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Koch, French by birth, and, in fact, the son of a rural constable at Jony-aux-Arches. He said sneeringly: "For sure, Wessel gave them away."

Charles flashed out at him: "Who the devil cares for Otto Winter—he is a swine. And Harstmann is a swine. *Des sales cochons!*"

Then we drank Schiedam, out of tall thin glasses; and casually, I asked: "And where is Mathilde, these days?"

"Boucles," said Charles shortly. There is no way of putting into English the pitiful abruptness of Charles' stony French; but what he meant to say was that Mathilde was still in prison, having been huddled blindly across the German frontier, where she never intended (Heaven knows!) to go. A blond French spy—Anduin, a deserter from the French army—said sentimentally: "She was the best of them all. I ought to know!" And he twisted up his mustaches with a self-satisfied air.

"Bah!" said Charles, "she got better men than you, you sausage, she got Wessel, when he was a lieutenant at Potsdam."

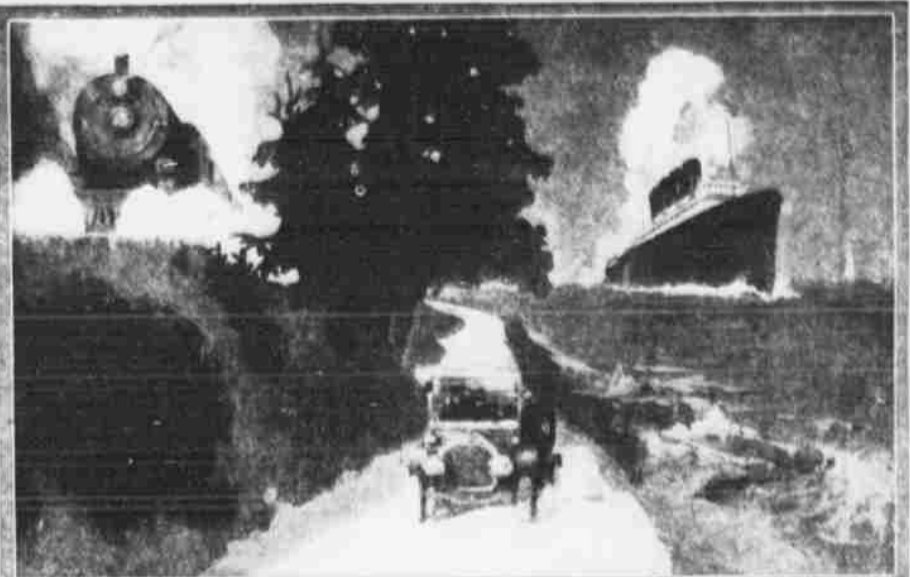
"Wessel was a captain, then!" And they quarreled while I paid the bill.

Five days later—it was January 29—as I was coming out of the Hotel Metropole I came face to face with Wessel. He had conserved and fattened; he was no longer the handsome German officer—spy and rogue and thief—some of us knew a half dozen years ago in Paris. An insolvent spy, without, for over him, was there not the protection of two Great Powers, France and England?

IN BRIEF this is the story of Wessel; in the background of it is the mysterious veiled figure of the most extraordinary adventuress Europe has suffered from in the last two decades. I have named Mathilde Baumbler. She is a handsome, blue-eyed woman, with the look of a Slav rather than of a German. She was born in Kolnigsberg. Her parents were Protestant folk of good standing. She was educated in a teacher's college, and went out into the world as governess in the family of a Prussian general. She was young then—twenty years ago—and fell into the hands of Richard de Cuers, the Napoleon of Spies. He it was who trained her. Like all the women who succeed as spies, she had a natural taste for intrigue, the love of adventure; she was fond of riot and extravagance and of the admiration of men. Ten years ago I met her in an operabox at the Monnaie in Brussels; she shimmered with opals from her slippers to her hair. And she had charm. A worn and wicked woman she still radiated charm—that uncanny kind of fascination which captures a certain kind of unpraiseworthy man. The man who was under her spell at that time was Wessel. Indeed, she had just been married to him; but that was a passing sentiment and had nothing to do with her business in this world.

Wessel had been a lieutenant of engineers in the German army. She was working for France at the time—chiefly for Jumps who was then prominent in the "service"—and she succeeded in corrupting the young German officer, who turned over to her all the military documents upon which he could lay his hands. Meanwhile, Wessel, unsuspected, was made a captain. But Mathilde was an expensive acquaintance, and in an endeavor to secure more important documents—for which a high price was offered—Wessel was detected. By the good offices of Mathilde, he managed to get across the frontier. Together they went to Brussels and thence, to the summer resort of treason, Ostend. In those days Ostend was one of the gambling-places of Europe—a little Monte-Carlo. Wessel lost heavily. One night he gave a false cheque to a "German army officer." He was arrested and locked up in the prison of St. Giles. (The German "officer" was a spy, who had been detailed to "get" Wessel so he might be arrested, extradited and made to pay for his treason.)

A few weeks later the Belgian government turned Wessel over to the German authorities. He was handcuffed and put in the train for Cologne.



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