

**THE CUNARD FLYER *MAURETANIA*  
CROSSING THE BAR**

**“HEAR THAT?”**

“Hear what?” asked Archie.

“Fast motorboat.”

“You have ears like a bat, Isaac. All I hear is the ship.”

Isaac Bell, a tall, lean man of thirty with a golden head of hair and a thick, impeccably groomed mustache, strode to the boat deck railing and stared intently into the dark. He wore the costume of a sober Hartford, Connecticut, insurance executive: a sailing day suit of Harris tweed, a low-crowned hat with a broad brim, made-to-order boots, and a gold watch chain draped across his narrow waist.

“It’s not the ship.”

They were sailing home to America on the Cunard flyer

*Mauretania*, the fastest liner in the world, bound for New York with twenty-two hundred passengers, eight hundred crew, and six thousand sacks of mail. Down in the fiery darkness of her stokehold, hundreds of men labored, stripped to the waist, shoveling coal to raise steam for a four-and-a-half-day dash across the Atlantic Ocean. But she was still creeping quietly in the channel, crossing the Mersey Bar with mere inches of tide beneath her keel and a black night ahead. Six decks above her furnaces and five hundred feet ahead of the nearest propeller, Isaac Bell heard only the motorboat.

The sound was out of place. It was the crisp rumble of a thirty-knot racer powered by V-8 gasoline engines—an English-built Wolseley-Siddeley, Bell guessed. But such exuberant noise spoke of a Côte d’Azur regatta on a sunny day, not a pitch-dark night in the steamer lanes.

He looked back. No boat showed a light. All he saw was the dying glow of Liverpool, the last of England, eleven miles astern.

Next to the ship, nothing moved in the invisible intersection of inky water and clouded sky.

Ahead, the sea buoy flashed intermittently.

The sound faded. A trick of the wind gusting in from the Irish Sea perhaps, rattling the canvas that covered the lifeboats suspended outside the teak rail.

Archie opened a gold cigar case with a ceremonial flourish. He extracted two La Aroma de Cubas. “How about a victory smoke?” He patted his vest pockets. “Forgot my cutter. Got your knife?”

Bell drew a throwing knife from his boot in a flicker of mo-

tion quicker than the eye and cut the Havanas' heads as cleanly as a guillotine.

Archie—redheaded Archibald Angell Abbott IV, a socially prominent New Yorker—looked like a well-off man-about-town, a gilt-edged disguise he adopted when he traveled with his young wife, Lillian, the daughter of America's boldest railroad tycoon. Only the ship's captain and chief purser knew that Archie was a private detective with the Van Dorn Agency and that Isaac Bell was Van Dorn's chief investigator.

They lighted up, sheltering from the wind in the lee of a web support, to celebrate capturing a Wall Street stock swindler whose depredations had shut mills and thrown thousands out of work. The swindler had fled to a luxurious European exile on the mistaken assumption that the Van Dorn detectives' motto—"We Never Give Up! Never!"—lost its teeth at the water's edge. Bell and Abbott had run him to ground in a Nice casino. Locked in the *Mauretania's* forward baggage room in a lion cage rented from a circus—the liner's brig already occupied—he was headed for trial in Manhattan, guarded by a Van Dorn Protective Services operative.

Bell and Abbott, who had been best friends since fighting a legendary intercollegiate boxing match—Bell for Yale, Archie for Princeton—circled the boat deck alone. The hour was late, and the cold wind and fog had driven the *Mauretania's* First, Second, and Third Class passengers to their respective state-rooms, cabins, and galvanized-iron berths.

"We were discussing," Archie said, only half in jest, "your not-so-impending marriage to Miss Marion Morgan."

"We are married in our hearts."

Isaac Bell's fiancée was in the moving picture line. She had caught the last boat train from London after photographing King Edward VII's funeral procession for Picture World News Reels. Cine-negatives from the taking machines she had stationed along the route had been immediately developed, washed, dried, and printed. Tonight—only nine hours after old “King Teddy” had been buried—five hundred and twenty feet of “topical film” was showing in the Piccadilly theaters, and the hardworking director was enjoying a hot bath in her First Class room along the *Mauretania's* promenade deck.

“No one doubts the ardor of your courtship,” Archie said with a wink so suggestive it would have earned any other man a fist in the eye. “And who but the blind could fail to notice the colossal emerald on her finger that signifies your engagement? Yet friends observe that it's been a while since you announced . . . cold feet?”

“Not mine,” said Bell. “Nor Marion's,” he added hastily. “We're both so busy we haven't time to nail down a date.”

“Now's your chance. Four and a half days on the high seas. She can't escape.” Archie gestured with his cigar up at the *Mauretania's* darkened bridge and asked casually, as if he and his wife had not conjured up this conversation the day they booked passage, “What do you say we ask the captain to marry you?”

“Miles ahead of you, Archie.”

“What do you mean?”

A big grin lighted Bell's face with a row of strong, even teeth that practically flashed in the dark. “I've already spoken with Captain Turner.”

“*We're on!*” Archie grabbed Bell's hand and shook it vigor-

ously. "I'm best man. Lillian's matron of honor. And we've got a boatload of wedding guests. I snuck a look at the manifest. *Mauretania* is carrying half the 'Four Hundred' and a fair slice of *Burke's Peerage*."

Bell's grin set in a determined smile. "Now all I have to do is corral Marion."

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**ARCHIE, WHO WAS RECUPERATING** from a gunshot wound, announced abruptly that he was going to bed. Bell could feel him trembling as he helped him through a heavy door that led into a companionway.

"I'll walk down with you."

"Waste of good tobacco," said Archie, holding tight to the banister. "Finish your cigar. I'll make it under my own steam."

Bell listened until Archie had safely descended. Then he stepped back out on deck, where he lingered, his ears cocked to the dark sea.

He leaned over the rail. Sixty feet below, the water swirled in the lights of the pilot boat lumbering close, belching smoke and steam. The helmsman pressed his bow skillfully to the moving black cliff of the *Mauretania's* riveted hull. The pilot who had guided the mammoth steamer out of the river and over the sandbar descended a rope-and-wood Jacob's ladder. It was neatly done, and in another minute the two vessels disengaged, the smaller extinguishing her deck lights and disappearing astern, the larger gaining speed.

Bell was still peering speculatively into the night when he

heard the crisp V-8 rumble again. This time it sounded nearer. A quarter mile or less, he estimated, and approaching rapidly. The motorboat closed within a hundred yards. Bell still could not see it, but he could hear it running alongside, pacing the steamship, no small job in the steepening seas. He thought it odd, if not plain dangerous, that the vessel showed no lights. Suddenly it did—not running lights but a shielded Aldis signal lamp flashing code.

## 2

ISAAC BELL LOOKED UP AT THE OPEN OVERHANG that extended from the bridge, expecting the *Mauretania's* answering flash. But the bridge wing was deserted of officers and seamen, and no one signaled back. He saw no response either from the foremast that towered invisibly two hundred feet into the dark sky. The lookout perched in his crow's nest watched ahead of the ship, not to the side where the Aldis lamp had aimed its narrow beam.

Suddenly Bell saw the splash of a bow wave. It gleamed white, in sharp contrast to the black water. Then he saw the boat itself veering close. It *was* a Wolseley-Siddeley, burying its nose in the steep seas, hurling spray, and tearing ahead in the hands of a helmsman who knew his business. It drew alongside directly under him, forty feet long, sharp as a knife, spewing a bright feather of propeller wash.

Bell heard a shout behind him, a frightened cry stifled abruptly. He whirled around and scanned the dark boat deck. Then he heard a grunt of pain and a sudden rush of feet.

From the companionway where he had said good night to Archie burst a tight knot of men in fierce struggle. Their silhouettes lurched past the light spilling from the First Class library windows. Three big men were forcing two smaller fellows to the rail. Bell heard another shout, a cry for help, a hard blow, a muffled groan. A victim doubled over, clutching his stomach, the wind knocked out of him.

Isaac Bell sprinted the distance that separated them.

He moved in utter silence.

So intent were the three that the first they knew of the tall detective's approach was the crack of a powerful right fist knocking the nearest man to the deck. Bell wheeled on the balls of his feet and launched a left-hand haymaker with all his weight and strength behind it. Had it landed, he would have evened the odds at one to one.

Bell's target moved with superhuman speed. He slipped the punch so it missed his head and smashed his shoulder. It still connected with sufficient power to drive the man to the deck. But he was carrying a heavy rope looped over his shoulder, and the springy Manila coils absorbed the shock.

A counterpunch exploded from the dark with the concentrated violence of a pile driver. Isaac Bell rolled with it, sloughing off some of the impact, but the momentum pinwheeled him into the railing and so far over it that he found himself gazing down at the motorboat pressed against the hull directly under him. The man who had unleashed the blow that sent

Isaac Bell flying dragged his two victims to the rail. At a grunted command, his accomplice jumped over the body of their fallen comrade and charged Bell to finish him off.

Bell saw a knife flash in the light from the library.

He twisted off the rail, regained his feet, and tried to sidestep a vicious thrust. The blade passed an inch from his face. Bell kicked hard. His boot landed solidly. The man hit the railing and tumbled over it. A shriek of pain and fear ended abruptly with the sickening thud of his body smashing on the motor-boat sixty feet below.

The boat sped away with a roar of throttles opened wide.

Isaac Bell whipped a Browning automatic from his coat.

“Elevate!” he commanded the astonishingly quick and powerful man with the rope, whom he could see only as a shadow. “Hands in the air.”

But again the leader of the attack moved like lightning. He threw the coiled rope. Loops of it entangled Bell’s gun hand. In the instant it took to untangle himself, Bell was astonished to see the attacker scoop his unconscious accomplice off the deck and throw him over the railing into the sea. Then he ran.

Bell threw off the rope and leveled his pistol: “Halt!”

The attacker kept running.

Isaac Bell waited coolly for him to reach the light spill from the library in order to get a clear shot to shoot the man’s legs out from under him. His highly accurate Browning No. 2 semi-automatic firing .380 caliber cartridges could not miss. Just before reaching the lights, the running man clapped both hands on the rail, flipped high in the air like a circus acrobat, and tumbled into the dark.

Bell ran to the spot the man had jumped from and looked over the side of the ship.

The water was black, bearded white where the *Mauretania's* hull raced through. Bell could not see whether the man was swimming or had sunk beneath the waves. In either event, unless the motorboat returned and its crew was extraordinarily lucky in their search, it was highly unlikely they would pull him out before the bitter-cold Irish Sea sucked the life from his body.

Bell holstered his pistol and buttoned his coat over it. What he had just seen was singular in his experience. What would possess the man to throw his unconscious accomplice overboard to certain death, then hurl himself to the same fate?

"Thank you, sir, thank you so very much," spoke a voice in the accent and baroque cadence of a cultured Viennese. "Surely we owe our lives to your swift and courageous action."

Bell peered down at a compact shadow. Another voice, a voice that sounded American, groaned, "Wish you'd saved us before he socked me in the breadbasket. Feels like I got run over by a streetcar."

"Are you all right, Clyde?" asked the Viennese.

"Nothing a month of nursing by a qualified blonde won't cure." Clyde climbed unsteadily to his feet. "Thanks, mister. You saved our bacon."

Isaac Bell asked, "Were they trying to kill you or kidnap you?"

"Kidnap."

"Why?"

"That's a long story."

"I've got all night," said Isaac Bell in a tone that demanded answers. "Did you know those men?"

“By their actions and their reputation,” said the Viennese. “But thanks to you, sir, we were never formally introduced.”

Gripping each man firmly by the arm, Bell walked them inside the ship and back to the smoking room, sat them in adjoining armchairs, and took a good look at their faces. The American was young, a tousle-headed, mustachioed dandy in his early twenties who was going to wake up with a black eye as well as a sore belly.

The Viennese was middle-aged, a kindly-looking, dignified gentleman with pink-tinted pince-nez eyeglasses that had stayed miraculously clipped to his nose, a high forehead and intelligent eyes. His suit of clothes was of good quality. He wore a dark necktie and a round-collar shirt. In contrast to his sober outfit, he had an elaborate mustache that curled up at the tips. Bell pegged him for an academic, which proved to be not far off. He, too, was going to have a shiner. And blood was oozing from a split lip.

“We should not be here,” the Viennese said, gazing in wonder at the richly carved wood paneling and elaborate plaster ceiling of the enormous lounge, which was decorated in the manner of the Italian Renaissance. “This is the First Class smoking room. We voyage in Second Class.”

“You’re my guests,” Bell said tersely. “What was all that about?”

The smoking room steward appeared, cast a chilly eye on the Second Class passengers, and told Bell as solicitously as such an announcement could be uttered that the bar was closed.

“I want towels and ice for these gentlemen’s bruises,” Isaac Bell said, “an immediate visit from the ship’s surgeon, and stiff

scotch whiskeys all around. We'll start with the whiskeys, please. Bring the bottle."

"No need, no need."

The American concurred hastily. "We're fine, mister. You've gone to plenty trouble already. We oughta just go to bed."

"My name is Bell. Isaac Bell. What are yours?"

"Forgive my ill manners," said the Viennese, bowing and pawing at his vest with shaking fingers, muttering distractedly, "I appear to have lost my cards in the struggle." He stopped searching and said, "I am Beiderbecke, Professor Franz Bismark Beiderbecke."

Beiderbecke offered his hand, and Bell took it.

"May I present my young associate, Clyde Lynds?"

Clyde Lynds threw Bell a mock salute. Bell reached for his hand and looked him in the face, gauging his worth. Lynds stopped clowning and met his gaze, and Bell saw a steadiness not immediately apparent.

"Why did they try to kidnap you?"

The two exchanged wary looks. Beiderbecke spoke first. "We can only presume they were agents of a munitions trust."

"What munitions trust?"

"A German outfit," said Lynds. "Krieg Rüstungswerk GmbH."

Bell took note of Lynds's fluent pronunciation. "Where did you learn to speak German, Mr. Lynds?"

"My mother was German, but she married a lot. I spent some of my childhood on my Swedish-immigrant father's North Dakota wheat farm, some in Chicago, and a bunch of time backstage in New York City theaters. 'Mutter' finally hooked a

Viennese, which she wanted all along only didn't know it, and I landed in Vienna, where the good Professor here took me in."

"Fortunate Professor, is the truth of the matter, Mr. Bell. Clyde is a brilliant scientist. My colleagues are still gnashing their teeth that he chose to work in my laboratory."

"That's because I came cheap," Clyde Lynds grinned.

Bell asked, "Why would agents of a munitions company kidnap you?"

"To steal our invention," said Beiderbecke.

"What sort of invention?" asked Bell.

"Our *secret* invention," Lynds answered before the Professor could speak. He turned to the older man and said, "Sir, we did agree that secrecy was all."

"Yes, of course, of course, but Mr. Bell has so kindly treated us. He saved our lives, at no small risk to his own."

"Mr. Bell is a handy fellow with his fists. What else do we know about him? I recommend we stick to our deal to keep quiet about it, like we agreed."

"Of course, of course. You're right, of course." Professor Beiderbecke turned embarrassedly to Bell. "Forgive me, sir. Despite my age, I am not a man of the world. My brilliant young protégé has persuaded me that I am too trusting. Obviously, you're a gentleman. Obviously, you sprang to our defense while never pausing to consider your own safety. On the other hand, it behooves me to remember that we have been sorely used by others who appeared to be gentlemen."

"And who tried to yank the fillings from our teeth," grinned Lynds. "Sorry, Mr. Bell. You understand what I'm saying, don't you? Not that we're not grateful for you charging to the rescue."

Isaac Bell returned what could be judged a friendly smile.

“Your gratitude does not have to take the form of giving away an important secret.” His mild answer disguised curiosity that would be best satisfied by biding his time. As Archie had noted, for the next four and half days on the high seas no one was going anywhere. “But I am concerned for your safety,” he added. “These munitions people mounted an audacious campaign with military precision to kidnap you from a British liner putting to sea. What makes you think they won’t try again?”

“Not on a British liner,” Lynds fired back. “On a German ship we’d worry about the crew. That’s why we took a British ship.”

“You mean they tried before?”

“In Bremen.”

“How did you happen to give them the slip?”

“Got lucky,” said Lynds. “We saw them coming, so we made a big show of booking passage on the *Prinz Wilhelm*. Then we ran like heck the other way, to Rotterdam, and caught a steamer to Hull. By the time they figured out we hadn’t sailed on the *Wilhelm*, we were on the train to London.”

Bell had many more questions, but they were forestalled by the arrival of the ship’s doctor. When the chief officer bustled in right behind the doctor, Bell emptied his whiskey glass into a spittoon before the officer could see and conspicuously poured another from the bottle.

The chief officer listened with an increasingly skeptical expression as the Professor and Lynds described an attack by three men who subsequently fell overboard. Then, while the

doctor examined Beiderbecke's cut lip and Lynds's swelling eye, the officer said quietly to Bell, with a significant glance at the whiskey in his hand, "One cannot help but wonder whether those two gentlemen had a falling out and covered it up with a tall tale of, shall we say, 'piracy in Liverpool Bay'?"

Isaac Bell sipped his whiskey. He intended to get to the bottom of the bizarre attack, as well as the nature of Beiderbecke and Lynds's self-described secret invention, which had provoked it. But the kidnappers had drowned in the night, miles behind the ship. The Austrian and the American-raised German-Swede were the only sources of information available. And the *Mauretania's* officers were even less qualified than a small town police force to investigate the motive for the attack. They would only get in his way.

"I say . . ." the chief officer went on. He had begun politely, almost diffidently, the model of the smooth company man unfazed by the peccadillos of wealthy passengers. Now he fixed Bell with a flinty eye practiced at terrorizing junior officers: "As no one jumped, fell, or was thrown overboard, I am curious how they induced you, Mr. Bell, to embroider their story."

"Sympathy," Isaac Bell smiled. He touched the whiskey to his lips. "Poor chaps were so embarrassed by their behavior . . . and I had had a drink or two." He peered into his glass. "Seemed like a good idea at the time . . ." He looked the officer full in the face and grinned sheepishly. "It felt jolly good to be a hero, even for a moment . . ."

"I appreciate your candor, Mr. Bell. I am sure that you will agree that as soon as the surgeon has done his work it will be best if we all turn in for the night and let sleeping dogs lie."

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“**KRIEG RÜSTUNGSWERK GMBH?**” echoed Archie Abbott, who had traveled regularly back and forth to Europe his whole life. Most recently, in the course of an extended honeymoon, he had laid the groundwork for overseas Van Dorn field offices. “They’re a private munitions outfit with strong Army connections. As you’d expect of a cannon manufacturer gearing up for a European war.”

Isaac Bell had joined him in the dining saloon moments after the breakfast bugle had blown. The *Mauretania* was steaming past Malin Head on the northern tip of Ireland, and as she left the Irish Sea in her wake, the liner had begun lifting her bow into unusually tall Atlantic swells, churning rumors in the elevators and vestibules of rough weather ahead.

“Why do you ask?”

“Do you recall the motorboat you could not hear last night?”

“If I couldn’t hear it, how could I recall it?”

Bell told him what had happened. Archie was crestfallen. “Of all the darned times to go to bed early. *All* three overboard?”

“The one who tried to stab me, the one who got tossed by his boss. And the boss under his own steam.”

“You have all the fun, Isaac.”

“What sort of lunatic drowns himself?”

Archie smiled. “Is it possible he was afraid of a fellow who had already floored two of his gang and was suddenly waving a gun?”

Bell shook his head. "A man afraid would not have taken the time to throw his accomplice overboard. No, he made sure there was no one left to confess. Not even himself. Lunacy."

"Are you sure he didn't jump into a lifeboat?"

"Positive. I went back and looked later. He was along that open stretch in the middle where there aren't any boats. Ten yards at least from the nearest one."

Archie forked down several bites of kippered herring. "I'd say less *lunatic* than *fanatic*. Krieg Rüstungswerk operates hand in glove with the Imperial German Army. So if Krieg Rüstungswerk wants the Professor's 'secret invention' it must be some sort of war machine, right?"

"Undoubtedly a war machine."

"Then Krieg might well recruit German Army officers to snatch it. They're fanatical on the subject of '*Der Tag*'—'the Day'—to kick off Kaiser Wilhelm's 'Will to deeds.' And we all know what 'Will to deeds' means."

"Shorthand for 'Start a war,'" said Bell. "Though I keep hoping that the European war talk is just talk."

"So do I," said Archie. "But Great Britain is paranoid about German dreadnoughts, and Imperial Germany is ambitious. The kaiser loves his Army, and the Army rules society—just like in old Prussia. Everyone's drafted for three years, and the bourgeoisie are so nuts for uniforms they take reserve commissions just so they can dress up like soldiers."

"Soldiers didn't build German industry. Civilians did."

"No doubt millions of hardworking Germans would rather get rich and send their kids to school than fight a war. The question is, can the kaiser stampede them into battle— But enough

small talk about war and secret weapons! Dare I ask—has Marion said yes again?”

“Haven’t braced her yet.”

“Too busy tossing miscreants overboard? Hey, where are you going? You haven’t finished your breakfast.”

“I am marconigraphing the Berlin office before we steam out of range. Get Art Curtis cracking on Lynds, Beiderbecke, and Krieg Rüstungswerk.”

“Good luck. Art’s only a one-man office, and he just got there.”

“Art Curtis is quicker than a mongoose and smart as a whip—plus he speaks fluent German. Why do you think Mr. Van Dorn gave him Berlin?”

“I’ll meet you in the smoking room. We have to talk about you taking your beautiful bull by her horns— Say, Isaac? What happened to the rope he threw at you?”

“The rope was gone when I went back to look.”

“A crewman must have scooped it up.”

“Or an accomplice.”

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**BELL PICKED UP A BLANK** from the purser’s desk and filled out his message. Rather than pass it before inquiring eyes, he carried the form directly to the Marconi house on the top deck of the ship between Funnels 2 and 3.

A window curtain, gray with coal smoke, flapped in the wind as Bell walked into the radio room extending a British pound sterling note—five dollars, two days’ pay—to derail ahead of

time any suggestion that he send his message through the purser. Nor did the operator, who was not a member of the *Mauretania's* crew but employed by the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company, remark that Bell's message looked like gibberish, as it was written out in cipher.

Bell stood by as the operator dispatched his message by Morse code to a shore station at Malin Head. From there it would be relayed overland by telegraph and under the Irish Sea and English Channel by cable and back onto telegraph wires across the continent to the Van Dorn field office in Berlin. Depending how far at sea the *Mauretania* had preceded, Arthur Curtis's reply would be transmitted from Ireland or relayed by other ships.

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**"JUST IN TIME FOR THE BLOVIATING,"** Archie greeted Isaac Bell when the tall detective joined him in the smoking saloon. Midmorning, the male haven was crowded with gents smoking cigars, pipes, and cigarettes, playing chess and solitaire, and reading the ship's newspaper. Thin northern daylight, filtered through stained glass and tobacco smoke, shone upon settees, tables, and armchairs grouped on a pale green carpet. Two ruddy-faced middle-aged men were arguing in raised voices. Bell cocked an ear. In smokers and club cars, even the judicious sank to braggadocio, spilling priceless information by the boatload.

"Who's the large gent in tents of tweed?" he asked Archie.

"Earl of Strone, retired British Army."

“Who’s that Strone’s squaring off against?”

“Karl Schultz, a Pan-Germanist coal-mining magnate known not so affectionately by the Ruhr Valley laboring classes as the ‘Chimney Baron.’ Before they get any louder, let me imbue you with courage. I implore you, my friend, moor the fair Marion before she drifts off.”

“Midnight tonight,” said Isaac Bell. “Every detail lined up. Champagne and music for the kickoff.”

“You can’t go wrong with champagne. But where will you get an orchestra at midnight? Even the steward who bugles goes to bed after he blows ‘Sunset.’”

“I’m going to surprise her with a gramophone.”

“Won’t a gramophone horn flaring from your dinner jacket spoil the surprise?”

“The horn is made of cardboard. The whole thing folds flat in a little box no bigger than a camera case.”

Archie looked at him with genuine admiration. “You are relentlessly strategic, Isaac.”

“Lillian’s pacing outside the door. You can give her the thumbs-up. It’s in the bag.”

“Is it too early in the morning to drink to your success?”

Bell had already caught the steward’s eye. “Two McEwan’s Exports, please.”

“I’ll be darned,” said Archie, rising to his feet and waving. “That’s Hermann Wagner, the banker. He hosted a dinner for us on our honeymoon in Berlin. Herr Wagner!”

Wagner came over, smiling. Bell noticed the air of the sophisticated Berliner about him, the elegant inverse of his coarse-grained countryman Chimney Baron Karl Schultz.

While exchanging passenger chitchat about the rumored rough weather and agreeing that the *Mauretania* was already pitching heavily for such a long vessel, they were suddenly interrupted by the Earl of Strone heard across the saloon.

“What possible need has Germany for more dreadnoughts?”

“Because now strikes the hour of Germany’s rising power,” replied Schultz, as loudly.

Conversation ceased. Every man in the smoker waited for Lord Strone’s response.

The Briton tugged a watch from his vest. He thumbed it open, peered at the face, and announced to laughter, “The hour, by my timepiece, appears to be half-eleven.”

“I refer to Germany’s achievements,” Karl Schultz replied proudly. “We have surpassed England in the production of coal and steel, and our scientists are dominant in chemicals and electricity. We produce half the world’s electrical equipment. And we have a superior culture of music, poetry, and philosophy.”

Archie’s friend Hermann Wagner interrupted in a gentle voice. “‘Superior’ is perhaps a strong word among shipmates. From strength comes humility.”

“Humility is for fools,” Schultz growled. “We are neither despots like the Russians nor weakling democrats like the French. Our achievements give Germany the right, the duty, the *lofty* duty, to seek more colonies.”

“Good God, man, you’ve got German East Africa and German South-West Africa. You’ve even got a sliver of Togoland, as I recall. What more do you need?”

“Leopold, king of minuscule Belgium, has the *entire Congo*.

Germany demands her rightful share of Africa. *And* South America, *and* the Pacific, *and* China. England has had too much for too long.”

The earl’s lips tightened, and he started to rise to his feet.

Hermann Wagner intervened, placating him with smiles and pleasantries. Strone settled back down in his chair, harrumphing like an indignant mastiff, “The colonies are already spoken for.”

“Strone’s a darned good actor,” Isaac Bell told Archie.

“Actor? What do you mean?”

“Ten-to-one he’s British Military Intelligence.”

Archie Abbott looked more closely.

“And twenty-to-one,” Bell added, “he’s *not* retired.”

Archie, who himself would have become an actor if his mother had not forbidden such a leap from society’s bosom, nodded agreement. “No bet.”

The Briton said to the German, “You want war in hopes of grasping the spoils of war.”

“Those powers that try to impede German ascendancy will eventually recover from the weakening we mete out and accept their place in the new order.”

Lord Strone rounded suddenly on Isaac Bell. “You, sir, you look like an American.”

“I have that honor.”

“Will the United States accept the ‘new order’?”

Bell answered diplomatically. “Britain’s navy rules the seas, and the German Army is the largest in the world. We have every hope that you will work out your differences. In fact,” he added sternly, “we *expect* you to work out your differences.”

“Not likely so long as Germany keeps building dreadnoughts,” said the earl.

Schultz’s cheeks flushed crimson. “I quote Kaiser Wilhelm: ‘Our armor must be without flaw.’”

Hermann Wagner intervened again, smiling polite apologies for his countryman’s florid aggressiveness. “But if—God forbid—Great Britain and the German Empire are on a collision course, on which side will America stand?”

“On the far side of the Atlantic Ocean,” drawled Archie Abbott, sparking laughter around the room.

The Berliner laughed with them and even the Chimney Baron smiled. But Lord Strone replied gravely, “We are sailing in a four-day ship, sir. *Mauretania* steams to New York at twenty-six knots. The world is closer than Americans think.”

“Not so close we won’t see it coming,” said Isaac Bell.

The men laughed again, sipped their drinks, and drew on cigarettes and cigars.

Hermann Wagner broke the silence, and Isaac Bell wondered why he persisted so. “But if America had to choose, was *forced* to choose, to whom would you gravitate?”

“Germany,” Schultz answered. “More Germans have emigrated to the United States than from any other nation.”

“Americans and Englishmen share blood and centuries of tradition,” countered the Earl of Strone. “We are brothers.”

“But Americans fought their brothers in the Civil War.”

A grim glance flickered between Isaac Bell and Archie Abbott. It sounded as if the German Empire and the British Empire would fight sooner than later. God knows if France, Russia, Italy, and Austria would pile on. But the two detectives

had no doubt that the United States of America should steer clear of Europe's chaotic politics.

Isaac Bell stood to his full height and looked the certainly not retired military intelligence officer in the eye. The Briton, at least, ought to know that the days of romantic cavalry charges were long dead. Then he widened his commanding gaze to encompass the Germans and said to all, "Before you resort to war, I recommend you observe closely the effects of up-to-date machine guns. If you gents can't sort out your differences, you'll turn Europe into a slaughterhouse."

"Are you in the arms trade, Mr. Bell?" asked Wagner.

"Insurance."

"Oh, really? May I ask what firm?"

"Dagget, Staples and Hitchcock."

"Venerable firm," Lord Strone rumbled. "My solicitors engage them for my American holdings. But tell me, old chap, is it common for insurance men to observe the effects of modern machine guns?"

"We number among our clients Connecticut and Massachusetts arms factories," Bell answered smoothly. "And by extension, factories with whom they conduct business abroad. Vickers, of course, in England," he said to Strone, and to Schultz, "Krieg Rüstungswerk in Germany. Are you familiar with Krieg?"

"Only by reputation," Hermann Wagner answered, as the Chimney Baron glanced aside.

"What is Krieg's reputation?"

"Innovative," Hermann Wagner interrupted, again. "Full of get-up-and-go, as Americans would say."