

# “Passengers Must Be On Board by Midnight”

By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

*Illustrated by HAROLD W. McCREA*

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*A story of marriage which should be subtitled:  
Romance is dead! Long live Romance!*

**T**he exact moment when it dawned on Sonia that the party “thrown” by Teddy in her honor was a thing of irony, she could not quite determine.

Perhaps it was when Ellaline Holmes secured Teddy as her partner for the fifth or was it the sixth? time.

For the moment, the couple to her right having left their salad for the dancing floor, and Teddy being gone from the other side of her, Sonia was alone at the table. She could think without intrusion. Ellaline could dance divinely. Diners at the tables that circled the dancing space forgot the immediate concerns of food to watch.

Sonia danced moderately well. There were places where Sonia shone better than in a ballroom. Much less spectacular places. Places where one couldn't wear daring low-cut green with trailing green foam to the ankles. She should have learned by now that by training, by instinct, by inclination, she was not of this set—his set—never had been, never would be.

They were reasonably nice to her. They did not know that once she had overheard a conversation.

“Who’s the girl Teddy Williamson married?”

“Sonia Smith.”

“What’s she like?”

“My dear, a Juno with the soul of a frump!”

It was Ellaline who had said this unkind untruth. Was it an untruth? And what, please, was a frump? A person who suddenly, at a party in her honor, discovered herself to be quite alone? There was one girl over; Jimmy Bogert had done something accidental to the detriment of one leg, and been excused at the last moment.

Tears sprang into her eyes. She told herself it was not rudeness, intentional; it was sheer verve, a vibrancy that she envied them. And they had a *savoir faire*, in public places such as this, denied to her.

Did a girl have to incline her fair hair quite so close to a gentleman’s shirt front and gaze up at him with such intimate rapture? Couldn’t Teddy see Ellaline was a little vamp?

She mustn’t appear discomfited in the eyes of nearby diners. At her own party! Her party! And this was Teddy’s last night; tomorrow he was sailing—business abroad for three whole months. Tomorrow night he would go on board.

Sonia picked a flower from the great bowl of mixed fragrance that was flanked in the centre of the table with orchid candles rising from fluted silver. Lilies-of-the-valley, hothouse things, but the real ones from the moist earth of spring gardens would be out soon. A nostalgia tore her. She saw the small town where her girlhood had had the surroundings and intimacies of a limited but well-bred circle, where her career in the city—brief because of Teddy—was followed with an interest capped and crowned by the wedding of a year ago. Scarcely a year ago.

Teddy had said the night before the wedding: “Look here, pick me some of those lilies, Sonia. I’d rather wear them than these boughten things!”

She had reached up and put the green stalks through his buttonhole and was swept up into his arms, her face close to that buttonhole fragrance. The dome of sky above swung dizzily. It was blue. It was green. It was saffron. It was spattered with pale yellow stars.

Was it necessary for yellow hair to rest so closely against a lapel, just about the place the lilies had been put that night? Oh, it was silly to think things like that! Silly to invoke sudden fancies now; to recall how often opportunities had happened—or been made—for Ellaline and him to be together. Teddy was head of some committee connected with the Charity Fair that opened tomorrow. He'd had to drop it when this business came to take him abroad. Quite natural that Ellaline should have occasion to see him.

It was silly to think. . . oh, Teddy, why look like that into a girl's eyes here on a public dancing floor? Can't you see, Teddy, everybody's watching, grinning, whispering? Oh, Teddy, don't make a fool of yourself before people! Never mind me, but these people! They'll think he loves her. One shouldn't hold a girl that way and gaze into her eyes—except in a garden, with the sky a breathless green, and blue, and saffron, pricked by pale yellow stars.

The group of dance numbers was over; they were all coming back to the tables, to the neglected dinners!

“Sonia, I'm so sorry. I didn't know you were all alone here.” She bit her lip. Why must he call attention? And so in all this time he hadn't noticed?

“It's all right, Teddy!”

She smiled. The smile was as much a social deceit as the words. She'd rise to this! She'd be the life of the party—her party!

Ellaline Holmes said: “How terribly skimpy the orchestra is tonight! Only two encores. Teddy and I were just getting nicely into the swing of it. My dear,” she addressed Sonia blandly, “will you pass me the olives? What a trip your hubby is going to have, Sonia! Aren't you horribly jealous? I should be, myself, if dad hadn't promised me a run over in June. Shall you be near London at the end of June, Teddy? What a lark if our times clicked!” Her teeth met in the meat of an olive. The carmine of her lips was accentuated. Too much color, thought Sonia furiously, yet men seemed to like that kind of thing. “Sonia,” cried Ellaline, “lend me your glass! Mine's empty! I want to drink to Teddy's trip. Good lord—what is it—ginger ale? Your health, Teddy dear. . . and may a kind fate let us meet in the Big Smoke!”

Sonia half rose in her seat. There was a limit to—to things! Beneath the bland coldness of Ellaline was something too obvious to overlook. The set recognized the challenge for what it was. Ellaline had gone too far. They all saw that. Sonia saw blurred ovals equipped with eyes. The eyes seemed to

be saying: “Will Sonia take it up? Or is she just dumb enough not to read beneath the words?”

It was more than a challenge from Ellaline: it was a challenge from the Set. Sonia had never belonged. She was not their kind. She had not their ways. They thought her a frump. They thought her old and prim, and she was in years more youthful than they, and in experience a child beside them. Teddy was looking at her: she could not determine or interpret his glance. She had a feeling of estrangement. He was one of them . . . one of the enemy. She could not fit in: Ellaline belonged. Ellaline would fit in here, or in London. Sonia had a prophetic vision of them doing London together, these two! Teddy had planned all that for the honeymoon, and then—business reasons—it could not be. They had put their passport with the funny photographs of themselves, away with a sigh. “Sometime later!” Teddy had cheered her. And now he was going on business, alone. And, in June, Ellaline would be in London.

Had minutes elapsed since Ellaline spoke, or an hour, or a lifetime? In reality, she supposed, seconds.

Sonia’s glass in Ellaline’s hand tinkled gaily against a plate. As if it were a signal the orchestra burst into a gay extravaganza of sound.

Ellaline cried:

“Teddy, that’s our encore! I sent a special request a few moments ago!”

“If you dance it,” said Sonia steadily, “I shall go home!”

She wondered what inner power steadied her voice, redeeming the statement from being a whine, or anything but what it was—an irrevocable and dignified protest. Ellaline halted, flung up her head, looked at Teddy.

“Sonia’s being funny!” she cried. “Come along, Teddy!”

Teddy went. Somebody snickered. Sonia lifted her head. The rude, vulgar lot of them! She was through! She hated them all! She hated Teddy! She caught up her evening cloak and made her way through the lines of tables and out into the lobby. Teddy would probably follow; she hurried. She spoke to the doorman, stepped into a taxi, and the car glided into the night traffic of the city.

She was in bed when Teddy came in. He looked pale, standing there in the doorway in his tuxedo. She said before he could speak:

“Please don’t bother me tonight. I’ve got a terrible headache!”

That was true enough. She was glad Teddy turned on no more lights; her eyes smarted intolerably. She watched him, however. When he went to the bathroom and she heard the familiar splash of water, something broke within her. In a moment or two she would sob her heart out. He would try to comfort her. The water ceased its splashing. Teddy came out.

She said:

“Do you mind sleeping in the spare room?”

“Sonia!”

“Please!”

“Oh, all right.”

She would have recalled her request a moment later. He gathered up such things as he needed.

“Shall I put the lights out?”

“Please!”

Wasn't he going to kiss her?

He hesitated, snapped off the light at the wall switch; a familiar scent of soap and mannish talcum moved to her in a wan breath and died. She lay still, listening for him to come back. That was their last night together for three months. The first night in separate rooms. If he came back ever so little, she would call him. The door of the spare room closed firmly. Silence and darkness lay in the hallway.

**T**he Charity Fair opened at two o'clock at the Forum on the morrow. As a member of the publicity committee—she had a nice flair for pastels—Sonia's work was largely done in advance; but with last night's episode crowding her memory she determined to go. If any additional impetus were needed it was given by the equal desolations of breakfast and lunch; the one with Teddy glumly opposite her, the other alone—which was the lonelier she did not know. Breakfast was the least comfortable. A grey mist hung over the city; the air was sluggish as that in an unaired room. She set the table in the breakfast alcove mechanically.

She hoped he would attempt no explanations; equally she hoped he would. His eyes dwelt rather miserably upon her, but nothing eventuated that way. The politenesses demanded by passing and receiving food were ridiculously formal.

He broke through to say: "You'll be going to the Fair, Sonia?"

"Of course." She added, smolderingly, "Why not?"

He swallowed the question and the dregs of his coffee, and rose.

"Must be off. Have a terrible lot to do. Be in by seven at the latest, though. I shan't be home to lunch today, of course."

He hitched the shoulders of his raincoat, put on his hat meaninglessly, took it off again, looked at her, mumbled good-by and was off!

One read of such things. One was told before marriage, "Wait till you've been married a little while." They had laughed together over that. "Not us," said Teddy. And here it was.

"Sometimes, my dear, it's just some little thing; sometimes it's another woman." She had laughed at the worldly-wise voice that told her that. It hadn't scared her. She'd told Teddy. Then he'd laughed. "Silly old fool," he said.

This wasn't Teddy. It was a stranger standing there. Now he was no longer there. He had gone. She heard his quick footsteps in the corridor, on the stairs. She listened until the echoes ceased.

At luncheon she nibbled odds and ends snatched from the refrigerator. She dressed with utmost care: a green sports costume because of the dash it lent one. She was on hand at two. A large room off the main auditorium was humming with the comradeship of workers. Eventually this would be the tea room, and already was proclaimed such by a poster of Sonia's, of which she was rather proud. A tide of gaiety swept up to her, seemed to take note of who was coming, and receded. She felt like a swimmer left on the beach on a cold day. It was not a conscious snub; it was inevitable. Last night's episode was noised abroad, and at sight of her, everybody stopped talking to remember it—that was all.

Ellaline was there. Sonia had an impression—ridiculous, of course—that she was yawning and licking her chops. Pampered little pet! Nobody ever brooked her. They said that "Ellaline had a way with her." In committee you could be very certain her voice would break in with half-languid amusement: "What a leprous idea!" And everybody apparently—the ninnies!—would suddenly have their eyes opened to see the white symbols of leprosy on the idea they had just been cherishing to their bosoms as perfect, and hasten to expose themselves nakedly to the scratch of Ellaline's voice, and inoculated by her decisions against their own diseased ones!



Ellaline, in a flame frock of a type only Ellaline could wear and not be funny, waved a hand in greeting:

“’Lo. . . hardly expected you, m’dear!”

That surely was gratuitous! Two spots of pink grew in Sonia’s cheeks. And then, suddenly, she remembered she wasn’t afraid of the Set any more. They weren’t her Set; they had been only because they were Teddy’s; and now Teddy. . .

Sonia laughed.

“Didn’t you?” she took Ellaline up. And then, marvelling that her remark seemed as casual as Ellaline’s own: “My dear, you don’t belong in here with that frock on. It’s a false note!”

The thing was perfectly true. The tea room was a bower in pastel shades: delicate pink-paper blossoms sprouting in profusion from springs of real branches; daffodils, narcissi, flags of a peculiarly clear, restrained blue like an April sky. Sonia in her green belonged; Ellaline didn’t. Sonia nodded and moved on, inspecting with calm eyes the rest of the decorations.

A voice spoke in her ear:

“Bull’s-eye for you, Sonia!”

She turned, not expecting masculine invasion in such a place. It was Jimmy Bogert.

“Supposed to be in bed nursing a bad leg,” he grinned. “Can’t keep a good man down, so I tottered round to see the fairies in fairyland!” His eyes regarded her in frank approval. He mumbled sardonically: “Heard about last night, Sonia. Serves El jolly well right! Let’s go and look at the flutings and flutterings that have made the great waste spaces blossom like the rose!”

Sonia smiled up at him. Jimmy Bogert was in the Set with a large capital S. A warm captivating satisfaction moved over her—like the warmth of a bath to tired limbs. She had always thought Jimmy a little on the fresh side. She’d no idea he was so nice. She presented her back to Ellaline and the Set, moving off with Jimmy Bogert, conscious of what the Set were thinking, conscious of what Ellaline was feeling, wishing that Teddy might be here to see. The last thought came from some far place within her, where it was hard and cold, and very uncomfortable. It was warmer to bring it out and look at it and toy with it, here on Jimmy’s arm, and under the leashed balloons, and beside the booths arranged in streets that transformed the great building into a village, ablaze with the spirit of carnival.

A curious sense of duality troubled Sonia, and drove her on to become part of this very spirit of carnival, to throw everything else to the winds, and abandon herself to the gaiety that the place and her companion induced. The more there crept into her mind thoughts of Teddy, the more she determined on this gaiety at all costs.

“Here, Sonia, have a shot at this!”

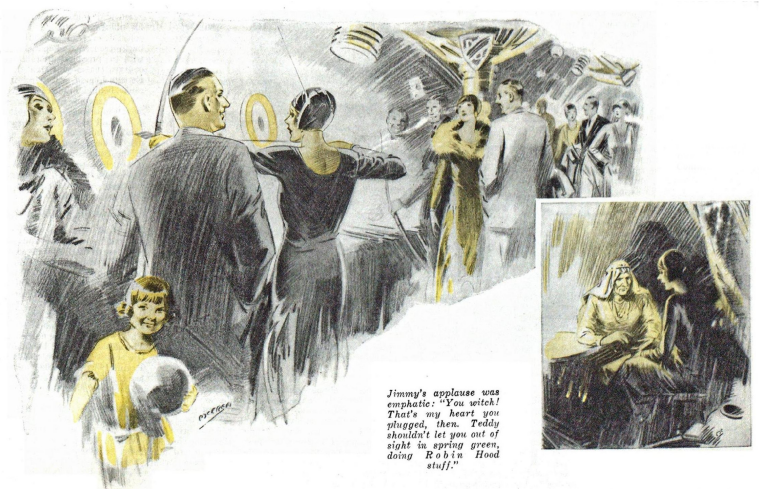
“What?”

“Archery! You hit that red heart there and get something—cigars or something useful.” Jimmy nodded to the attendant. “We’ll take two trials each.”

She concentrated on that. Her cheeks were flushed a little, her brows pencil-marks of concentration; she was glad she’d worn green sports wear; she was glad that she had shared with a brother the making and firing of bows and arrows.

“Sonia, you little devil! I couldn’t do that to save my life. Let me try. No, it’s no good. Go ahead, try again.”

People were applauding. Jimmy Bogert’s mouth was close to her ear.



“You witch! That’s my heart you plugged twice, then! Tell Teddy he’s out of luck. He shouldn’t let you out of his sight in spring green, doing Robin Hood stuff. Let’s ramble. An ice for two, I think, after that!”

The tea room was busy now; that blessed green of hers belonged under the showering blossoms. In the general hum there was privacy. He leaned toward her, pushing aside his half-finished ice. She knew, of course, he hadn't wanted one any more than she hers; this was just an excuse to sit *tête-à-tête*. His eyes seemed determined by their unswerving glance, half mocking, to make her blush or something.

"Tell me," he said. "Does Teddy know you're . . . like this?"

"Like what?"

"A green witch."

"Why should he?"

He was silent, his eyes still frankly upon her.

"I think," he said at last, "Teddy's a you-know-what kind of condemned young fool."

Almost she flew loyally to Teddy's defense. Instead she forced a smile that faded as implications began to appear. Jimmy had not meant, perhaps, to glance quickly just then at Ellaline who passed at a distance. So he knew; he and probably all the Set, what her eyes had been opened to see last night, how Teddy stood with Ellaline.

"Had enough of that stuff, Sonia?"

She nodded.

"Where do we go from here?"

"Anywhere you say, Jimmy."

There were a thousand and one things to see, to do, to inspect, silly things to be enjoyed only if you obeyed the beckoning of the Spirit of Carnival. Sonia became conscious of time.

"Jimmy, I really must go!"

"Go? Where did you pick that word up?"

"But, Jimmy. . ."

"Listen, lovely lady. There's a dark, desperate plot afoot. Early supper and dance at the Salle Doree, and drink confusion to your enemies. I mean it. Us two; toodledo!"

Was he mad to think of such a thing? Tonight of all nights?

“I can read you like a book,” he said. “You’re thinking to put me off. Tomorrow never comes. Tomorrow, Allah knows, you will likely withdraw into your lovely green shell, and think some silly nonsense about it being improper—with hubby away. I mean it, Sonia. You take my advice and give a jolt right at the start. A jolt in time saves. . . whee-whoop, you know. . . work for the unrusting divorce mills, and all that.”

Why did she listen? Why did anyone do anything here in this place they mightn’t do elsewhere? Was it because the lighting was so queer and clever, playing tricks all down the street-like aisles, or because the decorations were so cubistically meaningless, or because the Committee in some bright moment of inspiration had caused incense in every booth to rise from gay-lighted, pagan shrines; little wisping essences of the woods in spring?

They were standing for a moment by the tent-like booth where, within an inner sanctuary, a gipsy woman told fortunes, when someone called:

“Going to have your palm read, Jimmy? She’s a wizard. Or are you afraid?”

Sonia looked up in time to meet Ellaline’s glance, and knew the mockery, addressed to Jimmy, was for her.

“Sonia doesn’t need it,” said Ellaline smoothly. “She’s the kind who orders life and brings everything in it to heel!”

“Cat!” said Jimmy in Sonia’s ear. “Let’s brazen her out for that, and have ours told. Shall us?”

“All right.”

“Have to line up. Two ahead, and Ellaline falling in behind. No, she’s vamoosed! Good riddance. Shall we carry on? You don’t mind? Some people get disturbed over these gipsy fakirs.”

“Not a bit.”

A girl came out, laughing in a subdued way to a companion.

“She’s got me down cold. *Brr!* I’m to marry twice and. . .”

“My dear, do you believe? Is there anything in it? Because you told me. . .”

“You’re next,” said Jimmy. “May I come and sit in on the seance?”

“One at a time, please,” said a slightly accented voice. “This way, please, madam.”

The dusky, scented gloom received her. She was seated on a stool; the old woman drew another alongside and sat down. A hand took Sonia's and stroked it. The old woman looked at both hands and resumed concentration on one. And suddenly, in a low, grumbling, inconsequent way, began a flowing recital of Sonia's life, intimate history slightly wrong, just wrong enough to make no mistake of its fundamental authenticity. The voice paused; went on.

"The past is no more, it cannot be repaired; the present is slipping fast. The future, young lady? It is the future the young ladies wish to know. Even the married ones, yes! The married ones too, *heh, heh!* In these days it makes no difference. When I was young. . . but your hand. . . interests. . . me. . . The voice trailed off; began again abruptly.

"Your husband is going on a trip shortly?"

It was the first direct question, but not, apparently, demanding an answer. "It is a first parting! It is a last. . ." Sonia's hand was suddenly pushed from her. "I do not care to read any more, lady. Fifty cents, please."

Sonia sat as though cut in stone.

"You must tell me the rest!"

"No, lady."

"I shall sit here until you do."

"It is unwise to plumb too deep. Enjoy the present; let the future be. . . the future." She moved away from Sonia, who heard her calling: "The gentleman is next. Come, please. The lady is through."

Jimmy Bogert was standing there grinning at her. Sonia stood up. He'd laugh in a minute. Her face must be like death.

"Well, what did the chief witch say to the green witch?"

Sonia stared at him. He seemed then to realize there was something wrong. He put out a hand, but she brushed him aside and almost fled from the place, out of the tent, down the long aisles full of swirling horrible lights and shadows, saturated, drunk with the incense of a false spring. She could not understand her panic. It was unreasonable. Certainly she did not believe in such stuff. And the old creature had said nothing definite. That was just it; one could laugh at something definite.

"It is a first parting! It is a last. . ." One didn't believe. But there were things—queer things these days.

She was surprised how late it had grown. One could tell by the crowds in the streets; a violet autumnal twilight lent an intense clarity in which people moved.

Passing a confectioner's shop, impulse swept her. She went in and bought recklessly. There was a florist's nearby; there also she knew a moment or two of abandonment. Lilies-of-the-valley and roses! Teddy would be nonplussed. She would say:

“For our last meal together, Teddy.”

She tried to wreck the mental sentence; but it persisted in its coherent nonsensicality. She hurried recklessly through traffic, and sought the doorway of a grocery and meat purveyor's. In a meat shop, with a smiling, aproned fat man efficiently wielding knife and hatchet one should not be conscious of impending tragedy.

**T**he apartment, when she reached it, seemed close. She threw wide the windows. The purple twilight was shot through with gold. Some of it came and spread itself on the kitchen window sill while she worked. She felt better.

The candles were all lit; one must have candlelight for a party. The fat orange waxes seemed to enter into the spirit of it. Already it was five minutes past seven. Several times, in the next twenty minutes, the street door banged three flights down, and she heard steps on the stairs; once they came right up and she told herself—though she knew better—they must be his; they went into the apartment across the hall. She made adjustments to salvage food that was slowly losing its first prime.

The bell in the lower vestibule rang. Teddy must have forgotten his key. He was always forgetting his key. She pressed the button that would release the lower door. Determined to have everything right on the table, she swept the salvaged food from oven to table in such minutes as it would take Teddy to climb the stairs. Whisking her apron off, she opened the door.

A man stood there offering her a small parcel.

“Right address, mum? Please sign here.”

She disciplined her hand. She stood staring at the parcel in her hand, a gift for Teddy. The handwriting was Ellaline's.

She put it down at Teddy's place beside his cutlery, as if this were a birthday party.

It was only then she thought of telephoning the office. How stupid of her! She rang, and the beat of her heart was amazing.

“No, ma’am, he’s not here. There’s no one here but me. The night watchman. I seen him leave, ma’am, about six.” She hung up. She understood. She had lost him. She had lost him last night when, banishing him to the spare room, she had lain listening for any move he might make, longing for reconciliation. This morning she had thrust him away again. And she had expected him, because suddenly she had become alarmed for him, discovered his preciousness to be above all other things, to awaken also to the folly of anything but their love.

She took refuge in a sudden whirl of activity. There were her dresses to be put away in her own trunk; Teddy was to take her to the train, the tenthirty, for home. She would be home with her people while he was away. He would first take her to the vessel and leave his own things, so that she might, as it were, see him off; then he would escort her to the railway station and himself return to the steamer. Passengers must be on board by midnight. They sailed at dawn. It suddenly struck Sonia how much there was to do.

Leaning over her trunk to pack her dresses, she felt suddenly overcome. These dresses—her trousseau things—evoked too many memories; there seemed in this packing away a sense almost of burial.

She left them for a moment and began to clear away the dishes and the food. For the sake of strength she snatched a mouthful or two. She would send all this food down to the janitor. After that she must really finish packing her things and Teddy’s. She was glad his were lying mostly packed in two suitcases; she had done that for him yesterday.

A clock struck eight. Two-and-a-half hours and she would be on the train home!

The telephone rang. Her heart leaped. She answered. His voice seemed distant and confused.

“Sonia? Look, Sonia, don’t keep anything for me. I tried to get you but the line was busy. And I’ve been too much on the hop to call again. You’ll be all ready to leave? I’ll get there as soon as I can.”

She said: “Wh-where are you?” but he had rung off.

Too busy? On their. . . their last night! And he had left the office at six. She sat on a chair disciplining herself, and watching the movement of the hands of the clock. On their last night! Their last night! She mustn’t think that word. Busy? With whom?

Her head went suddenly down on the arm of the chair—the great overstuffed chair belonging to the set they had gone, very gaily, to buy together.

“Oh, Teddy, Teddy, Teddy,” she cried.

**H**e came at nine. His key was in the lock, and he himself in the living room before she was aware.

There he stood, saying in a queer, constrained voice:

“All packed and ready?”

She said—couldn’t help herself saying:

“There’s a parcel come for you! It’s over there!”

She watched him pick it up, and examine it: then he set it down again, a little gingerly. Now he would say something, and upon what he said would depend everything! Instead, his face looked a little hard, almost cruel. She couldn’t believe. . . couldn’t believe it in him! He hesitated, said abruptly: “I’ll call the taxi. . . if everything’s ready.”

Sonia nodded; he came over and helped her close the trunk and lock it; she felt more than ever a sense of estrangement.

Now they were in the taxi. She cast one backward look at the apartment that had housed them these months of married life. Their windows on the third floor were dark: she felt a sense of unbearable pathos. They had been so so happy there! Had he not thought of all that? He’d come away as if it meant nothing; as if everything for him lay ahead.

It seemed queer and terrible to see his bags and hers jouncing together above her trunk. She supposed the taxi driver if he thought at all was thinking: “Lucky young dogs! Off to Europe together!” He’d not notice there was no steamship “CABIN WANTED” stickers on her luggage.

There was a fresh smell about the night and an intense clarity in the atmosphere. The people on the streets against the twinklings of electric signs, the brilliantly lit façades of amusement palaces, were cardboard figures, cut out and endowed with a precise life. She and Teddy were cardboard figures, too. Only the jouncing luggage was alive and significant.

As the lights of the shopping and amusement districts gave place to the bleak emptiness of the financial and dockside areas at night; as, indeed, the faint smoke from the steamer’s funnels moved up in the clear air to where,



on a mast caught in some partial illumination, flew the Blue Peter, Sonia noticed that over Teddy's face there was moving a subtle and estranging excitement. She supposed one should forgive this. If she were going she would be quite delirious. But not if she were leaving him behind! Had he not thought of overshadowing separation? They were now in the shed, alive with febrile activity. Teddy helped her punctiliously out of the taxi. She turned away when he stopped to make arrangements about the luggage; she could not bear to see her trunk—which an ambitious steward was already fastening upon as legitimate prey—set aside as something which did not belong to this adventure of an ocean voyage.

She was suddenly seized upon, in a purely vocal sense, though she had all the sensation of hands being put upon her.

“Darling,” purred Ellaline's voice. “We're all here to help you see friend husband off.”

The Set formed a background for their champion. Sonia had a primitive desire to reach out and scratch. No one but Ellaline could pour content like that into “darling.”

“Where's Teddy?”

“He's coming. Seeing to his things.”

She supposed that was her voice. They must not suspect anything. They were, they declared, all going on board. Their hands were neither secretive nor large enough to hide evidences of paper streamers and confetti. Val Watchkiss, whose bibulous nature had again been asserting itself, got ahead of things and threw a whirling orange snake that wound itself partly around Sonia and struck a deadly blow at her heart with fangs none could imagine. Teddy came into the picture.

“Hullo, people. Nice of you all. Shall we go on?”

Teddy had her arm for an instant. Val Watchkiss, still premature, threw confetti—a multi-colored mist that fell in paper rain upon them. Somebody from the dock cried:

“Look! There's a wedding!”

Sonia caught at herself. She had sometimes dreamed of this before her wedding, when they had planned their honeymoon to Europe. She could smell lilies, fresh-picked from the garden. It was perfume, of course; Ellaline, pushing near, had Teddy by the free arm.

“Teddy, my dear, show me your cabin. Come along. I’ll be choosing my own accommodation later. Excuse us, people.”

Teddy went with her. That was all Sonia’s mind could think about, though she had an idea she was saying things, answering questions. Teddy had gone to show Ellaline his cabin. As if his—his wife—was not the one to be most interested in his comfort.

The Set began to disintegrate. Sonia, forgotten, went to the rail, and stood staring down the precipitous side into dark water that reflected blobs of brightness. A tug trailed its red and green lights in quivering lanes along the harbor waters. Sonia turned away. Ships fascinated her. She had dreamed all this for Teddy and herself. When Teddy was to have it, she had thought: “I’ll see him off, anyway, and we’ll pretend. . . and then next time perhaps. . .”

And he was down there with Ellaline, and she was alone. The Set had gone in twos and threes on cruises of inspection. She tossed desolation from her with a lift of her chin. Tiny rounds of paper, blue and white and orange and red, fell to the deck.

She became conscious of Teddy behind her.

“Sonia! I’ve been hunting all over for you. They’re going off now. Come along.”

She nodded. She edged away from his extended arm. He seemed not to feel this reproach. She could see that he was glowing and excited. She said, to prevent emotional disaster:

“We’ll have to hurry. Did you keep the taxi?”

“Taxi?” He said it almost stupidly. Had he even forgotten her train? He caught her arm then, urgently, hurrying her along across the deck, through the crowded, flower-perfumed lounge to the gangway on the farther side. Shouts greeted them. Ellaline caught at Teddy.

“Come and take your medicine, my man.”

Teddy was swept away by the Set. They had formed a ring about him, of which Sonia was only an unimportant part. Ellaline had the spotlight with him. Colored streamers began to weave them together—Ellaline pretending that she must hold the victim and Teddy pretending, she saw, that he was trying to escape the showers of confetti, the maze of streamers.

Ellaline's voice reached her, politely shrill:

"You should see the cabin, ducky! I hope I get as good. But, my dears, the man's luggage! Three bags and a trunk. He must be going to take London by storm!"

Val Watchkiss, taking advantage of an interlude, launched a new paper offensive in Teddy's face. Teddy fell back a pace and broke through the ring almost against Sonia. Next moment he had her arm. There was a queer look on his face, almost grim.

"Tie that fool up," he said, indicating Val. Something in his tone silenced them. "As for the luggage, El"—he faced Ellaline directly, his voice came more slowly, "you may have influence with fortune tellers, but you're no mind reader yourself. Where do you suppose Sonia would carry her stuff if not in a trunk?" Sonia suddenly felt the need of his supporting arm, now put defensively about her. "Say good-bye to them, Sonia. They look a bit muzzy. Shouldn't wonder if they'd better all trot along!"

Ellaline's voice came queerly:

"Sonia's not going?"

"Isn't she?" drawled Teddy. "Why, we've planned this for. . . for years!" Val Watchkiss renewed his offensive, and starting a bibulous cheer found himself reinstated in favor. Others joined. Remaining streamers began to wind themselves kaleidoscopically about Sonia and Teddy. She couldn't believe; but she stood there, abandoning herself to the thrill. They were shaking hands then, the girls kissing her—even Ellaline, a thing made possible by the pale defeat in Ellaline's startled face. They were gone. Teddy turned to Sonia. Their eyes met. Teddy said: "People here; come along!" He swept them as clear as might be of streamers and confetti. She was conscious of a vastness to the night, in which the stars, the harbor lights, the city beyond, the fascination of the ship under them, had proper place. The upper deck was deserted. They stood secluded by the rail.

"Teddy," she said shakily, "what does it mean? You can't afford. . ."

"I can't," agreed Teddy, "but I'm going to. I've been planning this for ages, hoping but not daring to breathe it to you. And then I saw it was no go. . . couldn't manage it." He grinned at her boyishly. "The stock went down instead." He sobered, said almost nervously: "That's just it, Sonia, dear. These last few weeks I've acted the fool, let myself go a bit just because I was fed-up over it. And last night, with El and all. . ." He hesitated. "Then late this afternoon Jimmy Bogert barged into the picture.

Hunted me up to say you'd been frightened or something—some hokum at the Fair. He kept his nose to it until he smelled it out, Sonia.” The pressure on her arm tightened. “That old wretch of a mercenary hokum dispenser had been tipped off by Ellaline, and bribed to—to frighten you.” He choked. “The cunning little beast!”

He paused. Overside, a tug plowed its way through flaring waters. “Sonia, dear, can you forgive me for ever having anything to do with her?”

She put an arm about him.

“Oh, Teddy,” she cried. And then, “You look so tired, dear.”

“Confounded lot of running around arranging things,” he grinned. “Short time to arrange accommodation, raise extra cash and everything. Jimmy was a brick. Lucky we had our passport all in shape, eh? Sheer luck. And we'll send your people a wireless.”

“Teddy! But—but—you can't afford. . .”

“Of course not. But I'm going to. And if we go broke, we go broke. I don't know any nicer way to do it, do you?” She did not answer. “Let's sit down here on this thingummy,” he said. “I am tired, duckums. Didn't sleep much last night, you know.”

He looked at her, a little shyly.

“Oh, Teddy.” She wanted to say more but couldn't. It was nice enough to sit here under the stars, with the deck a deserted, enticing white runway before them, and the boats a shelter against any wind, and the prophetic lift of smoke from the after funnel drifting to that dim place above where the Blue Peter flew as a symbol of activity at dawn.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of "*Passengers Must Be On Board by Midnight*" by Leslie Gordon  
Barnard]