent betrayed the least recognition.

And then Lanyard was outside the station, his facteur introducing him to a ramshackle taxicab.

No need to speculate whether or not Roddy were gazing after him; in the ragged animal who held the door while Lanyard fumbled for his facteur's tip, he recognized a runner for the Préfecture; and beyond question there were many such about. If any lingering doubt should trouble Roddy's

mind he need only ask, "Such-and-such an one took what cab and for what destination?" to be instantly and accurately informed.

In such case to go directly to his apartment, that handy little rez-de-chaussée near the Trocadéro, was obviously inadvisable. Without apparent hesitation Lanyard directed the driver to the Hotel Lutetia, tossed the ragged spy a sou, and was off to the tune of a slammed door and a motor that sorely needed overhauling....

The rain, which had welcomed the train a few miles from Paris, was in the city torrential. Few wayfarers braved the swimming sidewalks, and the little clusters of chairs and tables beneath permanent café awnings were one and all neglected. But in the roadways an amazing concourse of vehicles, mostly motor-driven, skimmed, skidded, and shot over burnished asphalt all, of course, at top-speed — else this were not Paris. Lanyard thought of insects on the surface of some dark forest pool....

The roof of the cab rang like a drumhead; the driver blinked through the back-splatter from his rubber apron; now and again the tyres lost grip on the treacherous going and provided instants of lively suspense. Lanyard lowered a window to release the musty odour peculiar to French taxis, got well peppered with moisture, and promptly put it up again. Then insensibly he relaxed, in the toils of memories roused by the reflection that this night fairly duplicated that which had welcomed him to Paris, twenty years ago.

It was then that, for the first time in several months, he thought definitely of Troyon's.

And it was then that Chance ordained that his taxicab should skid. On the point of leaving the Ile de la Cité by way of the Pont St. Michel, it suddenly (one might pardonably have believed) went mad, darting crabwise from the middle of the road to the right-hand footway with evident design to climb the rail and make an end to everything in the Seine. The driver regained control barely in time to avert a

tragedy, and had no more than accomplished this much when a bit of broken glass gutted one of the rear tyres, which promptly gave up the ghost with a roar like that of a lusty young cannon.

At this the driver (apparently a person of religious bias) said something heartfelt about the sacred name of his pipe and, crawling from under the apron, turned aft to assess damages.

On his own part Lanyard swore in sound Saxon, opened the door, and delivered himself to the pelting shower.

"Well?" he enquired after watching the driver muzzle the eviscerated tyre for some eloquent moments.

Turning up a distorted face, the other gesticulated with profane abandon, by way of good measure interpolating a few disconnected words and phrases. Lanyard gathered that this was the second accident of the same nature since noon that the cab consequently lacked a spare tyre, and that short of a trip to the garage the accident was irremediable. So he said (intelligently) it couldn't be helped, paid the man and over tipped precisely as though their journey had been successfully consummated, and standing over his luggage watched the maimed vehicle limp miserably off through the teeming mists.

Now in normal course his plight should have been relieved within two minutes. But it wasn't. For some time all such taxis as did pass displayed scornfully inverted flags. Also, their drivers jeered in their pleasing Parisian way at the lonely outlander occupying a position of such uncommon distinction in the heart of the storm and the precise middle of the Pont St. Michel.

Over to the left, on the Quai de Marché Neuf, the façade of the Préfecture frowned portentously — "La Tour Pointue," as the Parisian loves to term it. Lanyard forgot his annoyance long enough to salute that grim pile with a mocking bow, thinking of the men therein who would give

half their possessions to lay hands on him who was only a few hundred yards distant, marooned in the rain!...

In its own good time a night-prowling fiacre ambled up and veered over to his hail. He viewed this stroke of good-fortune with intense disgust: the shambling, weather-beaten animal between the shafts promised a long, damp crawl to the Lutetia.

And on this reflection he yielded to impulse.

Heaving in his luggage — "Troyon's!" he told the cocher....

The fiacre lumbered off into that dark maze of streets, narrow and tortuous, which backs up from the Seine to the Luxembourg, while its fare reflected that Fate had not served him so hardly after all: if Roddy had really been watching for him at the Gare du Nord, with a mind to follow and wait for his prey to make some incriminating move, this chance-contrived change of vehicles and destination would throw the detective off the scent and gain the adventurer, at worst, several hours' leeway.

When at length his conveyance drew up at the historic corner, Lanyard alighting could have rubbed his eyes to see the windows of Troyon's all bright with electric light.

Somehow, and most unreasonably, he had always believed the place would go to the hands of the house-wrecker unchanged.

A smart portier ducked out, seized his luggage, and offered an umbrella. Lanyard composed his features to immobility as he entered the hotel, of no mind to let the least flicker of recognition be detected in his eyes when they should re-encounter familiar faces.

And this was quite as well: for — again — the first he saw was Roddy.

III

A POINT OF INTERROGATION

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The man from Scotland Yard had just surrendered hat, coat, and umbrella to the vestiaire and was turning through swinging doors to the dining-room. Again, embracing Lanyard, his glance seemed devoid of any sort of intelligible expression; and if its object needed all his self-possession in that moment, it was to dissemble relief rather than dismay. An accent of the fortuitous distinguished this second encounter too persuasively to excuse further misgivings. What the adventurer himself hadn't known till within the last ten minutes, that he was coming to Troyon's, Roddy couldn't possibly have anticipated; ergo, whatever the detective's business, it had nothing to do with Lanyard.

Furthermore, before quitting the lobby, Roddy paused long enough to instruct the vestiaire to have a fire laid in his room.

So he was stopping at Troyon's — and didn't care who knew it!

His doubts altogether dissipated by this incident, Lanyard followed his natural enemy into the dining-room with an air as devil-may-care as one could wish and so impressive that the maitre-d'hotel abandoned the detective to the mercies of one of his captains and himself hastened to seat Lanyard and take his order.

This last disposed of; Lanyard surrendered himself to new impressions — of which the first proved a bit disheartening.

However impulsively, he hadn't resought Troyon's without definite intent, to wit, to gain some clue, however slender, to the mystery of that wretched child, Marcel. But now it appeared he had procrastinated fatally: Time and Change had left little other than the shell of the Troyon's he

remembered. Papa Troyon was gone; Madame no longer occupied the desk of the caisse; enquiries, so discreetly worded as to be uncompromising, elicited from the maitre-d'hôtel the information that the house had been under new management these eighteen months; the old proprietor was dead, and his widow had sold out lock, stock and barrel, and retired to the country — it was not known exactly where. And with the new administration had come fresh decorations and furnishings as well as a complete change of personnel: not even one of the old waiters remained.

"All, all are gone, the old familiar faces," Lanyard quoted in vindictive melancholy — "damn 'em!"

Happily, it was soon demonstrated that the cuisine was being maintained on its erstwhile plane of excellence: one still had that comfort....

Other impressions, less ultimate, proved puzzling, disconcerting, and paradoxically reassuring.

Lanyard commanded a fair view of Roddy across the waist of the room. The detective had ordered a meal that matched his aspect well — both of true British simplicity. He was a square-set man with a square jaw, cold blue eyes, a fat nose, a thin-lipped trap of a mouth, a face as red as rare beefsteak. His dinner comprised a cut from the joint, boiled potatoes, brussels sprouts, a bit of cheese, a bottle of Bass. He ate slowly, chewing with the doggedness of a strong character hampered by a weak digestion, and all the while kept eyes fixed to an issue of the Paris edition of the London Daily Mail, with an effect of concentration quite too convincing.

Now one doesn't read the Paris edition of the London Daily Mail with tense excitement. Humanly speaking, it can't be done.

Where, then, was the object of this so sedulously dissembled interest?

Lanyard wasn't slow to read this riddle to his satisfaction — in as far, that is, as it was satisfactory to feel still more

certain that Roddy's quarry was another than himself.

Despite the lateness of the hour, which had by now turned ten o'clock, the restaurant had a dozen tables or so in the service of guests pleasantly engaged in lengthening out an agreeable evening with dessert, coffee, liqueurs and cigarettes. The majority of these were in couples, but at a table one removed from Roddy's sat a party of three; and Lanyard noticed, or fancied, that the man from Scotland Yard turned his newspaper only during lulls in the conversation in this quarter.

Of the three, one might pass for an American of position and wealth: a man of something more than sixty years, with an execrable accent, a racking cough, and a thin, patrician cast of features clouded darkly by the expression of a soul in torment, furrowed, seamed, twisted — a mask of mortal anguish. And once, when this one looked up and casually encountered Lanyard's gaze, the adventurer was shocked to find himself staring into eyes like those of a dead man: eyes of a grey so light that at a little distance the colour of the irises blended indistinguishably with their whites, leaving visible only the round black points of pupils abnormally distended and staring, blank, fixed, passionless, beneath lashless lids.

For the instant they seemed to explore Lanyard's very soul with a look of remote and impersonal curiosity; then they fell away; and when next the adventurer looked, the man had turned to attend to some observation of one of his companions.

On his right sat a girl who might be his daughter; for not only was she, too, hall-marked American, but she was far too young to be the other's wife. A demure, old-fashioned type; well-poised but unassuming; fetchingly gowned and with sufficient individuality of taste but not conspicuously; a girl with soft brown hair and soft brown eyes; pretty, not extravagantly so when her face was in repose, but with a slow smile that rendered her little less than beautiful: in all

(Lanyard thought) the kind of woman that is predestined to comfort mankind, whose strongest instinct is the maternal.

She took little part in the conversation, seldom interrupting what was practically a duologue between her putative father and the third of their party.

This last was one, whom Lanyard was sure he knew, though he could see no more than the back of Monsieur le Comte Remy de Morbihan.

And he wondered with a thrill of amusement if it were possible that Roddy was on the trail of that tremendous buck. If so, it would be a chase worth following — a diversion rendered the more exquisite to Lanyard by the spice of novelty, since for once he would figure as a dispassionate bystander.

The name of Comte Remy de Morbihan, although unrecorded in the Almanach de Gotha, was one to conjure with in the Paris of his day and generation. He claimed the distinction of being at once the homeliest, one of the wealthiest, and the most-liked man in France.

As to his looks, good or bad, they were said to prove infallibly fatal with women, while not a few men, perhaps for that reason, did their possessor the honour to imitate them. The revues burlesqued him; Sem caricatured him; Forain counterfeited him extensively in that inimitable series of Monday morning cartoons for *Le Figaro*: one said "De Morbihan" instinctively at sight of that stocky figure, short and broad, topped by a chubby, moon-like mask with waxed moustaches, womanish eyes, and never-failing grin.

A creature of proverbial good-nature and exhaustless vitality, his extraordinary popularity was due to the equally extraordinary extravagance with which he supported that latest Gallic fad, "le Sport." The Parisian Rugby team was his pampered protégé, he was an active member of the Tennis Club, maintained not only a flock of automobiles but a famous racing stable, rode to hounds, was a good field gun, patronized aviation and motor-boat racing, risked as many

maximums during the Monte Carlo season as the Grand Duke Michael himself, and was always ready to whet rapiers or burn a little harmless powder of an early morning in the Parc aux Princes.

But there were ugly whispers current with respect to the sources of his fabulous wealth. Lanyard, for one, wouldn't have thought him the properest company or the best Parisian cicerone for an ailing American gentleman blessed with independent means and an attractive daughter.

Paris, on the other hand — Paris who forgives everything to him who contributes to her amusement — adored Comte Remy de Morbihan ...

But perhaps Lanyard was prejudiced by his partiality for Americans, a sentiment the outgrowth of the years spent in New York with Bourke. He even fancied that between his spirit and theirs existed some subtle bond of sympathy. For all he knew he might himself be American...

For some time Lanyard strained to catch something of the conversation that seemed to hold so much of interest for Roddy, but without success because of the hum of voices that filled the room. In time, however, the gathering began to thin out, until at length there remained only this party of three, Lanyard enjoying a most delectable salad, and Roddy puffing a cigar (with such a show of enjoyment that Lanyard suspected him of the sin of smuggling) and slowly gulping down a second bottle of Bass.

Under these conditions the talk between De Morbihan and the Americans became public property.

The first remark overheard by Lanyard came from the elderly American, following a pause and a consultation of his watch.

"Quarter to eleven," he announced.

"Plenty of time," said De Morbihan cheerfully. "That is," he amended, "if mademoiselle isn't bored ..."

The girl's reply, accompanied by a pretty inclination of her head toward the Frenchman, was lost in the accents of

the first speaker — a strong and sonorous voice, in strange contrast with his ravaged appearance and distressing cough.

"Don't let that worry you," he advised cheerfully. "Lucia's accustomed to keeping late hours with me; and who ever heard of a young and pretty woman being bored on the third day of her first visit to Paris?"

He pronounced the name with the hard C of the Italian tongue, as though it were spelled Luchia.

"To be sure," laughed the Frenchman; "one suspects it will be long before mademoiselle loses interest in the rue de la Paix."

"You may well, when such beautiful things come from it," said the girl.

"See what we found there to-day."

She slipped a ring from her hand and passed it to De Morbihan.

There followed silence for an instant, then an exclamation from the Frenchman:

"But it is superb! Accept, mademoiselle, my compliments. It is worthy even of you."

She flushed prettily as she nodded smiling acknowledgement.

"Ah, you Americans!" De Morbihan sighed. "You fill us with envy: you have the souls of poets and the wealth of princes!"

"But we must come to Paris to find beautiful things for our women-folk!"

"Take care, though, lest you go too far, Monsieur Bannon."

"How so — too far?"

"You might attract the attention of the Lone Wolf. They say he's on the prowl once more."