

The DESTROYER

By BURTON E. STEVENSON

CHAPTER FOUR—CONTINUED.

Both Monsieur and Madame Brisson grew voluble at once, for rarely had it been their fortune to address so attentive an audience. But there were few grains of wheat among the chaff. The two strangers had arrived, it appeared, on the evening of the 22nd, Friday. They were Americans, they said, on a walking tour. Their names? Brisson did not remember; but they would be found on the police registration slip which he had caused them to fill out at once and had sent to the prefecture that very evening. He had noticed on the slip that they had come from Marseilles and were on their way to Nice. Their bags had already arrived from Marseilles, and, at their direction, he had had them brought up from the station.

"Where are the bags now?" asked Lepine.

"They directed that they be sent to Nice," explained Brisson. "I dispatched them yesterday morning, as I agreed."

"You have the receipt?"

"But certainly, sir," and Brisson, while his wife held the light, rummaged in his desk and finally produced the paper in question.

Lepine placed it in his purse beside the 100-franc note.

"Proceed," he said. "In what way did these strangers occupy themselves during their stay?"

They were absent from morning till night, it appeared, walking about the streets, about the docks, visiting the ships in the harbor, climbing the hills back of the town, and even going as far as Cape Cepet, where the great fort is penetrating, in a word, to every nook and corner which it is possible for visitors to enter. In fact, in the two days of their stay, they had seen more of Toulon than had Brisson in the 20 years of his residence.

The details of these expeditions Brisson had learned with the greatest difficulty, for his guests had talked but little, had kept to themselves, had discouraged his advances, resented his questions, and often pretended that they did not understand—all of which was in itself suspicious. When talking together, they used a language which Brisson supposed to be English; but he was not familiar with English, knew only a few words of it, indeed—"money," "dama,"—such words as every one knows. Their French, also, was very bad,—much worse at some times than at others.

Lepine finally stopped this flow of language, when it became apparent that nothing but chaff remained.

"Do any further questions suggest themselves?" he asked, looking first at Crochard and then at Pigot. "No? You understand, my friends," he added, turning back to the inn keeper and his wife, "that of all this you will say nothing—not even to each other. An incautious word, and you may find yourselves in a most difficult position. On the other hand, if you are careful, if you are reticent, you will not be forgotten."

"We understand, sir," said they both in a breath, and Brisson added, with venom in his voice, "They were swine! I rejoice that they did not get their telegram!"

Lepine jumped as though a pin had been driven into him.

"Their telegram? What do you mean?" he cried.

"About an hour after they were gone," Brisson hastened to explain, "or perhaps two hours—I do not know—a messenger appeared with a telegram addressed to a grotesque name—Zbones, Smeed—I do not remember—in care of the Hotel du Nord. I concluded it was for one of them, and told the messenger it was too late, that the man had departed—to Frejus, to Nice—I did not know whither. So he took the telegram back again."

Lepine's eyes were gleaming as he glanced at Crochard.

"I am glad that you have mentioned this detail, M. Brisson," he said. "I thank you—and you also, Madame!" and with that, he and his companions bade the worthy couple adieu.

Once in the street, Crochard paused.

"I will leave you now, M. Lepine," he said. "You have your work to do—but you do not need me. Should I have anything fur-

ther to communicate, you will hear from me."

"And if we wish to find you?"

"For the present, I am staying with my friend on the Quai de Cronstadt."

"Very good," said Lepine. "Good night," and in a moment he and Pigot were lost in the darkness.

The rain had ceased and a chill wind had arisen, but Crochard did not seem to feel it, as he walked slowly toward the quays, his head bent in thought. An ironical smile curved his lips, as he picture Lepine off upon the scent first to the prefecture, then to the post office. He would follow it well, of course; he would run it to the end. He would discover, no doubt, the identity of the two travelers; that would not be difficult. Crochard himself had pointed out the way.

But what then? Even if they were found to be men high in the German service, that was of small importance. It proved nothing. They were at liberty to visit Toulon, if they wished to do so; and, after all, their arrival at the quay five minutes before dawn might have been an accident; they might have lingered for a last look at La Liberté without any suspicion of what was about to occur. Such a coincidence, if not probable, was, at least, conceivable; and such, of course, would be their explanation, if an explanation was ever asked for. There was no way to disprove it.

As to the yacht on which they had embarked—well, that, too, may have been an accident—a boat belonging to a friend whom they had come upon unexpectedly and upon which they had been persuaded to take a cruise. Suspicious circumstances—yes, many of them; but no proof, no absolute proof. And nothing, absolutely nothing, to show that the explosion had been caused by any outside agency.

Arrived at the water front, Crochard walked on until he was opposite the wreck. There he sat down, with his legs overhanging the quay. Two or three searchlights were still focussed on the ruin, but the rescue parties had been withdrawn, and only a few sentries remained. He could see how that formidable monster of a ship had been torn and twisted into an inextinguishable and hideous mass of iron and steel. One turret remained above the water, blown over on its side, its great guns pointing straight at the zenith; but the rest was a mere tangle of metal.

Such destruction could have been wrought only by the explosion of the magazines; no mine or torpedo could have done it. And as he gazed at the mass of wreckage visible above the water, he perceived a certain resemblance to photographs he had seen of the wreck of the Maine. The Maine's forward magazine had exploded; but Crochard knew, as well as M. Deleasse himself, what had caused that explosion.

Perhaps history was repeating itself, as, proverbially, it is supposed to have a way of doing. But Crochard shook his head. If the catastrophe was not an accident, then it was the result of some agency far more subtle than mine or torpedo. And, also, if it was not an accident, those two men who had waited in the shadow of the doorway back of him for the deed to be accomplished, must have had an accomplice. They could not destroy the ship merely by staring at her! Somewhere, somewhere, concealed but not far distant, that accomplice must have awaited the first beam of the rising sun as the signal to hur his thunderbolt, to loose his mysterious power!

What was that power? How had the thing been done? Those, Crochard felt, were the questions to be answered. As to who had done it, or why it had been done—that could wait. But if there existed in the world a force which, directed from a distance, noiseless, invisible, impalpable, could destroy a battleship asleep at her anchorage, then indeed did it behoove France to discover and guard against it!

At last, his head still bent, Crochard arose, crossed the quay, opened the door of Number Ten, and entered.

No doubt it would have interested both him and M. Deleasse to

know how nearly parallel the channels of their thoughts had run!

CHAPTER V.

AT THE CAFE DES VOYAGEURS.

M. Deleasse was scarcely out of bed, next morning, when Lepine's card was brought in to him. He smiled as he read on the line scrawled across it: "My report awaits Monsieur."

"Show M. Lepine into the breakfast room," said the minister, "and inform him that I shall be down at once. Also inquire if he has breakfasted. If not, see that he is served."

He hastened on with his toilet, and, five minutes later, joined Lepine, whom he found at his favorite amusement of standing at a window and gazing into the street—an amusement which occupied every idle moment, sometimes with the most astonishing results. Chance plays a larger part in life than most people are willing to admit; Lepine believed in it; went half way to meet it—and, more than once, had seen drifting past him along the pavement the face for which his best men had been searching vainly.

Lepine, it appeared, had already breakfasted, and, while the minister ate, told of the interrogation at the Hotel du Nord. He had sent one of his men to Nice, with the receipts for the bags, and if, as seemed probable, they were still uncalled for, they would be examined at once.

"Though, even if they are still there," Lepine added, "we shall probably discover nothing of moment. One does not place anything of value in a bag and then abandon it. But I have another clue of the first importance," and he produced the 100-franc note. "Here is the note given to Brisson by one of the strangers. You perceive that it is quite new. I suggest that you send the number of this note to the Bank of France, ascertain when and to whom it was issued, and if any other notes of the series were issued at the same time."

"I will do so," said M. Deleasse, and made a note of the number. "I agree with you that this is most important."

"One thing more," went on Lepine, repeating the note in his pocketbook and extracting a slip of paper: "a small thing, but of significance. I have here the police blanks which the two men filled out upon arriving at the Hotel du Nord. Their names, you see, are given as George Arnold and William Smith, their home as New York city, United States of America. If you will notice the 'S' of the word 'Smith,' you will see that it is made in the German manner."

"That is true; but it may mean nothing. There are many Germans who are citizens of the United States."

"Yes; but the German name is Schmidt, not Smith. I conclude that this man is a German, but was trying to conceal it."

"You may be right," Deleasse assented, with a trace of impatience in his manner; "no doubt you are right. Is there anything more?"

"There is one thing," said Lepine, coloring a little, "which I have kept until the last, because it seems to upset M. Crochard's theory."

"What is that?"

Lepine drew two sheets of yellow tissue paper from his pocketbook. "An hour after our men left the Hotel du Nord," he said, "a telegram arrived, addressed to this William Smith. Here it is," and he spread out one of the sheets on the desk before the minister.

Deleasse bent forward eagerly and read:

William Smith, Hotel du Nord, Toulon, France: Our mother requests that you abandon trip, cancel all arrangements, and return at once. Alfred.

"Well?" and Deleasse looked up at his companion.

"That would seem to show, sir," said Lepine, "that William Smith was only an ordinary traveler, after all. You will see that it was filed at Brussels at noon of Sunday, the 24th. It was delayed in transmission, and for some reason was not received at Toulon until 9 o'clock in the evening. Messages here are not delivered on Sunday evening after 8 o'clock, and this was held until 7 the next morning. At that hour, William Smith was no longer at the hotel."

"Well?" asked Deleasse a second time.

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"Well," Lepine continued, "at 10 minutes past 6 on Monday morning, this message was filed at the office here," and he spread out the second sheet of tissue.

Again Deleasse bent forward,

and read:

Alfred Smith, Restante, Brussels: We continued our trip as planned. All well. Next address Nice. William.

"You will see," Lepine went on, "that these messages are such as an ordinary tourist would send and receive."

But Deleasse was not listening. He was reading the message a second time and yet a third, and there was a wrinkle of perplexity between his brows. At last he looked up, and the prefect was astonished at the expression of his face.

"There is one thing I forgot to tell you last night, Lepine," he said. "I did not myself see its significance until I had got to bed. The first telegram received from any foreign power in reference to the disaster was from the German emperor."

Lepine smiled. "The German emperor was the first to get word of it," he said. "I examined the other telegrams filed Monday morning. At 10 minutes to 7, the German consul here notified the minister of state at Berlin of the explosion. Admiral Belle did not file his message to you until 40 minutes later. No doubt he wished to assure himself of the extent of the disaster, in order not to alarm you needlessly. You should have received it not later than 8 o'clock."

"It was in fact, a few minutes before that hour. And when I reached the Elysee palace, I found the president with a message from the kaiser in his hand. It struck me as most peculiar."

"It was ironic, certainly," agreed Lepine, "but, under the circumstances, easily explained."

"You think, then—"

"I think that Crochard has assumed too much; I think that, before we accuse these men, we need more proof."

Deleasse pushed back his chair and paced for some moments nervously about the room. At last he sat down again, and rolled and lighted a cigaret.

"You are right," he said; "we need more proof. It is for you to find it, if it exists. And at this moment, I am interested not so much in the movements of these men, as in the cause of the explosion. Even supposing that they had a hand in it, how was it accomplished?"

Lepine returned the telegrams to his pocket.

"I agree with you," he said, "that that is the vital question. And I am unable to answer it."

"I shall institute a board of inquiry at once," went on the minister; "I have, in fact, already summoned the officers who will compose it. I will arrange for it to visit the wreck and begin to take evidence today, as it is important that the evidence be secured while the event is still fresh. I would suggest that you place some of your men at the disposition of the board."

"Very well, sir," Lepine agreed, and withdrew.

Toulon was awake again, and the streets were thronged as on a fete day. The first shock of the disaster had passed, and the in-born cheerfulness of the people was asserting itself. The excuse for a holiday was not to be overlooked, and every one who could take a day, or even an hour of leisure, did so, and spent it partly on the quays staring at the wreck, partly in the Place de la Liberté listening to the orators, partly in the Place d'Armes watching the men at work draping with black the Maritime Prefecture, where the board of inquiry was to sit, and the church of Saint Louis, where requiem high mass was to be celebrated. Finally as much as remained of the holiday was spent at a cafe before a glass of coffee or aperitif, with the satisfaction of a sacred duty conscientiously performed.

Lepine, as he made his way through the crowd, noticed that there was no longer any talk of treachery or treason,—even the word "sabotage" was no longer uttered. Every one agreed that the affair was another accident, deplorable indeed, but unavoidable and without dishonor, and so not to be taken too deeply to heart. France could build other battleships! The mercury in the national temperament was asserting itself.

For an hour Lepine walked about with thoughtful face, listening to the talk, watching the crowd, joining a group here and there, catching chance words from passers-by. He had had only three hours' sleep, but he showed no trace of fatigue. Certainly nothing was farther from his thoughts at this moment than that he needed rest.

Brotherly Love

What is your reason for saying you won't enlist unless you're sent to the Seventy-third Infantry?" questioned the recruiting officer.

"Because I want to be near my brother that's in the Seventy-fourth," returned Dennis O'Rourke.

UNCLE WIGGILY AND THE WHITE QUEEN.

Uncle Wiggily, the nice, ably gentleman, was hopping along through the woods one day, wondering if he would have an adventure with Alice of Wonderland or some of her kind when all of a sudden, coming to a place where a rail fence ran along through the trees, he saw, caught in a track of one of the rails by its legs, a white butterfly.

The poor butterfly was fluttering its wings, trying to pull out its legs, but it had to pull very gently, for a butterfly's legs, you know, is very tender and easily broken, like a piece of spider-web.

"Oh, my!" cried kind Uncle Wiggily, when he saw what was the matter. "You are in trouble, aren't you? I'm glad it happened to come along."

"Why, to see me in trouble?" asked the white butterfly.

"No, indeed!" exclaimed the bunny uncle. "But I want to help you."

"Well, I wish you would," went on the fluttering creature. "I've tried, and tried to get my poor leg loose, but I can't. And I'm on my way—oh, but I forgot. That part is a secret!"

"Well then, don't tell me," spoke Uncle Wiggily with a laugh. "for I might not be very good at keeping secrets. But I'll soon have your leg loose."

With that he took the small end of his red, white and blue striped rhesus crutch that Nurse Jane Fuzzy Wuzzy had gnawed for him out of a cornstalk and putting the little end of his crutch in the crack of the rail fence, Uncle Wiggily gave a hard push and soon the butterfly's leg was loose and she could fly away.

"But first I must thank you, Uncle Wiggily," she said. "And as you did me so great a favor I want to do you one in return. Not now, perhaps, as I am in a hurry, but later. So if ever you find you want something you can't get, just come to these woods and say a little verse. Then you shall have your wish."

"What verse shall I say?" asked Uncle Wiggily.

"This," answered the butterfly. Then she recited:

"When the wind blows in the trees,
Making perfume for the breeze,
Will you grant to me this boon,
That my wish may come true soon?"

"And what then?" asked the bunny. "I'll answer that for you, you must whisper your wish to a green leaf and—well, we'll see what happens next."

"Thank you," said Uncle Wiggily, and then he hopped on through the woods, while the butterfly fluttered away.

Uncle Wiggily had no adventure that day, but when he reached home to his hollow stump bungalow he found his muskrat lady housekeeper in the kitchen looking quite sad and blue.

"Cried the jolly bunny uncle, 'whatever is the matter?'"

"Oh, I have broken my nice gold and diamond dishpan and I can't do any more kitchen work until it is mended. I can't wash the dishes nor get you any supper."

"Oh, never mind about that," said Uncle Wiggily. "I'll take the diamond dishpan down to the 5 and 10 cent store and have them mend it for you. Where is it?"

Nurse Jane gave it to him. The pan had one crack right across the middle. The muskrat lady said it had fallen to the floor and had broken when she went to get Jackie Bow Wow, the little puppy dog, a slice of bread and jam.

"I'll soon have it fixed for you," said Uncle Wiggily. But it was more easily said than done. The 5 and 10 cent store was closed because every one was on a picnic, and no one else could mend the dishpan.

"Never mind, I'll buy Nurse Jane a new one and say nothing about it," said Uncle Wiggily. "I'll surprise her!"

And this, too, was more easily said than done. In all Woodland, where Uncle Wiggily and the animal folk lived, there was not another gold and diamond dishpan to be had. They were all sold.

"Oh, dear! What shall I do?" thought Uncle Wiggily. "Nurse Jane will be so unhappy! Then he happened to think of the white butterfly and what she had told him. So, taking the dishpan, he went to the wood where he had helped the fluttering creature and whispered to a leaf the little verse.

"Well, what is your wish?" asked a sudden voice.

"I wish Nurse Jane's gold and diamond dishpan to be mended," said Uncle Wiggily.

Instantly something white came fluttering down out of a tree, and the bunny saw it was the white butterfly. And then, all of a sudden, before he could count up to 16,000, the white butterfly seemed to fade away and in its place was a beautiful white Queen seated on a golden throne with a diamond crown on her head.

"You shall have your wish, Uncle Wiggily," she said. "Give me the dishpan."

"Why—why!" exclaimed the bunny. "You are—you are—"

"I am the White Queen from Alice in Wonderland," was the answer. "And I will ask you a riddle. When you take the dishes out of the pan what remains?"

"Nothing," answered the bunny. "Wrong," answered the White Queen. "The water does. Now I'll mend this for you." And she did, taking some gold from her throne and some diamonds from her crown.

Soon Nurse Jane's pan was as good as ever and she could wash the dishes in it.

"Thank you," said Uncle Wiggily. "But how is it you are a queen and a butterfly, too?"

"Oh, we Queens lead a sort of butterfly existence," said the White Queen. "But I must go now, for I have to find the tarts for the Queen of Hearts who is always losing hers."

Then, changing herself into a white butterfly again, the Queen flew away and Uncle Wiggily hopped on to his hollow stump bungalow, where he and Nurse Jane were soon having a nice supper and were very happy.

And if the points matter doesn't go to the movie pictures and step on the toes of the egg beater I'll tell you next about Uncle Wiggily and the Red Queen.

She Was Literal

From The Bits

"I grovel here before you in the dust!" observed the impudent youth, as he hark onto the recruiting room door.

"I don't know what you mean by that," replied the soldier. "I look after this room myself every morning."

Origin of "Greener"

From the Youth's Companion.

Once upon a time the greener, as we know him, was a rhymer, and a rhymer was a rhymer, and he bought a pair of any kind of shoes and sold them in small quantities; that is, he bought an egg, as the French put it, and he bought it by measure, as the French put it, as an "egg" being a "green."

In the fiscal year, 1915-1916, the British postoffice carried 11,000,000 letters and 87,000 parcels weekly for the United Kingdom and handed them over to the army. It distributed 2,270,000 weekly in separation allowance to 7,700,000 persons.

FRECKLES

Now is the Time to Get Rid of These Ugly Spots.

There is no longer the slightest need of feeling ashamed of your freckles, as the prescription of the double strength—double strength—double strength—is guaranteed to remove these homely spots. Simply get an ounce of othine—double strength—from your druggist, and apply a little of it night and morning and you should soon see that even the worst freckles have begun to disappear, while the lighter ones have vanished entirely. It is seldom that more than one ounce is needed to completely clear the skin and gain a beautiful clear complexion.

Be sure to ask for the double strength othine, as this is sold under guarantee of money back if it fails to remove freckles.—Adv.

SOME STRANGE INDIAN NAMES

That Red Men's Cognomens Retain Picturesqueness Is Shown by Those Figuring in Recent Land Sale.

That Indian names still possess their early strength and picturesqueness is shown by the names that figured prominently in the recent sale of Indian lands in the Standing Rock reservation in North and South Dakota.

An inspection of the list reveals such names as Kate Good Crow, whose nearest neighbor is Barney Two Bears. Mary Yellow Fat adjoins Melda Crowghost, while Mrs. Crazy Walking, on the southeast quarter of section 19, 23, 25, has probably reached the state in the same section with Elk Ghost.

Mary Lean Dog rather envies Agatha Big Shield, her aristocratic name. In like manner, Jennie Dog Man and Mary Shave Head may be all too willing to assume on short notice the heroic name borne by Morris Thunder-shield, heir apparent to Long Step Thundershield.

Mrs. Did Not Butcher, judging from her name, is in no condition to supply the wants for her nearest neighbor, Mrs. Frosted Red Fish, who lives on a half section, not far from Helen Dill-cut.

And on feral days there gather such notables as Francis Many Horses, Joseph Shoot the Bear, Mrs. Stanton Grindstone, Mrs. No Two Horns, Plus Broguth, Good Voice Elk, See the Bear, Married to Santee, Her Holy Road, Tiberius Many Wounds, Plus Shoot First and Shave on One Side.

How It Started

"Who is that man who just spoke to you?"

"I don't know."

"But he spoke as though he knew you."

"Perhaps he does. I may have met him somewhere, but I don't recall his name."

"That's queer. Men don't usually speak to other men unless they know them. Perhaps he's someone you're ashamed to let me know you know."

"I tell you the man is a stranger to me. He may be a minister of the gospel for all I know."

"That isn't very likely. The few ministers you've ever met you could remember easily enough. It's more likely he's a gambler or a barkeeper."

"Great Scott, woman!"

"Oh, there's no use losing your temper. I'm just a poor fool of a woman, not supposed to know anything or have any sense at all, but just the same I'm thoroughly convinced you're hiding something from me."

Kind to Father

Little miss, three years old, very observing, called on her grandaunt the other day. "Come again," said grandaunt in farewell.

"Father next morning said: 'Good-by, Little Miss.'"

"Good-by. Come again," she replied in polite tones.

Tough Times on the Farm

First Cow—It's going to be an awful summer for us.

Second Cow—Yes, it will probably be tresson to kick the farm help.

Half a parasol is better than no umbrella in a shower.

Instant Postum

A table drink that has taken the place of coffee in thousands of American homes.

"There's a Reason"



Delightful flavor
Rich aroma
Healthful
Economical
Sold by grocers everywhere.