

DANGEROUS CARGO

HULBERT
FOOTNER



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Title: Dangerous Cargo

Date of first publication: 1934

Author: Hulbert Footner (1879-1944)

Date first posted: Jan. 17, 2021

Date last updated: Jan. 17, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210140

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Jen Haines & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

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DANGEROUS CARGO



By

HULBERT FOOTNER



Harper & Brothers Publishers

New York and London

1934

DANGEROUS CARGO

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FIRST EDITION

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DANGEROUS CARGO

I. *The Worst Hated Man in America*

WHEN hard times were at their hardest it was customary for the newspapers to say that Horace Laghet had all the money in the country. His name was on every lip; the least of his doings and sayings constituted front-page stuff.

He first came into prominence during the panic of 1929, when it transpired that he had sold short. Of course he made millions. And after that, when everybody else was desperately trying to revive confidence, Laghet continued to sell America short, and America, unfortunately, justified his disbelief. He raked in more and more millions.

He spent lavishly. At a time when the building trades were almost at a standstill he commenced the construction of a huge marble palace on upper Fifth Avenue, and another at Newport. He ordered a yacht that was to exceed any yacht ever built. When these extravagances were criticized he retorted: "Well, I'm keeping the money in circulation, am I not?" And there was no come-back.

To do him justice, I must say that he subscribed great sums to the unemployment funds and to every form of relief. It did him no good. People felt that he ought to have given more. In the gay old days millionaires used to be respected—or at least admired, but not now. People felt in a dim way that Laghet had profited out of the country's misfortunes and he was hated.

Lord! how he was hated! His name was never mentioned without a covert sneer. It was said that his life had been attempted several times, and that he never ventured out without an armed guard.

This being the situation, my excitement can be understood when one morning a crisp voice said over the phone: "This is Horace Laghet speaking." Just like that. No hireling or secretary, but the great man himself. At first I thought it was a hoax.

"Is Madame Storey in her office?" he asked.

"I'll see," I said, cautiously.

"Oh, don't give me that bunk!" he said. "I'm Horace Laghet. Connect me with her."

"If I were sure that it was Mr. Laghet speaking . . ." I began.

“Connect me! Connect me!” he shouted. “She can hang up if she’s not satisfied, can’t she?”

I thought it best to switch the call to my employer’s desk. She was cool and offhand. He asked if he could see her. “I can give you half an hour at noon,” she said. She politely declined an invitation to lunch. He said, “Very well, I’ll be there at twelve.”

When she had hung up I went in. She was helping herself to a cigarette with an amused smile. “Well, Bella, business is picking up,” she said.

“Fancy! Horace Laghet coming here!” I said, all agog.

“Well, there’s no occasion to strew roses in his path,” she said.

When he entered my office I got a shock. I suppose I had read that he was only thirty-five years old, but it was hard to believe that the man everybody was talking about could be so young. A tall, stalwart figure at the top notch of a man’s vigor, with a deeply tanned skin, though the month was February. He had a dark, passionate face that could be brutal, I suspected, but at present was masked by a courteous smile. He had the air of assurance that great riches give to a man, but I discovered that he was easily upset.

I opened the door of Mme. Storey’s office, and followed him in. He stopped short at the sight of her. “I didn’t think that you would be like this,” he said. His black eyes fired up with admiration. He was a disturbing man to women.

Mme. Storey is used to this sort of thing. “That can be taken in two ways,” she murmured.

“You know what I mean,” he said. “Of course I have often seen your photograph and admired it. But the published photographs of prominent women are so touched up that you never believe in them.”

She smiled ironically. “Sit down,” she said. “Have a cigarette?”

He glanced at me deprecatingly. “I wished to see you alone.”

“Miss Brickley is present at all interviews,” said Mme. Storey. “It is a rule I have made.”

He stood up and his face flushed darkly. “I am not just an ordinary caller!” he said, angrily. “This is important.”

It was the wrong line to take with my employer. “It is my rule,” she repeated, with deceitful mildness.

I thought he was going to walk right out of the door again, and my heart sank. The richest man in town walking out of the door! However, he thought better of it. He sat down again, and after a moment succeeded in smoothing his ruffled plumage. I went to my desk in the corner.

“I suppose you know who I am,” he began.

“I read the newspapers,” said Mme. Storey, smiling.

A spasm of anger crossed his face. “Yes, damn it!” he muttered, “and a nice sort of scoundrel they make me out to be! . . . Have you noticed that I have had a yacht built and am starting on a cruise with a party of guests tomorrow?”

“I had seen a later date mentioned.”

“I know. But the President-elect sent for me yesterday, and from what I learned from him I can see that there is a bad time ahead of us. Worse than anything we have been through. Well, I mean to be out of the way of it. They blame me for everything that happens. I’m going for a six months’ cruise to the West Indies and to South America.”

“How pleasant!” said Mme. Storey. “What can I do for you?”

“Two weeks ago,” he went on, “I was called up at my office by a woman’s voice. A superior sort of voice, soft-spoken, educated. She warned me not to go on this voyage. When I pressed her for particulars she hung up. Well, I am frequently called up or addressed through the mail by all sorts of triflers. So I thought no more about it.

“But today she called up again. There was a ring of earnestness in her voice. You can’t mistake that sort of thing. She was crying; she seemed scarcely able to speak for terror. All she said was that if I went on this voyage I should never come back alive. That they were laying for me. When I tried to get more out of her she hung up.”

“How did she reach your private ear on both occasions?” asked Mme. Storey.

“I have a private phone on my desk that is connected directly with the Exchange. She called up on that.”

“She knew the private number?”

“Oh, well, many do. There’s no clue in that.”

“It is impossible to trace phone calls in these days of dial phones,” said Mme. Storey.

“I don’t want you to trace the call,” he said; “I want you to come with me on the voyage . . . And your secretary, if you want her. Ostensibly you will be my guests, but in reality you will be working for me.”

I was so astonished my jaw dropped as if the spring had broken. I expect I gaped at the man like a clown.

Mme. Storey was not at all put about. “If you think there is anything in this warning,” she said, “my honest advice to you is to give up the voyage.”

“Never!” he said, setting his jaw. “This yacht has cost me three millions. I’m going to sea in her.”

“You don’t want anybody like me,” she said. “You need men who can guard you all the time.”

“I’ll have them if I need them. I want you to lay bare the plot, if there is a plot. Nobody can do that so well as you. What’s more, you will be a delightful addition to the party. I wouldn’t like to impose an ordinary detective on my guests.”

“Thanks,” said Mme. Storey, dryly. “Frankly, it doesn’t appeal to me.”

“Why not?”

“Have you ever taken a long voyage in a yacht?”

“No.”

“Well, I have. In such close quarters the guests get rather badly on one another’s nerves.” She looked at him in a dry way that suggested he himself was a bit too passionate and domineering to make the ideal fellow voyager.

He laughed it off. “You won’t find the quarters on the *Buccaneer* too close.”

“*Buccaneer*?” said Mme. Storey. “Well named!”

He was ready to get sore at that, but decided to laugh again. “Just a small party,” he said. “The ladies include my *fiancée*, Celia Dare, and her mother and Mrs. Holder.”

“Who is Mrs. Holder?”

“Just a dear friend,” he said, carelessly.

“A widow?”

“No. She’s got a perfectly good husband somewhere. He’s in business and can’t get away. . . . The men will be my brother Adrian, young Emil

Herbert the celebrated pianist, and my secretary, Martin Coade. Martin is a host in himself. He's in Holland just now, but will join the ship when we touch at Curaçao."

"Such a ship must carry a big crew," suggested Mme. Storey.

"Yes. Nearly a hundred men."

"Easy to plant an assassin among them," she murmured.

Laghet showed his teeth unpleasantly. "I assure you they have been hand picked," he said, grimly.

Mme. Storey debated with herself.

"Five thousand dollars a week," said Laghet, seductively.

"Good pay," she said.

"Will you take it?"

"Yes." But as his hand shot out she held hers up. "Under certain conditions."

"Name them, lady!"

"I cannot undertake any responsibility for your safety."

"That's understood."

"Secondly, I must be free to terminate the agreement and to leave the ship at any time."

"Right! We'll make it so pleasant for you you won't want to leave."

"Thirdly, you must tell me the whole truth."

He stared. "Why on earth shouldn't I tell you the truth?"

"My dear man," she said, "you haven't reached your present position without—how can I put it inoffensively?—without being mixed up in things you don't want to talk about. When I come to you for necessary information you must tell me the whole truth or I can do nothing."

He appeared to like her frankness. "Agreed," he said, grinning.

"Lastly, anybody can see that you have a dominating personality and do not take kindly to direction. But you must understand that in such situations as may arise out of this investigation if you do not act as I advise I will be useless to you."

“That’s the hardest one,” he said, ruefully. “It will be a novelty to take orders from a woman. However, I agree.”

They shook hands on it.

“Have you any idea who it is that may want to murder you?” asked Mme. Storey.

He shrugged. “It might be one of twenty men.”

“And is probably none of them,” she put in. “It is always the unexpected enemy who has murder in his heart.”

“Will you be ready to go aboard at noon tomorrow?” he asked, eagerly.

“It would be wiser to put off the sailing until I can make a preliminary investigation.”

“Not an hour!” he said, with a darkening face.

“Very well,” she said. “In my business one has to be prepared for anything.”

“You’re a wonderful woman!” he cried. “I’m glad I came to you! I’ll make out a check to bind the bargain.” He did so then and there. When he got up to go he said: “Perhaps it’s all a stall, anyhow. In that case we’ll have a swell time on the seven seas and forget the depression!”

Mme. Storey had half turned in her chair and was looking out of the window behind her. “It is not a stall,” she said, quietly.

Laghet’s face sharpened. He showed his teeth. “What makes you so sure of that?” he demanded.

“Look out of the window,” she said. “Do not come close enough to show yourself. That man standing against the park railings opposite. The one with a greenish Fedora pulled over his eyes. Is he in your employ?”

“I never saw him before,” said Laghet.

“Then he’s a spy. He followed you here, and he will follow you when you leave.”

“But I came in my car!”

“No doubt he has a car waiting, too.”

Laghet caught up his stick. “By God! I’ll soon settle his business!” he cried.

“What good will that do you?” said Mme. Storey. “He’s only a paid spy. If you assault him you’ll be arrested. You won’t be able to prove anything. It will only delay your sailing.”

“Damn it, I suppose you’re right!” he said, groaning with balked rage. He jammed on his hat and strode out.

II. *Fire*

I STAYED that night with Mme. Storey at her place on East Sixty-third Street. This had been arranged so that we could work late in clearing up all the odds and ends of business that demanded attention before she sailed. We had spent the afternoon in doing necessary shopping for the voyage. All our things were packed and ready.

I have had occasion before to describe my employer's original little establishment. She and her friend Mrs. Lysaght bought an old brownstone house and transformed it into two maisonnettes in the French style. Mme. Storey occupies the two lower floors. The kitchen faces the street, with a barred window that is left open at night for ventilation, and the dining-room opens on a tiny garden in the rear. Upstairs her bedroom is over the kitchen and her delightful living-room looks down on the garden.

As there is only one bedroom, I had to share it with her. Her maid Grace made up a bed on the sofa. Grace and the cook sleep up on the top floor of the house with Mrs. Lysaght's maids. But the Lysaght establishment was closed at this time.

We had just gone to bed and were lying there talking about this and that. It was very late. The windows were open and the street was wrapped in stillness. Only a distant hum reminded us that we were a part of a great city. The thought of danger to ourselves was farthest from our minds. In fact, for the moment we were occupied with the details of our own business and had forgotten Horace Laghet.

I can remember hearing some clock strike two and Mme. Storey saying, "We *must* go to sleep."

Suddenly we heard a hard object fall to the floor of the kitchen underneath us. We both jumped up and instinctively ran to a window. We were in time to see a man running away down the street towards Third Avenue. He ran awkwardly, with hunched shoulders and a sideways movement.

I would have shouted to stop him, but Mme. Storey clapped a hand over my mouth. "Too late to catch him now," she said.

As she spoke there was an explosion, not very loud, in the room beneath us. And a moment afterwards that most awful sound of all at night, the rushing and snapping of fire. I stood in the middle of the bedroom, half stupefied. Mme. Storey gave me a shake.

“Put on a dressing-gown and slippers and follow me!”

It brought me to myself. “Shall I telephone?” I asked.

“No!” she said, in a tone that surprised me. Standing in the corner of the stair landing was a copper fire-extinguisher. Mme. Storey snatched it up and ran down. On the lower landing was another extinguisher that she mutely pointed out to me. We could hear the flames roaring like devils behind the kitchen door. The difficulty was to get the door open. Fortunately, it opened towards us and Mme. Storey was able to shield herself behind it. Flame leaped out of the kitchen like a red ravening beast, shriveling us with its hot breath.

The whole room was blazing at once and little runnels of fire crept over the sill into the hall. It burned with that special speed and fury that only gasoline can induce. Mme. Storey, backing away out of reach of the flames into the dining-room, turned her extinguisher upon them. The thin hissing stream was swallowed up and lost. The fire only roared louder. Suffocating black smoke billowed into our faces. Mme. Storey was driven back foot by foot.

“We must get out of here!” I cried.

She paid no attention. After a moment she muttered: “Open the window at my back. The wind is on that side.”

I obeyed, and a current of air was created that held the flames and smoke in check. On the other side of that wall of flame I could hear cries from the street. Mme. Storey began to regain the lost ground, driving the flames back with an unerring eye whenever they tried to flank her. I stood with the second extinguisher ready to hand to her when the first was exhausted.

We crossed the hall again. The two maids came running down the stairs. They stood on the bottom step, fascinated with horror but perfectly silent. They had confidence in their mistress’s ability to handle anything. The fire was forced back, snarling, into the kitchen. We heard the fire trucks coming from afar.

Once the chemical mixture got the upper hand, the fire soon gave up. All around the walls Mme. Storey drove it back towards the window. Suddenly it was out and the kitchen was just a black charred hole. Through the

window I had a glimpse of the crowd hanging over the railings. The lights had not been burned out and I got them turned on. After all, not much had suffered but paint, varnish, and plaster. But what an escape!

In the middle of the floor lay a tell-tale jagged piece of tin. We found another behind the stove. Meanwhile the trucks had drawn up outside and the firemen were banging on the ornamental iron gate that gave entrance to the house alongside the kitchen. I started to let them in, but my employer laid a hand on my arm.

“We don’t want any investigation, Bella.”

Opening the cellar door, she kicked the two pieces of tin down stairs.

The firemen swarmed in, nosed all around, as they always do, and asked the usual questions. Mme. Storey’s explanation was ingenious.

“I came downstairs to heat some water on the gas stove, and went up again. I suppose the curtain at the window blew across the flame and caught fire. Unfortunately, my maid had left a can of cleaning fluid on the window sill and that exploded.”

“Very careless to leave an explosive so near the stove, madam,” said the fire captain.

“You are absolutely right, Chief,” she replied, with a straight face. “I shall scold the girl severely, and I can promise you it won’t happen again.”

She led them into the dining-room for a little refreshment, and they presently departed with loud praises for her quickness and presence of mind. The trucks roared away and a great quiet descended on the street. Mme. Storey and I went back to bed, but not to sleep.

At eleven o’clock next morning we were seated in the living-room with Latham Rowe, Mme. Storey’s attorney. A horrible stale smell of wet burnt stuff filled the house. Our baggage had been sent on ahead to the yacht landing, and we were all set to go in hats and gloves.

Latham is a nice man, the chubby, sweet-tempered type that is predestined to be the friend of every woman and the husband of none. Mme. Storey was saying:

“I’ll have to leave it to you to see that the insurance is collected and the repairs properly done.”

“Sure,” he said. “But tell me, Rosika, on the level, what caused this fire. You can’t expect me to believe that bunk about Grace’s carelessness.”

Mme. Storey smiled. "It cost me a new dress to square Grace for that lie," she said. "The truth is, somebody shoved an open can of gasoline between the bars of the kitchen window last night, and threw a lighted match or something of that sort after it."

Latham's rosy face paled. "Good God! What a fiendish thing to do!" he cried. "And you're not going to say anything about it?"

"If there was an investigation it would prevent me from going on this voyage. And nothing would come of it. I prefer to deal with my enemies myself."

"Have you an idea who did it?" he asked.

"It was obviously somebody who didn't want me aboard the yacht."

"And you're still determined to go!"

She smiled at his simple earnestness. "I cannot refuse a dare, my dear. It is a weakness of my character. Yesterday I wasn't at all keen, but today I'm mad to go!"

He was terribly distressed. "But seriously, Rosika, I can't stand by and see you risk your life for . . . for . . ."

"Five thousand a week," she put in, slyly.

"Be serious! This fellow Horace Laghet is a scoundrel! You should hear the stories they tell about him downtown. If somebody wants to shoot him up, let him go to it and welcome, I say. What have you got to do with it?"

"I can see that Laghet is going to give me trouble," she admitted. "But a job is a job, and this is a rather fascinating one."

"What can you do?" he pleaded. "On land you know where you are, but on a ship anything may happen. The sea is always there to swallow a body and yield no trace. If there is a man aboard that yacht who is determined to get Laghet, how can you stop him? If you get in his way, you'll go overboard, too."

She merely smiled.

"How can you save the man from being murdered when he makes an enemy of every man he meets?" he went on. "There's a feeling of hatred rolling up against Horace Laghet like a tidal wave. If you take his part it will overwhelm you along with him."

She patted his cheek affectionately. “You’re a great dear, Latham, but you’re on the wrong line. If you could persuade me that this was going to be a quiet cruise with nothing to do but loll in a deck chair and put on pounds and pounds, I’d drop it this minute. But when you talk of *danger!* Ha! . . .” She flung her arms up. “It’s useless, my dear. Ask Bella.”

He spread out his hands helplessly.

III. *The Buccaneer*

WHEN we descended from the taxicab at the yacht-landing, foot of East Twenty-sixth Street, the *Buccaneer* lying out in midstream burst on us in full glory. It was a cold bright day and the sparkling river made a fit setting for her. A great white ship with an insolent squat funnel and long strings of fluttering flags.

As the latest sensation of the marine world, a crowd had gathered on the pier to have a look at her. Ultra modern design, the yachtsmen were saying, with her high sides and oblique cutwater; ugly but very smart. As for myself, the thought that all those millions had been spent to carry six people to sea for an idle cruise, filled me with a vague fear of retribution.

Only second in interest for the crowd was the launch which was waiting for us, a dazzling affair of mahogany and brass. It was such a launch as might have been used to carry kings and queens. When we stepped aboard everybody gaped at us in awe and envy. Some of the rougher types muttered insolently.

In five minutes we were at the ship's ladder, which was not a ladder at all but a teakwood stairway carpeted with rope to keep your feet from slipping. A handsome young sailor handed us off, and a smart officer saluted on deck. There was a steward in a white coat to show us to our cabins.

All very grand, but it did not make us feel we were being welcomed on board. Sailor, officer and steward all had cagy, expressionless faces. Not one of them looked us in the eye.

It appeared that we were the last arrivals. The launch was immediately hooked to the davits and drawn up. A bosun's whistle blew, and I heard the clank of the anchor chain up forward. Fancy keeping all that waiting!

Below, our suite was more like that of a luxury hotel than anything afloat. A sitting-room twenty feet long, with a bedroom almost as big at either side; a marble bathroom for each of us, with gold-plated fittings. The whole was lighted with a row of big round portholes rimmed with brass, and it was all so beautifully furnished and decorated that nothing obtruded itself; it just received you.

The steward told us that cocktails were being served in the winter garden. When we had taken off our coats he led us up to the sun deck, where there was a green-and-white room with a glass roof and big windows all around. It was filled with tropical plants and orchids. Here the party was gathered.

When you are introduced to a lot of new people at the same time you only get your bearings by degrees. I found myself beside a lovely young girl with a modest, timid air that was almost unbelievable in this day and generation. She told me that she had lately graduated from a convent in France. This was Celia Dare, Horace Laghet's *fiancée*. It seemed rather a shame.

Her mother was a beautiful woman still on the sunny side of forty. Everybody called her Sophie. In contradistinction to her daughter she was very much in the know. Her bright touched-up eyes darted this way and that, full of calculation. I suppose she thought she had done very well by the girl.

The third woman was Mrs. Holder, or Adele. She was a beauty of what used to be called the Dresden-china type, with that exquisite fragility that appeals so strongly to men, particularly of Horace Laghet's sort. It often goes with a hearty appetite.

Among the men I should have recognized Adrian Laghet anywhere as Horace's brother. He was tall and had the same cast of features, though an entirely different character was suggested. Adrian was soft. Already at thirty-two his waist measure was approaching that of his chest. He was the social light of the family.

Emil Herbert, the pianist, was an attractive young fellow, blond, quiet in manner, but with the fine resolute eye that bespeaks a master of his trade, which Emil was. Apart from music, however, he was nothing but a shy boy. I caught him glancing sideways at the girl beside me.

Under the influence of the masterly cocktails there was a lot of talk and laughter. Superficially it had the look of a good party, but it was not so, really. I had not been among them two minutes before I could feel the strain. The eyes in those smiling faces were guarded and uneasy. All those smart people seemed to be incased in glass armor.

Tall, slender, and casual, Mme. Storey among the other women looked like a cardinal bird in a cage of tame canaries. Her smile was perfectly good-humored and inscrutable. I felt enmity in the room, but among those glassy smiles I could not locate it.

Horace Laghet seemed to get his pleasure out of insulting everybody. That was his idea of humor. When he brought his brother up to introduce him to Mme. Storey he said: "This is little Adrian who will kiss your hand and do a little song and dance or paint a little picture or what you will!"

A loud laugh greeted this. Horace's cracks naturally were sure of a big hand. I could see by Adrian's eyes that it flicked him on the raw, but he swallowed it.

Horace, indifferent to what anybody might think, bore himself in a lovely fashion towards the beautiful Adele—a contemptuous lover. This made me feel more than ever sorry for the girl he was supposed to be engaged to. Celia didn't seem to mind. Perhaps she was too inexperienced to realize what it meant. I wondered what her mother was about. Willing, I suppose, to overlook anything if she could only take the rich Horace into camp.

The yacht was under way and I went to one of the windows to watch the panorama of the city moving by. It was hard to believe that we had already cut loose from all we knew. The East Side waterfront is far from beautiful, but I felt a sudden love for the old town and heartily wished myself ashore. Moment by moment I liked our situation less.

Adele joined me at the window. She said, lightly, "I wonder if it will show any change when we come back."

"Who can tell?" I said. And to myself I added: "Will *we* show any change when we come back? And will we all come back?"

"Just the same I'm glad to get away for a while," Adele went on, with her meaningless professional-beauty smile. "Life in New York is so wearing!"

She was very beautiful. I wondered if there were any real feelings under that perfect mask. I presently found out.

A sailor came walking along the deck outside. I saw him before Adele did. I was struck by his appearance because he didn't look like a common sailor, but like a member of the younger country-club set who had been hitting it up; a clean-cut young man who was getting a little blurry. He didn't know anyone was watching him. There was a possessed look in his eyes, such as you see in one who goes along the street muttering to himself.

When he saw me, he dropped his head and assumed the slouch of a common fellow. He went by us with his head down. I heard Adele gasp, and her slender fingers closed around my wrist like a vise.

“Please! please,” she stammered, “come downstairs with me.”

I followed her wonderingly through the door into the stair hall. She was careful to keep her back turned to the others in the room. Her knees were giving under her. Yet when Horace called out, “Where are you going, Adele?” she sang out, gaily, “Back in half a moment.”

She went stumbling down the stairs. I heard her murmuring to herself: “O my God! What am I going to do?” She clung to the post at the bottom, white-faced and shaking. In a moment she opened her eyes and said, with a ghastly attempt to laugh it off:

“What must you think of me?”

“You are not well,” I said.

“Yes . . . yes,” she said, eagerly. “It was so hot upstairs I thought I was going to faint.”

I said nothing. Feeling, perhaps, that her excuse was rather lame, she went on: “I have a bad heart, you see, and naturally one doesn’t want a man to know it. If you had not come with me Horace would have followed and . . . and his eyes are so sharp!” A terrible shudder went through her thin body.

“Come to my cabin and get a spot of brandy,” I said.

When she had swallowed the brandy she began to chatter. “I feel all right now. It was nothing at all. Nothing. So silly of me! Dear me! I hope I’m not going to be a bad sailor!” And so on. But her eyes were still sick with fear.

She went to the mirror and rubbed a little rouge into her cheeks, then turned her head this way and that, gazing into her face with the most penetrating anxiety. I suppose that face meant everything in the world to her. It was all she had.

She entered the winter garden with a gay rattle of talk. “Horace, when are you going to show us over the vessel? I can’t wait until I see the swimming pool. It’s all perfectly marvelous! Like Aladdin’s cave afloat!”

In my mind I could still hear that desperate voice murmuring: “O my God! What am I going to do?”

IV. *The Eavesdropper*

MME. STOREY'S first task was to acquaint herself with every part of the yacht and to make friends with everybody on board. We wandered around in the guise of an innocent curiosity.

Captain Grober was an enigma. A fine-looking, sailor-like German of the bristly-haired type, he was most polite. But we could never get him to unbend; his gray-blue eyes held no more expression than those of a fish. One had to admit that his position on board was a difficult one. He had always commanded big liners where his word was law at sea, but now he was under the shadow of the owner.

The under-officers, all young Germans, took their cue from the captain. Polite and wooden, it was impossible to make friends with them. On the other hand, the engine-room staff were mostly Scotch. The chief, McLaren, was a grand old fellow whom I always delighted to talk to when I could catch him on deck.

It was not a happy ship. Horace was brutal and overbearing towards the crew. American sailors will not stand for it. As Horace's guests we shared in his unpopularity. Once as we sat on deck he passed near by, looked down into the well deck over the rail and passed on. We heard a growling voice from below: "Huh! Thinks he's the Lord God Almighty! But he ain't immortal! He ain't immortal!" Mme. Storey arose and looked over the rail, but the speaker was gone.

Among the friends we made was Jim, a gnarly old fellow with white hair. His principal duty was to wipe down the white-painted walls on deck. Thus he was nearly always somewhere about our quarters and we could talk to him when we pleased.

Another man we liked was Les Farman. We came upon him sitting on a bitt on the forward deck, making a bag out of a piece of sailcloth. He was a magnificent physical specimen with steady blue eyes and firm mouth. Mme. Storey stopped and looked at him in pleasure. He stood up in instinctive politeness, but he was not in the least afraid of her. Indeed, there was a hint of fun in his eyes. He knew his own worth. And that charmed her.

We talked for a while. When she suggested that he seemed somewhat above his station, he answered coolly that he had a master's papers. Having had trouble with his owners (he did not say of what nature), he had found it impossible to get another ship during such hard times, and had been glad to sign as a seaman on the *Buccaneer*.

Just because those two men were so square and decent, Mme. Storey would not attempt to use them as spies on the rest of the crew.

I was never able to point out the sailor whose appearance had so terrified Adele. Apparently he was keeping out of our way.

On our third day at sea Mme. Storey and I were pacing the deck after lunch. It was already warm as we steamed south, and all the doors and windows were open.

Every time we passed the door of the music-room we could hear Emil Herbert softly playing Chopin. Little Celia Dare was sitting in a big chair behind him with tears in her eyes, and smiling at us through them. It was about the only moment of the day when the child could escape from her argus-eyed mother.

Presently we met Horace himself, black-browed and scowling, strolling with a cigar. "Rosika," he said at once (all formality had been dropped by this time) "I want a talk with you."

His overbearing manner always brought a wicked smile to Mme. Storey's face. "Well, I can spare you ten minutes," she said.

"Do we have to have this creature along?" he said, with a hard glance in my direction. It was supposed to be a joke. I didn't care.

"Oh, why not?" said Mme. Storey.

He gave in sullenly, and led the way up to the sun deck, where he had a sort of den aft of the officers' quarters. It was a beautiful little room with red leather chairs, sporting prints on the walls, and an honest-to-God fireplace.

Horace mixed himself a whisky and soda. Mme. Storey and I declined. "What do you think of the situation?" he growled.

"I don't think anything of it," she said. "I lack information."

"How about the crew?" he asked. "I've seen you going about among them."

"What is the captain's history?"

“Surely you don’t suspect him!” said Horace, staring.

“I didn’t say I did. He seems perfectly correct.”

“He used to be captain of the *Koenigen Louise*.”

“Oh, the big liner that burned in the stream at Bremerhaven.”

“Not his fault,” said Horace. “He wasn’t even aboard at the time.”

“There was an ugly story going around that she was burned for the insurance. She had never paid expenses, you see.”

“Even so,” said Horace. “Certainly it wasn’t the captain who got the insurance . . . I bank on him,” he went on. “He’s got twenty-five years of good seamanship behind him. I consider myself lucky to get him for a little vessel like this.”

Mme. Storey said nothing.

“Apart from the yacht, we don’t touch anywhere,” Horace went on. “What possible reason could he have for wanting me out of the way?”

“I don’t know,” she said, mildly. “I’m not accusing him. Only asking for information . . . He brought his own officers aboard?”

“Yes, his navigating officers. Everybody else was hired in New York.”

“By him?”

“Yes; but in consultation with my attorney. I may tell you that when I received my first warning two weeks ago, I fired the whole crew on a caprice, and hired another. The record of every man aboard has been investigated.”

“I doubt if it is in the fo’c’s’le that the source of danger is to be looked for,” said Mme. Storey.

Horace stared angrily, but said nothing.

“Murders, roughly, divide themselves into five classes,” she remarked. “Firstly, there is the killing committed in a sudden passion. That is out, because this plot has been cooking for two weeks or more. Secondly, there is the murder induced by jealousy . . . Have you wronged any man by taking his girl from him, Horace?”

He suspected that she was making fun of him. “No,” he said, shortly.

“Then that’s out. Next there is the motive of fear. Has any man got cause to fear you?”

“No,” he said, with a hard grin. “I’ve already done my worst to them. I’m out of the market now.”

“Fourthly, there is revenge,” she went on. “But revenge is the motive of primitive natures only. Except among gangsters, murders for revenge are rare. That brings us to the last and most prolific cause of murders.”

“What’s that?”

“Murder for profit.”

“Who on earth is there who would profit by my murder?” he said, scornfully.

She did not answer directly. “When are you going to be married?” she asked.

“What’s that got to do with it?” he said. “There’s no hurry. I’ll marry when I get around to it.”

“Hm!” said Mme. Storey.

“Isn’t she a little darling!” he said, with a cynical smile. “So modest and gentle! The perfect wife! Almost unheard of nowadays.”

“If you’re not ready for marriage, why get engaged?”

“I want to make sure of her. She’s unique. Sophie is taking care of her for me. Sophie won’t let the bloom get rubbed off my peach.”

“Sounds Turkish to me,” murmured Mme. Storey.

“Hey?” he demanded.

“Nothing . . . Have you made a will?”

“Sure.”

“Is Adele Holder mentioned in it?”

“Well, upon my word!” he said, darkening with anger.

“I told you I should have to ask all sorts of questions,” said Mme. Storey, calmly.

“Yes, she is,” he said, sullenly. “For fifty thousand only.”

“Have you told her?”

“Yes. She has a lot more than that to gain from me living.”

“Surely . . . Who is your heir?”

“My brother Adrian. Until such a time as I marry, of course.”

“He knows you will marry,” said Mme. Storey, quietly. “There’s a possible motive.”

“What, Adrian!” he cried. He laughed harshly. “That poor fish! He has no reason for existence apart from me! He is nothing but what I have made him!”

“He could stand alone if he had your money,” she said.

“Adrian! That’s comic!” He laughed again.

“Weak men are the most dangerous,” remarked Mme. Storey. “They strike in the dark . . . You treat him badly.”

“He’s a fool!” said Horace. “He asks for it.”

“How much do you allow him?”

“Fifteen thousand a year.”

“Not very much, considering what your income is.”

“More than he’s worth,” said Horace. “He does nothing.”

“Suppose this weak man is nursing a sense of resentment in his breast,” said Mme. Storey. “A sort of poisonous mushroom growth that spreads and spreads until it crowds out everything but itself.”

“I know every thought in his foolish noddle,” said Horace.

“No man knows the secret thoughts of another.”

“I’ve been with Adrian since infancy. He’s always done what I’ve told him.”

“He could hire tools stronger than himself. With such a tremendous stake in view he could afford to offer a big price. . . .”

“You will never convince me that Adrian is plotting against me,” cried Horace. “He hasn’t the initiative of a tadpole!”

“Well, anyhow, there’s more than one man concerned in it,” said Mme. Storey. “I advise you not to go on deck alone at night.”

“Let them try it, that’s all,” growled Horace, clenching his fist. “On my own ship I’ll be the master!”

Mme. Storey suddenly sat erect in her chair. “Lower your voice!” she said, quietly. “There is somebody out on deck.”

With a single movement Horace was out of his chair and through the door. We heard him cursing and ran out. He was struggling with a sailor. Horace had the man by the throat and was shaking him like a rat. It was the same man whose appearance had so frightened Adele two days before.

“Let the man speak!” said Mme. Storey, sharply.

Horace let go, and the sailor backed off feeling of his throat and scowling from under his brows with venomous hatred.

“What are you doing here?” demanded Horace.

“Just on my way aft to report to the quartermaster,” muttered the sailor.

“Say ‘sir’ when you speak to me!”

“Sir!” repeated the man, with an ugly sneer.

“You’re a liar!” said Horace. “You were listening just beyond the window.”

“I wasn’t listening. I could hear that you were talking privately and I was afraid to show myself in front of the windows. I couldn’t hear anything.”

“What’s your name?”

“Johnson, sir.”

“Get on about your work!” barked Horace. “If I catch you listening at my windows again I’ll know what to do.”

The man picked up his hat, saluted, and slouched aft. His glance was murderous.

“He couldn’t have heard anything,” Horace muttered, rubbing his lip and glancing sideways at Mme. Storey.

“You won’t get much out of a spy by strangling him,” she said, dryly. “Leave him to me and I’ll try other measures.”

V. Ill-Starred

ONE afternoon Mme. Storey and I were in our sitting-room decoding wireless messages that had been received, and coding the replies. It had been impossible to cut off the business in New York with one stroke. Latham Rowe had been left in charge of the office, and we were in communication with him every day. I helped Mme. Storey to prepare many of the messages, but not all of them.

We were interrupted by a knock at the door. It was Celia Dare. She ran in, flung her arms around Mme. Storey, and buried a hot face in her neck. The girl was as natural and spontaneous as a flower, and a great friendship had sprung up between her and my employer.

Mme. Storey held her off, trying to see into her face. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Celia obstinately kept her head down. The red and white chased each other through her delicate cheeks. "Emil kissed me," she murmured.

Mme. Storey folded her in her arms. We exchanged a glance over Celia's head. It was only too clear what a danger this created, yet the girl was such a darling we couldn't help smiling, too.

"How did it happen?" asked Mme. Storey.

"It was up in the music-room just now. Emil was playing something so wistful that it brought the tears to my eyes. I always cry when he plays, though I love it better than anything. Suddenly he stopped and looked around. He said . . . he said my eyes were like diamonds. He went down on his knees beside my chair and . . . and he kissed me."

"Did you like it?" asked Mme. Storey.

A very small voice issued from her neck, "Ye-es."

"Did you kiss him back again?"

"I'm afraid I did."

Mme. Storey held her close. "But you're engaged to marry another man."

“I clean forgot it!” cried Celia.

We laughed outright at that.

“Oh, what shall I do!” mourned Celia.

“Well, we must talk it over,” said Mme. Storey.

“I think Emil is waiting out in the corridor,” murmured Celia.

“Bring him in.”

Emil entered, very flustered and good-looking, his blond hair all standing on end as if he had been wildly running his fingers through it. “I’m so sorry!” he burst out. “I wouldn’t have had it happen for anything. I just lost myself!”

Celia raised her head and looked at him a little resentfully.

“Don’t express too much regret,” said Mme. Storey. “It might be misunderstood.”

“I love her!” he cried, with perfect inconsistency. “And I think she loves me back again. Anyhow, she would in time.”

“Yes,” said Celia.

“Nonsense!” said Mme. Storey as well as she could speak for laughing. “When did you two meet for the first time?”

“When we came aboard the yacht.”

“Then you don’t know your own minds yet, either of you. Give yourselves a chance.”

“I shall never change,” said Emil, seriously.

“Me neither,” said Celia.

“This is just dramatics,” said Mme. Storey. “Now listen to me. The trouble with young people is they attach far too much importance to a kiss. They think because they have kissed once that they must go on kissing to the bitter end. There’s nothing to it. A kiss is just an accident. It’s like a drop of rain that might fall on anybody’s head. You don’t have to stay out in it until you’re all wet!”

They both laughed at that. Celia left Mme. Storey and, going to Emil, slipped her hand inside his like a child. They looked at each other, completely lost. It gave me a little stab of pain to see it because if ever a love affair was ill-starred, this was it.

“Emil, you know she’s promised to another man,” said Mme. Storey.

He dropped Celia’s hand and thrust his fingers through his hair. “Oh, it’s damnable!” he cried. “An old man like that!” (Emil was twenty-three.)

“Celia,” said Mme. Storey, “are you in love with Horace?”

“Oh no!” cried the girl, in great surprise. “I respect him, of course, but how could I be in love with him?”

“Then you must tell your mother that.”

“I have told her. She says love will come.”

“Emil,” said Mme. Storey, “you know that Horace is a violent man. He is terrible when his will is crossed. There will be the most awful trouble if this comes out.”

Emil flushed up. “I’m not afraid of him,” he said, quickly.

Mme. Storey saw that she was taking the wrong line, and quietly abandoned it. “What do you propose to do in this situation?”

Emil despaired again. “What can I do?” he groaned. “If we were ashore it would be easy. I could walk out of the man’s house. But here I am, a guest on his yacht, and I can’t get away!”

“You can leave at Curaçao when we call there in a couple of days.”

“Oh no!” they both cried, in terror. Their hands flew together again.

“How could I go away and leave her in that man’s power?” cried Emil, brokenly. “Her mother is completely dominated by him. It would be more than flesh and blood could stand!”

“All right,” said Mme. Storey. “But there must be no more kissing until this matter is cleared up. Don’t fool yourselves by thinking you can keep it secret. Nothing can be kept secret aboard a yacht. You must play the game.”

“All right,” said Emil, doggedly. He glanced longingly at Celia. “It’s not going to be easy, now that I know she likes it.”

Mme. Storey bit her lip. “And, Celia,” she went on, “you must tell your mother about Emil.”

The girl paled. “How can I?” she gasped. “Her heart is set on my marrying Horace. She thinks of nothing else. You don’t know my mother!”

“Mme. Storey is right, Celia,” urged Emil. “Your mother must be told. If you can’t do it, I will.”

“Oh no!” cried Celia, in terror. “That would be worse. She doesn’t like you.”

“Sophie must be told!” said Mme. Storey, firmly.

“All right,” murmured the girl. “I’ll manage it somehow.” She looked imploringly at Mme. Storey. “But you’ll stand by us, Rosika?”

“To the limit!” said Mme. Storey, “. . . if you play the game!”

VI. *The Cat's-paw*

ON the surface that cruise was like any other cruise in a luxury yacht. High spirits was everybody's line. Adrian Laghet was the chief entertainer. He always had some new stunt to propose. Nobody had a good time, really. It was like a lot of hysterical children jumping on the thin crust of a volcano. I waited for the explosion.

I used to wonder what was really going on behind Adrian's calf-like brown eyes, which were too large and emotional for a man's. He was a very good-looking fellow if you like that sort of thing. He was supposed to be artistic, but there was no evidence that he had ever worked at the arts.

Once when we happened to be the first ones to meet in the lounge for cocktails before dinner, I asked, "Do you find it difficult to be Horace's brother?"

"Why should I?" he countered, with a swift, hard stare. "Horace is one swell guy!"

"Why, of course!" I said. "But he's such an overpowering somebody."

Adrian sounded his loud, empty laugh. "I think it's a swell job to be Horace's little brother!" he cried. He twirled around with his cocktail glass in one hand and a *canapé d'anchois* in the other. "Like the lilies of the field, I toil not, neither do I spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these!"

Such was Adrian's style.

On the night before we arrived at the island of Curaçao everybody was up in the winter garden, playing some absurd game that Adrian had started. The laughter sounded false and strained and I was fed up. Only Emil and Celia were really enjoying themselves, because the game gave them a chance to touch hands occasionally.

Adele had already slipped away on the pretext of a headache, and at a moment when nobody was looking I beat it, too. I intended to pick up a book in the music-room and go to my cabin to read. The sea was as smooth as a pond.

It was dark in the music-room, and as I put out my hand to turn the switch, I happened to catch an oblique glimpse of Adele through a window. She was coming along the promenade deck outside, and there was something so furtive in her attitude that I instinctively drew back my hand and watched her.

Her head was continually over her shoulder, watching to see if she was observed. Her face was white and strained. She passed my window, going aft, and I crossed the hall and went on through the dark lounge, keeping her in view through the windows.

At the end of the lounge there were windows looking aft. Out on deck near the stern there was a little stairway leading down. It was used only by the sailors. Adele paused with her hand on the rail for a cautious look all around. Then she descended out of sight.

It was my duty to find out what was going on, and I followed without a qualm. I hastened back to the stairway. I looked down. I could see nothing. I took off my slippers and went down in stocking feet.

I was now on what they called the A deck. Aft of all the cabins there was a little open deck from side to side, with a solid screen shutting off a bit of the stern. I think the machinery that turned the rudder was behind this screen. There was a door in it and it was closed, but as the deck was open behind the screen I could hear the murmuring voices there.

I had come right in the middle of a tense scene. I heard Adele's voice, broken with weeping:

“Oh, Harry, why did you come? Why did you come?”

Then a man growling, “Damn it all, you're my wife!” I recognized the voice of the sailor that Horace had manhandled on deck.

“But you knew all along what I was going to do. You agreed then.”

“I got to thinking,” muttered the man. “I couldn't stand it.”

“What good does it do, your coming on board?” she went on. “You will ruin me! And yourself, too. He'll kill you if he finds out. He's a wild beast when he's aroused.”

“He won't find out if you don't tell him.”

“You know I won't do that. But, O God! what torture! Every moment! Every moment! I've been sick ever since I learned you were on the vessel. Horace is already wondering what is the matter!”

“Damn Horace!” said the man, thickly. “Damn his soul to hell!”

“Oh, hush!” wailed Adele. “What good does that do?”

“Do you love this man?” he demanded, savagely.

“Love him? I hate him! I hate him! You don’t know what I have to go through!”

“Look!” he said, eagerly. “We’re going to call at one of the islands tomorrow. Come ashore with me. We’ll make our way back to New York somehow.”

“He has promised me the Emeritinsky diamond. It’s worth a hundred thousand dollars.”

“To hell with it! Do you want to drive me crazy?”

“I won’t go.”

“You’ve got to go!”

A thin hard note crept into Adele’s voice. “I won’t go and you can’t make me! . . . This is our one chance to make a stake. If I passed it up, you would be the first one to blame me when we went broke again. We’ve got to have money. How are we going to live?”

There was a silence, then the man’s voice, humbled, indicating that he had given in. “But you do care for me, don’t you?”

“You know I do!”

“All right,” he said. “If you’ll just let me see you once in a while, I’ll keep quiet.”

“How can I do that?” mourned Adele. “Think of the risk! O God! this is awful!”

I stole away back up the stairs. I could not tell how suddenly this scene might end. If the door opened, there I was. Anyhow I had learned the nature of the situation. That was enough for the moment.

I returned to the winter garden. The noisy game—or another game—was still in progress. I let Mme. Storey know that I wanted to speak to her privately. When she was able to get away we went down to the promenade deck. On the stairway we met Adele coming up. She had brightened up her complexion, and passed us with a sweet, insincere smile.

Out on deck, as soon as I had started to tell Mme. Storey what I had overheard, she said:

“Come on, let’s try to intercept him on his way back to his quarters.”

Forward of the promenade deck and below it there was a space between the owner’s part of the ship and the fo’c’s’le that they called the well deck. There was a ladder leading down from the promenade. We descended it, and waited at the foot while I told the rest of my tale. There was nobody around.

A door opened aft, and our sailor came out of it. He was passing us without paying any attention when Mme. Storey said, softly:

“Holder!”

He jumped as if he had received a stab, and turned a terrified face. He tried to recover himself, but it was too late.

“Were you speaking to me?”

“No use trying to bluff it out,” said Mme. Storey. “Your talk with your wife just now was overheard.”

“Spying!” he snarled.

She ignored it. “You and I have got to have a little talk.”

“You’ve got nothing to do with me!”

“If you act ugly,” she said, coolly, “I shall have to tell Horace Laghet that you are on board this vessel. You can figure out what that will mean.”

He said nothing. His chin went down. I could hear him breathing fast.

“I don’t want to be a party to a killing,” she went on. “You’d better come to my suite and talk things over.”

“Not allowed in that part of the vessel,” he growled.

“You have just come from there. If you are with me nobody will question it.”

He shrugged and followed us. It was after midnight and we met nobody in the corridor. At a sign from my employer I locked the door of our sitting-room after we had passed in. She said:

“Put up your hands!”

He stared at her open-mouthed, and did not obey until he saw that she had taken a small automatic from the drawer of the table and was playing it. Then his hands went up fast enough.

“Search him, Bella.”

I took a gun from his hip pocket. It was the only weapon he had on him. I handed it to Mme. Storey and she threw both guns in the drawer and closed it.

“You’re better off without it,” she said, smiling. “Sit down and relax. Smoke a cigarette. I am not your enemy. In fact, I’m sorry for you, though you appear to have got yourself into this mess. Well, we usually do.”

He sat down, staring at her sullenly. He couldn’t make her out at all. He lit a cigarette in trembling fingers. One could see the promising boy he had been with his nice eyes, and thick, wavy hair brushed straight back. Probably spoiled by his mother.

“You and Adele are not divorced,” said Mme. Storey.

“No,” he growled.

“Were you living together up to the time she sailed?”

“Off and on.”

“When Adele told you she was going to make this cruise you didn’t object.”

Holder was silent.

“Then why have you started to kick up a dust now?”

His muttered answer was the same he had given Adele—“I got to thinking.”

“What started you thinking?”

“Aah! what’s the use of all these questions?” he blurted out.

“Somebody is using you as a tool,” said Mme. Storey, calmly, “and I want to find out who it is.”

This was evidently a new thought to him. He stared at her with distended eyes, but said nothing.

“Somebody’s been after you,” she suggested. “Got you all stirred up.”

He shook his head. “Nobody ever said anything.”

“Then it was a letter, an anonymous letter, signed Well-Wisher or something like that. Good old Well-Wisher!”

“God! How did you know that?” he said, staring.

“I am merely following out a process of deduction,” she said, with a shrug. “This letter asked you as a man and an American if you were willing to stand for your wife going on a cruise in Horace Laghet’s yacht. It told you what other men would think of you. It suggested that if you had a spark of manliness in you, you’d put a stop to it.”

From the frightened look that appeared in his eyes it was evident that she had hit on the truth, or close to it.

“Such letters always run true to form,” she went on. “It suggested that you ship aboard the yacht so you could see what went on . . .”

“That was the second letter,” he muttered, forgetting himself.

“Oh, there were two!” said Mme. Storey. “Sort of follow-up system. I suppose the second letter told you just where to go, what to say, what name to give. Told you everything would be made easy for you, very likely. Told you you had friends who wouldn’t see you wronged!”

His hangdog look confessed that she was right.

“And you fell for it!”

“I was like a crazy man,” he muttered. “I couldn’t help myself.”

“What happened after you got aboard?” she asked.

“Nothing. I was treated like anybody else.”

“Who approached you? What proposition has been made?”

“Nobody. Nothing.”

“Where did the gun come from?”

No answer from Holder.

Mme. Storey took the gun out of the drawer and examined it. “You got this after you came aboard.”

“Well, I found it in my bunk,” he muttered. “There was a box of shells with it.”

“And you were glad to get it,” she suggested. “You didn’t trouble much where it came from.”

No answer.

“Sooner or later you would have shot Horace Laghet?”

“Well, that’s my business,” he growled.

“You would certainly have shot him that first day when he attacked you if you’d had the gun then.”

He scowled and twisted in his seat.

“And what would have happened afterwards? You would have gone to the chair, or at least to prison for life, and somebody would have reaped a golden harvest from Horace Laghet’s death.”

Holder said nothing.

“What do you propose to do about it?” she asked.

Like a child, he took refuge in his stubborn silence.

“Are you willing to put yourself in my hands?”

“What do you want to do?” he asked, suspiciously.

“Arrange for your passage from Curaçao back to New York.”

“And leave her with him?” he growled. “I’m only flesh and blood!”

“You’ve got to face realities!” said Mme. Storey. “If you don’t go ashore tomorrow, and stay ashore, I’ll have to tell Horace Laghet who you are. That’s my job.”

There was no answer.

“Adele isn’t worth it,” she said, softly.

He hung his head.

“You know it,” she murmured, compassionately, “but you’re in hell just the same.”

A spasm of intolerable pain twisted his face. His endurance snapped. “Ah! What is it to you?” he snarled, jumping up. “You think you have me on the grill, don’t you? Good sport to sit there and watch me squirm! I know women . . . Well, to hell with you! To hell with you! I won’t leave this vessel without my wife, and that’s flat!”

Mme. Storey shrugged and spread out her hands.

Holder’s voice scaled up hysterically: “Go ahead and tell Laghet!” he cried. “Tell him! Tell him! I have plenty of friends aboard. The crew is with me. They’re men, not dogs. And if Laghet lays a finger on me they’ll mutiny. Do you know what that means? Mutiny! It will sweep you all overboard! If you know what’s good for you, you’ll be the one to go ashore tomorrow. I’ve warned you now! Go ashore and stay ashore, if you ever

want to see New York again.” Shaking and gasping, he turned and rattled the door.

“Let him out,” said Mme. Storey, quietly.

I unlocked the door and he ran down the corridor. I turned and faced my employer.

“You dare not tell Laghet,” I said. “Holder has the whip hand over us. What can you do?”

“It appears to be up to Adele,” she said, smiling enigmatically. “I will go and talk to her.”

VII. *At Willemstad*

ON the following day, after lunch, the *Buccaneer* cast anchor off the port of Willemstad in the island of Curaçao. There is a dangerous current off the mouth of the harbor, and as Horace Laghet intended to remain only long enough to pick up Martin Coade, his secretary, they didn't want to take the big yacht inside.

After six days at sea the sight of land was grateful to the eye, though it was but a brown and treeless island. However, the beach was of the whitest, the sky of the bluest, and the town picturesque enough with its steep-roofed Dutch houses bordering the quays. In designing those roofs, the prudent Dutch were not taking any chances of a heavy snowfall.

It put Horace in a temper to learn that the liner *Orizaba*, which was bringing Martin Coade from Europe, had not yet arrived. "Nothing to see in this damned hole but oil-refineries," he growled.

Nevertheless, the indefatigable Adrian insisted on getting up a shore party. Horace refused to accompany them, and Mme. Storey begged off on the pretext of having letters to write. All the others went ashore in the launch. Adele's pretty face was drawn and haggard under the careful makeup. She had put herself into Mme. Storey's hands the night before, and during the morning had smuggled a small bag containing some clothes into our cabin.

About the same time another launch set off from the yacht, carrying a party of sailors who had been granted four hours' shore leave. Harry Holder was among them. Adele had communicated with him.

About an hour later the *Orizaba* hove in sight and Mme. Storey sent word on deck, asking to be carried ashore. She carried Adele's little bag.

Horace was on deck, and his eyes narrowed at the sight of the bag. "Are you leaving us?" he asked, laughing. It had an ugly ring.

"Not yet," she answered, smiling. "I have a lot of stuff to send in the mail, and this is the easiest way to carry it."

He only half believed her, and for a moment I thought she would be obliged to open her bag like a departing servant. However, she smiled him

down.

“Do you want company?” he asked, with a hangdog air.

This was awkward. “Just as you like,” she said, calmly. “I shall be pretty busy at the post and the cable office.”

He turned away sorely. “We sail at nine,” he said.

I breathed again.

The entrance to the great inner harbor of Willemstad is by way of a mile-long passage like a big canal. The town spreads along both sides of it. The oddest feature of the place is a pontoon bridge over the canal. The middle pontoon is equipped with an engine and paddle wheels, and when a vessel wishes to pass through, the bridge gives a shrill toot and paddles itself out of the way. I am sure there is not another bridge like it in the world.

Mme. Storey and I landed on the quay and struck into the narrow streets of the town, gazing around us like idle sight-seers. When we had satisfied ourselves we were not being watched, we made our way to the principal hotel and engaged a front room. A notice-board in the lobby informed us that the *Orizaba* would sail for Panama at 7 P.M.

According to prearrangement we were presently joined in our room by Adele, followed a moment or two later by Harry Holder. The latter had procured a suit of shore clothes from an outfitter. Apparently a reconciliation had taken place between the pair. It was almost piteous to see how hungrily the man’s eyes dwelt on his wife’s beautiful face. Adele was tense and jumpy.

“Has Horace come ashore?” she asked.

My employer shook her head.

“Oh, what will he say?” murmured Adele.

“It would have been better to have it out with him,” said Mme. Storey, dryly. “Then you could have taken all your clothes.”

“I couldn’t face him!” murmured the girl.

Mme. Storey shrugged. “Where are the others of the party?” she asked.

“They hired an automobile to tour the island. I refused to go because of the dust. They didn’t suspect I was going to give them the slip. They are dining at a Chinese restaurant.”

There was little more to say. We sat down, watching through the windows. Holder took Adele's hand between his, but she jerked it away pettishly. She was ashamed of him in his common, ill-fitting clothes. Mme. Storey smoked impassively.

Our windows commanded a view of the sea. We saw the *Orizaba* drop anchor and immediately become surrounded by a fleet of small boats.

Among them we distinguished a launch from the *Buccaneer*. After a while it returned to the yacht, bearing Martin Coade. All we could distinguish at the distance was that he was accompanied by a small mountain of baggage.

"Martin's out of the way," said Mme. Storey. "You'd better go aboard now. Stay in your cabin until she sails."

We shook their hands and wished them a pleasant voyage. Mme. Storey had already given them sufficient money to carry them to New York. They had shipped on the *Orizaba* as Mr. and Mrs. John Matthews. The man was wild to get aboard the vessel, but Adele, shaking with terror, held back. Through the window she searched the quay anxiously before she would venture out.

Finally they went. Watching from the window, we saw them board a launch at the quayside, and followed it with our eyes until it deposited them at the ladder of the *Orizaba*. We could distinguish Adele's pink dress climbing the ladder. The two of them were swallowed up on deck. The launch started back.

"Thank God, that's accomplished!" I cried.

Mme. Storey smiled dryly. "Unstable as water!" she said. "Such people won't stay put. We'd better stick around a while to make sure they don't come ashore again."

"Let's stay on in this hotel," I urged. "You've done your job. You've saved Horace Laghet. Don't go back to that horrible yacht!"

"Harry Holder's only a tool," she said. "There may be a dozen such willing tools aboard the yacht. We haven't yet found the intelligence that directs them."

"Don't go back!" I persisted. "The dice are loaded. You cannot win!"

"Maybe not," she said, soberly. "But I can't throw up a job half finished. . . . However, I don't want to force you to anything against your judgment. You can sail on the *Orizaba*, too."

“You know I’m not going to leave you,” I muttered.

And so the subject was dropped.

The sun went down about six o’clock, and the tropical night descended swiftly. We left the hotel and walked along the quay, watching the animated scene. Never in my life have I seen such a mixture of races. They speak an uncouth dialect called papiemento, which appears to be a mixture of half the languages on earth.

Presently we discovered that we were being followed by a sailor from the *Buccaneer*. He was making no effort to conceal himself, and it seemed as if he wanted to speak to us. So we sat down at a sidewalk café to give him the chance.

He came sidling up to our table with a sheepish look like a schoolboy. It was a good-looking young fellow whom we had seen about the decks of the *Buccaneer*, but had never had any speech with. His name was Wanzer.

“I’ve deserted,” he said out of the corner of his mouth. “Can’t stick that hell hole!”

“Well,” said Mme. Storey running up her eyebrows, “why confide in me?”

“Thought maybe you’d stake me to a suit of clothes,” he muttered. He looked down at his smart white ducks. “How can I make a getaway in a fancy rig like this?”

“What do you mean, hell hole?” she asked.

“I’d tell you,” he said, “if I was only sure of getting clear. They’d kill me if they found out I’d told anything. There’s dirty work on board. I don’t want to have nothing to do with it. . . . I’ll tell you everything if you’ll protect me.”

“That’s a fair offer,” she said. “I’ll take you up.”

“Not here,” he said, glancing nervously around. “The bunch has gone off to the ship. When they find that I’m missing they’ll send ashore to look for me. I got to get under cover.”

“Well, let me see . . .” she began.

She got no further. “O God! here comes the old man now!” said Wanzer, in a terror-stricken voice. And like a shadow he had slipped inside the café.

In a moment or two Captain Grober, very stiff and seaman-like, came sauntering by. At sight of us he clicked his heels together in the German fashion and bowed from the waist. His handsome face was as expressionless as a plaster wall.

“At your service, ladies,” he said. “I look for two missing seamen, name of Johnson, name of Wanzer. Have you seen any of our white-suit sailors during the past half hour?”

“Why, no!” said Mme. Storey, innocently. “Do you suppose they have run off?”

The captain shrugged. “Who can tell?”

“But after only six days at sea, with good food and good pay, why should they become dissatisfied?”

“They are American seamen,” he said. “They expect to be treated like royalty. It is not so with Germans.”

“How can you expect to find them single-handed?” she asked.

“My boat’s crew is searching through the town,” he said. “If they have been hidden by others, of course we shall not find them. There is no time to make a house-to-house search. Fortunately, the yacht is fully manned. They will be no great loss.”

“I am afraid you’re not very happy aboard the *Buccaneer*, Captain,” she said, just to see what kind of an answer she’d get.

He looked at her sharply, as if he was about to make a confidence; but he thought better of it and ended with a shrug. “It is a fine ship,” he said, “the pay is very good. What more can a seaman ask?”

“Won’t you sit down and have a drink?” she asked.

He bowed again. “I thank you. I must get on with my search. . . . The last boat will leave at eight-thirty, madame.”

“We’ll be there,” said Mme. Storey. “We are dining ashore.”

He backed away, still bowing, and went on down the quay. When he had passed out of sight we went inside the café. It was a humble place, and the rough customers gaped at the brilliant apparition of Mme. Storey. She addressed herself to the proprietor, a burly Dutchman.

“The sailor in the white suit who came in just now, where is he?”

He pointed impassively to an open door leading to a yard in the rear. "I not know, my lady. He run through."

While we stood there, wondering what to do, a small, ragged boy with a *café au lait* complexion pulled timidly at Mme. Storey's skirt. He was offering her a scrap of paper on which was scribbled in pencil:

I'll wait for you at Feng Lee's restaurant. He gives sailors a hideout.

W.

"Where is Feng Lee's restaurant?" Mme. Storey asked the stolid Dutchman.

He pointed through the door and across the big canal. "Scharlo."

"Is it a respectable place?"

"Very nice. Very nice."

Outside we picked up a dilapidated car that was waiting for hire. The driver knew all about Feng Lee's. "Very nice. Very nice," he said in his turn. We rattled over the pontoon bridge, turned to the left along the quay on the other side, crossed a shorter bridge over an inlet, turned to the right, and stopped. It was not far.

Mme. Storey made a sharp survey of the place before getting out of the car. While it was not Pierre's or Marguery's, it had the look of a popular restaurant. In the West Indies the Chinese restaurants are generally the best. It was wide open to the street, and brilliantly lighted inside. It was too early for dinner, but there were already several people at the tables. Plenty of people passing to and fro outside. In short, nothing to arouse suspicion.

My employer paid off the chauffeur and we went in and sat down. Each small table had a red-shaded lamp on it and a few limp paper flowers in a holder. Around the walls hung red banners engrossed with Chinese characters. In one corner an immense phonograph was braying forth: "Lazy-bones." Just like home.

A smiling Chinese boy came to take our order. They are an engaging race, but inscrutable. Mme. Storey asked for Feng Lee, and the boy went back and fetched the proprietor from the kitchen. This was a tall, portly Chinaman in native costume; very dignified and wearing the beaming Oriental smile that may mean anything or nothing. He bowed and awaited our commands.

“The sailor in the white suit said I should find him here,” said Mme. Storey.

“He is waiting in the kitchen,” said Feng Lee in perfect English. He glanced at the other diners and lowered his voice. “Would you mind stepping out there? The sailor does not want to show himself.”

There seemed to be no reason why we should refuse. We went through a perfectly ordinary swing door into an ordinary kitchen—range, carving table, sink, racks of dishes. Dinner was in full course of preparation. There were a number of Chinese standing about—cooks, waiters, dish-washers, all of whom turned smiling faces at our entrance. I didn’t see Wanzer.

While I was looking at the smiling Chinamen their smiles changed horribly. *They were all looking at something beyond me.* My blood froze. Before I could act, something thick, soft, and all-enveloping was thrown over my head and drawn tight. A hand thrust the stuff into my mouth and I could make no sound. Nor did I hear a sound from Mme. Storey beside me.

A rope was hastily thrown around my body, pinning my arms fast. Several hands picked me up and ran me through a door, across a dirt-paved court, through another door which rolled heavily to behind me, and through a third door which was unlocked with a creaking key.

Inside I was dropped on a board floor. I heard the fall of another body near me. An immensely heavy wooden door thudded to with a dull sound and the key creaked in the lock. Then silence except for the soft lapping of water somewhere beneath me.

VIII. *The Opium Chamber*

IN their haste the Chinamen had not made a very good job of tying me up. I found I could move my arms a little. By rolling on the floor and twisting my arms I succeeded gradually in working the ropes up to my elbows. That freed my forearms, and the rest was easy. When I sat up clear of the ropes and the suffocating quilt, a voice near me asked:

“Are you all right, Bella?”

The quiet tones put new heart into me. I schooled my voice to answer as steadily as she had asked: “All right!” Upon putting out my hand I found that she too had freed herself. Wherever we were, it was black as the pit.

Mme. Storey wasted no time in lamentations. “Let’s figure this out,” she said. “When we drove across the bridge over the inlet we turned into a street on our right. Feng Lee’s joint was on the right-hand side of that street. We were carried out through the back of his premises. Therefore this must be his godown on the shore of the inlet. Hence the sound of lapping water.”

Meanwhile I had started to explore our prison on hands and knees, feeling before me as I went.

“Wait a minute,” she said. “I’ll show a light.”

She had been seized so quickly that the rope had caught her little handbag under her arm, and she still had it. I heard her tapping a cigarette. She got her lighter and struck it. The little flame revealed her quiet face almost smiling you would have said. She drew on the cigarette and held the lighter aloft so we could see.

A small chamber, perhaps ten by ten and eight feet high, all tightly sealed in with smooth matched boards. The walls gave back a dull sound when rapped with the knuckles; double walls insulated with some sound-deadening material. The door was so snugly fitted that we had some difficulty in finding it. The keyhole did not come through to our side.

“About eight hundred cubic feet of air,” I said, casually. “How long will that last for two?”

“The oxygen will be gone before morning,” said Mme. Storey, “but of course we can drag on for a while after that.” She dropped her cigarette and

trod out the spark. “No use feeding our oxygen to the gasper.”

Apart from the door there was nothing to break the smooth walls of our cell except a big hook depending from the middle of the ceiling. Mme. Storey took a good look at it and shut off the tiny light. “We must hoard the juice,” she said.

She continued her deliberations in the dark. “Do you recognize that smell, Bella?”

I took a sniff of the faint, acrid odor that filled the place, and said, at a venture: “Poppies.”

“Right. Call it opium. Feng Lee must deal in it in a big way, and this will be his storeroom. What’s the hook for? Well, if there’s water underneath, it would be natural to float a boat under and bring the stuff up through a hole in the floor. The hook is to support the tackle. If my reasoning is correct there’s a trap door under the hook, Bella.”

“The floor is perfectly smooth,” I objected.

“Let’s look.”

With the aid of the light we succeeded in outlining the trap in the floor, but it was so snugly fitted that there seemed to be no possibility of raising it. We clawed at it in vain.

“Save your finger nails,” said Mme. Storey. “Let me try to dope this thing out. There must be some way of raising it.”

“Maybe they push it up from below,” I suggested.

“Never! That would make it too easy for Feng Lee’s rivals to come and rob his secret store.”

With her sensitive fingers she patiently tested each short length of plank in the trap door. We saved the light. Suddenly she said, “This piece is not nailed, though it is set in tight.”

She got a nail file out of her bag and set to work to prise it under the end of the board. It was a tedious job. In the end, when we were not expecting it, the loose board suddenly sprang up. We hastily lit the light and saw beneath the false flooring a heavy iron ring for raising the trap, and two bolts driven into the side beams to prevent it from being shoved up from below.

We drew back the bolts and, thrusting the loose piece of board through the ring, stood one on each side of the trap and raised it between us. We let it thud back on the floor. Having no hinges, it came away clear. We dropped

on our stomachs and held the little light down in the hole. A puff of wind blew it out, but we saw the sulky gleam of water eight or ten feet below.

“At any rate, we won’t suffocate now,” said Mme. Storey, dryly.

The trap door was oblong in shape. Without saying anything further she shoved it around until the wide side was athwart the hole in the floor. Then she tied together the ropes that had bound us, and tied one end to the iron ring. My heart sunk when I saw what she was up to. It was not sharks that I feared, but a smaller and deadlier creature. All I said was:

“Barracuda.”

“Oh, the barracuda is a sporting fish,” she said, lightly. “He’s no wharf rat.”

I wasn’t so sure of that, but it was useless for me to protest; useless to offer to go in her place.

She tucked her dress around her waist and lowered herself through the hole. Winding the rope around her leg, she slowly sank out of sight. The light had been left with me. I reached it down through the hole so she could see, shielding it from the draught with my free hand. Presently her voice came up:

“Put it out!”

All I could see was a wilderness of black piles with the water sucking around them. After I had blown out the light she said:

“I can see starshine a little way off. I’m going to swim for it. Stay there and guide me back with your voice if I need it.”

I heard the soft splash as the water took her. For a moment or two I could hear her cautious strokes as she swam away—then silence.

I could never tell you how long a time passed. The one who is left behind has the hardest job. Nothing to do but clench my teeth and see it through. I gripped the edge of the hole and stuck my head down, straining my ears. No sound but an occasional lap of the water like some vast creature licking its lips. All else silence like total deafness.

Silence . . . silence, except for the lazy licking of the water and the beating of my own heart. How long had I been waiting? How long must I go on waiting? It was easier to go down a rope than to climb up again. On the one side savage fish armed with rows of serrated teeth; on the other, slant-eyed grinning Chinamen!

A sound outside the door of my cell jerked me into an upright position as if I had been electrified. I heard the key thrust into the lock. It creaked. Quicker than thought I made my choice. Catching hold of the edge of the floor I swung down through the hole and let go. The warm water closed over my head.

When I rose to the surface I was dimly aware of a lighted square above me with heads sticking over. I heard a guttural voice giving an order. I struck out blindly. They launched the heavy trap door through the hole. It struck the water just behind me with a tremendous splash, sending out a wave that washed over my head. But I was safe.

My head collided with one of the piles, knocking the sense out of me. As I choked and struggled in the water a hand closed in my hair. I fought back blindly. I heard a well-known voice saying: "Easy! Easy, Bella! I've got a boat!" I went limp all over. Somehow I was dragged into the boat and dropped in the bottom.

While I lay there gasping, Mme. Storey was shoving the boat along from pile to pile. We shot out under the starry sky. She sat down and, snatching up the oars, began to row for our lives. The inlet was something less than a quarter of a mile wide, I judged, with lights sparkling on the other side. Close at hand was a huddle of buildings along the shore, with wharves and godowns rising blackly against the stars.

She had not taken more than a few strokes when we heard somewhere close behind us the exhaust of a motorboat as the flywheel was turned over. Instantly she headed the rowboat under the nearest wharf and took in her oars. I sat up and helped her push it from pile to pile just as deep under as we could get. We grounded in the mud of the bank.

Through the piles we had glimpses of the motorboat, a heavy craft without much speed. Somebody in it was flashing a powerful light under the wharves as they went by. We dropped in the bottom of our boat so that no stray beam might pick up our white faces. A moment or two of agonizing suspense and then we breathed again. We were too deep under and there were too many piles between; they had passed by.

We pushed the boat along under the wharves in the opposite direction until I judged we were under Feng Lee's godown again. This was the last structure on piles, and we had to come out into the open beyond. We could see the motorboat down near the bridge over the mouth of the inlet, the light still flashing alongshore.

Mme. Storey started rowing across the inlet while I steered with a spare oar. They could not have heard us, owing to the noise of their own engine, but it was possible they might see us when we came out in the open. But they were a good way off and we felt that we would be safe once we could land. All the inhabitants of Willemstad were not thugs.

It was one of those enchanting tropical nights with a cool breeze ruffling the surface of the water and a multitude of strange stars hanging out their little lamps. From far off we could hear the sounds of our own kind, and wished they were nearer—the slam of a door; the whirring of an automobile-starter; a steamship whistle.

The motorboat down by the bridge suddenly stopped its engine, and we had a nasty moment of anxiety. Mme. Storey lay on her oars and we bent over double in the boat, though it was little good that could have done us. The engine started again, and my employer made the water fly from her oars. However, we were still safe. They did not come our way.

We were bitterly disappointed to discover that the other shore of the inlet was swampy. A broad belt of mud separated us from a firm footing; soft stuff that would certainly have swallowed us to the waist if we had stepped in it. The buildings on this side were a long way back. We rowed along towards the bridge, looking for a landing.

The motorboat went under the bridge and disappeared, and our hearts rose. Not for long. The flash of the light warned us that they were returning. They stopped under the bridge and a man climbed out and took up his station in the middle of it. They were satisfied that we were still inside.

On our side of the inlet, between us and the bridge, there were several dark and empty scows anchored in line. We made haste to reach the nearest one, and hung close under its shadow, crouching in our boat and watching to see what the Chinamen would do. This time they headed for our side of the inlet and began to search around the first scow.

A grim game of hide and seek followed. Fortunately for us, we were able to follow their movements and to anticipate them by the reflection of their flashlight. As they passed around one side of a scow we softly drew ourselves around to the other. They moved quicker, but we could maneuver in a smaller space.

As they made their way back from scow to scow we were stealing ahead. Motorboat and skiff wove a kind of chain in and out between the scows. There was a moment when the slow chug of the engine passed within fifty

feet of us on the other side of a scow. We could even hear an undertone of whining, singsong voices.

Finally they set off towards the head of the inlet. We pulled ahead to the first scow. Here we were within fifty yards of the bridge, with the solitary figure standing upon it, outlined against the night sky.

“Safety lies on the other side of the bridge,” whispered Mme. Storey. “We must make a break for it.”

I clenched my teeth and hands to keep from shaking. “He is certainly armed,” I said.

She made no answer. We waited a little in an agony of indecision. Then we heard voices approaching. How my heart went out to those unknown speakers! Three men came in sight, walking towards the bridge from the direction of town.

“Now!” said Mme. Storey. “He won’t dare shoot, with others looking on!”

She bent her back to the oars while I stood up in the stern and helped the best I could by using the third oar as a paddle. With all our efforts we seemed to crawl like a turtle. The instant we came out from the shadow of the scow the man on the bridge raised his voice in a long-drawn cry like a night-bird.

I experienced a hideous moment of fear when I passed beneath the bridge. But I wasn’t annihilated. When we issued from under the other side three curious heads were sticking over the rail, watching us. From the inlet we could hear the motorboat approaching at its best speed.

About a hundred yards separated us from the great canal connecting the inner harbor with the sea. Here there were a number of vessels moving back and forth, among them a big tanker nosing her way into the harbor, and a speedy motorboat coming out.

The latter was heading directly for us. She had a small searchlight mounted on the bow. We could hear the loud voices of men aboard, apparently speaking English. As she came abreast somebody turned the searchlight on us and instantly there was a chorus of cries.

“By God! fellows, look what’s here! . . . Hello girls! . . . Nice night for a row! . . . Come aboard and have a drink!” etc.

Mme. Storey called back, “Give us a tow, boys!”

Instantly they stopped and reversed their engine with a great kick-up astern. We rowed alongside, and Mme. Storey handed the end of our painter to a bald-headed old beach-comber who leaned over the side of the launch to take it.

“Won’t you come aboard, darlings?” he asked, grinning.

“Go ahead,” answered Mme. Storey, in a voice so quiet and peremptory that he meekly turned and made the rope fast around a cleat astern. He gave word for the engine to be started.

At the same moment the motorboat with the Chinese aboard issued out of the inlet. We were jerked forward with a violence that almost threw us on our backs, and it soon became apparent that the other boat was nowhere as regards speed. The man who was amusing himself with the searchlight cast it briefly on the Chinese. Their impassive faces gave nothing away. They followed us for a little, and then, finding it to be useless, went back.

It soon became clear that we had only exchanged one danger for another. The steersman ahead was as tight as the rest of them, and we pursued a crazy, zigzag course through the canal. It was only owing to the special Providence that looks after drunken men that we didn’t hit anything.

Our skiff behaved like a hooked fish, shooting off first to one side, then the other. Every moment I expected to feel her capsizing under me. Mme. Storey stationed me in the stern with an oar to steer her, but the speed almost tore the oar out of my hands. She shouted to the bald-headed man to shorten the towline, but he was too foggy to get it. The wash of the speed boat roared past like a cataract.

The motorboat was of the trunk-cabin type with a cockpit astern. There were about six men aboard her. Two of them arose with drunken impressiveness, and with their arms full of bottles of beer stood up on the stern seat and commenced bombarding us with the bottles. Their aim was bad. Mme. Storey was able to catch but one.

She cracked off the neck and drank off half the contents, passing the rest back to me. “Thirsty work!” she said. “Save the bottle!”

We roared through the gap in the pontoon bridge without slackening speed, and headed out into the open sea. Heaven knows where that drunken crew thought they were bound for. Luckily the sea was calm. The *Buccaneer* with her lines of sparkling lights came into view off to the right. Mme. Storey did her best to make the men understand that that was where we wanted to go, but by this time they had their heads together in the cockpit,

emitting what they thought was close harmony, and either they could not or they would not hear her.

It was a comical situation; terribly dangerous, too. The sea was so vast and so dark. The *Buccaneer* began to drop astern, and I had visions of being carried out into that waste of water and swamped while the motorboat sped on regardless.

Mme. Storey asked me for the broken bottle, and I handed it over. Kneeling in the bow of the skiff, she sawed at the taut rope with the jagged edge of glass. Absorbed in their singing, the men had forgotten us for the time being. The severed ends of the rope leaped into the air, the motorboat sprang ahead, and the water ceased to roar past us.

Mme. Storey picked up the oars and started rowing for the yacht. We could follow the motorboat by her lights, but as far as they were concerned, we were immediately swallowed by the night. In a minute or two they stopped, and we saw the little searchlight swinging wildly around. Then they went on. One could picture how they shrugged with drunken heedlessness and let us go.

On the way to the yacht, one of her launches passed us far to the right, coming off from the town. It was the fancy plate-glass and mahogany affair that carried the owner and his guests, but she was too far away for us to see who was aboard. It was then about a quarter to nine.

As we drew near the yacht's ladder a group of sailors on the boat deck were hoisting the launch out of the water. Apparently they did not see us in the dark. When we stepped out on the little platform Mme. Storey gave the skiff a thrust with her foot and it drifted away on the tide. As we started up the ladder the head of a sailor appeared over the rail and was swiftly withdrawn. We reached the deck just in time to see him scuttling out of sight up forward.

"Wanzer," said Mme. Storey, dryly.

There was no one else in sight on the promenade. We could hear voices from the winter garden above. In our wet and bedraggled state we didn't want to meet anyone, and we quietly ran down the companionway to our cabins. On the stairs we heard the shrill whistle of the bosun's whistle on deck, signifying that the yacht was about to get under way.

"Hm! They didn't waste much time looking for us," remarked Mme. Storey.

IX. *Out of the Air*

WE changed from the skin out, wrapped malines around our hair to conceal the fact that it was still dampish, and sallied up above. When we looked out on deck we could see the lights of Willemstad disappearing astern.

In the pretty green-and-white winter garden on the boat deck Adrian, Sophie, Emil, and Celia were sitting around, sipping planter's punch. I expected to create a sensation upon entering, but not a bit of it. They were not surprised—or if they were they hid it well. Apparently, we had not been missed.

“Hello!” said Adrian, offhand. “Did you dine ashore?”

“No,” said Mme. Storey. This was true because we hadn't had any dinner at all. I wasn't conscious until that moment that I was hungry.

“Oh, we had a wonderful drive!” said Sophie, in her gushing manner. Sophie paid her way by praising everything up to the skies. “And afterwards such a dinner in a Chinese restaurant! Feng Lee's, it was called. Marvelous food, my dear!”

“Yes, Feng Lee's a great character,” said Mme. Storey, dryly.

“Oh, do you know the place?” said Sophie.

Mme. Storey let it go at that. “Where's Horace?” she asked.

“Somewhere out on deck,” said Adrian, carelessly.

There was an awkward silence. It was broken by young Celia, who blurted out: “He's in an awful temper. We're all afraid to speak to him.”

“Celia!” said her mother, reprovingly.

“I'm not afraid of him,” said Mme. Storey. “I'll go find him.”

As we turned towards the door Adele came in, fragile and lovely as a dream creature in a cloud of pink organdy. My jaw must have dropped a full inch. Fortunately, my back was turned to the others in the room. Adele, whom I had seen sailing away on the *Orizaba*, as I supposed! I had the impulse to pass my hand weakly over my face.

She was not surprised to see us, though it put her out of countenance. "Hello!" she said to Mme. Storey. "I was wondering where you were. . . . Come out on deck a moment," she added, swiftly, in a whisper, "and I'll explain."

Mme. Storey hid whatever surprise she may have felt—after all, she had said that Adele would never go. Her smile was rather grim. "What a lovely dress!" she said. "And, oh! my dear, that marvelous jewel!"

I saw then that Adele was wearing, partly hidden under an organdy ruffle, a superb, pear-shaped diamond almost as big as a pigeon's egg. Half-veiled by the thin stuff, the enormous gem shone with a wicked gleam that would have seduced the most virtuous of women. The Emeritinsky diamond!

"Horace gave it to me a long time ago," she said, fingering it. (How convincingly the woman could lie!) "Tonight he asked me to wear it!"

"We nearly dropped dead when we saw it!" gushed Sophie in the background. "It is lovelier than the Kohinoor!"

Mme. Storey, Adele, and I sauntered out on deck in a natural manner. "What a shock you must have got when you saw me!" said Adele, nervously. "I was hoping that I could see you alone first and explain."

"What is the explanation?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Well, Harry and I talked things over after we got aboard the *Orizaba*," said Adele, glibly, "and we decided that it would be better for everybody if I came back to the yacht instead of breaking things off with a lot of fuss and scandal. So Harry's gone back to New York, and here I am. I came off early and had dinner with Horace on the yacht."

"I see," said Mme. Storey.

"Don't you believe me?" said Adele, hotly. "Well, what do I care whether you believe me or not! I'm not accountable to you for my action and don't you think it! If my husband is satisfied, that's enough for me!"

"Oh, quite!" said Mme. Storey, blowing a ring of cigarette smoke and following it with her eyes.

Adele stood trembling with rage, trying to think of a rejoinder that would crush her. But nothing came. With a stamp of her foot and a defiant flirt of pink organdy she turned back into the winter garden.

“Undoubtedly lying,” I murmured. “What do you suppose really happened?”

“Time will tell,” said Mme. Storey, calmly. “Come on, let’s look for Horace.”

We found him below on the promenade deck, moodily chewing an unlighted cigar. To Horace, anyhow, our appearance was sensational. When he saw us coming along the deck his eyes almost started from his head. One might have thought we were a pair of ghosts that had materialized out of nothing before his eyes. Without knowing what he was doing, he tossed the unsmoked cigar overboard. He took a step forward and, seizing Mme. Storey by the elbows, gave her a shake, half overjoyed, half exasperated.

“Rosika! Rosika!” he cried. “How did you come aboard?”

“In a rowboat,” she said, smiling.

I had never seen the man so moved. I understood then that Adele’s star was rapidly declining in his affections, while my employer’s rose. But I don’t think he realized it as yet.

“Then you changed your mind!” he cried. “Or perhaps you were only fooling me!”

“You’re talking in riddles,” she said. “Why did you set sail without even inquiring what had become of us?”

“Without inquiring?” he said, indignantly. “What do you make of this?”

He pulled a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to her. She carried it under a light and read out:

DEAR HORACE:

The situation is impossible and it is useless to go on with it. Bella and I will not return to the yacht. It will do you no good to try to find us, as I mean to keep safely out of the way until you have sailed. I am doing this in order to avoid an unpleasant quarrel. You may ship our things back to New York from any port where you touch.

Sincerely yours,
ROSIKA STOREY.

“A clumsy forgery,” she said.

“How was I to know that?” growled Horace. “I have never seen your handwriting.”

“You could have found samples of it in my cabin to compare with this.”

“Well . . . it sounded like you! It made me sore! I haven’t told anybody about this note.”

“You mean your conscience was bad. You know very well that you have not kept the agreement we made before I came aboard.”

He impatiently waved this aside. “What did happen?” he demanded.

“Wait a minute,” she said. “Who gave you this note?”

“It was brought off from the town in a motorboat about seven-thirty. It was handed me by a young fellow who said he had been instructed not to put it in any hands but mine.”

“A Chinaman?”

“No. Mulatto. But there were Chinese in the boat that brought him. I looked over the rail. Why do you ask?”

She gave him a brief and graphic account of what had happened to us. Horace was furious. He cursed and pounded the rail with his clenched fist.

“We’ll go right back!” he cried. “We’ll lodge that dirty chink and his gang behind the bars for this!”

“Calm yourself,” said Mme. Storey. “Feng Lee is nothing in our lives. He’s in Curaçao and we’re on the high seas. We have nothing further to fear from him. What we’ve got to do is to find the man who hired him, and he’s right on this ship!”

Horace calmed down. “You suspect the captain?” he asked.

She shrugged. “I have no evidence, but I don’t see who else it could have been.”

“I’ll find out!” said Horace.

“Better not show your hand until we have more to go on.”

Just then Adele came along the deck with a highly self-conscious air. She wanted to find out what Mme. Storey was telling Horace.

“Hello Horace!” she said, with dulcet sweetness. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere!” She slipped her arm through his.

“Oh, hello!” he said, with a careless fondness that was little better than insulting. He freed his arm. “Run along like a good girl. Mme. Storey and I have a little business to talk over. I’ll be with you directly.”

“Must I be kept out of it?” she said, pouting.

“It hasn’t anything to do with you,” said Horace.

This satisfied her for the moment. “I’ll wait for you in the music-room,” she said, leaving us.

The music-room was alongside where we were standing. Mme. Storey, as if by accident, led Horace a little farther away as they resumed their talk.

“All these things going on under my nose and you ask me to do nothing about it!” cried Horace.

“Has the captain informed you that two men deserted at Willemstad?”

“No.”

“Then here’s something you can do. When you see the captain let it fall casually that I mentioned I had run into him looking for the deserters, and see what he says. We may catch him napping.”

“If he’s guilty his face will give him away when I tell him you are safe aboard.”

“We were seen coming up the ladder,” she said, dryly. “You will find his face prepared for the news.”

“If he knows you got safely away he must know that you have told me the whole story,” objected Horace. “Why should I make out I know nothing?”

“The more you can keep him guessing the better chance we have of catching him out,” she said.

Horace moved his shoulders impatiently. He could never take kindly to a suggestion from without.

“And watch yourself!” added Mme. Storey, seriously. “If they imagine that we have them on the run they’ll become reckless.”

“Sure,” he said, only half listening.

While Horace went in search of the captain, Mme. Storey and I ascended to the wireless cabin on the boat deck to ask if any messages had come while we were ashore. The operator was a young lad called Charlie, who,

like many a man before him, had fallen for my employer's dark eyes. His face lighted up like a turned-on lamp when we appeared in his doorway.

"No message for you," he said, "but look what I picked out of the air while we were lying at anchor. Funny doings aboard the *Orizaba*. As a criminologist I thought it would interest you."

He handed her a form covered with his flowing handwriting. She read it and passed it to me with an inscrutable face. "Time has told sooner than I expected," she murmured. Charlie didn't hear it. I read:

CHIEF OF POLICE,
Willemstad,

Shortly after weighing anchor this evening the attention of a steward aboard my ship was attracted by a pounding on one of the stateroom doors. A passenger from Willemstad to Panama, one John Matthews, was discovered to be locked in and the key missing. Upon being released, he claimed that after coming aboard with his wife an hour before, she had contrived to drug him with a drink in the stateroom, and had then locked him in and had returned ashore. He demanded to be taken back to Willemstad. I refused to bring my ship about, whereupon, seeing a motorboat passing, he leaped overboard. I hove to and played searchlights on the spot. I saw him picked up by the small boat and continued my voyage. This for your information.

B. CARSTAIRS, Master, R.M.S. *Orizaba*.

"What do you make of it?" said Charlie, grinning.

"Oh, a lady wanted to get rid of her husband painlessly," said Mme. Storey. "Not an uncommon situation."

The boy laughed. Horace, hearing our voices, appeared in the doorway of the wireless-room, and young Charlie froze up, as Horace's employees did in his presence. We strolled along the deck with Horace. He said:

"The captain said it was true that two sailors had deserted in Willemstad; Wanzer and Johnson. He said he hadn't troubled me about the matter because the ship was amply manned, anyhow."

"He is lying," said Mme. Storey, crisply. "It is the first positive bit of evidence we have got against him. I saw Wanzer on deck just before we weighed anchor. And I have reason to believe the other man is aboard also."

“Johnson?” asked Horace, carelessly. “What’s he got to do with the situation?”

“He’s the sailor with whom you had a run-in on deck the first day.”

“Ha!” cried Horace. “We’d be well rid of that mutineer.”

“I’ve got to tell you the whole story now,” my employer continued, “so that you can take measures to protect yourself. Johnson’s real name is Harry Holder.”

Horace stopped short, staring. “What are you saying?” he cried. “Holder?”

“No other,” she said, dryly. “Adele’s lawful husband, it appears.”

His face flamed with rage. “Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“I didn’t want you to kill the man while we looked on. I persuaded him and Adele to sail for home on the *Orizaba* as the easiest way of avoiding trouble. But Adele backed out, as you know, and now it appears that Holder hasn’t gone, either.”

“By God! Do you mean that woman had the face to bring . . .”

“Wait! Let’s be fair to her. It was somebody else who smuggled Holder aboard and tried to heat him up to the point of shooting you. Adele was terrified when she found him here.”

“But after having left him she came off from the town this evening all smiles and sweetness! Said she’d come back early because she couldn’t bear to let me dine alone! God! I thought I knew women! But they can always go you one worse!”

“Well, you see she hadn’t yet got the diamond you promised her.”

“Damnation!” cried Horace. “. . . How do you know Holder didn’t go, either?”

She handed over the wireless message. “Charlie got this out of the air just as an amusing case.”

When he had read it Horace was beside himself with rage. He walked away from us, cursing under his breath and unconsciously shaking his clenched fists. He came back growling:

“I’ll have the ship searched. I’ll find him! I’ll find them both! We’ll have a show-down now!”

“Just as you will,” said Mme. Storey, mildly. “But if the search is carried out by the same men who have an interest in hiding the sailors, your chances of finding them are not very good, are they?”

“I’ll head the search myself,” he growled.

Adele appeared on the stairway from the deck below. She came towards us, pouting like a child who is sure of getting what it wants. “Horace, how long are you going to keep me waiting?” she said.

He turned on her with blazing eyes. I thought he was going to strike her, but he held himself in. He didn’t say anything. It wasn’t necessary. The heat of his rage shriveled her. She drew back terrified, and her hand instinctively closed over the diamond on her breast.

Observing the action, Horace laughed harshly and walked away up forward.

X. *The Banjo-strummer*

THE swimming-pool gave me more pleasure than anything else aboard the *Buccaneer*. It was constructed deep in the hold of the yacht, forward of the engine-space, the bottom of the pool resting on the keel, so that the water in it served as ballast.

It had been Horace's notion to have the whole place furnished in dull black marble, with a row of slender pillars all around. Overhead there was a dome of colored glass with lights behind it to give the illusion of sunlight shining through. There was a row of dressing-boxes along the far end, with curtains hanging in front, but these were never used. We dressed in our cabins.

Regularly at eight o'clock every morning I used to run down and dive in. At this hour I had the pool to myself. Horace, an early riser, had finished his swim, and the others were too lazy or too timid to enjoy cold water upon getting out of bed.

On the morning after we sailed from Willemstad I dressed after my swim and went up to breakfast. This was a sort of movable feast in the English fashion. There was an electric table in the dining-saloon to keep things hot, and you went in and helped yourself whenever you had a mind to.

I breakfasted alone this morning. As I was finishing I heard the sound of a banjo being played on deck. A gay and careless tune surprising to hear on that uncomfortable vessel. So I went to investigate.

I found the player sunk deep in an easy chair on the after deck with his heels cocked up on a table, and the banjo in his lap. I got a good look at him before he saw me. A tall, lean, ugly young man wearing glasses. He was playing the sort of rollicking tune that you associate with old-time minstrels, but when he threw back his head and sang, I discovered that the words were Spanish. Something about *Simbolico Nombroy*.

I had never seen him before, but I knew it must be Martin Coade, Horace's secretary. Upon catching sight of me he never batted an eye or stopped strumming, but sang out:

“Hello, Bella!”

“Hello yourself!” I said.

He made believe to be greatly alarmed. “Cheese it, Bella! Your roof’s on fire. Don’t come near me, girl! It’s hot enough already!”

Well! My hair is red, but it’s not so red as all that. He was deliberately trying to rile me, so I held myself in. “You’re pretty fresh,” I said.

“Fresh as new-made beer!” he cried, strumming a loud chord on the banjo. “I foam at the tap!”

“Unfit to drink,” I said.

He was one of these humorists who never laugh themselves. His gray eyes were sharp behind his glasses, and he had a way of searching you through and through like certain children I have known, and then coming out with something nasty. How he guessed that I detested the name of Nellie I could never tell you.

“Come and sit down beside me, Nellie,” he said, “and let’s get acquainted.”

I remained by the rail. “Thanks. I like it better here,” I said. “There’s more air.”

He played a little obbligato on the banjo and sang:

“Nellie, Nellie, give me your answer, do!
I’m half crazy, all for the love of you!”

“Not very good,” I said.

He became serious. Blinking rapidly behind his glasses, he said: “Nellie, what’s the situation aboard this hooker? I dropped in on it yesterday all unprepared. Something tells me there’s hell to pay. Put me wise, kid, so I won’t make a crashing fool of myself.”

“I couldn’t stop you from that,” I said.

“Smarty! On the level, Nell, give me the dope.”

“I know nothing,” I said.

He struck a chord and sustained it. “You lie, darling!”

“Horace is the right one to tell you.”

“Can you see me asking him? Horace has to be handled with due regard to anti-sepsis, my love. You and I ought to form the secretaries club for mutual support and protection.”

“Suits me,” I said.

“Then come and sit down and let’s organize.”

By this time the others were beginning to appear on deck. The first to pass us was Mme. Storey, taking her morning constitutional alone. Her face was serene, as it always is when she is thinking hardest. She smiled at us and went on.

An extraordinary expression came into Martin’s face. “Some doll!” he murmured.

The cheap phrase angered me, and I suppose it showed in my face when I turned on him. At any rate, he blinked rapidly and tried to smooth me down by asking:

“Why didn’t you introduce me?”

“You didn’t wait for an introduction to me!”

“Oh, you’re such a cuddly bit, Bella, it didn’t seem necessary. Aren’t we both secretaries together? But Rosika is so—so pictureskew and monumental she puts the fear of God into me.”

“Is it possible?”

“*Quelle femme! Quelle femme!*” he murmured, with more stunts on the banjo.

Presently Sophie and Adrian walked briskly past us. They were both great talkers, and one could hardly wait until the other was through. They didn’t listen to each other. Martin followed them with a derisive grin.

“What brought those two so close?” he asked.

“Oh, it’s natural for people aboard ship to pair off,” I said.

“That’s no natural pairing off, ducky. They love each other like the Chinese and the Japs.”

The next couple to pass were young Emil and Celia, trying to conceal how happy they were in each other’s company, and not succeeding.

“Hm!” said Martin. “That lad was hired to claw the ivories and not to strut with the boss’s girl. A mere piano-player is not supposed to have the feelings of a man.”

“Emil happens to be a great artist,” I said, indignantly.

“Oh, yeah?” said Martin. “Listen to this!” And he punished the banjo further.

Finally Adele passed with Dr. Tanner. I have had no occasion to mention him before. He occupied a position something between that of ship’s officer and guest. A young man with protuberant black eyes and a silky mustache. I didn’t like him. Adele was talking to him in an emotional way, and he was listening with a wooden face, occasionally nodding his head wisely.

“I reckon the boss is fed up with Fluffy Ruffles,” said Martin.

“What makes you think so?”

“When a woman like Adele gets shipped she has to pick up another fellow quick in order to save her face. . . . Oh, well, it was inevitable!”

“Why inevitable?”

Martin blinked rapidly behind his glasses. “What chance has a chicken when the bird-of-paradise comes aboard?”

When she had taken her regular number of turns around the deck, Mme. Storey dropped into the chair on the other side of Martin. She didn’t bother about preliminaries, but started in as if she had always known him:

“I’m glad you’ve come aboard. I’m depending on you to help me handle Horace.”

Martin straightened up and left off playing the banjo. He blinked and ran his fingers inside his collar. “Lady, you can put your foot on this neck. Or say the word and I’ll leap over yonder rail with my banjo. But I cannot undertake to make my wealthy boss act like a reasonable man.”

She laughed at his nonsense. “You have more influence over him than you think. Judging from the way he talks about you, I should say you were the only person aboard to whom he is really attached.”

Martin searched her with his keen glance from behind the glasses. “Not the only one,” he said, meaningly. “You are putting me on a painful spot, lady. Asking me to embalm myself for the sake of another.”

He didn’t get any change out of Mme. Storey. “Yes, yes, it’s very sad!” she said, with mock sympathy. “But the man who enjoys hearing himself talk will never die of grief!”

Martin dropped his fooling. “What *is* the situation?” he asked.

“You know why I was invited to join this cruise?” she said.

“Yes. Horace wirelessed me that.”

“I can’t tell you any more now,” she said. “Too many people about. You and I mustn’t appear to become confidential. I’ll find an opportunity later. We will work together.”

Horace came up the little service stairway towards the stern. He was followed by Mr. Niederhoff, the natty first officer; big Les Farman, the handsomest sailor aboard; and Fahrig, a mean-looking steward who I had been told was the captain’s personal servant.

Horace approached us with a face as black as thunder. Martin began to strum softly on the banjo. Fahrig slipped away forward; Niederhoff went to the rail and stood staring at the sea, while Les Farman remained standing by the stairway. It was only too clear that there had been violent scenes below.

Horace snarled at Martin, “Stop that damned noise!”

Martin sucked in his cheek and laid the banjo softly on the table. Horace dropped heavily into the chair beyond Mme. Storey. The man appeared to be poisoned with balked anger. My employer said:

“Have you finished the search?”

“Yes,” he growled. “Didn’t find either of them.”

“Are you satisfied they are not aboard?”

“No!” he cried, with an oath. “I believe the whole gang is in cahoots! The hull is divided into five compartments. There are watertight doors between them which are not supposed to be opened. But while we were crossing over the deck from one compartment to another, what was to prevent them from opening the doors below and slipping through?”

Mme. Storey prudently held her tongue. Even her silence exasperated him. “Why don’t you say, ‘I told you so!’ ” he snarled. “You’re thinking it!”

She shrugged slightly and said nothing.

Horace’s poisoned glance happened to fall on Les Farman at that moment. The good-looking sailor was merely standing awaiting further orders with a composed face, but Horace’s rage had reached the pitch where it had to have some object to vent itself on. He jumped up.

“What are you standing there for, looking at me?” he cried. “Get to your work!”

The sailor looked at him in surprise. “You hadn’t told me if you wanted me any further,” he said.

“Well, I don’t want you!” shouted Horace. “Get the hell forward where you belong!”

Les Farman gave him a slow, hard look and started forward. He didn’t move fast enough to suit the infuriated Horace, who gave him a violent push from behind. When Les recovered his balance he turned around with a white face and an ugly furrow etched on his brow. He came back to Horace with clenched fists. I thought we were in for it then. I saw Niederhoff coming up, reaching for his hip pocket as if to protect Horace.

Les Farman himself saved the situation. He held himself in with an effort, and a hard grin spread across his handsome face. “Keep your shirt on, boss,” he drawled. And went quietly forward.

Naturally this didn’t make Horace feel any better. He dropped into the chair beside Mme. Storey with a groan. Meanwhile, Niederhoff slipped down the stairway. My employer was not disposed to spare Horace now. She said, quietly:

“You have made an enemy of the best man aboard the ship.”

“Aah! what the hell!” snarled Horace. “What’s one more or less?”

XI. *The Dance of Death*

WHILE we were all gathered around the table at lunch, Adrian Laghet in his light-headed way proposed that we have a dance on deck that night.

“The wind goes down with the sun every evening, and the nights are like black velvet,” he said, sentimentally. “It would be a shame not to take advantage of it.”

Horace, who had scarcely spoken throughout the meal, sneered at his brother’s effusiveness. His ill-tempered glance traveled from face to face around the table, watching to see how we would react to the suggestion. Mme. Storey, who knew how to handle Horace, made believe to express pleasure.

“Up on the boat deck,” she said, “under the stars.”

The others were dead against it—Martin, Sophie, Dr. Tanner; even Emil and Celia, who were no doubt longing to dance with each other, must have felt that it would be unsafe to do so under Horace’s poisoned glance. Adele, who sat at the table like a wan ghost, said nothing, but her face was expressive enough. And perhaps mine was also! Imagine getting up a dance while such ugly hidden passions smoldered under hatches.

When Horace saw that the majority was against it, nothing could have held him back. He laughed harshly and struck the table. “Fine!” he said. “We’ll trip the light fantastic until dawn!”

“Can I give orders to have the boat decorated?” asked Adrian, eagerly.

“Go as far as you like!” said Horace.

Later, Mme. Storey found Horace alone in his den on the boat deck. “You’d better call off this dance before the preparations go too far,” she said.

“Why,” he said, in pretended surprise, “you welcomed the idea at the lunch table!”

“You are not having it to please me, but to spite the others.”

“Maybe you think I can’t dance,” he said. “I’ll show you. I’d like to dance with you. If there’s a dance, you can’t refuse to dance with me.”

“Why should I?”

“I’ll dance every dance with you!” he said, violently.

“Oh no!” she said, coolly. “A woman reserves some freedom of choice.”

“Why shouldn’t we have a dance?” he demanded, like a willful child.

She steadily faced him out. “It is dangerous.”

He sneered. “What do you expect to happen?”

“How can I tell? I’m no soothsayer. But matters aboard this ship are clearly coming to a head. Give me another day and I’ll put the truth before you.”

“All right,” said Horace. “But in the meantime we’ll have our dance.”

She shrugged and left him.

So the preparations went on. Adrian excelled at this sort of thing. He had a boom affixed to the after mast, with long strings of colored lights hanging from it, the lower ends being tied to temporary stanchions around the rail. This made a sort of canopy of lights over the dance floor, with the stars peeping between. The deck was waxed and polished, and palms brought from every part of the ship were banked in the corners. The after end of the winter garden folded all the way back, making a sort of veranda café opening on the dance floor.

Nobody wanted to go to the dance, but nobody dared stay away. All the women prepared to wear their best. Sophie casually let fall that she wasn’t going to dress until after dinner. This merely meant that she wanted to show two dresses. A foolish business, but none of us wanted to be outdone by Sophie. We all followed suit. Dinner was a nervous meal, with squalls of artificial gayety. Horace sat silent throughout, drinking a lot more than was good for him.

At ten we gathered on the boat deck. There were not enough of us to make a party go; just five couples, and two or three of the stiff young German officers for stags. They didn’t contribute much. Little Celia’s eyes were shining with youth, and Sophie’s with belladonna drops. The latter was wearing a little dancing-dress of yellow net as light as a butterfly’s wing, but, man! she was stoutly held in underneath. She could scarcely breathe.

Adrian, chattering in his high-pitched voice, was everywhere at once. It seemed ridiculous for a man to get so excited over an affair of this sort, but that was his line. He seemed to look on this as his big night.

All the bloom was rubbed off Adele on this occasion. Jealousy and disappointment made her face look mean. She didn't care for Horace, but it broke her heart to have the other women see that he had thrown her over. She kept Dr. Tanner close at her side. His stolid pop-eyes kept glancing uneasily in Horace's direction, but Horace paid no attention to them whatever.

There was an orchestra on board the yacht, recruited from among the stewards, but they were not very good, and the fastidious Adrian would not have them. He used the big radio set and tuned in on a dance program from Havana—waltzes and tangos as only Latin-Americans can play them.

Mme. Storey wore a straight black velvet gown hanging from her shoulders in points. No touch of color; no jewels. Perhaps she intended it as a mute protest; but, anyhow, the effect was magnificent. When she appeared on deck, the sight of her roused Horace from his ill-temper. I heard him murmur:

“By God! you look like the queen of night!”

Martin Coade, standing beside his employer, blinked rapidly but said nothing.

Horace claimed Mme. Storey for a dance, and Martin coolly took possession of me. He held me too close and I objected; whereupon he hugged me closer still. I was not going to be overridden by him, and I stopped short on the floor. He had to stop, too, or drag me around by main strength.

“You will have to dance the way I want or not at all,” I said.

He made a wry face and started again, holding me out at arm's length. “Can't you ever forget the typewriter?” he said.

I said nothing. I wasn't going to let him get my goat. He could dance beautifully when he wanted to. After a while he said:

“Having a good time?”

“Not particularly,” I answered.

“Why not?”

“It's too much like dancing on a red-hot deck.”

“Slippers too tight?”

“You know what I mean.”

He held me away from him, and his gray eyes searched me through. He never smiled. There was something inhuman about his stare. He was clever, but you couldn't get near him. He exasperated me, yet I found him attractive in a way—very much of a man.

Meanwhile I watched my employer and her partner when I could. They made a handsome couple, but things were not going well with them. Horace's dark face was flushed and he was devouring his partner with his eyes. Her face was averted, and from the peculiar blandness of her expression I knew she was angry.

Martin, who seemed to be able to read my very thoughts, murmured: "Like master, like man!"

The only ones who were enjoying themselves were Emil and Celia, who were dancing in the dark around on the port side of the winter garden.

Presently Mme. Storey quietly detached herself from Horace's arms, leaving him staring. Turning, she held out a hand to Niederhoff, who was standing at the edge of the floor, saying, "Dance with me."

The young first officer's eyes rolled in a terrified fashion towards Horace, but he could not very well refuse. They danced away, while Horace glowered after them helplessly. He went to get a drink.

"That won't improve his temper any," Martin murmured in my ear.

Somewhat later I was seated in a deck chair alongside the starboard rail, watching the dancers. Horace was again dancing with my employer. She had mastered him and he had a more subdued air. Martin was now dancing with Sophie, blinking at her owlshly and talking a streak.

Forward of the dancing space the brightly lighted winter garden stood wide open to the deck. Inside, a bar had been set up for the occasion. Still farther forward on each side, the yacht's boat hung from davits, resting in chocks on deck. My chair was turned sideways to the rail so it wouldn't interfere with the dancers, and the boats on the starboard side were therefore in front of me. But, seated under the lights as I was, everything up forward was hidden in the densest shadow.

It was a perfectly still night. There was a slight heave to the vessel, just sufficient sometimes to send the dancers sliding down to one side of the deck, and creating laughter. But quiet as it was, one never could forget the sea. There it lay alongside like some monstrous creature quietly breathing.

Horace and Mme. Storey danced over near me. At the moment there was nobody else on that side of the deck. My employer said to me, laughingly, over Horace's shoulder:

“Drag one of those officers out on the floor, Bella. They stand there like three wooden soldiers.”

Just at that moment a running, crouching figure, gun in hand, materialized out of the darkness up forward. I shouted a warning. Quick as the figure was, Mme. Storey was quicker. Thrusting Horace from her with a hard push, she turned to grapple with the runner. It was Harry Holder with a face like a madman. She thrust up his right arm and the gun exploded harmlessly in the air.

From the other side of the deck women screamed. I ran to Rosika's assistance. Horace stood dazed by the suddenness of the attack. Between us, we succeeded in wrenching the gun from Holder. Mme. Storey thrust it inside her dress. Holder went limp and trembling in our grasp. Horace came to and charged at his assailant with a roar like a bull.

“Hold him back!” shouted Mme. Storey. “The man is disarmed.”

The three ship's officers seized hold of Horace and dragged him back. All this took place under the lights. Across the deck I could see Adrian, white-faced, frozen with terror. He was no good in a mix-up. Martin was not afraid, but he took no part in the scene; merely blinked at it.

Mme. Storey and I were supporting the trembling, gasping Holder between us. “Run him up forward,” she whispered.

When Horace divined our intention he roared, “Take your hands off me, damn you!” His employees were so much in awe of him they obeyed. Horace ran at us and, violently thrusting out his arms, knocked Mme. Storey and me to the deck. Rage gave him a superhuman strength. Seizing the trembling Holder by his clothes, he swung him straight above his head. The man was limp in his grasp. Running forward to the rail, Horace flung him into the sea. A long, thin cry broke from Holder. I waited to hear his body strike the water.

Absolute confusion followed. Mme. Storey was the only one who kept her head. Scrambling to her feet, she snatched a life-buoy from its hook inside the rail, and tossed it over. She was so quick it must almost have fallen on top of Holder. It was the kind that has a flare attached which lights upon contact with the water. Horace stood there staring at his empty hands, like a man just awakened from sleep. Across the deck the women were

screaching continuously. Adele sank down fainting, but no one noticed her for the moment.

Once the damage was done the officers acted promptly enough. Fulda, the second, ran forward to the bridge, shouting: "Man overboard!" Niederhoff put a whistle to his lips and blew shrilly. "Crew of number two boat on deck!" he shouted. "Quickly, men!" There was a rush of running feet from below.

The lighted buoy quickly dropped astern. We were unable to make out if there were anybody clinging to it. When Fulda reached the wheelhouse the helm was jammed hard over, and the yacht began to swing around in a circle, heeling to starboard. The sailors arrived on deck. They swung the boat out over the sea, and the crew jumped in, holding the ropes preparatory to lowering away.

We were all jammed against the rail, silently staring at the bobbing light astern. I felt some one pulling at my arm. It was Mme. Storey. She pointed at the huddled figure of Adele in her pretty dancing-dress.

"Poor wretch!" she murmured. "It's too big a price to pay for her foolishness!"

Between us we picked her up and laid her in a deck chair. I ran into the deck house, snatched up the brandy-bottle from behind the bar, and brought it back. It seemed almost a shame to bring her back to consciousness. When the fiery spirit trickled down her throat she stirred and began to whimper. Presently she broke into a low continuous weeping very painful to hear. "Harry! . . . Harry! . . . Harry!"

I suppose she loved him in her fashion. We went away and left her to her regrets. There was nothing that one could say to her under the circumstances.

When we got back to the rail the yacht was bearing down on the lighted buoy. Fearful of running over it, they stopped and reversed their engines until the vessel lost all way. The small boat dropped into the water; the men unhooked the falls and shipped their oars. There were four sailors in the boat, and Niederhoff was steering.

The yacht meanwhile had thrown a searchlight on the buoy and it was obvious there was nobody clinging to it. The small boat rowed to the buoy. They drew it out of the water, blew out the flare, threw it in the bottom of their boat, and immediately turned back to the yacht. We all murmured in surprise.

When they arrived below the spot where we all stood, and started hooking on to the falls again, the captain shouted down, “Why didn’t you stop and search for him, Mr. Niederhoff?”

And the strange, grim answer came up, “We have him, sir.”

Absolute silence fell on our group. Standing in the dark on the other side of the davits were the rest of the sailors, silent, too. The blocks screeched weirdly as the boat slowly rose towards us. The searchlight was turned off. As the heads of the boat’s crew rose to a level with ours the captain flashed on a pocket light.

“What do you mean, you have him?” he asked, irritably.

Niederhoff stooped down in the bottom of the boat and detached something from the buoy. The flashlight focused on it brilliantly in the surrounding dark; a human hand with bent clutching fingers and part of an arm cut off clean between wrist and elbow.

“The sharks got him, sir. They were following the ship.” He tossed the hand overboard.

There was silence for a moment, then a shuddering cry from Sophie, “Ohh! . . . Ohh! . . . Ohh!” Her high heels clacked smartly on the deck as she ran away. Celia ran after her mother, and Adrian, wringing his hands like a woman, followed them both. That left five of us standing together—Mme. Storey, Horace, Emil, Martin, and me. Horace, very stiff and straight, giving no sign of what he felt.

The group of men in the dark on the other side of the davits began to mutter. Men muttering angrily, there is no other sound on earth like it; it strikes a chill to the blood. Horace, hearing it, threw back his head.

“He attacked me, didn’t he?” he cried, angrily. “He tried to murder me!”

From the dark a grim voice answered: “He had been disarmed. I call it murder!”

“Yes! . . . Yes!” growled the others.

I had the feeling of tottering on the edge of a dizzy cliff. I held my breath. The captain spoke sharply: “Silence, men! Go below!” There was an agonizing pause. They decided to obey and shuffled forward. We went aft.

The damned radio had been forgotten. It was still crooning a seductive tango. The sound was too awful. I ran and switched it off. Horace passed me

with his head down. God knows what he was feeling. Everybody instinctively gave him room. He went to his own quarters.

XII. *The Whip*

THAT was an uneasy night aboard the *Buccaneer*. Early in the morning I was awakened by a heavy sense of foreboding. I saw by the light through my portholes that it was just coming full day; in other words, between five and six o'clock. Something was different from other mornings; something was wrong.

Suddenly I realized that what I missed was the swish-swish of the heavy sandstone with which the deck overhead was scoured every morning. The time-table at sea is as unchangeable as the passage of the sun. If they were not scouring the decks as usual at this hour, it meant that the whole discipline of the ship was interrupted.

Mme. Storey appeared in the doorway of my cabin, and I saw by her grave face that she was disturbed, too. She said, "Get up, Bella, and let's go on deck."

I lost no time in obeying her. When we came out on the promenade deck it was perfectly empty. We even missed the figure of the old sailor, Jim, who was eternally to be found wiping down the white-painted walls. It was a heavenly morning, with an emerald sea and a sky like palest turquoise, except for a diffused ruby glow in the east which heralded the coming sun.

We started to make a circuit of the deck. Up at the forward end, when we looked over the rail into the well deck we understood why the yacht seemed so deserted. With the exception of the engine-room staff, the entire ship's company was gathered on the well deck, all standing so still and quiet they seemed scarcely to be breathing.

The whole dramatic scene focused in the tall figure of Les Farman. Les, stripped to the waist, was standing facing the fo'c's'le bulkhead, thus presenting a broad muscular back to the crowd. His wrists were tied to a ring above his head. On one side of him stood the captain, with three of his officers behind him; on the other side, Horace, armed with an ugly dog-whip of plaited leather. Sailors, cooks, and stewards were ranged along the rail at both sides, watching with faces like masks having burnt holes for eyes.

Mme. Storey watched for a moment to learn what the situation was, before she interfered. The men below were all so intent upon what was

happening that our coming passed unnoticed.

The captain was speaking to Horace in a voice so low that his words did not reach us. Under any circumstances—at a dance or at a flogging—Captain Grober’s face was always the same, that is to say, perfectly expressionless. The three young officers modeled themselves upon him, but they were not so good at it. They were unable to hide their uneasiness in the face of that grim, watching crowd. Horace’s face was twisted with rage. He kept drawing the whip-lash ominously through his fingers.

Angrily interrupting the captain, Horace demanded of Les Farman, “Did you or did you not call me a murderer last night?”

We heard Les’s voice, cool and steady, “I did!”

“What more do you want?” shouted Horace at the captain. “That’s mutiny! I order him flogged.”

There was a silence. Nobody moved.

“When a man has to be flogged, whose job is it?” demanded Horace. “Is it yours?”

“No,” said the captain.

“Then order somebody else to do it.”

Once more the captain remonstrated with Horace. Something about times having changed at sea, and sailors being under protection of the law. We couldn’t hear it well. It suddenly came to me that under his wooden demeanor the man was sweating with fear.

“Then, by God! I’ll do it myself!” cried Horace. And raised the whip.

Mme. Storey’s voice sounded crisply, “Stop!”

Every face turned up to her as if they all moved together on one neck. Hers was the one voice which could have made Horace pause. He looked at her, scowling, and his whip arm dropped. Meanwhile she was running down the ladder.

“Get away from here!” growled Horace. “This is no place for a woman. Get away, I say!”

Ignoring this, she went up close to him. Horace’s eyes fairly blazed at her and the whip trembled in his hand. She faced him out. In the end her steady gaze was the stronger. Horace looked away. I saw her lips shape the words, “Give me that whip.”

He didn't exactly give it to her. But when she took hold of it his grasp relaxed. Mme. Storey caught it by the lash and sent it spinning overboard. A curious murmur escaped from the watching crew. Their faces showed no change, but you could feel the tension relaxing. I saw the captain surreptitiously wiping his face.

Once the whip was disposed of, Mme. Storey's manner changed. She hung her head as if inviting Horace to hector her. It would have been impossible for a man like Horace to knuckle down to a woman with his whole crew looking on. She gave him a chance to save his face.

"Are you setting up to be my master?" shouted Horace.

"Oh no!" she murmured.

"You have me at a disadvantage," he went on, bitterly. "You know very well that I can't talk to you before a crowd of servants. Come up above!"

This was just what she wanted, of course. She let him march ahead with a masterful air, while she followed meekly. I don't think the crew was much deceived. I saw sly grins here and there.

When they got up on the promenade deck out of sight of the crew the situation was suddenly reversed. Mme. Storey's eyes were bright with anger. I have rarely seen her so lifted out of herself.

"You fool!" she said, softly.

"Don't speak to me like that!" said Horace, thickly. "I won't take it!"

They moved on around the corner of the deckhouse from me, but I could still hear every word.

"You'll have to take it," she coolly retorted. "For once in your life you're going to hear the truth. God knows I'd wash my hands of the whole business if I could, and let you dig your own pit. But there are others aboard this vessel to be considered. If you go on as you are going you will have us all murdered!"

"That's ridiculous!" he said. "They wouldn't dare."

"How do you know what men will dare to do when they're roused. They will kill you in a rage. Afterwards they'll have to kill us and sink the yacht in order to cover the first crime. If they turned up in one of the boats with a story of shipwreck, who could call them to account if we were all at the bottom of the sea?"

Horace said nothing.

“For Heaven’s sake, why did you have to pick on Les Farman?” she went on. “I told you he was honest. Perhaps the only honest man in the crew.”

“He’s an insolent brute,” muttered Horace.

“If you were not an overbearing brute you would not meet with insolence from your employees,” she retorted.

And Horace took it.

“Farman holds us in the hollow of his hand,” she went on. “Your captain is a crook and the other officers are merely his creatures. If we have to put them in arms, Farman is the only man aboard who can bring us safe to port.”

They moved aft along the deck and I could hear no more.

Mme. Storey had a hard fight on her hands because Horace, like all men of his type, was as stubborn as he was ill-tempered. For an hour they moved up and down the deck, at it in low voices, hammer and tongs. Finally Horace went off to get a drink which he badly needed, and my employer dropped into a chair beside me with a whoof of relief.

“Lord! how it takes it out of you to struggle with hard-headedness!”

“What was the outcome?” I asked.

“Horace has agreed to meet Les Farman if I can bring them together without anybody knowing of it. He has promised to offer his hand to Les and ask him to forget what has happened.”

“That’s a real victory!” I said.

“Half a victory!” she amended, ruefully. “I have to see the other man now and get him smoothed down. And he has real cause to feel enmity. . . . How men waste our time with their truculence!”

It was after breakfast before an opportunity offered itself of getting in touch with Farman. We had to proceed with the greatest caution, because if the real crooks aboard suspected that we were trying to win Les to our side, it would spoil everything.

When we came out on deck old Jim was at his endless task of wiping down the white-painted walls with his damp rag. We had often talked with Jim, who could be very entertaining without forgetting his place. His honesty was transparent and we instinctively trusted him.

We did not approach him directly, but sat down in two chairs and waited until his work brought him behind us. “Jim,” said Mme. Storey, “there’s a bad situation up forward.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Jim, guardedly. “Bad as it can be.”

“How does Les Farman stand with the crew?”

“Stands high, mum, though not what you’d call popular, being as he was formerly an officer like. But he don’t lay back on it, mum. He does his work cheerful, and no shirking. Keeps pretty much to himself, as you might say, but all hands respects him. . . . Anyhow, they are all for him now,” he concluded, significantly.

“Exactly,” said Mme. Storey. “Jim, in order to keep the situation from getting worse I’ve got to have a talk with Les Farman without anybody knowing anything about it.”

“That won’t be so easy to bring about, ’m,” said Jim. “Les can’t come in your part of the vessel, and if you went in his part everybody would certainly know about it.”

“Where is he now?” she asked.

“I don’t know, ’m. But I could go and fetch me a fresh pail of warm water and sort of look about, like.”

“Go to it!”

Jim returned in about ten minutes with an innocent, inscrutable look on his gnarled face. He immediately set to work wiping down the wall behind us, and spoke out of the corner of his mouth.

“Les was sleeping in his bunk, ’m. Wa’n’t nobody else near, so I woke him up and told him what you said. Les said fine business! he was just wishing he could talk with you. Said you had the coolest head aboard the ship.”

“This is too much,” said Mme. Storey, smiling.

“Les said it would be too risky for you to come to him,” Jim went on. “He said he’d watch his chance and come to you. He can slip into your corridor by the door from the well deck. He said shortly after one would be the best time, when all the guests are up in the dining-saloon. Please to leave the door of your sitting-room unlocked, he said, so he can slip in without waiting to knock, hoping that it’s not too much of a liberty.”

“Oh, not in the least!” said Mme. Storey, with a twinkle in her eye.

XIII. *Playing the Game*

THE *Buccaneer* was like a funeral ship. A pall of horror and dread hung over her. It was so difficult to keep up pretenses with one another that the guests remained in their own cabins for the most part, and we went to ours. Our charming sitting-room was like a haven of refuge where we could relax and say what we pleased.

In the middle of the morning, while we were there, a tap came at the door, and upon being told to enter, Emil and Celia ran in. As soon as the door closed they flew to each other's arms and kissed, regardless of us.

"Well!" said Mme. Storey.

"Please," said Celia, blushing adorably, "can we stay in here awhile? It's so comfy here."

"Surely!"

The instant permission was given they forgot about us. Plumping down on a little sofa, they kissed again as frankly and innocently as Adam and Eve before the fall.

"Why do you come here?" asked Mme. Storey, dryly.

"There is no place else on the ship where we feel safe," said little Celia, naïvely.

"But I say!" said Mme. Storey, with mock severity. "I can't have you using my chaste sitting-room as a rendezvous for your clandestine love!"

They dropped each other and stared at her in affright.

"This isn't playing the game!"

"But I did what you told me to," said Celia, eagerly. "I told my mother about us."

"And what did she say?"

"She took it beautifully. Much better than I expected. She said if I was truly in love with Emil she was sure everything would come right in the end."

“What!” cried Mme. Storey. “Do you mean to tell me that Sophie threw over her billionaire son-in-law without a word?”

“Not a word!” said Celia. “She said she would never be the one to stand in the way of her child’s true happiness.”

“Hm!” said Mme. Storey, dryly. “How do you account for this sudden change of front?”

“Well, after all, mother has a good heart.”

“Hm!” said Mme. Storey, even more dryly. She doubted Sophie’s goodness of heart, and so did I. “What else did your mother say?” she asked.

“She said we must be very discreet and not let a soul guess that we were fond of each other, until she could tell Horace. . . .”

“You didn’t tell her that I knew?” interrupted Mme. Storey.

“No.”

“Well, don’t tell her.”

“I sha’n’t. . . . She undertook to make things right with Horace, but she said she would have to wait until she could get him in the right humor. And of course the way things are now it’s impossible to speak to him!”

Mme. Storey looked at me. We know each other’s ways so well that we can express a good deal without speaking. Her look meant: There is something very funny in Sophie’s sudden change of front. It must be looked into.

Meanwhile, Celia, having made what she considered a satisfactory explanation, flung her arms around young Emil’s neck and kissed him roundly. “Isn’t he sweet?” she said.

“Wa-ait a minute!” said Mme. Storey.

They looked at her in alarm.

“You are still not playing the game,” she said, struggling to keep a straight face. “Horace asked Celia to marry him and she promised to do so. She is not free to love another man until Horace releases her.”

Emil reluctantly dropped his darling. “That’s true,” he said, distractedly running his fingers through his blond hair. “Whatever shall we do?”

“Mother will make it all right with him,” said Celia. “Horace doesn’t care about me, really.”

“Sure he doesn’t,” said Emil, indignantly. “Not after the way he’s been carrying on first with Adele and now with Mme. Storey right before your face.”

My employer smiled.

“But he’s a perfect dog in the manger!” cried Emil. “He’ll never set you free if he suspects that another man wants you!”

“Well, anyhow, I don’t see that I owe Horace anything after the way he has been behaving,” said Celia, rebelliously.

“Whatever Horace does, you must play the game,” said Mme. Storey.

“But I love Emil so!” cried Celia.

The young man flung an arm around her and drew her close. “And I love you!” he murmured.

Just at that moment there was a knock on the door, and we heard Horace’s voice asking if he could come in.

Heavens! what a situation! Even Mme. Storey changed color, though she grinned, too. Celia was terrified out of her wits. Emil was not frightened, but the set face he turned towards the door was as white as paper. Mme. Storey pointed silently to the open door of her bedroom, and they slipped in. I closed the door while my employer was opening the other. This enabled me to hide my face from Horace until I could compose it. Mme. Storey’s face was bland.

Horace came in with a sullen, beaten air. His eyes sought my employer’s face imploringly. “Rosika, I want to talk to you,” he said. “Can’t you send Bella out of the room?”

“Why should I?” she said, coolly.

“Don’t rub it in,” he muttered. “Damn it all, a man can’t bear to expose his feelings before a . . .” He was about to say “servant,” but changed it hastily to “secretary.”

Mme. Storey had no mercy on him. She had discovered that she had to treat the brute brutally in order to bring him to heel. “That’s the reason I want her to stay,” she said. “I don’t want you to bare your feelings, but to put your wits to work to help us get out of this mess we’re in.”

He said no more, but dropped gloomily on the little sofa that the lovers had just vacated. I was terribly uncomfortable. “Please let me go out,” I murmured to my employer.

“Very well,” she said, indifferently. “You can go into my bedroom, but come right back when Horace begins to shout at me.”

“Aw, Rosy!” he protested. “I’m not an ogre!”

“You’ve been giving a good imitation of it,” she said.

I went into the bedroom, closing the door after me. I shooed the lovers out into the corridor and placed a chair beside the door into the sitting-room. I was determined to hear as much as I could. I thought my employer would wish it. As a matter of fact, I heard almost everything that was said, because Mme. Storey took no care to lower her voice, and Horace was incapable of doing so when he was excited.

“Have you seen that fellow Farman?” asked Horace.

“Not yet. He’s coming here later.”

“Coming here?” growled Horace. “A common sailor!”

“We’ll never get anywhere if you take that attitude. Bear in mind that he’s a qualified master and superior to all of us while we’re at sea.”

“Can I be here when he comes?” Horace asked, more humbly.

“No.”

“Why not?”

“You’d spoil everything. This man has a right to feel injured and I’ve got to smooth him down before I can bring you together.”

“Well, all right,” he growled, “but you don’t have to treat me like dirt. It makes me ugly.”

“Ugly?” said Mme. Storey, and I could see her eyebrows running up. “Never mind that now,” she went on as one might speak to a child. “We have serious matters to talk over. . . . Have you come to any fresh understanding with Sophie lately?”

There was a silence, then Horace’s reluctant voice, “Why do you ask that?”

“Sophie seems to have been acting very peculiarly.”

“What do you mean?”

“When Celia expressed a doubt whether she loved you sufficiently to marry you,” Mme. Storey put it thus diplomatically, “Sophie told her that she would not force her to marry you.”

This brought Horace sharply to attention. "By God!" he cried, "if that's true . . .!"

"I assure you that it is quite true. Can you explain her sudden change of front?"

No answer from Horace.

"What are your financial arrangements with Sophie?" she asked.

"Damn it, Rosy . . .!" he began to bluster.

She must simply have looked at him in that way she has. He quieted down and answered the question.

"I'm not paying Sophie anything, if that's what you mean. Oh, their dressmakers' bills, and little favors of that sort. I simply agreed to make a will in favor of Celia."

"Yes, you told me that. What are the conditions of this will to be?"

"No conditions. After making bequests to Adrian, Adele, and a few others I have left my whole estate unreservedly to Celia, provided she is my wife at the time of my death or is still engaged to marry me."

"*Have left?*" said Mme. Storey, sharply.

"Sure," growled Horace, with sullen reluctance. "I made out the will and signed it a couple of days ago."

It was Mme. Storey's turn to be amazed then. "Good Heavens!" she murmured.

There was a long silence in the next room.

"What are you getting at?" Horace demanded, ill-temperedly. "Are you trying to make out that Sophie has murderous designs against me?"

"Consider what a temptation you have put in her way!" said Mme. Storey, quietly. "All those millions to play with—*and freedom for the girl!*"

Another silence. Horace was growling indistinctly.

"Which one of you suggested the clause about 'still engaged to me'?" Mme. Storey asked, crisply.

"I don't know. Sophie, very likely. What of it? It's ridiculous to suspect her of plotting to murder me. I know Sophie. She's as crooked as a ram's horn, but hardly murderous."

"How can you tell?" said Mme. Storey. "I have felt murderous."

“You!” he growled. “God, yes! You could do a murder. Magnificently. But not Sophie. She’s only a cat with claws.”

“Maybe the claws are poisoned.”

“Nothing to it!”

“What induced you to make a new will just at this time?” she asked.

“Oh, Sophie was always after me,” he grumbled. “First about Adele, then about you.”

“About me!”

“Yes. She was sharp enough to see that I was falling for you before I realized it myself. She said it was insulting to her and Celia for me to be making up to other women right in front of them. So I made the will to shut her up. After all, I’m going to marry the girl eventually.”

“Did you have assistance in making it?”

“No. I wrote it myself on the typewriter.”

“Who witnessed it?”

“My valet. But I didn’t let him know what it was. It will hold all right until I can consult my attorney.”

“Have you told Adrian about your change of mind?”

“No. Why should I?”

“To remove a possible temptation.”

“O God!” said Horace, with his scornful laugh. “First you have Sophie plotting to murder me, then Adrian!”

“Just the same, I advise it,” said Mme. Storey, dryly. . . . “Where is the new will now?”

“I gave it to Sophie. I have a copy in my pocket. I wanted to show it to you because I have put down your name.”

“My name!” she cried, in great surprise.

There was a silence while Horace, I suppose, produced the will and she read it. Suddenly he said:

“What are you doing? What are you striking out your name for?”

“I don’t choose to be listed with these other ladies,” she said.

“Well, you’re down in the original,” he growled. “You can’t change that.”

“If your executors insist in handing me the money I’ll use it to found a school for spoiled children,” she said, and I could see her smiling. “It’s a pet idea of mine. . . . In the meantime I’ll keep this copy to show them what my sentiments are.”

When Horace spoke again his voice was thick with rage. “By God! no woman has ever spoken to me like that!”

“Then it’s time one did,” she retorted.

“I’m not just an ordinary man,” he cried. “I count for something in these days. Is it nothing to you that I am crazy about you, that I . . .”

“Don’t be silly,” she interrupted, with devastating good humor. “I’m not another Adele or a Sophie. I am not overwhelmed by your millions, because I can make all the money I need to supply my own wants. And incidentally keep my freedom.”

“By God! you can’t treat me like this! I’ll show you . . .!”

“Bella!” she said, crisply.

I opened the door and went in. Mme. Storey was seated in an easy chair beside a porthole. Horace stood over her threateningly. He gave me a poisonous glance and slammed out into the corridor. Mme. Storey laughed, but I could not join her. She lit a cigarette with a steady hand.

“Could you hear?” she asked.

“Nearly every word.”

“Good! Put it down before you forget it. Some day you may be required to testify to it.”

XIV. *Able Seaman*

WE were still in the sitting-room of our suite when the trumpet sounded on deck for luncheon. Instantly a strong feeling of excitement took possession of me and I couldn't keep my eyes off the door. Mme. Storey smiled provokingly.

"Listening for his footsteps," she murmured.

Time passed and nothing happened. The minutes were like hours. It was impossible to sit still. "He isn't coming!" I said.

Almost as I spoke the door opened without a sound. Les Farman slipped in and closed it behind him. He snatched off his cap, and stood against the door, smiling at us.

"Made it!" he said. "I had to look sharp and get everybody placed."

Blond and blue-eyed as a viking, his shoulders were so broad you didn't realize how tall he was until you compared him with the size of the door. He had the calm smile of the man who is sure of his own strength. The most attractive thing about him was that although he only rated as a common seaman he was not in the least afraid of us. Mme. Storey made no secret of the pleasure it gave her just to look at him.

"Sit down," she said.

He looked a little surprised.

"Sit down . . . Captain."

He flushed with pleasure and dropped into a chair as if he was perfectly accustomed to sitting in the presence of ladies.

"Out on deck discipline must be maintained," she went on, "But in private there is no reason why we should not act as we feel. I always think of you as an officer."

He said nothing, but from that moment he was hers.

"We shall have to be brief," she continued, "because Bella and I have to show ourselves at the lunch table within a few minutes. . . . This morning

when I sent Jim to try to get in touch with you he brought back word that you wanted to see me.”

“That’s right,” said Les.

“What about?”

He answered her question by asking another, “Has the boss told you what port we are going to make next?”

“No. Nobody aboard seems to know.”

“That’s right,” said Les grimly. “He aims to keep us at sea until he has us cowed. . . . Can you make him call at one of the islands?”

“How can I tell? . . . Why?”

“This is what I wanted to say to you,” said Les, strongly. “Get ashore off this hell ship! You and the young lady yonder. There are no strings on you two. You have no call to tie up to Laghet. Make him fetch port somewhere and go ashore. Don’t matter if it’s one of the forgotten islands where steamships never call. Get ashore!”

“Why?” she asked again.

“Don’t ask me that,” he muttered.

“You mean you don’t want to betray your shipmates.”

“Well, I haven’t said I’d go in with them, either.”

“Horace Laghet is my client,” said Mme. Storey, with apparent irrelevance. “Or, if you like, my employer for the present, consequently I have to speak of him with a certain discretion. But you can form your own conclusions.”

He grinned in his attractive fashion. “I get you. You agree with me that he’s a first-class you-know-what, but you can’t say it.”

She laughed. “Are you willing to tell me what has happened to you personally aboard this ship?”

“Sure. There’s no secret about that. . . . From the day we left New York I could feel that there was trouble brewing aboard. There’s a kind of crooked ring among the men, but I’m outside of it. Well, I’m not an officer now and it’s none of my business. I closed my eyes and ears to it and just did my job.”

“Were you friendly with Holder?”

“No more than with the others. There’s a certain element among the men made a kind of pet of Holder. . . . Yesterday when the boss hustled me on the after deck the news got forward before I did. They made a kind of hero of me. Not that I give a darn. I’m just telling you. All slapping me on the back, and telling me they were with me, and so on.”

“Then there was last night on the boat deck,” he continued. “You did the right thing in taking Holder’s gun. That was sufficient. They had been feeding him coke, I believe, until he was crazy. And when Laghet threw him to the sharks I saw red. But I should have kept my mouth shut.”

“And it made you a bigger hero with the men than ever?” she put in.

“Sure,” he muttered. “I’m ashamed of it. . . . I was on watch until morning. About two bells when it was just beginning to get light the boss came on deck and ordered Niederhoff to tie me up. I could have raised the crew right then, but I didn’t. I let him tie me. Niederhoff was afraid to refuse. The boss ordered all hands on deck. He was like a crazy man.”

“I know what happened after that,” said Mme. Storey. “The captain came and tried to stop him—or made believe to try.”

Les gave her a shrewd look. “Yeah,” he said, dryly. “And when I turned in to sleep at eight bells I found a loaded gun in my bunk. There was a little piece of paper fastened around it with an elastic. On the paper was printed in pencil: ‘Don’t hesitate to use this. We’re all behind you.’ ”

“Have you got that paper?”

“No. Tossed it out the port.”

“Have you got the gun?”

“Sure.” He coolly produced it from his hip.

Mme. Storey examined it and smiled. “I’d like to keep this for evidence,” she said. “I’ll give you a gun of mine in place of it.”

“Don’t want it,” said Les, carelessly. “I can always take care of myself.”

Nevertheless she insisted on getting him an automatic from the table drawer. “You may need it to defend somebody else,” she said.

Les gave her a steady look and dropped the gun into his pocket.

Mme. Storey handed me his gun, saying: “Mark it ‘gun given up by Les Farman’ and put it with the two I took from Harry Holder.” To Les she said, “Is there anything else?”

“One thing more,” he said in his calm way. “When I wake up I have a little time to myself before dinner. I always spend it lying in my bunk, reading. The book is always lying face down and open on a little shelf at the foot of my bunk. When I picked it up there was another pencil message printed on the margin of the page. It said: ‘Stand by the porthole of steward’s stores at six-thirty tonight and listen.’”

“What does that mean?” asked Mme. Storey.

“Steward’s stores is the last door on the right of the corridor outside,” he said, pointing. “It was designed for a stateroom, but it’s an undesirable room because the ports open on the well deck instead of the sea. So the steward has taken it for his cabin stores—blankets, linen, and so on.”

“And you’re to stand outside that room at six-thirty to receive some communication.”

“Yes. At six-thirty the men will be at their supper.”

Mme. Storey flicked the ash off her cigarette. “Well, are you going to join the crooked ring?” she asked, casually.

Farman drew his straight brows together and said nothing.

“Laghet has given the men plenty of cause to hate him,” she went on, “but hardly sufficient cause for them to mutiny. You’re an intelligent man. It must have occurred to you that there is somebody behind all this; somebody who has it in for Laghet.”

“Sure!”

“Are you going to fall for it?”

No answer.

“You haven’t asked me why I sent for you,” she said.

He looked at her inquiringly.

“Horace Laghet wishes to offer you his hand and to ask you to forget what happened this morning.”

“What!” he cried, staring. “. . . You put him up to this!”

She shrugged. “Why go behind the appearance of the thing? He is willing to do it.”

“No!” cried Les. The blue eyes glittered like ice in the sun. “It’s just a hypocritical pretense! I won’t fall for it. I know his kind. In the very act of

offering me his hand he'd look at me in such a way I'd want to smash his face!"

Mme. Storey smoked without saying anything.

Les stood up. He dwarfed our little sitting-room. He looked magnificent when he was angry. "Man and boy I've been at sea for seventeen years," he cried. "I've had to put up with all kinds. I can stand a rough brute because there's some reason for him. But a polished brute, no! A man who thinks that his foul money gives him the right to wipe his feet on other men, no!" He started for the door.

"Don't go!" murmured Mme. Storey, seductively.

He turned back, but his anger was still crackling. "I'm not going to shoot him," he said. "If you doubt it you can have your gun back. But if anybody else wants to take a crack at him I won't lift a finger!"

"Then I have failed!" murmured Mme. Storey, making her voice sound poor.

Like all manly men, he was absurdly susceptible to a woman's plea. He looked at her uneasily.

She stood up, and her dark eyes frankly sought his blue ones. "Will you do it for me?" she said, softly.

He stepped back with an almost frightened look. "Oh! . . . that's not fair!" he stammered.

"I know it's not fair," she said, simply, "but what else can a woman do? I have taken this job and I have to sink or swim with Horace Laghet. Frankly, I am afraid of what is before us. I want you on my side. You're such a man! Will you do it for me . . . Captain?"

His face softened wonderfully. His eyes dwelt on her in delight. "Sure!" he murmured in his deep voice. "Reckon I'd grab the red-hot hoof of Old Hornie if you asked me!"

They laughed together. "Take mine first," she said, offering it.

A knock on the door brought us all sharply to attention. "Who is it?" asked Mme. Storey.

"Jepson, madam." (Jepson was a dining-saloon steward.) "Mr. Laghet's compliments, and would you and Miss Brickley like to have luncheon sent to your rooms?"

“No indeed!” sang Mme. Storey. “We’ll be up immediately.”

To Farman she said: “You stay here until we are out of the way. There is only one thing to be decided. Where is the hand-shaking ceremony to take place? Here?”

Farman was smiling at her a little dizzily. “Too risky to try to make it a second time,” he said. “Could you get the boss to come down to the swimming-pool after lunch?”

“The very thing,” she said. “No one ever goes there at that hour. We’ll meet you there at two.”

“Make it in the gymnasium forward of the pool,” he said. “Miss Bella can watch the door so we can’t be taken by surprise.”

We slipped out of the room and hastened up the companionway. We found a grim luncheon party in the dining-saloon, men only. They looked as if they hadn’t spoken to one another since sitting down. Adrian was as pale as a corpse and wretchedly nervous. He always appeared to disadvantage in the society of men. The five of them rose as we entered. Horace looked at us suspiciously.

“Sorry to be late,” said Mme. Storey, brightly. “The call for lunch took us by surprise. We were dressing.”

It was a pretty thin excuse, as we were wearing the same dresses we had on when Horace had last seen us. Horace looked at the dresses but said nothing.

“Thank God, anyhow, that you’ve come!” said Martin, blinking behind his glasses as we took our seats. “It was like a funeral feast!”

I thought his joke was in very bad taste under the circumstances, but Martin didn’t care. That was his line. Horace paid no attention.

Our coming didn’t help matters much. Martin made his cracks and we smiled stiffly. Horace was sunk in gloom, Mme. Storey was studying deeply, and the rest of us were jumpy. Naturally there was no reference to the tragedy of the night before. Feeling the way we did, the elaborate meal was a mockery. We refused nearly everything and got out on deck as quickly as possible.

Adrian, Emil, and Dr. Tanner slipped away—to attend on the ladies, no doubt. Martin was disposed to linger and entertain us. He was the only one besides Mme. Storey who was not afraid of Horace. Horace was fond of him and would let him say what he pleased. Just the same, Martin had a keen

sense of which side his bread was buttered on. He never said the unforgivable thing in Horace's presence.

Out on deck, Martin cocked an eye at the sun and took note of our course, which was almost due east. He voiced the question that was in all our minds. "Are we heading for Port-of-Spain, boss?"

"No," said Horace, curtly.

"Where away?"

"If I had my way we'd never make port," said Horace, bitterly. "Willemstad was enough!"

And that's all we got.

On the after deck Martin turned his back to us for a moment to draw up a more comfortable chair. Mme. Storey murmured to Horace:

"I have a little job for you. Get rid of Martin."

For once Horace was willing to obey her. He didn't want even Martin to be a witness of his humiliation. He sent his secretary up to the wireless office with elaborate instructions as to the sending of a message dealing with some financial operations.

When he was out of sight the three of us descended the companionway, past A deck which contained all the state cabins; B deck, where the business of the ship was carried on and where the servants slept; down to C deck, which was almost on the bottom of the yacht. The stairway came to an end at the edge of the beautiful black-marble pool.

"How is Farman going to get down here?" growled Horace.

"I don't know," said Mme. Storey. "That's up to him."

We made our way forward to the gymnasium. Alongside us the water of the pool swayed lazily from side to side in its black basin under the slight roll of the vessel. The gym was a smallish room with electric camel, horse, rowing-machine, and other apparatus. It was paneled with oak and there was a door in the forward side. We left the door into the pool open, and I stood there to watch that nobody came down the stairway.

While they waited in the gymnasium, Horace, affecting to sneer, the little door opened and Les Farman appeared, ducking his head under the lintel. I don't think Horace had noticed the door, and his eyes bulged at the unexpected apparition.

“What’s behind that door?” he asked, sharply.

“Steel bulkhead, sir, and watertight door,” answered Les. “Number one hold is forward of this. They call it the lazaret. The food is stored there.”

“Hm!” said Horace. His expression said: What the hell are you doing in the food stores?

Mme. Storey saw that this scene must be rushed through or there would certainly be an explosion. “Well, here we are!” she said, in a matter-of-fact way, to make it easy for them. “Shake hands, you two!”

They advanced towards each other like strange dogs. They were a fine-looking pair of men, Horace as dark as Les was fair. The difference between them was that Les could control himself and Horace could not. Horace felt inferior and it was almost more than his self-love could bear. His eyes glittered. The man was in a hell of his own firing.

He took Les’s extended hand and dropped it quickly. “Sorry for what happened this morning,” he muttered.

“That’s all right,” said Les.

“Come on,” said Mme. Storey.

She let Horace go first through the door into the pool. Turning, she said, quietly, to Les, “You will keep that appointment outside the steward’s stores at six-thirty?”

“If you want it,” said Les.

“Surely! After you have heard all he has to say, give the man, whoever he may be, a few minutes to make his getaway, and then come to my sitting-room and report. It doesn’t make any difference if you are seen coming, because then we must be ready to strike.”

“Okay,” said Les, smiling at her.

XV. *The Show-down*

AT six-thirty that evening Mme. Storey, Horace, and I were waiting in the sitting-room of our suite, in a state of strained suspense. Horace had been told of the trap we had set. In the interim the wind had risen and the yacht was pitching somewhat heavily. What with the excitement and the motion of the vessel, I felt wretched.

Horace was glancing at his watch every few seconds. "If we set the door open we could see anybody who went down the corridor," he said.

"Surely," said Mme. Storey. "And he could see us. In that case we would hear no details of the plot."

She was moving restlessly about the room. Suddenly she bent her head to listen by the door. "Somebody is passing now," she said, with a grim smile. "On tiptoe."

Horace instinctively sprang up, but she motioned him back.

We allowed the plotter, whoever it might be, time enough to get inside the steward's storeroom, then Mme. Storey gave the word to go. "Maybe he has only a brief story to tell," she said. "We must be ready to nab him when he comes out."

We stole softly forward to the end of the corridor. The steel door leading out on deck was closed. We stood with our backs against it. While we were in this position, if the person in the storeroom opened the door a crack to peep out he couldn't see us because we were behind the door. The door to Dr. Tanner's quarters was on our left, the storeroom door on our right.

Some minutes passed. Horace was breathing stertorously in my ear. The suspense was becoming unbearable. The door behind me had a porthole let into it, and I turned around to look out. I found when I put my head sideways I could see the edge of Les Farman's blond head where he stood on deck alongside the next porthole. The sun had gone down, but it was not dark. From the still poise of Les's head I judged that he was listening intently. He couldn't see me.

I whispered the news to Mme. Storey. "So far so good," she said, smiling.

I watched Les until he moved away across the deck. “Les has gone,” I whispered, and our three pairs of eyes fastened on the door in front of us like cats at a mouse hole.

I saw the handle slowly turn and my heart began to pound. The door opened a crack and was held so—to give the inmate a chance to peep down the corridor, I suppose. It was empty. A hand then appeared around the door, and feeling for the keyhole, inserted a key. The door opened wider and a man slipped around it.

It was a steward in his white drill suit, wearing a cap with a visor. At first I could not see his face. Still watching down the corridor, he softly closed the door behind him, turned the key and pulled it out without looking at it. Horace said, quietly:

“What the hell are you doing?”

The steward almost jumped out of his skin. I heard his breath whistle through his teeth. He flung a terrified glance over his shoulder. It was Fahrigr, the captain’s servant. He gathered himself to run, but Horace caught him in two steps, twisted his hand in the man’s collar, and shook him like a rat.

“Let me go! Let me go!” he cried gaspingly.

Horace ran him down the corridor and thrust him into Mme. Storey’s sitting-room. We followed as quickly as we could, and got the door closed. Apparently no one had heard the slight commotion. Horace thrust the man from him with a violence that threw him to the floor. He lay there shaking and crying, wrapping his arms around his head as if he expected kicks to follow.

“Give an account of yourself!” said Horace.

Fahrigr partly raised himself and scabbled to Horace’s feet. There he knelt, clasping his hands and mourning. It was a little too dramatic. I saw, by the look of cunning that came into his mean face, that he was getting his grip again, though he was carrying on more than ever.

“Mr. Laghet, I’m innocent!” he whined. “As God sees me kneeling here I am innocent! I swear it!”

“Innocent of what, for God’s sake?” cried Horace.

“I happened to get hold of a key that fitted the lock of the steward’s stores,” Fahrigr gabbled. “And I was tempted, thinking of all the goods stored in there. My mother in Germany is so poor! I went in there to steal,

Mr. Laghet, but when I got inside I thought better of it. I remembered what my mother taught me. I never took a thing, Mr. Laghet! Search me! Search me!”

A grim note of laughter escaped from Mme. Storey. “That’s a good one!” she said.

“You lie!” said Horace to Fahrig. “You were after bigger game than soap and towels!”

“I don’t know what you mean, Mr. Laghet,” whined Fahrig, making his eyes big. “I never touched a thing. Search me! Search me!”

Horace with a grunt of disgust raised his foot, but Fahrig scrambled out of the way with remarkable quickness. “Let me go this time, Mr. Laghet,” he pleaded. “Let me go for my mother’s sake. You will never regret it!”

There was a knock at the door and Les Farman came in. At the sight of him Fahrig became very quiet. A greenish tinge came into his sallow skin. Like a rat at bay, his eyes darted this way and that. I saw them marking the door into my bedroom, and I quietly put myself in front of it.

“Is this the man who talked to you just now from the storeroom?” asked Mme. Storey.

Les looked him over. “He’s dressed the same,” he said, “but I couldn’t swear to it because he kept in the shadow. His cap was pulled over his eyes and he had a handkerchief tied around the lower part of his face.”

“Well, we caught him coming out of that room,” put in Horace. “That’s enough for me.”

“Wait a minute,” said Les. “There was a little three-cornered tear in the corner of the handkerchief where it hung over his chin. Maybe he still has it on him.”

Like a flash Fahrig had the handkerchief out, balled it, and tossed it towards the open port. But I caught it and handed it to Les. He held it up and showed us the little tear.

“That is the man,” he said.

There was no make believe about Fahrig’s terror then. His face was greenish and damp.

“What did he say to you?” asked Mme. Storey.

“One moment,” said Les. “This rat is dangerous. Better tie him up.”

At the first move he made towards him, Fahrig whipped out a knife. That didn't bother Les any. Moving more quickly than my eye could follow, the big man seized his wrist and twisted it so that the knife fell to the floor. He flung Fahrig down on his face, knelt on his back, and pulled his arms behind him.

"Something to tie him with," he said, calmly.

Mme. Storey handed him two scarves, one for the man's wrists, one for his ankles. Fahrig was left writhing on the floor. Les got up, dusting his hands.

"He started in by telling me I was a fine fellow," he began, "and how it was a dirty shame the way I had been treated, and every man on the ship would back me up if I wanted to get square. He started to abuse the boss—well, I needn't go into that. I agreed with everything he said. When he cussed I cussed, and we were soon good friends."

"He's lying!" whined Fahrig from the floor. "This is an attempt to railroad an innocent man!"

Nobody paid any attention to him.

"He said," Les continued, "that if the boss kept on the way he was going there would be a mutiny on this ship, and not only the boss but all the guests would be murdered, and I said that was right. He said it would be a good act to stop the boss in order to save those innocent lives, and I agreed. He asked me if I was man enough to do it, and I said sure, if I thought I could get away with it. He said that would be easy.

"So he began to dope it all out. He knew that I was on watch from four until eight and that I was stationed as lookout in the bows. He asked me if I could steal away from my post for a little while. I said sure, it was only an empty form to keep watch in the bows on a clear night, but I had to be there to strike the ship's bell every half hour when I heard the bell on the bridge.

"So he told me to wait until one bell; that is four-thirty, when the other watch would have turned in and the ship would be quiet. I was then to steal back through the corridor to the boss's suite on A deck aft. The corridor door is locked at night, but he had a key for me. I asked him how about the watchman amidships, and he said after the passengers turned in, the watchman sat in the forward companionway outside the dining-saloon and took a good sleep.

"He said there was a special lock on the door of the boss's suite, but he had a key for that, too. He told me the boss was drinking hard. Nobody was

on to it because he carried it so well. He stayed up every night as long as he could get anybody to stay with him, but he had to go to bed some time, and when he turned in he slept like he was drugged. He said he had that straight from the boss's valet."

Horace's face was a study as he listened to this story. Les told it in a perfectly dry voice, so that Horace had no excuse to take offense.

"I said how about this valet?" Les went on. "Where does he sleep? He said the valet slept in a little cabin just outside the door of the owner's suite. I said he had a key to the suite, I reckoned, and if he heard anything why couldn't he follow me in there? And this fellow said sure he has a key, but you can lock him in as you go by. The valet never locks his door, but it's got a lock on it and I have the key. Suppose he did hear something, before he could bust out you could make your getaway two or three times over.

"I asked him how about this getaway, and he said after I put a bullet through the boss's head—he recommended me to put a pillow over the gun to muffle the report—I could climb out of a little window in the bathroom of the suite which opens on the open deck astern where the steering-gear is. The boss was most particular to keep that window locked, he said, but I could always open it from the inside.

"Once outside, I could drop the pistol overboard and there would be nothing in the world to connect me with the deed. From that little deck astern there is a ladder up to the promenade deck, and another down to B deck, and I could return either way. But I better make my way back through B deck, he said, in order to avoid the watchman on the promenade.

"That's all," Les concluded, "only he said there was somebody aboard the ship who was so scared the way things were going that he was willing to put up a thousand dollars to have the boss removed. And if I did my job, he said, I could come back tomorrow night same time, same place, and he'd pass me a grand. And I said well, I was a poor man and I couldn't refuse it."

Horace with a black face took a step towards the bound figure on the floor. "Who hired you?" he demanded, with an oath.

"Nobody hired me!" cried Fahrig. "It's all lies! All lies!"

"I'll find a way to make you tell!" said Horace, showing his teeth.

The man was livid with terror, but his eyes fixed themselves on Horace's in a kind of insane resolution. "You'll never make me tell," he said. "If you was to kill me I would say the same. It's all lies!"

“We’ll see,” said Horace.

Mme. Storey moved swiftly between him and Fahrig. “No torture!” she said.

“Why not?” demanded Horace, with an ugly scowl.

“Because I won’t stand for it,” she coolly answered. Horace glared at her, but she steadily faced him out. He turned away his head. “Besides, it’s not necessary,” she said, in a milder voice. “I know who hired him.”

The four of us went into a huddle in the corner of the room as far as possible from Fahrig.

“You mean the captain?” said Horace. “But what proof have we beyond the fact that Fahrig is his servant?”

“I have the proof—now,” she said. “The two guns that I took from Holder and the gun that Farman handed me this morning were all of the same make; moreover, they bore consecutive serial numbers. Obvious that they came from the same source. I wirelessly my attorney in New York to find out from the makers to whom these guns had been sold. I had his answer awhile ago . . .”

“What did he say?” demanded Horace, excitedly.

“Guns bearing those serial numbers were part of the equipment of arms furnished to the yacht *Buccaneer*. Well, as you know, the arms are kept in a locker adjoining the chart room. There are two keys to it; the captain has one and the first officer the other.”

Horace accepted it with a gloomy stare. He was badly shaken. “What must we do?” he said, blankly.

“Obviously, we must seize the ship and put the captain and his officers in irons.”

“We’d be helpless!” murmured Horace.

Mme. Storey turned to Les. “Will you undertake to steer us into port, Captain?”

“Sure,” said Les, carelessly confident.

Horace scowled at him. His feelings were badly mixed. He hated Les, but now he was dependent on him. “But if the men are mutinous?” he growled.

“The men can be divided into two classes,” said Les. “The majority of them are honest enough fellows whose minds have been poisoned against you by ceaseless underground propaganda. I can bring them back all right by telling them the truth. There is also a crooked ring, but if the officers are put under guard they will keep very quiet. They wouldn’t dare act on their own.”

“All right,” growled Horace, “you shall be captain.”

“We must act instantly,” said Mme. Storey, “before a whisper of what has happened gets around the ship.”

“But there are only four of us,” objected Horace. “Two men, two women.”

“Women are better than they used to be,” said Mme. Storey, smiling. “Who else can we trust?”

“Well there’s Martin, anyhow. We must get hold of Martin.”

Mme. Storey said nothing. From a drawer she got out the three guns that had originally come from the yacht’s arsenal. She gave one to Horace, one to me, and kept the third. Les was already armed. She tied one of the little capes around her neck that were fashionable at the moment, and held the gun under her left arm where it was completely hidden. I had no cape, but I hung a steamer rug over my gun hand. I had only to drop the rug in order to bring the gun in play.

When we started for the door Fahrig let out a kind of screech. It wasn’t very loud because his voice failed him. Instantly Les dropped beside him and struck him a blow on the temple that put him out cold.

“It’s a shame to do it,” Les said, with a deprecating grin, “but he was trying to raise the ship.”

“I’m afraid he’s done it, too,” murmured Mme. Storey, listening inside the door. Meanwhile Les was gagging Fahrig with a handkerchief.

There was a scurry of feet outside, an agitated knocking, and Sophie’s voice asking: “Rosika, are you there? Did you hear that? Oh, what was it?” Sophie’s suite was on the port side, opposite ours.

Mme. Storey whispered to us: “We can’t hide it. We must lie out of it.” She threw open the door.

Sophie stood there in peignoir and slippers, her hair all anyhow and cold cream plastered on her face—a ghastly sight. Her eyes widened like saucers when she saw the man on the floor.

“A thief,” said Mme. Storey. “We caught him red-handed and he put up a fight. But it’s all over now.”

“Is he dead?” gasped Sophie.

“Oh no, my dear. Only foggy.”

“Who is he?” asked Sophie, pressing nearer.

Mme. Storey stood in front of her as if to shield her from the men. “My dear, you’re a sight!” she murmured.

Sophie, suddenly recalled to herself, gave a little cry and scampered back to her own quarters. Les chuckled out loud. Mme. Storey was both smiling and serious.

“Come on,” she said. “We must act instantly. Sophie might use the telephone. There’s no time to look for Martin now.”

“Is it safe to leave this fellow here?” growled Horace.

“He’s safe for half an hour or so,” said Les, cheerfully. “I’ll take care of him later.”

We went out, locking the door behind us. The bedroom doors were already locked.

XVI. *Bloodless Mutiny*

THE four of us started up the forward companionway. Horace hung back on the landing.

“What are we going to do?” he growled. “We must have a plan.”

“It is very simple,” said Mme. Storey. “First we seize the captain and secure him. Second we secure the officer on watch. Third we secure the other two officers wherever we find them. If we can take them one by one there need be no fuss at all.”

We proceeded. At the head of the stairs in the dining-saloon forward two stewards were arranging the table. We dined at eight on the *Buccaneer*. We turned aft through the library, which was no more than a corridor, really, leading past the engine trunk. The music-room followed, then the after companionway with the big lounge on the other side. All this part of the ship was empty.

But from the companionway we could hear a murmur of voices in the winter garden overhead. After listening for a moment or two Mme. Storey said: “Captain Grober, Adrian, and Dr. Tanner.”

“It will look odd to them if I am with you,” said Les.

“It’s all right if I bring you,” muttered Horace.

Les had a mind of his own in such matters. Always smiling, he said: “I’ll go up by the deck. I’ll be right outside if you want me.”

“We must have something with which to bind our prisoners,” said Mme. Storey.

“The irons are kept in the arms-locker off the chart-room,” said Les.

She looked into the lounge. The window curtains were caught back with heavy silk cords. Les, following the direction of her glance, ran in and, making a hasty round of the windows, unhooked the cords and stuffed them into his pockets.

He ran out on deck, and the rest of us started up the stairway. Mme. Storey murmured to Horace:

“Bella and I will take the captain out on deck. You had better remain behind to watch the other two. I don’t know where Tanner stands.”

“And Adrian?” he said, truculently.

“You know what I think about Adrian. . . . If you hear nothing outside you will know that it is all right, and you can follow us to the bridge.”

The companionway ended in a little lobby adjoining the winter garden. This charming room with its growing plants and wicker furniture had the effect of a pavilion up on the boat deck. It was a fair warm night, though the sea was somewhat rough, and the after end of the room was wide open to the deck. The three men were seated in a row, looking out through the opening. Thus we came on them from behind.

Hearing us, they rose like three automatons, each with his drink in his hand; Captain Grober, blond, correct, and wooden; Dr. Tanner with his stupid pop-eyes and dinky mustache; and Adrian, so tall and handsome—and so soft! I advanced towards them, gripping my gun under the rug, and steeling myself not to tremble.

Horace was glum, but he always was, so that didn’t matter. Mme. Storey hailed the three gaily. “How inviting it looks out on deck,” she said. “Captain Grober, are you for ten minutes’ walk before I have to go and dress?”

She had not heretofore singled him out, and perhaps he was surprised, but, anyhow, he clicked his heels together and bowed from the waist. “Delighted, madame!”

He tossed off the rest of his drink, and they passed out through the opening, with me following meekly. When the captain saw that I was coming, too, he said, “Allow me to carry the rug, miss.”

The Lord knows what he thought I was going to do with it! I drew back hastily. “Oh, it’s no trouble!” I said.

Meanwhile Mme. Storey was saying: “Where’s the Southern Cross, Captain? Oh there it is! Do you know the Southern Cross is always a disappointment to Northerners? One hears about it all one’s life, and then after all it’s no brighter than our own stars!” etc. The German was a little dazed by her flow of language.

She led the way forward. Once we had passed the lighted windows of the winter garden it was dark on deck, but not absolutely. When we had

covered about half the distance to the bridge she stopped, and the gun appeared from under her arm. I dropped the rug and pointed my gun.

“Put up your hands!” she said, crisply.

There was light enough to show the guns, and he obeyed very quickly. “What! What! What!” he spluttered, in very broken English. “Is this what you call a choke, madam?”

“Just as you like. I’m staging a mutiny by order of the owner. . . . Les!” she said, softly.

As if by magic the big fellow appeared out of the dark. There was another behind him. “Picked up Jim,” he muttered. Grober was forced to put his hands behind him, and Jim tied him up, afterwards frisked him, taking his gun and his keys.

“You shall pay for this!” Grober threatened. “At sea I am the master. It is the law!”

“You’ll have a chance to tell the judge,” said Mme. Storey.

Horace joined us. “Outrage! Outrage!” Grober was muttering.

“Ah! shut up!” said Horace, harshly. “Fahrig is caught, and we’ve got the goods on you!”

Grober’s head sunk between his shoulders. He said no more.

In order to reach his quarters we had to lead him almost to the bridge. It was a ticklish situation because at this hour the majority of the crew would be loafing on the fo’c’s’le head immediately below. If the crew was roused before we got their officers under lock and key, God only knew what would happen.

Horace was sent on ahead to engage the attention of the officer on watch. The bridge was on the same level as the boat deck, and we could see the solitary shadow outlined against the sky. When Horace reached him we started forward. Jim was told to keep out of sight until he could count a hundred and then follow us. I picked up the rug and hung it over my gun again.

As we drew near the bridge the officer turned around and looked at us. Of course all he could see was a group of dim figures in the dark. Les whispered to Grober: “If you let a sound out of you I’ll crack you over the head with my gun!” Grober was dumb. We all breathed more freely when we got him inside the door leading to the officers’ quarters.

This was a short passage with two rooms on either side. At the forward end there was a door leading into the chart-room. Beyond the chart-room was the wheelhouse. Les opened the door of the captain's room, thrust Grober down on his bunk, gagged him, and tied his ankles together.

We were as quiet as we could be, but there were bound to be some suspicious sounds. As we came out of the captain's room, the door opposite opened and there stood Niederhoff with an astonished face. When he saw Les he knew he was in for trouble. He turned back. There was a gun lying on his desk.

Pushing me violently aside, Les sprang upon Niederhoff's back as he reached for the gun and bore him down on the bed. Mme. Storey secured the gun. A choked cry escaped from Niederhoff, and Les clapped a big hand over his mouth. It was obvious that Les couldn't tie him up like this, and I saw what I had to do. I sat on Niederhoff's head, pressing his face into the pillows, until Les had made his wrists and ankles fast. Les then gagged him and we let him breathe again. His face was growing blue.

There were no keys in the doors, and we couldn't stop to search for them. We proceeded forward into the chart-room. By this time old Jim had joined us. The chart-room was empty. The chart was pinned to a big drawing-board under a light, and on the other side of the room was the arms-locker. The door into the wheelhouse was always kept closed at night, as any light would interfere with the vision of the helmsman. Les signed to us to go into the wheelhouse and keep the watch occupied while he and Jim got out the irons we wanted.

An air of mystery hangs over the wheelhouse at night. It is dark and still; orders are given in quiet voices. However the passengers may strut down below, this is the real soul of the ship. There was a young sailor at the wheel, his face faintly illuminated by reflected light from the binnacle, and beyond him Bostock, the third officer, was standing.

"Madame Storey!" he exclaimed in surprise.

Naturally we had no business to be prowling around that part of the ship after nightfall.

"Just exploring!" said Mme. Storey, in the silly manner that she adopts when she wants to cover her tracks. "You have such cunning little rooms up here on the roof of the ship. Much nicer than ours."

Bostock said nothing. We could hear his heels click together as he bowed. He was a mere lad, but just as wooden as the others. Perhaps with

his own people he was a kind and likable lad, but he felt himself a stranger among us and he hated us.

“What a darling little wheel!” she cried. “Do you mean to say that that little wheel can steer this big ship?”

“The wheel merely transmits the impulse to the steering machinery,” answered Bostock, in his formal German fashion.

“Fancy that!”

There were doors right and left leading out on the bridge. Through the right-hand door we could see Horace and the other officer talking together. The door from the chart-room opened and Les entered, followed by Jim.

“Farman,” said Bostock, sharply, “what are you doing in there?”

By way of answer, Les presented a gun at his head. “Turn your back to me,” he said, crisply. “Put your hands behind you. If you make a sound I’ll shoot!”

The lad hesitated. He looked around. By that time Mme. Storey and I were covering the helmsman. Bostock submitted. He turned around and his chin dropped on his chest. At a nod from Les, Jim came forward and clicked the irons on his wrists.

“Take the wheel, Jim,” ordered Les. “The course is sou’ by east.”

“I’m on your side,” said the other sailor, tremulously.

“Good!” said Les, dryly. “Stick your hands behind you!” Click! went the irons. “If you’re on the square with me I’ll soon release you,” added Les.

He forced his two captives to lie down on the floor, and put the irons on their ankles. The irons were like wide bracelets, much heavier than police handcuffs. There had been no sound in the wheelhouse except the clinking of the chains that fastened them together. It was impossible to avoid this.

The unusual sound, slight though it was, suddenly brought the remaining officer, Fulda, in from the bridge on the run. He had a flashlight, and one glance inside the wheelhouse was enough for him. He turned back through the door shouting:

“Mutiny! Mutiny! Help, men!”

That was as much as he could get out before Horace leaped on him, bearing him to the floor with a crash inside the door. From the well deck

arose an ugly mutter that quickly swelled to a bellow of rage. Above all the others we heard a voice shouting:

“Come on, fellows!”

Les flung two pairs of irons on the floor, and crying out, “Secure that man!” ran out through the door. Swinging himself over the rail of the bridge, he slid down a stanchion to the promenade deck, and gained the top of the ladder before the men could swarm up from the well.

Meanwhile Horace, shouting to us to take care of Fulda, followed Les. He ran down the stairs, and it took him longer. Mme. Storey and I flung ourselves on the second officer. He was a powerful brute, and we could not hold him down and handcuff him too. Jim had to come to our aid. The yacht swung off and began to roll in the trough of the sea.

We secured Fulda, and ran out, leaving our prisoners writhing on the floor. The Germans did not curse as our men would. Les’s voice shouted from below: “Mind your helm!” and Jim grabbed the wheel again. Mme. Storey and I hustled down the stairs to the promenade. The yelling from below had died down for a moment, then broke out again, hideously.

What had happened during those few moments was this: Les, blocking the head of the ladder, and letting his voice roar out, cried:

“It’s all over but the shouting, boys! The captain and the three officers are prisoners, and I’m master of this ship!”

They heard it and fell silent. It was the silence of stupefaction. Quickly following up his advantage, Les said:

“I can’t take her into port without a crew. You know me, boys. Will you stand by me? I promise you that as soon as we touch port there shall be a full investigation of all the troubles on board!”

“Where’s the owner?” demanded a voice.

At this moment Horace reached Les’s side. Whatever his faults, Horace did not lack physical courage. “Well, what do you want of me?” he asked defiantly. He had his gun in his hand.

“For God’s sake put up your gun or you’ll have us all thrown to the sharks!” muttered Les.

Horace concealed the gun just a moment too late. There was a flood light on the well deck used when heavy supplies or baggage was brought aboard

at night. Somebody turned it on and cast it on the group at the head of the ladder. It caught the gun and a hellish chorus of cries broke out:

“Yah! Murderer! Murderer! . . . What you put the captain in irons for? Because he wouldn’t let you flog a man? . . . Yah! Les! you turncoat! Want to kiss the hand that flogs you! . . . What you getting out of this? . . . Put the owner in irons and we’ll work the ship! . . . Put the murderer in irons!”

This was going on when Mme. Storey and I struck the promenade deck. Before showing herself at the forward rail she called Horace back to her. He came with a hard white face.

“For God’s sake leave the deck!” he said. “This is no place for women!”

“Be quiet!” she said, peremptorily. “Go inside! It is the sight of you which infuriates them. I am in no danger!”

“I’m not afraid of them!” he growled.

“Well, I am!” she said, with bright eyes. “Go away from here or you will be the death of all of us!”

He sullenly gave in. “Take my gun,” he muttered. Her hands were empty at the moment.

She shook her head. “Worse than useless to me!” She went forward and Horace faded out of the picture; I don’t know where he went.

Les was standing in a strong light at the head of the ladder, looking down at the yelling mob with a composed face. His empty hands were in plain view. To a certain extent his quiet eye intimidated them, but they were gradually edging towards the foot of the ladder; there were sailors, stewards and oilers all mixed together. Mme. Storey showed herself beside him, and the crowd fell quiet. They didn’t know how to take her. She was on Horace’s side, but they couldn’t forget that it was she who had stopped the flogging. She said:

“Will you let me talk to you, sailors?”

There were confused cries of “Yes! . . . No! . . .” and a bull-like voice roaring: “What have *you* got to say?”

She smiled. It was neither forced nor contemptuous. Danger made her eyes bright. “Only want to tell you why we tied up the Captain. Before you run wild you had better find out what’s stinging you!”

There was some laughter. Also a voice shouting, “She’s only stalling, sailors!”

“Most of you are American boys,” she went on, quickly. “You can’t scare me because you’re my own kind. And I’m going to say my say!”

She suddenly started down the ladder. I gasped. Les made to follow her, but she turned, murmuring: “Go back! I am safer alone!” He obeyed, but I heard him groan with anxiety.

When she reached the lower deck the men backed away in front of her. “What are you afraid of?” she asked, smiling. She stood with her back against the foremast. “Come on up!” Nobody moved. “Any of you boys got a Lucky?”

Several men started forward, extending their packs of cigarettes. Mme. Storey accepted a smoke from one and a light from another. “I can talk better when I’ve got something in my hand,” she said blowing a cloud of smoke.

They began to move up. One came forward with a stool for her to sit on. “Thanks,” she said. “I’ll stand on it. I want to see you all.”

Somebody slyly turned the flood light so that it shone in her face. Mme. Storey made a bow in the direction of the light. “Thanks, electrician!” There was a general laugh, and I released my pent-up breath. She was getting them!

“I don’t know if you know it,” she said, “but I’m a sort of criminologist or investigator—if anybody calls me detective I’ll fight! Two weeks before we started from New York Horace Laghet was warned over the telephone that if he took this voyage he would never come back alive. He laughed at the first warning. The day before we sailed he was warned again, and then he sent for me and asked me to come along and find out if there was a plot aboard his yacht to get him.”

They listened to her in complete silence now. While she was speaking the guests gathered along the forward rail of the promenade. There was Emil and Celia pressed close together and looking down with the serene fearlessness of youth; there was Adele listening with a pinched and hateful face, half supported by Dr. Tanner, whose face was a blank; there was Sophie in one of her girlish evening dresses, running back and forth, torn between curiosity and terror, wasting her breath in vain whispered appeals to Celia to come away.

The last to arrive were Adrian and Martin in sleek evening dress. Adrian seemed to be half out of his wits with terror; his mouth worked and his eyes rolled like an idiot’s; he listened as if in pain. Martin, on the other hand,

looked down at the scene, merely blinking. A little behind the group Horace came into view listening with bent head. I didn't envy him his thoughts.

"You all know about the attack that Johnson made on the owner last night. Somebody said the poor devil was doped, and I don't doubt it. Who doped him? What you do not know is that I had previously taken a gun from Johnson and had shipped him back to New York on the *Orizaba*. But he escaped and came back aboard the yacht. That's the reason he had to be hidden from the boss and from me.

"Well, poor Johnson is gone. After the events of last night and this morning the plotters believed that they had another tool ripe for their purpose in Les Farman. And Les found a gun tucked in his bunk today. An hour ago somebody hidden in steward's stores yonder and speaking to Les through the porthole, offered him a grand to shoot Horace Laghet in his bed tonight. The whole approach and the getaway had been carefully planned out.

"We caught Fahrig, the captain's steward, coming out of steward's stores. We had other evidence, too. The three guns, that is to say the two I took from Johnson, and the one handed to me by Farman all came out of the arms-locker aboard this yacht. And the only two keys to the locker are in the possession of the captain and the first officer. When we discovered that we decided to put the officers under lock and key and make for port. Do you blame us?"

There was a murmur of assent. A voice cried: "Where's your proof?"

"You'll have to wait for proof until the officers are brought to trial."

"Will the owner be brought to trial for murder?"

"Certainly," said Mme. Storey, coolly. "Once we drop anchor everything will have to come out."

"Do you accuse us of being in this plot?" growled a deep voice.

"The majority of you are honest men," said Mme. Storey, "or I wouldn't be talking to you like this. But there's a crooked ring in the fo'c's'le. Let the honest men think back over everything that has happened since we left New York, and decide for themselves."

The men began to discuss the matter among themselves in loud voices. I judged that the current was running in our favor. But there was one opposing voice somewhere in the back of the crowd, a young voice, saying: "Aah!

you fools! Can't you see she's just talking you round? She knows how to work men!"

Mme. Storey's keen ear recognized that voice. "Ha!" she cried. "There's my old friend, Kid Wanzer! Bring him into the light, boys!"

Wanzer had not bargained for this. He made a break for the fo'c's'le but was collared and dragged back, struggling. All his courage ran out of him. He was brought to Mme. Storey's feet, shaking and cringing.

"There's one of your crooks," she said, grimly. "He betrayed Miss Brickley and me into the hands of a Chinese gang in Willemstad. Luckily, we escaped."

"She lies!" yelled Wanzer. But his own terrified voice convicted him. "Ah, you dirty scum!" cried one of the men who was holding him, striking him on the side of the head. Wanzer was in a fair way of being badly mauled when Mme. Storey called up to Les for a pair of irons. He tossed them to her.

"Snap these on him," she said, "and turn him over to the skipper."

Wanzer's hands were locked behind him. They ran him up the ladder, pummeling him as they went. He collapsed in a corner of the deck above.

The crew promptly forgot him. A dozen questions were asked of Mme. Storey at once. "One at a time!" she protested, waving her hands. Every question she could hear she answered instantly and truthfully.

I noticed that McLaren, the burly chief engineer, had joined the group of passengers. I was pretty sure that the Scotchman bore no love towards the Germans on the bridge and that he would be on our side. However, he was uncertain as to how the crew would take any interference from him, and he said nothing but merely watched the scene below with a grim face.

Suddenly the door from A-deck corridor banged open and two dishevelled figures ran out into the space in front of Mme. Storey's stool. It was Grober and Niederhoff. At sight of them Les pulled his gun and took a step down. But he immediately saw that the two officers were not armed. Putting up his gun, he stayed where he was.

Grober shook both fists in the air. Such was his rage he could scarcely articulate. "We were seized and tied up without warning," he cried, "and locked in our rooms! Fulda, Bostock, and the helmsman are lying helpless in the wheelhouse now. They are in irons and I could not release them! Men, it

is a plot to save the owner from a charge of murder. This woman for a price means to fasten the crime on us! on us!” he beat his breast like a gorilla.

The men fell silent. It was impossible to tell how they would react to this preposterous charge. Mme. Storey did not make the mistake of arguing with Grober. She appealed to the crew. “Well, you’ve heard his story now,” she said, coolly. “It’s up to you to choose who you’ll have to take us into port. There’s Les Farman, the American, and here’s Hans Grober, the foreigner.”

They all shouted at once, some for Farman, some for Grober. The cries for Farman were more numerous.

“This calls for a show of hands,” she said. “All who want Farman hold up their hands.” A number of hands shot up. “Grober?” The crooks among the crew saw which way the current was tending and declined to advertise themselves. Not a hand was raised. “Well, Captain,” said Mme. Storey, “you appear to have lost out!”

“Outrage!” he muttered.

“One moment,” said Les from the top of the ladder. “There can’t be two skippers on a ship. I refuse to take the responsibility unless those two are locked up.”

“Fair enough!” said Mme. Storey.

“Lock them up!” yelled the crew, starting forward. I suppose they were delighted at the idea of getting their hands on their former masters. However, Mme. Storey jumped down from her stool and, spreading her arms wide, held up the rush for a moment. Under cover of her skirts the two officers ran pellmell for the ladder and scrambled up on all fours, Fulda treading on Grober’s heels. Les received them at the top and led them with Wanzer meekly into captivity. The anger of the crew evaporated in a roar of laughter at this undignified exit.

“Well, that’s that!” said Mme. Storey, with a decisive gesture. “See you later, sailors.” They cheered her as she ran up the ladder.

The guests crowded around her admiringly—except the jealous Adele and her cavalier, who looked on with sneers. Above all the fulsome voices could be heard Sophie’s shrill cackle: “Darling! you were marvelous! . . . marvelous!”

Mme. Storey looked them over grimly. “We haven’t yet got solid ground under us,” she said. “You’d better keep your congratulations for a while.”

Beckoning to Horace and to me, she hastened along the deck after Les Farman. Horace was scowling at her in sullen pain. Bluebeard had met his match. Mme. Storey was not thinking about him. When she put the crowd behind her her face showed white and strained. It had not been so easy as it looked.

XVII. *Dinner at Nine*

It was decided to confine our five prisoners in Horace's den up on the boat deck. This room had but the one door, a heavy teak affair, opening on the starboard side in plain view of the bridge. Thus it would be under the observation at all hours of whoever was on watch. It had three windows which screwed shut in heavy weather. By removing the brass handles and substituting common nuts, the windows could not be opened except with the aid of a wrench.

Some of the furniture was taken out to make room, and mattresses laid on the floor. Irons were left on the legs of the prisoners, but removed from their wrists, so that they could feed themselves or read or smoke. Captain Grober protested angrily against being locked up with a steward and a common sailor, but Les merely grinned.

"You'll fare worse ashore," Les said.

The helmsman, a man called Roberts, was set free, since there was nothing against him. The whole ship was rotten with enemies and spies. We could only deal with that problem by maintaining a superior morale.

While the prisoners were being looked after, Mme. Storey and I visited the captain's cabin aft of the chart-room. The cords with which he had been bound lay on the floor where they had been dropped in his haste. They had been cut through with a sharp instrument. One of the drawers of his dresser stood open. It had not been so before. The drawer contained his toilet articles in neat array. There was an empty space among them.

"Their friend," said Mme. Storey, "whether he or she, entered this room first and removed the captain's gag. The captain told him there was a knife in the drawer and he cut the cords. Then they went across the hall and freed Niederhoff."

On the coverlet of the bed she found a tiny smear of fresh blood. "Hm!" she said, "it was either a woman or a man unhandy with a knife. He cut himself in his haste."

"Or the captain," I put in.

“No, himself. The captain’s feet rested on this spot. He was wearing boots. The woman or man that we are looking for has a little cut on his left hand.”

In Niederhoff’s room we found a silver pocket-knife with the captain’s initials on it—H. G.

When Mme. Storey told Les what she had discovered, he said, scowling: “By God! I’ll make him tell who set him free!”

“How?” she asked, dryly. “Under torture?”

Les looked like a nice boy caught in mischief. “Hell, no!” he growled. “I couldn’t torture a prisoner.”

“Quite!” she said. “We’ll find out some other way.”

Dinner was served about nine. Except for the delay, it was exactly the same as any other night. The shaded lights, the flowers, the deft servants, the beautiful dresses of the women and the gleaming bosoms of the men. *Hors-d’œuvres*, soup, fish, etc., each with its proper wine. The guests were thirsty and the champagne flowed generously. The same rattle of talk and meaningless laughter—only tonight one could hear sharp, nervous overtones.

All the guests were present at the table. If nothing else, curiosity brought them. Their faces offered an interesting study in expression. Everybody was watching his neighbors covertly. Everybody knew without being told that Captain Grober had not got up the murderous plot all on his own. Everybody knew there was a Judas among us. The real Judas, of course, made believe to be suspicious of his neighbors, too.

Mme. Storey talked as foolishly as the rest—but with a purpose. While she rattled I knew that she was listening to every word that passed, and weighing its significance. Often she was steering the talk without appearing to. Adele never spoke except in an undertone to Tanner.

“Horace, what port are we making for?” asked Sophie.

“Farman is working out our position now,” he answered. “We’ll decide later.”

“Heavens! I suppose that will mean weeks and weeks of delay at some stuffy little island. What a bore!”

“But, Mother, the islands are beautiful!” protested Celia, looking at Emil. “What fun it would be to explore one of them thoroughly.”

Sophie paid no attention to her child. “Rosika, you lied to me about Fahrig being a thief!” she said. “Why didn’t you tell me the truth? Didn’t you trust me?”

“Didn’t want to frighten you,” said Mme. Storey. “I thought you’d screech and alarm the ship. . . . You did screech!”

“Only a little one. Anyhow, somebody screeched before me.”

“That was Fahrig.”

“All that yelling broke out on deck while I was still only half dressed,” Sophie went on in her vivacious fashion. “It was perfectly awful to have to sit there and finish, not knowing what was going on!”

“Finest thing I ever heard of!” said Martin, blinking at her. “I will lay it before the Carnegie Hero Fund. Woman bravely remains at her mirror making up her face after mutiny breaks out!”

“Don’t be horrid!” said Sophie. “Where were you, I should like to know?”

“Dressing,” said Martin. “In my cabin astern, I couldn’t hear anything. I didn’t know anything was wrong until I got up on deck.”

“Wasn’t it awful!” cried Mme. Storey, laughing. “I must have been drunk with excitement. I have no idea now what I did or said. It has passed completely out of my mind.”

There was a general chorus around the table. “Rosika, you were marvelous!” etc.

“Just what was I doing when you came on deck?” she asked Martin, laughingly.

“Let me see,” he answered, “I was dazed with it all. It took me a minute or two to get the hang of it. The first thing I can remember is hearing you tell the sailors how you caught Fahrig.”

“Oh, the worst was over then! You should have seen Farman slide down from the bridge.”

“Everybody’s hero!” said Martin, sarcastically.

Horace looked at him with quick sympathy. “Sure!” he said. “I’ve had about all I can stomach of the noble Farman!”

“Well, thanks to him, we’re having our dinner!” put in Emil.

Horace glanced at him in dislike.

“Rosika!” cried Dr. Tanner from the other end of the table, “do you mean to say when you and Bella led the captain out of the winter garden you stuck him up by your two selves?”

“Oh no! We had a couple of husky sailors out on deck. . . . Didn’t he go like a lamb to the slaughter!” she laughed.

“Why didn’t you call on me and Adrian for help?”

“You weren’t armed. We didn’t want a rough and tumble.”

“By the way,” said Horace, looking up, “what did you do when the racket broke out? I didn’t see you rushing to our aid.”

“My first thought was of the women,” said Tanner. “I ran down to A deck to get Adele.”

“Oh yes?” said Horace, sarcastically.

Tanner swelled a little. That was his inferiority complex working. “I wouldn’t let Adele finish dressing. I threw a cloak around her shoulders and pulled her up on deck. It’s always my instinct to get out in the open when there’s trouble.”

“Yes?” said Horace.

“I wonder how the captain and the first officer got loose,” said Celia, innocently.

The same thought was in everybody’s mind. There was an awkward pause, then we all started talking.

“I was dressed before the trouble started,” Emil volunteered. “I happened to be up forward when somebody yelled ‘Mutiny’ on the bridge, and Farman came sliding down right in front of me.”

“I wouldn’t let Emil get in it,” said Celia.

“Funny thing, mob psychology,” said Martin, in his owlish style. “It was that little crack of Rosika’s about the electrician that really saved all our necks.”

“But that was right at the beginning,” I said.

“My child,” he retorted, “I have heard the whole story six times over within the hour. . . . No matter how they may be yelling for blood, if you can make them laugh they’ll turn around and eat out of your hand!”

“Out of Rosika’s hand,” amended Emil.

“Did you ever hear such fiendish yelling!” said Sophie, with a shudder.

“Do let’s talk about something else,” said Adrian, plaintively. Adrian had better control of himself at dinner, but he was jumpy. There was a bright red spot burning in either cheek. He had drunk a lot of champagne.

His remark attracted Horace’s attention to him. “And what did you do in the great war?” he asked, with a cruel smile.

“Oh, I don’t set up to be a fighter,” simpered Adrian. “I am just a playboy.”

“But what was your reaction when the noise broke out?” Horace persisted. “I’m curious to know.”

“I ran up forward,” said Adrian. “I looked into the wheelhouse and saw men struggling . . .”

“And then you ran aft again!”

“How could I help?” said Adrian. “I wasn’t armed. It was dark in the wheelhouse, and I couldn’t even tell which was friend and foe. . . . Like Frank, I thought of the women. I ran down to A deck to reassure Sophie.”

“Seems to me you were the one who needed reassuring,” said Horace.

There was a laugh around the table. Adrian made believe to join in it.

“I didn’t see you,” said Sophie, sharply.

“Well, I knocked on your door and you didn’t answer.”

“Then what did you do?” asked Horace.

“Ran up on the promenade with the others.”

“What was I doing when you reached the scene?” asked Mme. Storey, laughing. “Swedish exercises?”

“You were just climbing up on the stool.”

“You weren’t there,” I said. “You didn’t come until . . .”

“You’re mistaken,” he said, quickly. “I was round on the port side where you couldn’t see me. Afterwards I came over to starboard.”

I thought: Maybe so! But I didn’t say anything.

Mme. Storey appeared to pay no attention to this, but she was merely biding her time. There was a lot of fun up and down the table at Adrian’s

expense. Finally Martin blinked at him and drawled:

“Funny two brothers should look alike and be so different in character!”

This gave her an opening. “Character is written in the hand,” she said. “Let me see what yours has to say, Adrian.”

He was seated opposite her. He stretched his right hand across the table. “No, the left one!” she said. “The left hand shows what you were born with, and the right what you have made of yourself.”

She grasped his fingers and bent them back, the better to see his palm. Adrian winced involuntarily, and made as if to withdraw his hand. “What’s the matter?” asked Mme. Storey. “Oh! you have cut yourself! I’m so sorry I squeezed it.”

When she called attention to it I could see the little cut on the inside of his middle finger. It had been soaked in water and no blood showed, but only the clean little wound. It began to bleed again, and Adrian hastily conveyed his finger to his mouth.

“That ought to be covered,” said Mme. Storey, carelessly.

“What did you read in his hand?” somebody asked.

“A long life of luxury!” she said.

The talk went on. Adrian took his part in it without suspecting that he had betrayed himself. The discovery opened up a lurid vista in my mind. Adrian fascinated me, he was so soft and so dangerous. I couldn’t reconcile it with the way he played the fool.

XVIII. *A Ship Divided against Itself*

AS we left the dining-saloon a wireless message was handed to Mme. Storey. She took it down to our cabin to decode it. When she returned on deck she did not tell me what was in it. I judged from her face that it was serious, though as long as the crowd was around she appeared as rattle-brained as ever.

Horace, Martin, Mme. Storey, and I went up to the chart-room to consult with Captain Farman. Horace brought Martin into it as a matter of course. To do Martin justice, I must say that his suggestions on the whole showed better judgment than those of his employer.

Old Jim was still at the wheel. The door into the wheelhouse was closed, of course. Les told us of the arrangements he had made.

“I know the crew pretty well,” he said, grinning, “because I’ve had a fo’c’s’le view of them. I have chosen two men that I can trust for helmsmen. I want to use old Jim to look after the prisoners.”

“Who will take command while you are sleeping?” asked Mme. Storey.

“McLaren, the chief engineer. He’s had sea experience enough to keep her on her course, and that’s all I need. I will be close at hand if I’m wanted. There has never been any trouble in the engine-room, and he can be spared.”

“Where are we?” asked Horace.

“I’ll show you.”

We all bent over the chart. Les made a dot with his pencil. “According to the reckoning I found when I took command, we are here—10.70 north; and 56.17 west. We have passed beyond all the islands out into the open sea. I will verify it as soon as I can take an observation. As you can see, we are about equidistant from Georgetown, Demerara; Port-of-Spain, Trinidad; and Bridgetown, Barbadoes. We could fetch either place about noon tomorrow. Barbadoes is the nearest to home.”

“What’s the nearest U. S. port?” asked Horace.

Les spread another chart on the table. “In actual mileage Miami is a little nearer,” he said, “but we have made so much easting we can fetch New York

almost as soon.”

“How long to New York?”

“We’re making about sixteen knots now. I don’t know what she could do if we pushed her. Anyhow, we could make New York inside of four days.”

“Then I’m for New York,” said Horace.

“I’m for Barbadoes,” said Mme. Storey.

“Why?” he demanded, irritably.

“Because it’s nearer.”

“But we’ve got the situation well in hand.”

“There will be just that much less time to hatch a new plot.”

“The plotters are under lock and key!”

“Some of them are.”

Opposition always put Horace in a fury. “Damn it!” he cried, “I’m not going into any stuffy British port to get all tied up in red tape! Do you know what British red tape is? We would spend the rest of our lives unwinding it! Bottled up in some dirty little two-by-four harbor! I won’t risk it!”

“The British get to the bottom of things,” said Mme. Storey.

“Maybe so! But they’re too slow for me! . . . What do you say, Martin?”

Martin agreed with him, of course. “I’m for New York. In our own home town we know where we are.”

“Sure! . . . Farman, will you undertake to navigate us to New York?”

“Certainly, sir, if those are the orders.”

“Let it be New York then. Those are your orders.”

“I’ll dope out the course immediately, sir.”

Mme. Storey sucked in her cheek and said nothing.

As we filed out of the chart-room she said to Horace: “There are other matters that I must talk to you about.”

“Come down to my cabin,” he growled.

This was the first time I had been in Horace’s private suite. His sitting-room occupied the whole width of the vessel aft on A deck. There was a bedroom of almost equal size beyond it, and a wardrobe and bathroom

tucked into the stern. A dream of luxury, but I did not envy the possessor of it all. He looked as if seven devils were gnawing him. He was in love with my employer, and she exasperated him beyond endurance merely by being what she was.

We dropped into seats alongside the charming Adam fireplace—Horace could have a real fire there if he wanted it.

“Well, what is it?” he growled. He scowled at her like a pirate even while his sullen eyes were begging for mercy.

Mme. Storey said: “It was Adrian who set the captain and first officer free.”

“What!” cried Horace. “How do you know?”

She told him.

“God!” he muttered. “My own brother! . . . Oh, I know he’s a fool, and I treat him rottenly, but he *is* my brother! . . . Maybe there’s some mistake. He appeared out on deck several minutes before Grober burst out below. I saw him.”

“That proves nothing,” said Mme. Storey. “Grober and Niederhoff probably took the time to look for guns.”

“Martin,” growled Horace, “go find Adrian and bring him here. Don’t tell him what I want him for. Let me see his face!”

Martin slipped out of the room.

“What are you going to do with Adrian?” asked Mme. Storey.

“Oh, wait till I see him,” he groaned.

“You had better make up your mind before you see him. He ought to be locked up with the other prisoners.”

“No!” cried Horace, violently. “I won’t advertise him to the whole ship! You ask too much of me!”

“You speak as if I wanted something for myself,” she said, mildly. “My job is to protect you. The nearer we get to port the greater the danger you are in. The crooks can’t face an investigation.”

“Well, I’ll confine him,” he muttered. “But not with the others. I’ll make him keep to his own quarters.”

“You might as well let him range the ship. The stewards have master keys that open all the doors on A deck except your suite.”

“What can I do with him, then?”

“Put him down on B deck. Those rooms all have steel doors, and there are only two keys to each; one in the door and a duplicate in the possession of the watchman. When we were discussing what to do with the other prisoners, Farman spoke of a room aft of the galley which is occupied by two cooks. They can be shifted.”

“All right,” he growled.

In a few minutes Martin and Adrian came in. Adrian was laughing in his usual light-headed fashion, but his eyes anxiously sought Horace’s face to learn the reason for this summons.

“Sophie and I have been having it out hammer and tongs,” he said. “I love to get the old girl going, she . . .”

“Cut the comedy,” growled Horace. “I want to know why you set Grober and Niederhoff free after I had ordered them tied up.”

Coming like that, the shock knocked the breath out of Adrian. His face turned perfectly blank, his mouth opened. It was a moment or two before he could speak. “Why . . . why . . . why . . .” he stammered.

“Don’t lie,” said Mme. Storey quietly. “We know the whole story. You cut the captain’s bonds with a penknife out of the drawer of his dresser. In your haste you cut your finger.”

Adrian stared at her helplessly. “I wasn’t going to lie,” he gasped. “It’s true, I set them free.”

Horace leaped to his feet. “You damned traitor!”

We thought he was going to spring on Adrian, and we watched him closely. When he got his breath Adrian turned as glib and voluble as a woman.

“How was I to know?” he whined. “You never tell me anything. I heard a cry of ‘Mutiny!’ on the bridge. I ran forward. I saw the captain bound and helpless on his bunk. Of course I set him free! I thought if there was mutiny aboard, he was the one to handle it!”

“Why didn’t you tell me this at once?” demanded Horace.

Adrian hung his head. “Well . . . I was afraid. I’m no hero. When I saw I had done the wrong thing I was afraid to say anything.”

Horace looked at Mme. Storey. “What do you think?” he growled.

“I think he’s lying,” she said, coolly.

“So do I! . . . Have him locked up.”

She went to the telephone and called the wheelhouse. She asked Les if he could be spared for a few minutes to come down.

A wild cry broke from Adrian. “No, Horace, no! Don’t listen to her! I swear I have never knowingly done anything against you! I’m your brother!”

“Yes, my brother!” muttered Horace, bitterly.

“I don’t mind being locked up!” cried Adrian. “I’d go through anything for you! But it kills me to think that you believe I’m treacherous to you. O God! I wish you’d never made your filthy money! We were happy when we were poor. When we were boys together in the old home. Remember how I followed you around and imitated everything you did. How happy I was when you would let me go fishing with you! You were my hero!”

Horace walked away, clapping his hands to his head. “For God’s sake cut it out!” he muttered.

This painful scene was brought to an end when Les came in.

“Lock my brother up,” growled Horace.

“Yes, sir,” said Les, without batting an eye.

“Put him in the room on B deck that you were telling me about,” added Mme. Storey.

“Shall I put him in irons, like the others?”

“No!” shouted Horace.

“I advise it,” said Mme. Storey.

“I won’t have it! What harm can he do if you keep him locked up? Give me one of the keys to his room, and you keep the other.”

“Very good, sir.” Les jerked his head towards the door. “Come on!”

Horace was a wreck when this was over. I could see that my employer was sorry for him, but she would not let him see it, fearing that he might build too much on it. “Come on. You need a drink,” she said.

We got our drink in the lounge because we suspected that the rest of the gang was up in the winter garden and we didn't want to meet them. Afterwards the four of us walked on deck. Mme. Storey presently sent me down below.

I did not go to bed, because I suspected that our work was not over for the night. Sure enough, in about ten minutes Mme. Storey and Horace came into our sitting-room. As soon as I had left the deck, Horace sent Martin away, hoping to have a few minutes alone with her. Thus she had got rid of Martin without appearing to. She then invited Horace down to our suite.

His face fell when he saw me. "O God! here's Bella! Don't you ever go to bed, Bella?"

"It doesn't matter," said Mme. Storey, "because we've got to talk business."

"More business!" he growled.

"I have a very unpleasant proposition to put up to you."

"Well, it can't be so bad as what you've done already. Shoot!"

She lit a cigarette while she considered how to avoid angering him. "I do not feel that we have got to the bottom of this business," she began, slowly.

"Why?"

"Because it doesn't seem to me that there is enough persistency in Adrian's character to make him stick to a thing in the face of so many difficulties. I suspect that somebody is spurring him on. A woman, perhaps."

"Ha! you mean Sophie!" exclaimed Horace. "It's true they've been getting pretty thick lately. What of it, if Adrian is locked up."

"Sophie or Adele," she said.

"Adele!" he echoed, staring.

"It may be that she would like to get her hands on that legacy before you make another will. Or she may fear that you will force her to return the diamond. Whatever her motives may have been in the beginning, now she is so beside herself with jealousy and the desire for revenge she doesn't know what she's doing."

"What do you mean, revenge?"

"In her way she was in love with her husband."

“If she was in love with her husband, why should she be jealous because I have dropped her?”

“Do you expect a woman like that to be consistent?” Mme. Storey asked, dryly.

He merely scowled at his cigar.

“She ought to be parted from Tanner,” my employer went on. “The man has fallen completely under her influence. God knows what they may be hatching together!”

“He can have her,” growled Horace. “. . . What do you want me to do about it?”

“Confine both women to their cabins until we reach New York. Or, if you like, confine all the guests so you won’t appear to be showing any favoritism.”

“Imprison my guests!” said Horace, staring. “You must be crazy! Think of what a story they would make of it if the newspapers got hold of it!”

“There’s bound to be such a storm of publicity I don’t see what difference a little more would make. If you find later that you have wronged anybody, you can always make it up to him or her.”

Horace reddened with anger. “I won’t do it!” he said. “You’re taking too much on yourself!”

Mme. Storey was nettled, too. “On myself?” she said. “My only object is to see that you’re landed safely in New York. That’s my job! After that you can go your own way.”

“Go my own way!” repeated Horace, with extreme bitterness. “Don’t I know it! I know you hate me! But why do you have to keep rubbing it in? If you treated me decently you could do anything you liked with me!”

Mme. Storey fetched a long breath for patience. She smiled suddenly. “I don’t hate you,” she said. “But it’s impossible to get along with you. You despise those who flatter you and you quarrel with those who do not!”

This never reached him. “I don’t fight against women,” he said, sullenly. “I’ll take my chance with Sophie and Adele.”

“Very well,” she said, dismissing the subject with a gesture. “There’s another thing. . . .”

“Another?” he echoed, scowling at her in fear of what was coming.

“There is Martin,” she said, firmly.

His face flushed up again. “Now you’re after Martin!” he cried. “You don’t want to leave me a friend in the world! I won’t hear a word . . .”

“Be quiet!” she commanded, so peremptorily that he stopped midway, staring at her with his mouth open.

She opened the door and glanced out into the corridor. “Fortunately, there were no listeners,” she said. “Moderate your voice.”

“I won’t hear a word against Martin!” he went on, sullenly. “Martin and I understand each other. I would trust him with my last dollar. I have no secrets from Martin. He’s a darn sight more than just an employee. He’s my friend, sometimes I think my only friend. At any rate, he’s the only soul aboard this damned vessel that really cares for me. The others are just making up to my money. Martin doesn’t care for money. He wouldn’t let me put him down in my will. Martin is the only one who speaks to me honestly . . .”

“Not too honestly,” she murmured.

“What do you mean?” he demanded.

“He has the appearance of frankness, but I have noticed that he never says anything disagreeable to you.”

“Why should he?”

“He does to everybody else. It’s his line.”

“You would say that! . . . What have you got against him, anyway?”

“No evidence, if that’s what you mean. Only a motive.”

“In Heaven’s name what motive could Martin have for doing me in? He would only be out of a job. He is not down in my will. Neither the first nor the second will. He has seen them both.”

“You have forgotten the diamonds,” she said, quietly.

“Diamonds?” he repeated, staring.

“The diamonds he brought aboard at Willemstad.”

“I think you must be out of your senses!” said Horace.

“Not altogether,” she returned, smiling. From the desk she got the wireless message that had come after dinner. Between the lines she had

decoded it in pencil. She handed it to Horace without comment. Later I read it. It ran:

Finally got in touch with Etienne Joannot. Nobody else could get the information. Joannot cables Coade's business in Holland was to receive quantity of unset diamonds which Laghet has been buying secretly through many brokers for year past. Value estimated million and a half.

LATHAM.

"Etienne Joannot is the cleverest detective in Europe," remarked Mme. Storey. "He has worked for me before."

Horace's face was crimson. "What do you mean by going behind my back like that?" he demanded. "You have no business to be prying into my personal affairs!"

"That's merely silly," she said, coldly. "How did I know what I was going to turn up? It was part of my job to investigate what Martin was up to, as well as everybody else who was close to you."

Horace subsided into sullen muttering. He was like a child caught red-handed and trying to brazen it out. "Why shouldn't I buy unset diamonds if I have the money to pay for them?" he stormed.

"Why, indeed?" murmured Mme. Storey.

"They say we're headed for the revolution and that all values will be swept away. Well, whatever the state of society may be, diamonds will still have a value!"

"Certainly. And why shouldn't you smuggle them into the country on your yacht if you can get away with it? I am not an agent of the Treasury. I'm merely trying to point out to you that a million and a half is too great a temptation to put in any man's way."

"Temptation!"

"Martin believes that nobody in the world knows about these diamonds but himself and you. If anything happened to you they would just naturally fall into his hands."

"I trust Martin," he said, obstinately. "He's the only man living that I can trust! And it's useless for you to urge me to watch him or to lock him up. I won't go against my friend!"

“So I see,” she said, spreading out her hands. “Where are the diamonds now?”

“In the safe in my cabin.”

“Martin has the combination?”

“Certainly.”

“I suggest that you ought to tell him that I know about the diamonds. That can do no harm.”

Horace grinned disagreeably. “If he’s as bad as you think, that would only be putting your life in danger,” he said.

“My life has been in danger ever since I took this case,” she said, casually.

“Sure I’ll tell him,” he said. “. . . Martin went abroad two weeks before we sailed. How could he be mixed up in it?”

“You received your first warning the day after he sailed. Perhaps everything had been arranged then.”

He got up to go. “You will find that you are mistaken,” he said, confidently. “You ought to make friends with Martin.”

“I’ll try,” she said, dryly.

Horace paused with his hand on the door-knob and the hangdog look of appeal came into his face. “Would you like to see the diamonds?” he asked. “You can have any one that you choose.”

“Heaven forbid!” said Mme. Storey. “I am only a woman!”

XIX. *The Secret of the Pool*

It was on a Thursday night that we headed for New York. On Friday, as far as outward appearances went, we fell into our usual routine aboard the yacht. The members of our little party never had been honest with one another, consequently they had no difficulty in keeping up appearances.

Always the same guarded eyes when we came together, the empty vivacious talk, the meaningless laughter. It was tacitly understood among us that after some trifling difficulties in New York everything would be settled and we would all sail away again for the islands of the blest in a sea of perpetual summer. The fact that Horace himself would have to answer to a charge of murder was discreetly overlooked. No one ever referred to Adrian locked up below.

All this pretending that everything was lovely made the situation much harder to bear. There were times when Sophie took my arm and led me along the deck, chattering, when I felt as if I should scream. When I got up in the morning and when I went to bed I was haunted by a horrible foreboding of trouble ahead. I became as jumpy as a jack rabbit.

It was the same with the others. When you caught them off their guard there was a terrible look in their faces. In spite of all the makeup in the world Sophie's lost eyes made her appear twice her age. Horace, when he thought himself unobserved, paced the deck like a damned soul, chewing the inevitable cigar. The passions that were consuming Adele made her look like a caricature of her former self.

I must say for Adele that she did not make pretenses. She was like a strange cat aboard the ship. She spoke to nobody. All her meals were served in her cabin. Tanner was generally with her.

Les Farman quickly got his crew organized, and everything that had to do with the ship seemed to run as smoothly as it had always done. It took a heavy toll of the skipper because he had no trained officers to share his responsibility. As the days and the nights passed Les's eyes became red-rimmed through insufficient sleep. But his good-humored smile was unchanged.

One new development that made for trouble was that Horace appeared suddenly to recollect that he was engaged to Celia Dare. Whenever Mme. Storey humorously turned aside his attempts to make love to her, Horace sought the girl's company. Perhaps, manlike, he thought he could bring my employer to terms this way. Celia was terrified. She had no experience to guide her.

She used to come to our sitting-room with her troubles. Once Mme. Storey said to her: "Celia, you're of age, aren't you?"

The girl nodded.

"Then it's up to you to play a woman's part. You have never made believe to be in love with Horace and you don't have to begin now. But you must avoid angering him as long as we are at sea. We have trouble enough on board. Make Emil stay away from you and treat Horace exactly as you used to treat him before Emil came around. It's only for a few days."

The girl played her part very nicely, but the effect on Emil was terrible. That nice boy went savage. He lurked in the corners, scowling at Horace with murder in his eye. Luckily, Horace never noticed him.

During these days Mme. Storey seemed to be taking Horace's suggestion that she make friends with Martin. They had long conversations on deck, most of which I did not overhear. But it was clear that she was plumping him—with very little result, she confessed. Either there was nothing in him or he could hide it better than any man of his age she had ever known.

One morning when I was sitting alongside her she said to him, "You're married, aren't you?"

"Sure," he said. "But I never mentioned it. How did you know?"

She studied him through narrowed lids. "Oh, you have the general expression of a married man."

"What is that?"

"Shorn," she said. "Like Samson."

It nicked his vanity. "What about Storey?" he retorted. "Where is he?"

"Storey?"

"I mean the gent who gave you the right to hitch madame to your name."

"Oh, Storey! He passed out of the picture so long ago I have difficulty in recalling his features. I am free, white, and twenty-one plus!"

They chaffed each other back and forth endlessly. Just the same, Mme. Storey had found the joint in his armor—his wife. Martin spoke of her in the humorous, slighting manner he adopted towards everything, but he could not keep his voice from warming, nor his strange, peering eyes from becoming almost human.

“What’s her name?” asked Mme. Storey.

“Miriam.”

“What’s she like?”

“An old-fashioned girl; really good. She fell for me because I was such a bad guy.”

“You’re not very bad!”

“You don’t know the half of it, dearie! . . . The missus’s grand aim in life is to save my soul. I tell you I have to watch my step. If I reformed I would cease to interest her. On the other hand, if she knew the full extent of my wickedness she would turn from me in horror!”

“You’re a good psychologist,” said Mme. Storey, dryly. “Have you got a picture of her?”

“Yes. She sent me a snapshot in her last letter.” He took the envelope from his pocket.

I looked over Mme. Storey’s shoulder, and saw a tall, beautiful girl with a sensitive face. She was smiling, yet there was a look of sadness in her eyes, of which she was perhaps unaware.

“She is charming,” said Mme. Storey, handing it back.

Her sharp eyes took note of the address on the corner of the envelope, and when we got down below she said: “Martin lives in the Greycourt Apartments, number 2527 Broadway. Better put it down.”

On Saturday we ran into what Les Farman called “a whole gale,” and the guests disappeared from the decks. It was one of the historic gales in which several ships foundered. On the *Buccaneer* we heard their faint SOS calls, but we were too far away to be of any aid. It was a terrifying experience; the ship reeled and plunged like a mad thing. Yet the sea didn’t *look* rough, but only gray and snarling.

In the middle of it Les Farman came clumping down in sea boots and oilskins to give us a word of cheer. His face was beaming. “It’s immense!”

he said. "You should come up on the bridge and see how she rides it. Not a drop coming aboard! She's a duck of a ship!"

After that we felt better.

By Sunday afternoon it was all over and the guests reappeared on deck with their customary smiles. I expect most of us were thinking: Only twenty-four hours more! Dinner was quite a lively affair.

Immediately afterwards there was an outbreak which showed how thin was the crust of the volcano on which we were treading. It happened in the lounge. Nobody could tell exactly how it started. Apparently Adele and Frank Tanner were sitting in the corner whispering when Horace came in to get a cigar. Horace didn't like the way Frank stared at him and said so, whereupon Frank, fired by a sense of Adele's wrongs, real and imaginary, suddenly went crazy.

When I reached the scene Horace was shouting: "You're fired. Do you hear? Get out!"

"You brute! I wouldn't work for you for all your money!" cried Frank.

"You don't have to tell me that! Get out before I throw you out!"

"Where will you throw me?" snarled Frank. "Overboard? That's your specialty, isn't it? You murderer!"

Horace struck the smaller man a blow that sent him staggering back. He fell at Adele's feet and lay there panting and venomous. "Murderer! Murderer!" he muttered. If he had had a gun that would have been Horace's last moment. He was afraid to get up, for Horace, with head thrust forward and teeth bared, was waiting to hit him again. Adele was perfectly quiet, but there was murder in her face, too.

Mme. Storey slipped her arm through Horace's and said, quietly: "Horace! It isn't worth it."

He passed a hand over his face and looked at her stupidly. The spell of his rage was broken. He allowed her to lead him towards the door. As they turned away together Adele laughed.

Unfortunately, they had to pass Emil to gain the door. The young man's blue eyes were blazing. Horace stopped.

"What's biting *you*?" he growled.

"Why don't you hit a man your size?" said Emil.

“By God . . .!” Horace began, doubling his fist. But Sophie and Celia screamed and, getting in front of Emil, thrust him back violently into a chair. Horace with a harsh laugh went out on deck.

Martin, Mme. Storey, and I accompanied him down to his own suite. Martin didn’t say anything, but waited on him kindly and thoughtfully. In his own sitting-room Horace dropped in a chair and pressed his head between his hands. As usual after his rage had passed, he felt sick.

“God!” he groaned. “A little bit more of this and I’ll go stark, staring crazy! There’s a conspiracy aboard this ship to drive me mad! I spend my money on these people, I entertain them like princes, and they turn on me and show their teeth like rats!”

Martin fetched him a drink. Mme. Storey stood looking down at him inscrutably. I could guess what her thoughts were. She said:

“You’ve had a lot to bear. But there’s only one day more. Why don’t you keep out of the way of these people tomorrow? Stay in your own quarters. As soon as we reach port we’ll get a fresh deal all around.”

“I believe that’s good advice,” he muttered. “I’ll do it,”—he raised dog’s eyes to her face—“if you’ll come and spend part of the day with me, Rosy.”

“Surely,” she said. “I’d be glad to.”

We left him.

When I awoke next morning the sea was calm and bright. The cold air that blew in through the open port was perfectly delicious. The tropics might be all very well in their way, but I realized that I was a child of the north. A wonderful lightness of heart filled me! The hag-ridden voyage was almost over. Tonight I’d sleep at home!

I drew on my bathing-suit and threw a dressing-gown around me. It was a few minutes before eight. No sound from Mme. Storey’s room yet. I ran down the corridor. Only a few steps to the forward companionway, and down two flights to the pool.

My morning swim was the one thing that I completely enjoyed aboard the *Buccaneer*. I was always alone at that hour and could make believe that the marvelous pool was truly mine. The black basin with its greenish water lazily following the movement of the ship, the row of slender pillars all around, and the lighted dome—so beautiful.

I dipped my toe in the water to test the temperature. It had been warmed; just right. I ran around to the forward end where the springboard was. There was a splash of water on the marble pavement indicating that Horace, as usual, had had his swim before me. I walked out on the springboard, steadied myself, sprang, and went in.

My hands, cleaving the water in front of me, collided with something. I got the sickening feel of cold flesh and my senses reeled. I came to the top, gasping, and fought my way out of the water. Rolling out on the marble, I stared in horror at the spot where I had gone in. A black head slowly rose to the surface, the hair stirring in the water. A face appeared with open, staring eyes; a limp naked arm.

Snatching up my dressing-gown I ran. I flew up the two flights of stairs without the least consciousness of any exertion. I made no sound, but it was not because I had self-control. I wanted to scream; my throat ached with the desire to scream; but no sound would come. I banged open the door of our sitting-room and fell sprawling on the floor.

Mme. Storey ran out of her room. “Bella! Bella!”

“Horace . . .!” I gasped. “Horace . . .! Drowned in the pool!”

XX. *The Autopsy*

HALF an hour later seven of us were gathered at the side of the pool—Mme. Storey, Les Farman, Martin, Sophie, Celia, Emil, and I. It took a powerful effort of the will on my part to force me back to that dreadful place, but I knew my employer would need me. I had got a grip on myself by this time. It was only the ghastly shock of colliding with the dead body under water that had knocked me off my balance.

Mme. Storey had spent the intervening time in examining the place alone. I did not know what she might have discovered. Les, aided by a sailor, had drawn the body out of the water and laid it on the marble floor to the left. It was covered with a sheet. Little runnels of water trickled from under the sheet and found their way to the pool. Martin appeared to be a little dazed with shock. Of all those aboard the yacht, he seemed to be Horace's only sincere mourner.

We huddled around the foot of the stairway as if afraid to venture farther into the place. Adele was not present, which was natural enough, but the absence of Frank Tanner, the ship's doctor, was peculiar. My employer had just sent a steward for the second time to ask him to come.

She and Les were examining the dressing-boxes at the far end of the pool. In one of them Horace's dressing-gown and slippers had been found. This in itself was noteworthy because none of us ever troubled to use the boxes, but dropped our things on the nearest bench.

Frank Tanner finally came down the stairs. I do not think the others were aware of it, but Adele was with him. I caught a glimpse of her standing on the stairs above the landing, where she could hear all that went on without showing herself. Tanner was an unpleasant-looking young man. He took no trouble to conceal his feelings, but glanced at the sheeted form with a dull malignancy in his protuberant eyes. One almost expected him to kick it.

Mme. Storey came to meet him. "Doctor," she said, "we must have an autopsy."

"Can't see the necessity," he answered. "The man is obviously drowned. Very likely he was insane. It's the kindest thing you can say about him now."

“A strong swimmer can’t drown himself unless he ties his own arms and legs,” she answered, mildly. “However he might want to die, his limbs would strike out involuntarily.”

“Perhaps Horace had a stroke while he was in the water,” ventured Celia, timidly.

Everybody welcomed this suggestion. We had had enough of murder. “It is possible,” said Mme. Storey. “We must have an autopsy to find out.”

“I never conducted an autopsy,” said Tanner, sullenly.

“You must have assisted at many during your student days.”

“No,” he said, sullenly. “Wouldn’t know how to begin.”

She was patient with him. “I have been present at autopsies, and I can direct you. We must find out if there is water in the lungs.”

“I don’t recognize your right to give me orders,” said Tanner, insolently. “You say you had a certain agreement with Horace Laghet. Well, he’s dead and that cancels it. I won’t touch the body without the authorization of the nearest relative.”

Mme. Storey turned to Les. “Has Adrian been notified of what has happened?” she asked.

“Yes, madam.”

“He should be brought here.”

Les ran up the stairs. Mme. Storey lit a cigarette. The rest of us waited with fast-beating hearts for the next scene. The room where Adrian was confined was only a few steps from the top of the first flight of stairs, and he presently came running down with a wild expression. Les followed more soberly.

Adrian thrust us violently out of his way and ran to the body. Dropping to his knees beside it, he tenderly drew down the sheet a little way. “Oh, Horace! Horace!” he mourned. “Oh, my brother!” Kneeling there, he covered his face with his hands. It looked rather theatrical to me. His eyes were dry.

Mme. Storey gave him full time to recover himself. “Adrian,” she said, “it is obvious that there must be an autopsy to determine the cause of death. The doctor requires your authorization before performing it.”

He sprang to his feet. "Autopsy!" he gasped, in real or simulated horror. "You mean . . . cut him up! O God, no! My brother! No! No!"

"As soon as we reach port there will have to be an autopsy," she said, patiently. "The law will require it."

"Well, if they make me consent, I can't help myself!" cried Adrian. "But I will never consent voluntarily. No! No! No!"

"But if there has to be an autopsy, anyway, it should be held now," she persisted. "Within the next few hours there will be all sorts of chemical changes within the body. If the truth is to be revealed, it must be done now!"

"No!" cried Adrian. "I couldn't bear it! As his nearest relative and his heir, I refuse!"

That little word sent the investigation flying off at a new tangent. "You're not his heir," said Sophie, sharply.

"What do you mean?" demanded Adrian.

"A week ago Horace made a will leaving his residual estate to Celia unconditionally."

There was an astonished cry from the girl: "What! Mother! To *me*! No! No!"

"I can't believe it!" said Adrian. He was surprised, but less surprised than you might have expected, considering that his whole future depended on Horace's will.

"In other words, I'm a liar!" snarled Sophie. "Well, I'll show you!"

She ran up the stairs, and there was another ghastly pause in the proceedings. Nobody wanted to look at anybody else. Celia was crying in dismay:

"I didn't know anything about this! I don't want his money! I won't take it! . . . We won't take it. Will we, Emil?"

"No!" said Emil, stoutly.

Mme. Storey smiled at them. Experience had taught her that this violent antipathy to taking money would be modified later. "Don't worry about it now," she said. "That can all be arranged."

Presently Sophie came running and stumbling down the stairs with a face of horror. She caught her heel on a step and pitched forward into Les's

arms. "I've been robbed!" she gasped. . . . "The will . . . it's gone! . . . Robbed!"

Adrian smiled disagreeably. We were all aware of something new in him. All his life he had lived in fear of Horace. Now that Horace was gone a confidence in himself was beginning to appear—but this did not necessarily prove that he had brought about Horace's death.

"Where was it?" asked Mme. Storey.

"In a drawer of the desk, the safest place I had. The key in my handbag. . . ." Sophie caught sight of Adrian's smile. "You needn't smile like that!" she cried. "You know I'm speaking the truth! You stole the will!"

"How could I steal what I didn't even know existed?" demanded Adrian, indignantly.

"I don't know how you knew, but you knew!"

"Funny that the beneficiary didn't know," sneered Adrian.

"You pretended to be my friend!" cried Sophie. "You were continually in my room. You had the opportunity! You stole it!"

Mme. Storey looked at me, and held out a little key. I knew what she wanted, and ran upstairs. I heard her saying:

"As it happens, I know what Horace's wishes were, and I can show you all."

I got the copy of the will out of her dispatch-case and carried it back to her. When he saw the typewritten paper, Adrian turned a sickly clay color. I judged that he was familiar with the contents because he scarcely listened to the reading. Scowling and biting his fingers, he was planning how to meet this setback. The others listened tensely.

"To my brother Adrian Barnes Laghet," read Mme. Storey, "I give and bequeath the sum of five hundred thousand dollars. If he has any sense he will create a living trust with this sum in order to prevent himself from squandering his principal."

One could hear Horace's own surly voice in this paragraph. I glanced at the sheeted form in a kind of terror.

"To my friend Adele Holder the sum of fifty thousand dollars." The names of several other ladies followed with varying amounts to each; then: "After deducting the above bequests I hereby devise and bequeath any and all property that I may die possessed of to my *fiancée* Celia Dare, provided

that the engagement is still in effect at the time of my death. Should the engagement have been broken, the residue of my estate is to go to my said brother, Adrian Laghet.”

In the final paragraph Horace directed that Martin Coad and a certain New York trust company were to serve jointly and severally as executors and administrators.

The reading was followed by a moment's silence, broken only by the distressed murmuring of Celia: “No! No! No!” Finally Adrian asked if he might be permitted to see the paper. Mme. Storey turned it around for him to read.

“What's this line that has been crossed out?” he demanded.

“Horace was good enough to include me among his beneficiaries,” said Mme. Storey, dryly, “but I declined.”

“Humph!” said Adrian. “That thing's no good. It's not signed. It's not written in Horace's hand, but on the typewriter. You couldn't prove that Horace ever saw that paper.”

“Well, it would depend on how much credence the court was inclined to put in my testimony. I can swear that Horace handed me that paper, expressly stating at the same time what his wishes were in regard to his estate. My secretary was present and can corroborate what Horace said. Perhaps Martin can add further corroboration.”

“I never saw that will before,” said Martin, blinking. “Horace made it out without consulting me. I know nothing about it.”

Yet Horace had told us that he had shown both his wills to Martin.

Mme. Storey shrugged. “Anyhow,” she said, “I can promise you that this will will stand up in court. There will be Sophie's testimony, you see, that the original was stolen from her. There are plenty of precedents for such wills.”

Adrian turned away with a sick face. Flinging an arm up against the marble wall, he leaned his head against it. There is no doubt but that this gesture was sincere. Whether he was innocent or guilty, it was staggering to have one of the greatest fortunes in the world snatched away like that. I was surprised that he took it standing.

“To come back to this question of an autopsy,” said Mme. Storey.

Sophie spoke up quickly, “I won't permit it!”

My employer looked at her with raised eyebrows.

“You said my will was good, didn’t you?” Sophie went on, volubly. “I guess that puts it up to me!”

“Your will?” said Mme. Storey. She made believe to glance over the paper. “You are not mentioned here. Celia is the heir.”

“I’m her mother!”

“She’s of age.”

“She will do what I tell her!”

“Celia,” said Mme. Storey, “you have heard all that has been said. In my opinion an autopsy is necessary. What is your wish?”

The girl answered, tremulously: “I want you to do whatever you think is best, Rosika.”

“Celia!” cried Sophie, angrily. “Would you turn against me? Before all these people! You know nothing about this woman! She may ruin us!”

“How could she ruin us?” asked the girl, simply. “She only wants to find out the truth.” To Mme. Storey she went on: “If it is really up to me, I want you to act for me.”

“In other words, you constitute me your attorney?”

“I do.”

“I forbid it! I forbid it! I forbid it!” cried Sophie.

My employer ignored her. She said to Martin: “As Horace’s executor, what do you say?”

What Martin’s real feelings were I had no means of telling. He merely blinked. He must have known that if he had refused, Mme. Storey would have gone ahead, anyway. He said, impassively, “I consent.”

To Les Mme. Storey said, in a lowered voice: “Have the body carried to Dr. Tanner’s surgery on A deck. If Dr. Tanner refuses to go ahead, I will do what is necessary myself.”

“Yes, madam,” said Les. He spoke as if this were the most ordinary situation. Among those half-hysterical people it was wonderfully reassuring.

“Another thing,” said Mme. Storey. “I assume that this tank can be pumped out?”

“Yes, madam.”

“How long will it take?”

“A couple of hours.”

“Please have it done. My secretary will remain here to make sure that nothing is disturbed or removed until I get back.”

“How about him?” asked Les, with a jerk of his head in Adrian’s direction.

“Ask him to return to his room until we resume our . . . er . . . conference.”

“It’s unjust,” cried Adrian, “to treat me as my brother’s murderer! . . . Oh, Horace! . . . Why, I didn’t even have anything to gain by his death!”

“You didn’t know that! You didn’t know that!” cried Sophie, viciously.

“Come on, Mr. Laghet,” said Les.

XXI. *The Needle*

WITHIN an hour or so we were all gathered at the edge of the pool again. Adele was there now, sitting on a bench a little apart from the others, with Dr. Tanner standing beside her. The water in the basin was slowly going down. Everybody was covertly watching Mme. Storey's pale inscrutable face, wondering what secrets it hid. She was conferring with Les in a whisper.

Les went up the stairway, and she turned to us. "The investigation reveals that there is no water in Horace's lungs," she said. "Consequently he had ceased to breathe before his body entered the pool."

She paused, and one could hear a shuddering breath escape her hearers.

She went on, dryly: "Owing to my ignorance and Dr. Tanner's unwillingness, it was impossible to carry the autopsy any further. The water splashed on the edge of the pool shows that Horace fell or was thrown into the pool alongside the diving-board. Cases of cerebral hemorrhage, or 'strokes,' as they are called, are so rare in men of Horace's age and good condition I think that explanation should be rejected. Moreover, I have found a microscopic puncture in his leg which leads me to believe that he was poisoned."

There was a silence while the ugly word sank in. None of us liked to look at the others. Suddenly Adrian cried out:

"If he was poisoned, Sophie did it! Look at her face!"

Sophie's face crimsoned, then turned pale as paper again. She could not control the trembling of her lips. "It's a lie!" she stammered. "Just a clumsy attempt to divert suspicion from himself!"

"Sophie did it! Sophie did it!" he reiterated. "She was terrified Horace would find out how Celia was carrying on with Emil! It nearly came out last night. She had to act quick before Horace got wise and broke the engagement!"

Celia was aghast at this ugly charge. "It's a lie!" screamed Sophie. "I know nothing about poisons! . . . Do I have to submit to this man's horrible insults?" she demanded of us generally.

“I believe in the French fashion, of letting everybody talk,” said Mme. Storey, dryly. “The truth will come out!”

Sophie took refuge in noisy tears. Celia undertook to comfort her, staring over her mother’s head with a strained white face. It was a terrible initiation for the inexperienced girl.

“Who was the last to see Horace alive?” asked Mme. Storey. She turned to Martin. “We left him with you about half past eleven last night.”

“I left him a few minutes after you did,” said Martin. “He repeated his determination not to leave his rooms the next day.”

“Did he say anything about taking a swim?”

“No.”

Les returned down the stairs, bringing Beaton, Horace Laghet’s valet. Beaton was a little man no longer young, with a keen, good-natured face. Suspicion was never directed against him.

“Beaton,” said Mme. Storey, “when did you last see your master?”

“Last night when I was helping him dress for dinner, madam.”

“Not after that?”

“I never went in to him at night, madam, unless he rang for me.”

“How about this morning?”

“I heard him go past my door just before seven o’clock, madam. That was his usual hour. He would take a few turns on deck before going down to the pool. But I did not see him. I went in to lay out his clothes for the day, according to custom . . .” Beaton hesitated, and Mme. Storey asked:

“Well, what happened then?”

“About half-past seven Mrs. Dare came to the door to ask for him, madam.”

Every eye turned towards Sophie.

“Well, what of it? What of it?” she demanded, defiantly. “I asked for Horace. Beaton told me he had gone down to the pool, and I returned to my room, that’s all.”

Beaton looked rather strange, and Mme. Storey asked, “Beaton, can you confirm the fact that Mrs. Dare returned to her room?”

“No, madam,” said Beaton, reluctantly. “She didn’t go back to her room. At least, not right away.”

“What did I tell you!” cried Adrian.

“I thought it strange she should come to see Mr. Laghet at that hour,” Beaton went on, “and I opened the door a crack and watched her. She went along the corridor to the forward companionway and turned out of sight there. I cannot swear that she went down the companionway, but she did not appear again.”

“She went down, all right!” cried Adrian. “She was the last to see Horace alive!”

“I didn’t see him!” retorted Sophie. “It’s true I went down to the pool, but he wasn’t there. I looked in the gymnasium and he wasn’t there. So I went back to my room.”

“After Beaton had told you he was in the pool, didn’t it strike you as strange that he wasn’t there?” asked Mme. Storey.

“No. This is his yacht. He can go where he pleases on it.”

“Did anyone see you return to your room?”

“No. Celia was still asleep in her room.”

“What was it that you wanted to see Horace about so urgently?” asked Mme. Storey, mildly.

“None of your business!” retorted Sophie.

“Oh, Mother!” murmured Celia, in distress. “We have nothing to hide!”

“Certainly I have nothing to hide! But that woman has no authority over me!”

Mme. Storey glanced at Les Farman. He said, calmly: “Mrs. Dare, I am the master of this ship, and as long as we are at sea I have absolute authority over everybody on board. I am supporting Mme. Storey in this investigation, and I direct you to answer her questions.”

“And what if I defy you, too?” snapped Sophie.

He coolly faced her out. “I will lock you up, and turn you over to the police when we reach port.”

Sophie wilted somewhat. “I don’t mind answering any proper question, but I won’t be browbeaten! . . . It’s no great matter, anyhow. After that ugly

scene in the lounge last night, I just wanted to find out how Horace was. It was just a friendly impulse.”

“Friendly!” cried Adrian, with a wild laugh. “O my God!”

Mme. Storey said to Sophie: “I have one more question to ask you. When Celia told you that she was in love with Emil, why did you tell her that if she kept it secret for a little while, everything would come out all right?”

Sophie was taken by surprise. Her eyes rolled in a terrified fashion. “I didn’t . . . I didn’t . . .” she stammered.

“It is useless to lie,” said Mme. Storey, deprecatingly. “For Celia told me at the time, and I’m sure you don’t want to force her to lie now.”

“I was only thinking of her happiness,” faltered Sophie. “I would never force my child into a loveless marriage.”

Adrian laughed again.

“You and Celia are practically without means, I understand,” said Mme. Storey, relentlessly. “Emil has made a reputation artistically, but he is far from reaching the point where he can cash in on it. How did you think they were going to live?”

Sophie was stumped. “That’s nobody’s business,” she muttered.

“Believe me,” said Mme. Storey, mildly, “it is easier to answer such questions here than it will be in court. For your own sake and for Celia’s, I advise you to speak frankly.”

Sophie appeared to come to a sudden resolution. “Well, I will!” she said, hardily. “When I heard of the plot against Horace’s life, and when I saw how he acted on board, raising up enemies in everybody, I thought it quite unlikely that he would live long. That’s why I held him to his promise to make a will in Celia’s favor. And that’s the sole reason why I told her that if she waited, things would probably come out all right!”

Celia was shocked by this admission. “Oh, Mother!” she murmured.

“From the moment she got that will out of him, Horace was doomed!” cried Adrian. “She was here when he died! I demand that she be locked up!”

Things looked bad for Sophie. She had been caught in several lies. Her nerve failed her. She looked around in a terrified fashion and began to weep helplessly. “I didn’t! I didn’t!” she faltered. “Everybody is against me.”

“Look at her!” cried Adrian. “She’s found out! Lock her up!”

“One moment,” said Mme. Storey, dryly. “Let us go a little farther into this.” She turned to me. “Bella, as I understand it, you got down here about ten minutes to eight, or, say, quarter of an hour after Sophie says she left. Did you see any water on the floor except the one splash that you have described?”

“No.”

“You told me that you dived into the water. Was the diving-board wet?”

I shivered at the thought of that dive. “No, it was dry,” I said.

“That bears out Mrs. Dare’s story,” she said, coolly. “Horace had been in the pool for half an hour before she got here. It is not conceivable that he sat here doing nothing. It was his custom, as you all know, to dive repeatedly from the board. He climbed out by the ladder to the right of the board. Well, if there was no water on that side, and if the board itself was dry, it proves that he never entered the water until he fell, or was pushed in dead, to the left of the board. That must have been before Sophie got here.”

What a change in Adrian’s and in Sophie’s faces when they heard this. Sophie began to weep afresh, but these were tears of relief.

“Oh, Rosika,” she sobbed, “I thought you were against me!”

“I am neither for nor against anybody here,” said Mme. Storey, mildly. “I just want to get to the bottom of this business.”

Sophie quickly dried her tears and turned to Adrian, truculently. “What I’d like to know is,” she said, “how you knew I was down here this morning unless you were here yourself!”

“Nothing to it!” retorted Adrian. “You know very well that I was locked up!”

“So you say!”

“We will go into that later,” put in Mme. Storey. “Just now I want to examine the floor of the pool.”

This called our attention to the fact that it was almost empty. It had a sloping bottom and the water had receded to the deepest part, under the diving-board. Mme. Storey walked around the edge, keenly searching over the black tiles that lined it, and we followed her, unable to contain our curiosity.

Not until the water had been completely drawn off did she find what she was looking for. Then with a slight exclamation she pointed to a small bright object shining against its black background. It lay below the spot where I had found the water splashed on the floor. We went down on our knees to get a closer view. Everybody simultaneously recognized what it was, and a horrified whisper went around:

“A hypodermic needle!”

Mme. Storey went down the ladder to the bottom of the pool. “Before I touch this thing,” she said, “I want you to notice that the plunger is pressed all the way down. Whatever poison this needle may have contained was discharged before it was thrown into the water.”

XXII. *Probing*

WE all stood close around Mme. Storey at the edge of the empty pool. On her palm lay the sinister little nicked instrument. "Can any of you tell me anything about this?" she asked.

There was no answer.

"Has anyone here used a hypodermic needle during the voyage, or do you know of one having been used?"

No answer.

She singled out Tanner. "Doctor, you have such needles among your equipment on board."

"Sure," he answered, sullenly.

"How many have you?"

His pop-eyes rolled like those of a frightened horse. "I don't know. I'll have to look," he muttered.

She bent a searching glance on him, and he blurted out, "Three."

"How do you keep them?"

"In a cardboard box on a shelf in my surgery."

"Have you had occasion to use them during the voyage?"

"I have used one of them."

"Then the other two are still in their antiseptic envelopes."

"So far as I know, they are."

"Is this one of your needles?"

"How can I tell? They all look alike."

Mme. Storey undid the handbag she carried under her arm, and took a cardboard box from it. "I picked this up in your surgery awhile ago," she said, "thinking I might need it. Can you identify it?"

"It may be the one," he said, with a frightened sneer.

“If you doubt it, go and see if yours is there,” she said, blandly.

He made no move to go. Mme. Storey lifted the cover from the little box and we all saw the two needles in their unbroken cellophane wrappers, with a vacant space between them for the third.

“You can’t prove that that needle came out of there,” he snarled. “They all look alike. There may be a dozen such needles aboard this vessel!”

“Possibly,” she said, dryly, “but not likely. Of course if you can produce the needle that belongs in this box, that will automatically let you out.”

“My shelves are not locked,” he said. “Anybody could have picked it up—just like you did!”

“But the door of the surgery is always locked when you are not there,” she said. “I am told that you had the lock changed so that no steward or other servant of the ship could ever enter.”

He was silenced.

“Perhaps I can help you to trace the missing needle,” she said, mildly. “When did you use it last?”

“Yesterday morning.”

“For what purpose?”

“I decline to answer.”

“On what grounds do you decline?”

“Professional privilege.”

“Very proper,” she said, dryly. “Perhaps your patient will release you.” She looked around from face to face. “Adele,” she said, in the gentle voice that can presage so much trouble, “will you permit the doctor to answer my question?”

Adele stared and reddened. “Why do you pick on me?” she snapped.

“Well, I have noticed on several occasions during the last few days that you were under the influence of a narcotic.”

“Well, why shouldn’t I be, if I feel like it?”

“No reason whatever. All I want to know is, did the doctor administer it hypodermically?”

“Yes,” muttered Adele. “My nerves were shot to pieces!”

“Oh, quite! When did you receive your last treatment from him?”

“Yesterday morning about ten.”

“Ah, during the storm. Did the doctor give you the needle then?”

“No,” said Adele, startled. “Why should he?”

“So you could treat yourself if necessary.”

“Well, he didn’t. I never had the thing in my hand.”

Mme. Storey spoke a word or two in Les Farman’s ear, and the skipper went up the stairs again. Adele and Frank glanced at each other apprehensively.

My employer turned to the doctor. “After you treated Adele, you washed the needle, put it in its box, and returned the box to the shelf, I assume.”

“I suppose so,” he answered, sullenly. “Those are automatic actions. You do them without thinking.”

“You had no occasion to use the needle after that?”

“No.”

“Did Adele leave the surgery immediately?”

“No. She stayed for a while talking.”

“Then it is possible that she may have taken the needle without your knowledge?”

His eyes bulged out. “No!” he cried.

“But you cannot swear that it was there after she left.”

He saw that he had been led into a trap. He bit his lip and breathed hard.

Mme. Storey transferred her attention to Adele. “Did you, in fact, take the needle when the doctor wasn’t looking?”

“No!” cried Adele. “I told you I had never had it in my hand.”

“Where were you at a few minutes before seven this morning?”

“In bed and asleep,” said Adele, staring.

Mme. Storey appeared to forget them. She tapped a cigarette on the back of her hand and walked away, lighting it and studying deeply. Adele and Tanner were badly shaken. In fact, we all watched her apprehensively, wondering what she was going to spring.

Presently Les Farman came down the stairway, bringing two additional witnesses—Jepson, one of the dining-room stewards, and Hankley, a steward on A deck. Mme. Storey said, without looking at them:

“Jepson, please repeat the story that you told the captain a while ago.”

The steward, a brisk and good-looking young fellow, clearly enjoyed taking the center of the stage. “Yes, madam,” he said. “Shortly before seven this morning . . .”

“Wait a minute,” she interrupted. “How can you fix the time so exactly?”

“Because Mr. Laghet was walking the deck, ma’am. Every morning he comes up—I mean he used to come up—for half a dozen turns around the promenade just as regular as a clock.”

“What were you doing?”

“Working in the dining-saloon, madam, rubbing down the furniture.”

“Well, go on.”

“I hears somebody coming up the companionway. The saloon doors are closed, but I peep out between the sash curtains. It is Mrs. Holder. She has a funny look, so I watch her. She couldn’t see me. She waits just inside the door until Mr. Laghet comes around the deck, and pops out on him. They stand there talking.”

“Could you hear what they said?”

“No, madam. That is, just a word or two.”

Adele was listening to Jepson with a kind of stony terror.

“The boss is mad,” Jepson went on, “and Mrs. Holder is sort of crying. I mean her face is all twisted up, but I don’t see no tears. He wants to get away from her, but she holds on to him, talking fast. They are just outside the door into the lobby.”

“You told the captain what they said.”

“Yes, madam, they get excited, and then I begin to hear. The boss keeps saying: ‘Not a cent! Not a cent!’ She says something I can’t hear, and he comes back with: ‘That’s no romantic memory!’ She says: ‘Horace, our child! our child!’ And he says: ‘So you say!’ She is crying and hanging on to him. He gives her a shove, and she falls down.”

“He comes into the lobby, cursing,” Jepson went on. “He turns his head and says to her: ‘It’s nothing to me whether he marries you or not! Why

don't you cash in on the diamond?' Then he runs down the stairs."

"He is lying!" said Adele, huskily.

"It sounds like Horace," remarked Mme. Storey, dryly. "Isn't it true that you met him on deck this morning?"

"Yes, but it was just an ordinary meeting. This man is making up a sensational story about it."

"What did you talk to Horace about?"

"About Frank Tanner. Frank said it would ruin him if Horace discharged him without cause. I was just trying to persuade Horace to give Frank a letter stating that his professional services had been satisfactory."

"Crying?" asked Mme. Storey, dryly.

Adele was near tears then. "I wasn't crying!"

Mme. Storey turned back to Jepson. "What happened after Mr. Laghet went down the stairway?"

"Mrs. Holder comes in from the deck, and Dr. Tanner shows himself in the doorway of the library opposite me. He is hiding in there, but I didn't see him before. They don't speak to each other. Mrs. Holder she just shakes her head at the doctor and goes on down the stairway. The doctor he goes aft through the library. That's all I see."

Mme. Storey said to Adele, "Where did you go?"

"To my room!" she cried, hysterically.

"Hankley," Mme. Storey asked of the other steward, "did you see Mrs. Holder early this morning?"

Hankley was our steward, a little dry man with a face like a mask. "Yes, madam."

"Please describe the circumstances."

"Well, madam, as I was coming forward through the starboard corridor on A deck, I seen her coming up the forward companionway . . ."

"No!" cried Adele, in wild terror.

"You can swear that it was Mrs. Holder?"

"Oh yes, madam! She had on the pink lounging pajamas with a red girdle that I have often seen her wearing."

“You are certain that she was coming *up*?”

“Yes, madam. As she turned to the port side her back was towards me. She didn’t see me.”

“What time was this? Be careful how you answer.”

“Somewhere around seven, madam. I didn’t take no precise notice of the time. Somewhere around seven.”

“It’s a lie!” cried Adele. “I never went below A deck. I never saw Horace again. I swear it!”

Mme. Storey merely smoked and looked at her inscrutably.

“If I did go below,” cried Adele, “it was only because I was so agitated I went beyond my deck and had to come back again.”

Mme. Storey said nothing.

“Frank!” cried Adele, beside herself with terror, “tell her that I couldn’t have done it! Tell her that I never had the damned needle!”

Tanner’s face was ghastly. He moistened his lips. “It’s true,” he said. “Adele never had the needle.”

“You cannot swear that she didn’t have it.”

“Yes, I can! At three o’clock yesterday afternoon it was in its place in the box with the others. I saw it there.”

“Why didn’t you say so when I first questioned you?”

“I had forgotten.”

“Your sudden recollection is not very convincing.”

“I’ll swear it!” he cried. “I’ll swear to it in court or anywhere else!”

“How did you come to look in the box at three o’clock yesterday afternoon?”

“No particular reason. My eye happened to fall on it. I couldn’t remember putting it back in its place, and I looked to see if it was there. . . . Adele was not in the surgery at any time after that, and the door was locked when I was not there myself.”

“I see,” said Mme. Storey, dryly. “Then how did the needle that was locked up in your surgery get into the pool here?”

He saw that he was getting in deeper, and his eyes rolled. “You haven’t proved that it is the same needle.”

“Well, let’s put it in another way. What has become of the needle that *was* in this box at three o’clock yesterday afternoon?”

He had no answer to that. We could all see that he was near the breaking-point.

“Did you take it out yourself?” she asked, softly.

“No!”

My employer suddenly took a new line. “Do you expect to marry Mrs. Holder when we get ashore?” she asked.

“No,” mumbled Tanner. “I couldn’t presume to look so high.”

Mme. Storey smiled dryly. “Then how does she come to be wearing the ring with the bloodstone that used to decorate your little finger? It is rather noticeable because Mrs. Holder has so many more valuable rings.”

“Just a friendly keepsake,” he muttered.

“Ah!” Mme. Storey’s face suddenly became rather terrible. “I suggest that you and Mrs. Holder staged that scene on deck early this morning for the purpose of getting money out of Horace that would enable you to marry!”

“No! . . . No!” they murmured.

“It is evident from Jepson’s testimony that Mrs. Holder worked an ancient and well-known trick for that purpose. It failed, and I suggest that you and she then determined to put Horace out of the way in order to make sure of the money that was coming to her under his will!”

“No!” they whispered, abjectly.

“After the scene on deck, where did you go?” she asked him.

“To my room.”

“You weren’t headed in that direction. You are familiar with every corner of this ship. I suggest that you went down the after companionway and made your way forward through B deck to the door that opens on this stairway just above us.”

“No!”

Mme. Storey turned to Les Farman. "Captain, I recommend that you lock the doctor up. It is certain that he killed Horace Laghet, or has guilty knowledge of who did. We can wireless for the New York police to meet us at quarantine."

Tanner broke then. "No! No!" he cried. "I didn't do it! I'll tell all! That needle passed out of my hands yesterday!"

"Who got it?"

"Adrian!"

"Ah!" said Mme. Storey. "That's what I was trying to get at!"

XXIII. *The Clues in the Dressing-boxes*

THERE was an interval for lunch. Whatever happens, lunch has to be eaten. I had to have mine alone beside the pool, because of the evidence there, which Mme. Storey feared somebody might try to destroy. We could not be sure who was with us and who was against us aboard this ship.

While I was munching my sandwiches Martin Coade came down the stairway, blinking. "Hello, Pink!" he said. He had taken to calling me Pink as a delicate compliment to my hair.

"Well," I said, "it didn't take you long to finish."

"Oh, who could eat?" he said, with a gesture. "Thought you might get the horrors alone in this charnel-house," he went on, glancing around, "so I came down."

"Thoughtful of you," I said, dryly.

"This business has knocked me endwise!" he said, passing a hand over his face.

Any display of feeling was so out of Martin's line that it made me slightly uncomfortable. I didn't know what to say.

"You think I'm completely hard-boiled, don't you?"

"Not exactly hard-boiled," I said, "but you've adopted a certain line. In fact, I don't know anything about you."

"I'm quite human, Pink."

"Oh, I dare say. But you are continually blinking your eyes in order to conceal your feelings."

He laughed noiselessly. "The madam put you up to that!"

"Meaning that I haven't got sense enough to see it for myself!"

"I suppose it never occurred to you that the private secretary to a millionaire has to damned well learn how to hide his private feelings."

"I get your point, but I'm not your boss."

He said, "I like you, Pink."

“Say it without blinking!” I said.

He laughed. “You’re not exactly a pretty girl, but you have plenty of oxygen in your composition.”

In spite of my determination to keep cool, Martin always succeeded in exasperating me in the end. He was an ugly fellow, but there was something upsetting about his cool ways. He was infernally clever. I wouldn’t answer him, and he strolled away towards the door into the gymnasium.

“Don’t go in there,” I said.

“Why not?”

“Orders.”

“Do they apply to me?” he asked, in surprise.

“I don’t know whether they do or not. But you can’t go in there until I find out.”

He came back from the door. “What does the madam expect to prove by the gymnasium?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you make of this foul business, anyhow, Pink? I’m all at sea.”

“Same here.”

“The madam must have some theory that she’s working out.”

“Very likely,” I said. “But she never confides her theories in anybody until they’re proven.”

“Everything points to Adrian, but it doesn’t seem possible that such a consummate fool would be able to engineer a plot like this.”

“Maybe Adrian, too, has succeeded in concealing his real character from all of us,” I remarked.

Martin laughed his noiseless laugh, which wasn’t a laugh, really, but only a facial spasm. “One for Pink!” he said. “But, seriously, Pink, I wonder she doesn’t turn her attention to young Emil. If it’s a motive she’s looking for, he has as strong a motive as anybody. Through Horace’s death he gets the girl *and* the money!”

“Emil and Celia didn’t meet until they came aboard,” I pointed out, “and this plot was laid before we sailed.”

“Perhaps there were two plots,” he said, carelessly.

I didn't want to get drawn into a discussion of the case, so I didn't answer. Martin talked on about this and that until the others began to come down the stairs.

A table was brought down from the lounge to make it easier for me to take notes of the proceedings. When Mme. Storey sat down at it, with me beside her, my notebook spread before me, the place immediately took on the aspect of a court. The others sat on the marble benches against the walls, or stood at the foot of the stairway. Old Jim, the deckhand, was now present to give testimony.

The moment Adrian was brought down from his place of confinement he started protesting his innocence. "It's a cruel lie to accuse me of fratricide! Cruel and silly, because I was locked up when it happened!"

"All right," said Mme. Storey. "You'll have full opportunity to defend yourself directly. First I want to ask the doctor a few questions."

Tanner had recovered from his extreme terror. He was anxious to testify. His dull pop-eyes, incapable of expressing any feeling, made him look as if he were lying whether he was or not. When Mme. Storey asked him to explain how the needle got into Adrian's hands, he said:

"Yesterday after lunch old Jim came to my surgery and told me that Adrian was sick and wanted to see me. He said the captain had given permission provided he—I mean Jim—stayed in the room. So I went back with him. Jim remained standing in the doorway of Adrian's room, but he couldn't hear what we said to each other.

"Adrian was in a rotten state of nerves, but there wasn't anything else the matter with him. He told me he was on the verge of a breakdown and unless he got a shot of codeine he'd go all to pieces. He said he was accustomed to taking codeine hypodermically, and he had plenty of the stuff, but he'd broken his needle. He wanted another. I said I'd have to ask the captain's permission, but Adrian begged so hard not to publish the fact that he was an addict, that I said I would."

"How much did he offer you?" asked Mme. Storey.

Tanner's eyes bolted. "I'm not supposed to take any fees aboard the ship," he muttered.

"I didn't ask you what you were supposed to take, but what you got in this case."

"Nothing."

“Go ahead.”

“I returned to the surgery and got the needle, also some harmless tablets. I showed Jim the tablets I was giving Adrian, and slipped him the needle when I shook hands with him on leaving.”

“What else went with the needle?”

“Nothing!” cried Tanner, excitedly. “Nothing but some soda-mint tablets. I swear it! . . . Why, if Horace was killed with that needle, some terrific poison must have been used. I have nothing of that sort in my pharmacy. You can search it! I don’t even know of a poison that would act so quickly!”

“We’ll go into that later,” she said, quietly. “If you are an honest man, why didn’t you tell me this when I first questioned you?”

“I didn’t want to take the responsibility of accusing Adrian,” he mumbled.

“You mean you had been paid to keep your mouth shut!”

Tanner’s head sank down.

“This doesn’t prove anything!” put in Adrian, excitedly. “I can explain it all quite easily.”

“Oh, no doubt!” said Mme. Storey, dryly. “But wait a minute. . . . Jim! Does your account of these two visits agree with the doctor’s?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Jim, in distress, “but I never knewed the doctor slipped him anything.”

“Of course you didn’t!”

“I should have been present myself,” said Les Farman, scowling. “But I was so busy! And I didn’t feel that I ought to make the man wait for medical assistance!”

“Never mind it now,” said Mme. Storey. “One can’t foresee everything. . . . Jim! Did Mr. Adrian Laghet have any other visitor?”

“No, ma’am. Only the captain and me.”

“Let me explain,” cried Adrian.

“All right, go ahead!” said Mme. Storey.

“What the doctor said was perfectly true,” said Adrian, eagerly. “I asked for the needle for the purpose he said, and he brought it to me. I had the codeine.”

“Captain,” said Mme. Storey, “wasn’t he searched when he was locked up?”

“Yes, madam. I’ll swear there was no codeine on him, nor anything else of that sort.”

“It was in my dressing-case which was fetched to me afterwards,” said Adrian. “In a secret pocket.”

My employer looked inquiringly at Les.

“I doubt it!” he said, strongly. “I searched the dressing-case.”

“Well, let it go for the moment. The essential thing is, how did the needle get down here in the pool?”

“It’s not the same one,” said Adrian, confidently.

“Oh, indeed! Can you produce the needle the doctor gave you?”

“No. I threw it out of the porthole.”

Mme. Storey’s eyebrows went up. “Oh! you threw it out of the porthole! Why did you do that when you had been so crazy to get it?”

“Well, I got to thinking things over,” Adrian said, dramatically, “and it scared me the hold that stuff was beginning to get on me. I made up my mind I’d suffer anything sooner than become a slave to it. And I threw the needle through the porthole. It’s at the bottom of the ocean!”

“Very commendable,” said Mme. Storey, with deceitful sympathy. “So the habit was beginning to get a hold over you?”

Adrian was a born romancer. His big brown eyes rolled in agony. “Oh, it was awful!” he groaned. “That craving. I fought against it, but it was too strong for me. I was beginning to lose my self-respect!” His face registered a bright hope. “But I think the worst is over now. I haven’t had any of the stuff for three days. The craving is not so strong as it was.”

“Take off your coat,” said Mme. Storey, softly. “Roll up your left shirt sleeve.”

He saw the pit he had dugged for himself, and fear leaped up in his eyes. “Oh, the marks of the needle are all healed now,” he said.

Mme. Storey opened her little bag and took out a magnifying glass. “The wounds heal, but the marks do not disappear for a long time. This glass will show me.”

Adrian, staring at her, breathing fast, made no move to take off his coat.

“Or perhaps you used the right arm,” she said, casually. “Some do. Show me both arms.”

“I didn’t use the needle on my arms,” he muttered.

“On your legs, then?” she said, calmly. “Well, this is no time for modesty. Show me.”

“What difference does it make?” said Adrian, nervously. “What’s it got to do with Horace, anyway?”

“It has this to do with Horace,” she answered, with a steady look. “You have never used a hypodermic needle on yourself. You didn’t want this needle for yourself. You are lying!”

Adrian hung his head. For a moment he was at a loss. But only for a moment. His wits came to his aid again. “You are right, I lied,” he murmured, as if crushed with shame. Just the same, I noticed him looking sideways to see if his story was getting across. “I lied just to make a better story. Not for the reason you think.”

“Well, what’s the true version?” she asked, dryly.

“It’s true that I never possessed a hypodermic needle,” he said. “I have never used one on myself. But I wanted to do so. I had the bottle of codeine. Had used it for toothache. And I was nearly crazy under the false accusation that had been made against me. I thought if I could give myself a shot of codeine I could get some rest.”

“Excellent!” said Mme. Storey. “But you didn’t use it?”

“Oh, no!” he said, with a shudder. “Just as I was about to use it a reaction set in, and I pitched the needle and the bottle out of the porthole!”

“What, the bottle, too!” she said. “What a pity! Suppose you had another toothache!”

“Ah, you don’t believe anything I say!” he said, sadly. “What difference does it make, anyway. I never got out of my prison!”

“I wonder!” she said, softly. She turned to Les. “Captain, I understand that there are two keys to the room where Adrian was confined. I assume that Jim had one of them. Where is the other?”

“I have it, madam. The boss wanted to keep it, but I told him I couldn’t be responsible for the prisoner unless I had it, and he gave it to me. Since

then it has been in my pocket, and as you know I have never had my clothes off since I took command.”

“Jim,” she said, “has your key to Mr. Adrian’s room ever been out of your possession?”

The old sailor looked distressed and moved his feet uneasily. “Only for two three minutes, ma’am.”

“When was that?”

“This morning.”

“How did it happen?”

“Well, ma’am, when I fixed Mr. Adrian’s breakfast and took it to him I found the key weren’t in my pocket. I was in a way, ma’am. I run back to the pantry, and there it was lying on the shelf where I fix his tray. It’s only a little way from his room to the pantry and I had only missed it two three minutes.”

“Now let me get this straight: the pantries and the galley are on B deck immediately over our heads?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“On B deck there are watertight doors between each hold, but they are left open in fine weather, and you can carry the food aft to Mr. Adrian’s room in number three hold?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Jim, why did you take the key out of your pocket and lay it on the pantry shelf?”

“I couldn’t tell you, ma’am.”

“Do you remember taking it out of your pocket?”

The old sailor’s distress increased. “No’m. Can’t say as I exactly remember doing it.”

“Had you seen the key before this morning?”

“No’m.”

“Then perhaps you did not have it at all.”

Jim scratched his head helplessly.

“Where do you sleep?” asked Mme. Storey.

“In the room next to Mr. Adrian’s. The boss put me there so if Mr. Adrian wanted anything he could knock on the wall.”

“Do you take off your clothes at night?”

The old sailor’s modesty was alarmed. He glanced around to see if anybody was laughing. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Are you a sound sleeper?”

“I calc’late so, ’m.”

“Do you lock your door at night?”

“No’m,” he said, in surprise. “It never come into my mind to lock the door on myself.”

Mme. Storey looked at Les and spread out her hands. “How easy!” she said, ruefully. “Jim is too honest a man to make a good jailor!”

“It’s my fault!” said Les. “I should have warned him! . . . At first I kept the key in my own hands and made Jim come for it when he wanted it, but the boss ordered me to let Jim keep it, in case Adrian ever wanted anything.”

“No use crying over spilt milk,” she said, shrugging. “We must find out who let Adrian out.”

“I didn’t get out,” said Adrian.

“The five men who are confined on the boat deck,” Mme. Storey went on, “can you assure me that none of them have been out?”

“Absolutely,” said Les. “I keep the key to that room and Jim comes to me for it. Moreover, either Mr. McLaren or myself is on the bridge at all hours, and we never forget that room.”

“Nobody on the outside has been in communication with them?”

“Nobody but myself and Jim.”

“The telephone?”

“Disconnected.”

“Then we must look elsewhere,” she said.

“Nobody has been to my room!” cried Adrian. “I swear it! I saw nobody except Jim and the doctor from the moment I was locked up there until I was brought down here this morning!”

There was a ring of desperate truthfulness in his voice, yet it seemed as if he must be lying. "How did you get out, then?" asked Mme. Storey.

"I haven't been out! This is all guesswork on your part!"

"Not all guesswork!" she said, quietly. "We have traced the needle to you. It next turns up at the bottom of the pool. How did it get here? You were familiar with Horace's habit of bathing at seven every morning. I suggest that you stole down here before that hour and hid yourself in the dressing-box immediately behind the diving-board. You cut a tiny hole in the curtain so you could watch for Horace's coming. You knew that he would walk out on the board. You had only to reach out and stick the needle in his leg . . ."

Adrian suddenly went to pieces. "No! No!" he screamed, wrapping his arms around his head as if to shut out the sound of her voice. "I did not kill my brother! I did not! You have no proof!"

"Search him," said Mme. Storey.

"Yes, search me!" he cried, dramatically, extending his arms. "Search my person! Search my room! Search through my effects! I have nothing to hide!"

Les Farman attended to the job. I need not enumerate all the things they took from him—change, cigarette-lighter, wallet, etc. There was also a pair of nail clippers, a thing a man does not ordinarily carry around with him. Mme. Storey smiled at the sight of them. She thrust her own hand into the pocket from which the clippers had been taken, and drew it out, holding a tiny piece of rubberized cloth between thumb and forefinger.

"This is the piece cut from the curtain," she said, impassively. "Notice how it fits the curve of the nail-clippers. Adrian doesn't possess a pocket-knife. You see, he had no place to throw it down here, and he put it in his pocket. Later he forgot to throw it overboard. Well, every murderer makes one mistake." She walked down to the dressing-box and showed us that the piece exactly fitted the hole in the curtain.

Adrian sank down on a bench, half fainting. "No! No!" he moaned. "I didn't kill my brother! You are hounding an innocent man! I admit that appearances are against me, but I didn't do it, I tell you! When it came to the point I couldn't do it!"

"What do you mean, when it came to the point?" asked Mme. Storey, sharply.

Adrian pressed his head between his hands. “I will tell all,” he moaned, “but you must believe me!”

XXIV. *Adrian's Story*

ADRIAN remained sitting on the marble bench against the wall, with his head pressed between his hands. Once he got started, his story came tumbling out. His hearers listened in amazement.

“It’s true I meant to kill Horace! I was possessed to do it! I planned it just the way Rosika has described. I was hidden in the dressing-box with the poisoned needle in my hand, waiting and watching. But when he came my nerve failed me. I couldn’t do it. O God! I’m glad! I’m glad that crime isn’t on my conscience!”

“But Horace is dead,” said Mme. Storey, gravely.

“I didn’t have anything to do with it! It must have been a stroke of some kind.”

“The needle has discharged its poison.”

“I don’t know anything about that. I dropped it.”

“Begin at the beginning,” she said. “You have been planning this for a long time past?”

“Yes! Yes! Always I was wishing for Horace’s death. I was so afraid of him! He knew it, and he took advantage of it, even as a boy. He was cruel to me. You wouldn’t believe it! Always I made out to be crazy about him. I did everything to please him. Because I was afraid! Like a nightmare all my life!”

“But it’s only lately that I began to think of killing him. It was like something that came into me from the outside. A voice whispering: ‘Kill Horace! Kill Horace! And you can begin to live a life of your own!’”

“When he began to get ready for this voyage it seemed like a Heaven-sent opportunity. So easy to get rid of a man on shipboard without leaving any trace. I knew he would take me. He always wanted to have me around. He took a pleasure in tormenting me and making me feel cheap before others. And I always had to smile and make out I was crazy about him. I was so afraid!

“The first time I met Captain Grober I felt by instinct that he was crooked, that he would help me for money. He was just what I was looking for, because he wasn’t afraid. Little by little we came to an understanding. His price was a million dollars, to be paid out of my inheritance when I got it. Out of that he was to pay whoever else might help us aboard the ship. He took care of all the details.”

“Then it was Grober set my house afire,” said Mme. Storey.

“He had it done. We weren’t afraid that Horace would get on to us. You had only to put Horace in a rage and he could see nothing. But when we learned that he had employed you we were scared. We never did find out who warned Horace. And Grober undertook to make you miss the ship.”

“And it was Grober who undertook to have me murdered in Willemstad,” she said, dryly.

“I don’t know anything about murder. Grober simply said that he would have you detained in Willemstad until the yacht had sailed.”

“Well, go on!”

“Harry Holder seemed like a tool just ready to our hand, and Grober fixed it so that he was signed on as a sailor. Just put a gun in Holder’s hand and he’ll do our job for us, Grober said. Jealous husband and all that. Not the slightest risk to us. You got on to Holder and shipped him to New York. He sneaked back aboard the yacht, and Grober had him hidden, and had another gun passed to him.

“That failed, too. Then Grober picked on Les Farman to do the job. You know what happened then. We never did find out who warned Horace. Farman betrayed us and Grober and I were locked up separately. I thought it was all up.

“The second night that I was locked up I was awakened by something knocking at the glass of my porthole. I opened it and found a note hanging from a string outside. It was wrapped around a bolt to give it weight. The note was written in pencil. It wasn’t signed, but I naturally assumed that it was from Grober or one of his men.”

“Have you still got it?” asked Mme. Storey.

“No! After I memorized the contents I threw it overboard.”

“What did it say?”

“It said: ‘Horace knows all. This means a life sentence in the penitentiary for you unless you’re man enough to strike for your own freedom. Send for the doctor tomorrow and ask him for a hypodermic needle. Tell him that you are accustomed to give yourself a shot occasionally and you have the stuff but have broken your needle. The doctor’s a wise guy. He won’t inquire too closely if you let him understand that it’s to his advantage to keep his mouth shut. When you get the needle tell him to slip his hand behind the cushions of the wing chair that stands to the right of the fireplace in the lounge, and he’ll get his. If you get the needle I’ll pass you what goes with it, and you can lay for Horace in one of the dressing-boxes alongside the swimming pool. This is your last chance. Answer and let me know if you’re man enough. Destroy this.’ ”

“You answered that you would do it?” suggested Mme. Storey.

He nodded. “I was as much afraid of Grober then as I was of Horace,” he muttered. “I couldn’t stand going to prison. I would go mad. I’m near mad, anyhow, I’ve brooded on this so much. Wouldn’t take much to push me over the border line. It was only by killing Horace that I could get any peace!”

“Go on!” she said.

“We ran into the storm next day, and I didn’t do anything because I knew Horace couldn’t use the pool in bad weather. Yesterday afternoon when it moderated, I sent for the doctor. You know what happened then. He gave me the needle. And towards dawn this morning I heard from Grober again, or whoever it was. He sent down a little bottle of poison and the key to my room on a string. There was a note with it. Telling me to fill the needle and throw the rest of the poison overboard.

“The note also told me to leave my room at six-thirty, and to hide myself in the dressing-box that was nearest to the diving-board. After I had done the job I was to return to my room, throw the needle into the sea, and tie the key to the string so that it could be returned to Jim, thus destroying all links between me and the death of Horace.”

“You obeyed instructions?” prompted Mme. Storey.

Adrian nodded. He began to shake at the mere recollection. “I started out from my room. O God! I was terrified. I was afraid to go and I was afraid not to go. I died a hundred deaths on my way down to the pool. But nobody saw me. It was only a dozen steps from my door to the door opening on the forward companionway.

“I hid in the dressing-box, and cut a little hole in the curtain so I could see. When Horace came down the stairway I began to shake so that I couldn’t do a thing. He must have heard something, for he yanked the curtain back and discovered me there. He struck me, and it was then that I dropped the needle. I don’t know where it went.

“I grappled with Horace to prevent him from striking me. I was no match for him. I expected him to kill me. But while we were struggling he suddenly went limp. He sank down on the floor, pulling me with him. When I got clear of him I saw that he was dead. I could scarcely believe my senses. He was dead. He must have had a stroke of some sort.

“I ran back to my room and locked myself in. The string was not hanging down outside my porthole. But soon afterwards it came. I tied the key to it and after a moment or two it was drawn up. That’s all.”

“You’re sure the body was lying beside the pool when you last saw it?” asked Mme. Storey. “It was found in the water.”

“Certain,” said Adrian. “I could not be mistaken about that.”

“You are positive he was dead?”

“Absolutely. His eyes were staring open, his heart had stopped. If you could have seen him you would know!”

Les Farman’s eyes were blazing with scorn for the miserable Adrian. “He’s a pretty good liar,” he said. “Tells the truth until almost the end, hoping to get away with it!”

“Perhaps his story is all true,” said Mme. Storey, mildly. “It sounds true.”

“What!” cried Les, in astonishment. And more than one of us echoed him.

“Why should he lie about leaving the body beside the pool?” she said. “He has nothing to gain by that.”

“But the poison was discharged from the needle,” insisted Les, “and you found the puncture in Horace’s leg.”

“Surely. There is no doubt that Horace was killed. But perhaps somebody else did it.”

“What reason have you for saying that?”

“There is evidence that somebody else was concealed down here at the same time.”

“Oh, God bless you for that, Rosika! God bless you!” cried Adrian, hysterically. He snatched up her hand and fondled it. “Nobody can deceive you!”

She freed her hand. “If you are not the murderer,” she said, with a cold glance, “it is only because of your cowardice.”

XXV. *The Clue of the Burnt Match*

MME. STOREY dismissed her audience, announcing that she would resume her investigation in half an hour's time in the lounge. They filed up the stairway with manifest reluctance. They didn't want to miss anything. Adrian protested against being locked up again. My employer pointed out that there was as yet no proof of his story.

"What difference does it make?" he said. "There is no place I could go except overboard. If I jumped overboard it would save the state the expense of a trial."

"There is something in that," she said, dryly. "On the other hand, the authorities would blame Captain Farman and me for allowing you to cheat justice."

When they had gone, she pointed out to the astonished Les Farman that the steel door from number one hold into the gymnasium was loose. Les swore that he had made it fast when he had come through four days previously, and that no one had had any occasion to use it since.

"In case of accident at sea," he said, "our lives would depend upon these doors!"

As this door was fastened from the other side, we had to mount to B deck and go forward to reach the stairway into number one hold. We passed through the pantry and the galley. The cooks, already busy with the preparation of dinner, glanced at us with covert curiosity.

"It may have been one of these devils," muttered Les. "Who can tell where they have their spies?"

"I doubt if it was one of these," answered Mme. Storey. "For the present I am assuming that the second person who hid in the swimming-pool the same individual who sent the instructions and the poison to Adrian. That letter which Adrian repeated from memory was written by an educated person. He or she doubted if Adrian had nerve enough to carry the thing through, and so hid on the spot to make sure of it."

"Then you think it may have been a woman?"

“I am not eliminating the possibility,” she said, dryly. “A woman can do anything a man can do if the incentive is strong enough.”

The stair well to number one hold was immediately forward of the galley. Four doors opened off it on B deck: aft the galley through which we had come; to port the butcher’s stores; forward a storeroom for heavy baggage; and to starboard the crew’s mess. The stairway came down from the well deck overhead.

“Plenty of routes for our visitor to reach the spot,” remarked Mme. Storey. “We may need a flashlight below.”

“I have it,” said Les.

Mme. Storey opened the various doors to glance inside. The butcher’s stores was a small room with a block and tables for cutting meat. The refrigerator room opened off it. The floor was covered with sawdust.

At the foot of the iron stairway there were several locked doors leading to various storerooms, and aft, the bulkhead door into the gymnasium. This door was made watertight by a number of screw bolts all around it. A T wrench hung on the wall alongside.

On the occasion when Les had come through this door, Mme. Storey, whose eyes miss nothing, had noticed, by the marks made by the wrench on the painted heads of the bolts, that it was the first time this door had been opened. Now she had no difficulty in showing us with the aid of her glass the superimposed marks of the second opening. Moreover, that morning’s visitor had been in such a hurry to leave he had only given one of the bolts a turn or two to keep the door from swinging open.

The powerful flashlight revealed no fresh fingerprints on door or wrench handle. “Wore gloves,” said Mme. Storey. “We are dealing with a cool hand.”

“Can I fasten up this door now?” asked Les. “It’s dangerous.”

“Go ahead.”

While Les was so engaged, she continued to search with the flashlight. With an exclamation of satisfaction, she pounced on a tiny object at the foot of the stairs. “Burnt match,” she said. “He had to light a match to find the switch. It’s a wax match. Are there such matches in the ship’s stores?”

“I doubt it,” said Les. “None have been issued.”

“It’s not likely,” said Mme. Storey. “Such matches are not made in America. While I am going on with my investigation in the lounge, I want you to undertake a quiet search for the box from which this match was taken. Search the crew, and search their effects; search the guests’ staterooms. If you can find that box of matches we’ll send the possessor of it to the chair.”

Les left us at the head of the stairs in order to start his search. Mme. Storey borrowed the key to Adrian’s room from him, and we made our way aft through B deck. We found Adrian lying in his bunk in a pitiable state. He was the sort of man who was bound to go to pieces in solitary confinement. At sight of my employer, he sprang up half in terror, half in hope, but she ignored him.

What she was after was the exact position of his porthole. By measurement it proved to be six feet aft of the bulkhead separating holds two and three. Proceeding up to A deck, we found that there was an unoccupied cabin over Adrian’s place of confinement. One of its portholes proved to be immediately over Adrian’s porthole.

“Our plotter would send down his messages from here,” said Mme. Storey. “Much safer than on deck.”

Under the porthole there was a couch. Upon examining it, Mme. Storey smiled. “Look,” she said, passing me the glass. “He stood on the couch in order to get his head and an arm through the porthole so he could manipulate his string. For some reason unknown to me he stepped into the butcher’s stores on his way up from the swimming-pool. Then hastened here to recover the key from Adrian.”

On the upholstered couch I discovered—a flake or two of sawdust!

We went on up to the lounge. They were all waiting for us, divided into the usual suspicious little cliques: Sophie, Celia and Emil on one side of the room; Adele and Dr. Tanner on the other; Martin in front of the fireplace, alone and inscrutable. All eyes flew to Mme. Storey’s face to see what they could read there, but she wasn’t giving anything away.

My employer and I sat down behind a table, and I spread open my notebook. Jim brought Adrian up. Mme. Storey dispatched the old sailor to round up the cooks and waiters. Meanwhile she asked Adrian a few questions.

“When you returned to your room from the swimming-pool what did you do?”

Adrian, always dramatic, struck the back of his hand against his brow. "I was dazed," he said. "I have no recollection of how I got back. When I came to myself I was standing there with the key in my hand. I ran to the porthole, but the string was not hanging down outside. It was just growing light. I waited for what seemed an age, wondering what I would do if Grober didn't take the key off my hands. I was just making my mind to throw it into the sea when the string appeared, with the little bolt on the end of it. I tied on the key, gave it a twitch, and it disappeared. That's all."

"You say you waited an age. Can't you give me a better idea?"

"I was too confused to say exactly. Maybe five minutes. Maybe more."

"Time enough," said Mme. Storey. "Did you stick your head out of the porthole to look for the string?"

"The portholes on B deck are too small. I couldn't get my head out."

"That's all now."

The cooks and stewards were introduced to the lounge one at a time, and Mme. Storey patiently questioned them without eliciting anything. They all swore that nobody had passed through the pantry or the galley except the workers there. Nobody had been seen going up or down the stairway into number one hold. This didn't prove anything because these men had not gone on duty until six-thirty and our man had had plenty of time to hide himself beforehand.

When we came to the butcher he confirmed what we already knew, but added nothing. The butcher furnished the only moment of amusement during the grim scene. He was a deliberate man who insisted on relating every detail.

"The chef asked for lamb chops for breakfast, and when I went to my stores to cut them . . ."

"What time was this?" asked Mme. Storey.

"It had just gone six bells, ma'am. Seven o'clock. I come aft through the crew's mess, and I seen that the door to my stores was shut. This struck me as funny, because I keep it hooked back. There's nothing in there but a block and a table. The refrigerators is locked. When I put my hand against the door it resisted me. There was somebody inside. I says, 'Who's there?' and cussed him out, but there wasn't no answer."

"Did you put your full weight against the door?"

The butcher was a man of well over two hundred pounds. "Not my full weight," he answered, cautiously. "I was scared."

We smiled.

"I went into the galley and called the cook's helper," the butcher continued. "He picked up a knife and come back with me. But the door was open then and he was gone. Went up the ladder like a shadow."

"Did you follow him?"

"Yes, ma'am. Me and the cook's helper run up on deck, but we couldn't see anybody. He must have gone through the door into the corridor on A deck. There's funny things happens aboard this ship."

"Quite!" said Mme. Storey. "That's all, thank you."

The questioning went on. We were now in northern latitudes where the winter days were short. The lights were turned on in the lounge without anybody noticing it. But some time later Celia happened to look out of the window and cried out:

"Oh! Lights outside! Lights on shore! We're getting in!"

They all ran out on deck. I looked out through the door. Sure enough, there were the lights of Coney Island like a cluster of pin-point stars far away to starboard. A great feeling of thankfulness welled up in my breast. Anything to get off that murder ship! I think every face showed gladness except Adrian's. Reaching port spelled fresh terrors for him.

In a little while we dropped anchor off quarantine. Soon afterwards Mr. McLaren came down to report that he had been in communication with the health officers, and that no doctor was available until morning. That meant we must lie where we were. Faces fell. Mme. Storey went up to the wireless office to send a message to her attorney announcing our arrival and giving him certain instructions.

Afterwards the questioning was resumed. During this time it was impossible for me to keep track of the members of our party. Sometimes they were in the lounge, sometimes out on deck. However, they were all present when Les Farman came in.

"Did you have any luck?" Mme. Storey asked him, casually.

"No, madam. I carried out your instructions, but I did not find what I was looking for."

"Too bad!"

There was a silence. How strange it was to feel the ship lying so still under one after the incessant throbbing of the engine! Everybody was looking from Les's face to Mme. Storey's and back again, tormented with curiosity. Finally my employer said:

"I shall have to ask everybody to submit to a search. Close the doors, please."

"What are you looking for?" demanded Sophie, suspiciously.

"I'll tell you when I find it, darling."

Meanwhile she had stuck a cigarette in her mouth, and was making believe to fumble with her lighter. After several tries she threw it pettishly on the table. "Confound these things! Always out of order! Has anybody got an honest-to-goodness match?"

My notes end at that point. The question was never answered. We heard a hollow, muffled boom inside the vessel, and the whole fabric was violently shaken like a bird cage on the end of a spring. We were all thrown to the floor. There was a horrible series of crashes from pantry and galley; shouts and cries; then a strange silence. We were too frightened to move. I shall never forget that picture: chairs, tables, people sprawling fantastically. We could hear the inrush of water, most terrifying sound of all.

Les Farman leaped to his feet. His ear told him the location of the sound. "Number two hold; the swimming-pool!" He started for the door. Throughout the ship we heard the clang of the watertight doors on B deck. These could be closed from the bridge. McLaren was on the job. Les paused in the doorway and addressed us with an extraordinary smile. His voice was not even hurried.

"No immediate danger, folks. She'll float for a good while yet. There's a ship anchored not quarter of a mile from us, and, anyway, the shore's in sight. Go to your cabins and get warm clothes. All you can wear. All guests must be on the promenade deck, starboard side, in five minutes."

His voice broke the spell that held us. "What has happened?" somebody screamed at him.

"How can I tell until I go see?" he answered, with his good-natured grin. It was like a tonic. "An explosion of some sort; bomb; floating mine, perhaps." He disappeared.

We scrambled to our feet and ran this way and that, Sophie and Adele screeching continuously. Why do women have to act so? One longed to hit

them over the head! Sophie refused to leave the deck and Celia ran down below to fetch wraps for both.

XXVI. *The End of the Buccaneer*

THERE was a shrill whistle outside, and the command was given: "All hands on deck! Boat stations!" One heard running feet all over the ship. Presently, in order to avert the danger of an explosion, the valves were opened and the roar of escaping steam added to the confusion. Through other sounds I could hear the whine of the wireless. Charlie was sending fast.

As Mme. Storey and I went down the companionway we met stewards and other servants running up. Each was carrying a bundle of some sort. They looked at us coolly. We were all on a plane of equality now. On A deck Mme. Storey turned aft instead of forward towards our rooms.

"Come on!" she said.

"But our things!" I protested.

"They can wait," she answered, grimly. "It would be too bad to let a million and a half of diamonds go to the bottom!"

I had completely forgotten the diamonds.

At the after end of the corridor the door was open, and Beaton, Horace Laghet's valet, was standing there with a quiet face. "What has happened?" he asked.

"An explosion of some sort," said Mme. Storey. "All hands are ordered on deck."

"I didn't like to leave my master," said Beaton, simply.

Through the open door into the bedroom we could see Horace lying on his bed. Beaton had performed the last offices for the dead. Horace was as carefully groomed as in life, even to the white flower in the buttonhole of his morning coat. All the tumult and the shouting signified nothing to that quiet figure. Mme. Storey said:

"Find the captain and ask him to detail men to help you carry your master's body to the boats."

Beaton hastened away.

Mme. Storey pulled open a door in the paneling of the room, revealing a safe let into the wall behind. She tried the handle. It was locked. "A man in a hurry instinctively locks a safe by giving the knob a twist to the right," she murmured. "Perhaps I can open it."

Kneeling on the floor and holding her ear close to the lock to listen to the fall of the tumblers, she slowly turned the knob back. After a couple of false tries, she gave an exclamation of satisfaction, and smartly grasped the handle. It turned; the door swung open. But the safe was empty.

"Ah!" said Mme. Storey. "Somebody has been here before us!"

We met Beaton in the corridor, followed by Les Farman and three sailors carrying a folded stretcher. The stretcher was opened on the floor and Horace's body laid upon it. "Wait!" said Beaton as they were about to pick it up. He fetched a heavy overcoat and flung it over the body. The sailors grinned at each other; one said: "He don't need that, mate." But one understood the impulse that prompted Beaton's act. He and the sailors carried the body out.

Les said: "An explosion in the swimming-pool. Apparently the bottom of the vessel was blown out. I can't understand it."

"I can," said Mme. Storey; "a time bomb put there after we had left the place."

"How could a bomb be manufactured aboard the ship without somebody's getting on to it?"

"It couldn't be. Must have been brought aboard. All part of the plot."

"My God!" said Les.

"How long have we got?" she asked.

"There are five compartments," he said. "We have water in only one. She will float indefinitely—if the bulkheads hold. As to that, you can't tell until they're tried."

Les went back on deck, and we hastened to our rooms. The *Buccaneer* was down by the head now, and as we went forward we were running downhill. She felt different underfoot. She had lost buoyancy. As we passed the forward companionway we could hear the lap of water below—a sickening sound!

We snatched up furs and what money and jewels we had; my employer's strong box and brief-case, and ran up the two flights of stairs to the boat

deck. The interior of the ship was strangely deserted. As the steam failed the lights were beginning to dim.

It was bright enough on deck. There was an auxiliary plant run by a noisy gas-engine, and a pair of searchlights on either side lit up the scene in lurid fashion. Perfect discipline was displayed. The boats were swung out and lowered flush with the edge of the deck—two launches and two rowing-boats. The entire ship's company stood waiting the word to get in.

We met Les Farman. "What are you waiting for?" asked Mme. Storey.

"If she's going to float we may save her," he answered. "I've wirelessed for tugs."

The prisoners, relieved of their irons, were to go in the port launch in charge of Mr. McLaren. The owner's launch hung on the other side. Horace, on his stretcher, had already been carried aboard and laid in the cabin. I saw Sophie wrapped in several fur coats sitting in a chair that somebody had brought her, weeping like a child.

Emil and Celia stood close together, wrapped in a single big cape. As I passed I heard Emil say: "As long as we are together, darling!" My heart warmed towards them. It must be rather nice to be shipwrecked with your lover.

Mme. Storey glanced over the owner's group. "Where's Martin?" she asked, sharply.

"Martin? Martin?" they repeated, looking around witlessly.

Les came back to us. "Martin?" he said. "Isn't he here?"

The two of them went from group to group around the deck, searching among the faces and asking for him. He was not there. Nobody had seen him.

Presently there was a dull report from the interior of the ship, and she shuddered like a living creature. Les said: "Forward bulkhead. It's all over now!" Raising his voice, he gave the command to man the boats. Each of the after boats was under command of an assistant engineer. The crew climbed aboard in orderly fashion.

Soon we three were left standing alone on the deck. Three of the boats started lowering away; the owner's launch waited for us. From the darkness alongside came a hail: "Do you want assistance, Captain?" Les turned a searchlight in that direction, revealing a ship's boat manned by four sailors and an officer. The water had a strange dusty look in the light.

“Much obliged, Captain,” answered Les, cheerfully. “Our own boats are sufficient.” To Mme. Storey he said: “I must look for Coade.” She said, “I’ll go with you.” She told me to get in the launch, but I paid no attention. I wasn’t going to leave her. Les ordered the men to lower away, and pick us up from the ladder below. All the boats took the water safely and cast off.

We ran for the after companionway. It was dark below, but we had flashlights. The ship was settling gradually by the head. We slid forward and had to climb back aft. We ran through the beautiful rooms on the promenade deck: lounge, music-room, library, dining-saloon; already as cold and damp as if the ship had been deserted for years. We flashed our lights into the corners, and Les continually shouted Martin’s name. The silence mocked him.

We descended to A deck and ran along, opening the doors of the various cabins and casting a light inside. Clothes and personal belongings of every kind were strewn around the rooms where the terrified owners had dropped them. “Rich loot here for the old sea!” muttered Les.

In due course we came to Martin’s cabin, which was near Horace’s suite astern. The door was locked. Of all the doors only that one was locked. Les banged on it with his fist. “Martin! Martin!” he cried.

There was no answer.

Mme. Storey put her ear to the crack of the door and listened. “He is in there!” she said with a grim face.

“Martin, for God’s sake! the ship is sinking!” cried Les, violently rattling the door.

No sound from inside.

“If you don’t unlock it I’ll smash it down!”

At last Martin spoke: “Let me alone!” he growled. “My life is my own to do what I want with!”

Les put his brawny shoulder to the door. It creaked but did not give away. At the same moment we heard the crash of a pistol-shot inside the stateroom, and a heavy fall on the floor. Les retreated from the door.

“Break it down!” cried Mme. Storey.

As Les put his shoulder to it again, there was another dull explosion from amidships, and the stern began to settle. Les straightened up. “We got to go,” he muttered, “or we’ll be caught like rats!”

“Break down the door first!” she begged.

Les turned obstinate. “No! I’m not going to risk your life! Come on!” Seizing her wrist, he dragged her away in spite of herself. I followed.

“Anyhow, divers can recover the diamonds,” I said.

Les stared at me. I believe he thought I had lost my wits.

The vessel gave a little shake and heeled gently to starboard. “Quick!” said Les, “if you don’t want a cold bath!”

We ran up the stairs and raced for the ladder. Amidships the water had risen to A deck. Presently it would be pouring through the open portholes. The boarding-ladder was half submerged, and we had to climb over the handrail and drop into the launch as they brought her alongside. Celia’s sympathetic voice said:

“Ah! you didn’t find him! Poor, poor Martin!”

“Quick! Throw in your clutch! Get out of the suction!” cried Les to the engineer.

We lay to a couple of hundred yards away to see the last of the *Buccaneer*. She was going fast. The beautiful bold creature’s pride was lowered. How brief had been her career! The gas-engine was still noisily phutting on the boat deck, and the searchlights blazed, casting weird shadows. This engine supplied power to the wireless also, and we heard it whining. Charlie was beside me. He said:

“That’s for us!” After listening a moment he added, “The tugs are on the way.”

“Too late!” said Les.

She dipped her nose, and her propellers rose out of the water. We thought she was gone, but she righted herself and rolled lazily. The water was lapping the promenade deck. Then suddenly, as if a hand had seized her from below, she was drawn in swiftly and smoothly, bow first. She gave a long sigh as she disappeared, no other sound. One moment she was there with her searchlights blazing, next moment the sea was empty and dark.

Gone! with her rare tapestries and rugs, her gold-plated bathrooms, her exquisite crystal and silver; gone to rot on the floor of the sea! It had taken a year and millions of dollars to produce her and she had cruised for two weeks without doing anybody any good. What a tragic waste!

XXVII. *The Unexpected*

WE headed the launch for the steamship riding at anchor near by. This was the *Kingsley*, a British freighter bound in from Trinidad with a cargo of asphalt. Our other boats had already reached her. The only way of getting aboard was by a dangling rope ladder with wooden cross pieces. Mme. Storey urged us briskly to mount it. She had her feelings under strict control, but it was clear that she was driven by the necessity of haste. The exasperating Sophie declined to mount the ladder, but later changed her mind when she saw she was likely to be left alone on the launch with the corpse.

Quarters aboard the freighter were plain, but we were received with great kindness. While a sling was being devised to hoist the body aboard, Mme. Storey went off to the wireless cabin to send a message to her friend, Inspector Rumsey, who was then chief of the Detective Bureau of the New York police.

“Have you plenty of gasoline aboard the launch?” she asked Les.

“The tanks are full.”

“Good! We’ll need it tonight. As soon as you get the body off, go aboard with two men you can depend on, and be ready to start when I come down. Bella, you’ll go with us.”

Quarter of an hour later we set off again in the speedy launch. Beyond the fact that we were bound for town, Mme. Storey would tell us nothing of her plans. She never will do so when she is in doubt as to the outcome. She anxiously measured our speed through the water.

“Are you giving her all she’ll take, Les?” she asked.

“Every notch!”

“What is she good for?”

“About twenty miles an hour.”

It was a still, raw, starless night, black as the inside of a hat. The wide, empty spaces of the lower bay surrounded us. We headed for the faraway

Narrows marked by clusters of lights denoting Fort Wadsworth on one side and Fort Hamilton on the other.

“If you see anything coming out, give it a wide berth,” said Mme. Storey.

Fresh from the tropics, we shivered under our furs. We could have taken shelter in the cabin, but it was impossible to sit there staring at nothing. We remained in the cockpit, trying to pierce the darkness with our eyes. I was wondering what we were in such a hurry about.

Just before we reached the Narrows we saw two speedy tugs hastening to the aid of the *Buccaneer*, which was already lying on the bottom of the bay, but they didn't know it. We put out our lights and gave them a wide berth to port. After passing the Narrows we saw another and a speedier craft bound out. This was evidently a police boat summoned by Mme. Storey's message. We kept out of her way.

In the Upper Bay, with myriads of tiny lights all around us and the Staten Island ferries passing back and forth, I had the feeling that we had returned to civilization, and something of the weight of dread was lifted from me. This was the place I knew. We passed Liberty on one side gaily bedizened in her flood lights, and Governors Island on the other with its long rows of barracks.

“Where are we going?” asked Les.

“Pier A, North River,” said Mme. Storey.

“The police pier?”

“Exactly. Inspector Rumsey will be waiting for us. You had better come with us. The police will take care of the launch and lodge the two men.”

We were now close under the towering cliffs of the New York office buildings pointed with lights here and there. Off to our right were the lovely springing arcs of lights formed by the suspension bridges. The water is always rough off the Battery, churned by the meeting tides and passing vessels.

As we drew alongside Pier A I saw the doughty little figure of Inspector Rumsey waiting in one of the openings, dressed in plain clothes. The sight gave me great satisfaction. There's nothing of the spectacular sleuth about Rumsey, but he's a tower of strength. When he grasped Mme. Storey's hand, she said:

“Have you got a car here?”

“Yes,” he said, “and a motorcycle escort.”

“Good! Let’s go. I’ll tell you the whole story on the way uptown.”

“This is a most irregular landing!” said Rumsey, grinning. “You haven’t been passed by the customs and the immigration inspectors!”

The launch and the two men aboard her were handed over to the good offices of the police. As Rumsey was accompanied by his secretary and a couple of plain-clothes men, there was not room for all of us in the one car. Les and I were put in a taxicab and told to follow the police.

We set off up West Street with our shrieking escort. A mad ride, fifty miles an hour or better, I should say, with the sirens going continuously. Traffic lights meant nothing to us. It was funny to see the other cars scuttling for the curb, but my heart was in my mouth the whole way. Suppose something had popped out of one of the side streets. The driver of our taxi was delighted.

“Cheese! it’s the first chance I could ever let her out!” he said, and waved his hand to the various patrolmen on post as we flashed by.

Up West Street to the elevated highway, past all the new piers, Eleventh Avenue, the viaduct again, and Riverside Drive without slackening speed for a moment. Finally we drew up alongside the curb just above the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument, and our deafened ears had a chance to recover.

The police car and the motorcycle cops were dismissed here. Inspector Rumsey and Mme. Storey came back and joined us in the taxi and we drove on. I understood that we didn’t want to give warning of our approach. We drove a couple of blocks farther and turned east towards Broadway. Not until we drew up before a big apartment house and I read the name over the door—the Greycourt—did I learn where we were going. This was the address of Mrs. Martin Coade.

Her apartment was on the third floor. The door was opened to us by a fair, pale, beautiful young woman whom we instantly recognized as the original of the photograph Martin had shown us. There was obviously a great power of feeling in her, and I foresaw that my employer had a difficult task before her.

“Mrs. Coade?” she said.

“That is my name,” was the wondering answer. “What can I do for you?”

“I am Madame Storey.”

The girl's eyes widened and her face became paler still. Her hand stole to her breast.

"You have heard of me?" said Mme. Storey.

"Yes," she stammered, "but I thought . . . I read in the papers . . ."

"That I was one of the party on Mr. Laghet's yacht," put in my employer. "It is quite true. We returned unexpectedly tonight."

An agonized question leaped into the girl's eyes: My husband! Where is he? What has happened? But she said nothing.

Mme. Storey introduced the rest of us. She suppressed Rumsey's title, referring to him merely as Mr. Rumsey. "May we come in?" she asked.

Mrs. Coade mutely set the door wide, and we proceeded through a short hall into an inviting living-room, lighted with mellow shaded lamps. One of the most conspicuous objects in the room was a handsomely framed photograph of Martin with his queer invidious stare. It gave me the creeps. None of us sat down.

The poor girl could contain herself no longer. "Where is my husband?" she cried.

Mme. Storey tried to answer her, and could not. She turned away with a helpless gesture, murmuring, "You tell her, Les."

Les was never the one to refuse a difficult job. He straightened up and cleared his throat; his face was like wood. "It's a long story, Miss . . ."

"Oh, quick! quick!" she begged, clasping her hands.

"The yacht was blown up and sunk off quarantine a couple of hours ago," said Les, "and Martin, unhinged by that or other things, shot himself in his cabin."

Her mouth opened. She stared at him witlessly, and passed a vague hand over her face. Then a dreadful low cry broke from her. She dropped in a chair and covered her face. We all stood around in exquisite discomfort. It seemed like such a rotten deal that the poor creature should have none but strangers around her at such a moment.

Finally she raised her head. "You said . . . other things," she gasped. "What else happened? Oh, tell me!"

"Mr. Laghet is dead, too," said Les, woodenly. "Found murdered in the swimming-pool this morning."

A sharp cry broke from the girl, "I knew it!" In terror she instantly clapped the back of her hand over her mouth, but it was too late; we had all heard it. She broke into a helpless hysterical weeping.

Mme. Storey waited until the fit had exhausted itself. "I am sorry to have to trouble you at such a painful time," she said, gravely, "but there are certain questions I have to ask you."

"What do you mean?" cried the girl, wildly. "What do I know?"

"Twice you begged Horace Laghet over the telephone not to undertake this cruise!"

"No!" she cried, in terror. "How do you know that? What makes you say such a thing? It's not true!"

"I know it by a process of elimination," said Mme. Storey. "It couldn't have been anybody else but you. And now you have confirmed it by your cry."

"That's not fair!" cried the girl. "I didn't know what I was saying!"

"On the contrary," said my employer, a little grimly, "it is at such moments of emotion that the truth comes out."

"I shall never admit it!" sobbed the girl. "I shall never admit it!"

"Your husband was a very clever man!" said Mme. Storey, softly.

"I shall tell you nothing!"

"He had an almost uncanny insight into what other people were thinking. This gave him a power over others. You loved him, but you were afraid of him, too."

Mrs. Coade only wept.

"Adrian Laghet and Martin were great friends. Adrian was here all the time. . . ."

"Well, why not? What's the harm in that?"

"No harm, certainly. But Adrian was completely dominated by Martin. Martin could sway Adrian as he pleased without Adrian's suspecting it."

"Why do you say such things?" cried the girl. "What are you getting at?"

"It was certain things that you overheard when Adrian and Martin talked together that led you to warn Horace Laghet."

"No! No!"

“You heard talk of murder . . .”

“Oh, don’t torture me!” moaned the girl.

“All of us sympathize with you,” said Mme. Storey. “We are your friends. . . . But the truth must come out!”

Les was looking at the girl in great concern. He could not stand the sight of a woman’s tears. “Why don’t you answer Mme. Storey’s questions right out?” he said, gruffly. “Martin is gone. It can’t hurt him now.”

She gave Les a strange look and her resistance suddenly gave way. “It’s true! . . . It’s true!” she murmured, brokenly. “Martin was a devil . . . but I loved him! . . . Maybe I didn’t love him, but he had a power over me that I couldn’t resist! . . . I struggled against it, but he could make me do what he wanted. . . . Ever since I married him I’ve been like a lost woman! Nobody knows . . .!”

She was unable to go on for a moment. I was slightly behind her, making notes of her pitiful statement.

“It’s true I suspected that something like this might happen,” she went on. “I tried to warn Mr. Laghet, but it didn’t do any good. Ever since you sailed away I’ve been nearly crazy waiting for some news. . . .”

“It’s true Adrian used to come here all the time. They talked about murder. Imaginary murders. It was all supposed to be in fun. How a clever man could commit a murder and get away with it. Adrian simply drank it in. He was a weak fool and he hated his brother. And Martin kept at him . . . murder! murder! murder! until Adrian took fire at the idea. Martin was so clever Adrian never knew that it was he who had first suggested it!

“And when Adrian had begun to brood on the idea, Martin egged him on by making believe to raise objections. Martin led him on to ask questions in such an innocent-seeming way, that Adrian thought all the time he was pumping Martin! O God! it was fiendish! I knew Martin. I could see the way things were going. I only overheard a part of their talk, but it was enough! Martin was so sure of me he didn’t care if I did hear! . . . That’s all. I don’t know the details of the plot!”

“Well, there’s the situation, Inspector,” said Mme. Storey, softly.

“Fiendish!” muttered the inspector scowling. “She said the right word! . . . But if Adrian Laghet killed his brother he’ll have to burn for it just the same. No jury would be influenced by a plea of murder by suggestion.”

“*If Adrian killed him . . .*” Mme. Storey began.

She got no further. We were all electrified by the sound of a key in the entrance door of the apartment. The four of us instinctively drew back through the doorway into the bedroom which adjoined the little hall. Mrs. Coade struggled to her feet and stared into the hall like a woman turned to stone.

The entrance door opened and slammed shut. Martin ran into the living-room, his wicked face all lighted up with pleasure. "Miriam!" he cried, embracing her. "How's this for a surprise!"

No sound escaped her. Her body was stiff and unyielding in his arms. Presently it got to him that there was something wrong. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded, holding her away from him.

"Look behind you!" she said, hoarsely.

He turned his head and saw us coming out of the bedroom.

His reaction was as lightning—swift as a wild animal's. With a bound he was out into the hall again. He didn't stop to get the entrance door open, but ran on to the dining-room. Les made for the door from the bedroom into the hall to intercept him, but he was just too late.

Les charged after him into the dining-room. There he all but had his hands on Martin when the latter slung a chair behind him, and Les crashed over it helplessly. Martin ran on into the kitchen and we heard the service door bang back against the wall. Les picked himself up, cursing helplessly.

"It's all right," said Mme. Storey, calmly. "Inspector Rumsey has men on the service stairs."

There was the sound of a brief struggle outside. Presently we heard the service door slammed shut again, and a brawny plain-clothes man appeared from the kitchen, shoving Martin before him with a hand twisted in the latter's collar. A second man followed. Martin's glasses had fallen off and we seemed to see him for the first time in all his hatefulness. His face was as ugly as a gnome's.

But he was not afraid. He defied us all. Les towered over him with clenched fists, but he never flinched. Even then he attracted me horribly. I understood how Miriam felt. Les with a groan conquered the desire to smash him and turned away.

We all returned to the living-room. Miriam was sitting there like a stone woman, only her agonized eyes alive. Martin instantly opened up on her.

“Keep your mouth shut! Understand? Say nothing and they have nothing on us!”

Her terrified glance told its own tale. Martin cursed her brutally. “So you *have* been talking!”

“They told me you were dead!” she murmured.

“You ought to have known me better!” he snarled. “I’m not going to fluff out like that!”

Meanwhile big Les Farman was staring at him as if he were a ghost. “I don’t understand,” he muttered. “I don’t understand!”

“The shot you heard was just a bit of stage play,” said Mme. Storey. “I suspected as much at the time. However, I knew we would catch him here.”

“But how did he escape?”

“I reckon he escaped from the *Buccaneer* just one minute after we did.”

“He couldn’t have swum ashore. The water is cold enough to kill a man at this season.”

“Then he went ashore in a boat.”

“There were only four boats and they are all accounted for.”

“He had a boat of his own.”

Les stared at her incredulously.

“There are such things as folding boats,” said Mme. Storey. “They roll up in a bundle. No doubt there was such a bundle among all that baggage he brought aboard. When the bundle was unrolled and set up it would make a perfectly seaworthy boat. All he had to do was to float it off on the side opposite to where we were.”

“Well, I’m damned!” muttered Les, staring at Martin with a kind of reluctant admiration.

“Search him!” said Inspector Rumsey.

Under Martin’s jacket and his ordinary waistcoat the detectives discovered a second vest made of chamois cloth. “It’s full of lumps,” said one of the searchers.

“Rather valuable lumps,” said Mme. Storey, dryly. “About a million and a half dollars’ worth of diamonds.”

Martin was forced to remove the chamois vest. Rumsey slit one of the seams with his pocket-knife and a couple of the glittering stones rolled out on his palm. A murmur of amazement went around.

“Go through his pockets,” said Mme. Storey.

Among the usual objects that a man carries around with him—handkerchief, fountain pen, wallet, keys—they brought to light a little pasteboard match-box with a gaily decorated cover.

“That’s what I want,” said Mme. Storey, reaching for the box. She snapped it open. “Look, Inspector, wax matches. Bought in Amsterdam. These will send him to the chair!”

We had forgotten Miriam for the moment. We heard a shivering sigh, and, turning, saw that she had fainted in her chair. Les picked her up with infinite tenderness and carried her to a sofa. Martin looked on with an amused sneer. It was just as if he had said, My way with the women works better, old man! I could have smacked his ugly face. The worst of it was, it was true! Martin, ugly and bad as he was, had a fatal attraction for all of us.

On the following morning a storm of publicity broke loose in the press. From the newsgeters’ point of view the story had everything; murdered millionaire, stolen diamonds, a pair of young lovers to inherit the millions; even the suggestion of psychic powers in the murderer.

There are always those looking for a chance to get a slam at a popular favorite, and some of the papers went out of their way to point out that Mme. Storey’s long record of success had met with a check at last. Horace Laghet had engaged her to protect him from the plotters, they said, and she had fallen down on the job.

This was almost more than I could bear. I burned to sit down and write the truth to the papers; how my employer had accepted the task under certain definite conditions; how Horace Laghet had repeatedly broken the conditions; how by his own bullheadedness he had made it impossible for her to save him. She would not let me write the letter. Let the charges fall of their own weight, she said; everything blows over.

All those who had been on the yacht became fair game for the reporters. Adele Holder and Frank Tanner, for reasons of their own, had but little to say; Emil and Celia were bewildered by their notoriety; only Sophie enjoyed it. Her garrulousness was a vein of rich ore that they never succeeded in exhausting.

Miriam we spirited away where the reporters could not torment her. She had made up her mind not to see Martin again, and she stuck to it. And of course as long as he was locked up he could not exert his infernal personal influence over her. When the case finally came to trial neither side would call Miriam to testify; the prosecution because they would not, and the defense because they dared not.

Martin somehow was able to engage the most expensive legal talent in the country. At that he was probably the cleverest man among them. He directed the strategy of his own defense, and it was masterly. He made a wonderful witness in his own behalf. Cool, good-humored, and apparently as open as window glass, the prosecutor was unable to catch him out in any important respect. During the days that he was on the stand the court-room was besieged by thousands of women. It was said that he received a whole basketful of letters from them daily.

On the other hand, the prosecution had not been idle. An autopsy proved that Horace Laghet's central nervous system had been paralyzed by an injection of a drug with the properties of curare. Divers were employed to visit the wreck of the *Buccaneer*, and the pictures they took under water established that she had been destroyed by a bomb set off inside her hull. Of course Martin's original plan had been to blow her up in some foreign port, not at the door of his own home town.

Mme. Storey made a hasty trip to Holland, where, assisted by the astute M. Joannot, she was able to check up on Martin's movements with deadly accuracy. In addition to complete evidence as to the gathering together of the diamonds, she was able to show that Martin had purchased a folding-boat, had collected the materials to make a time bomb, and had visited a notorious herb doctor, from whom he might have procured curare. The herb doctor had disappeared.

Adrian, by the time the trial came on, had made peace with himself and was anxious to confess everything. On the stand he was obviously the ill-balanced neurotic and his tragic story was very damaging to Martin's case.

Martin was convicted of murder. Afterwards one of the jurors divulged that he and his fellows had been most influenced by the implied fact that Miriam had tried to warn Horace of the plot against him, though evidence that she had done so was not directly before the jury. If it was not true, why had not the defense put Miriam on the stand? the jurors asked themselves. Thus Miriam, even in her absence from the trial, convicted him.

He went to the chair blinking and unrepentant. There was a crowd of weeping women outside the prison gates.

Adrian's trial followed that of Martin. He pleaded guilty to a charge of conspiring to kill, and received a long sentence. I am told that his health is rapidly failing and that he will never live to complete it.

Adele Holder duly received her legacy from the Horace Laghet estate, and she and Frank Tanner were married. It didn't last long. Millionaires were Adele's specialty, and she found another. Tanner received a handsome sum to salve his wounded affections. He has just enough to live on in a small way without doing a tap of work, and is becoming fatter and more pop-eyed day by day.

When the trial was over, Mme. Storey, Sophie, and I spirited the young lovers down to Elkton, Maryland, where you can be married easier than in any place in these U. S. A. In Elkton the ministers stand out on their front porches and hold up a finger to passing motorists. Later on the same day we put the newly-joined pair aboard an unfashionable ship in Baltimore under assumed names. The secret was kept until they had sailed away.

I shall never forget their beaming faces when they saw the little suite we had taken for them.

"Gosh! think of being able to get away by ourselves!" said Emil. "I reckon I smashed a dozen cameras, but there were always two more for every one I broke!"

"But look, Emil," said Celia, very much the little wife. "You must learn to behave when we have to face the other passengers. Act as if we had been married for years. Treat me with indifference. We might quarrel a little."

"Couldn't keep that up," said Emil, grinning.

"Oh, well," said Celia, "when we can't stand it any longer we can always come down here and be silly."

When they returned from abroad, the question of what to do with all that money had to be faced. Notwithstanding all Sophie's pleading and tears, they were determined not to live up to it. Mme. Storey suggested that, after setting aside a sum sufficient for their needs, the entire fortune should be turned over to a Horace Laghet Foundation for the relief of need and suffering all over the country. Emil and Celia hailed the idea with cheers.

Thus Horace Laghet's name is to go down to posterity as one of the country's benefactors. To those of us who are in the know there is a pleasing

irony in the outcome.

Les Farman showed up so well in this affair that he obtained the command of a coastwise vessel trading to Florida. Every second week he spends three days in New York, and is generally to be found sitting in Miriam's apartment, grinning at her with a mixture of wonder and admiration. It must be a big change after Martin. I believe she will marry him in the end out of gratitude. If she does, she will discover that life is not yet over for her. Les is capable of surprising a woman. A man of gentle nature may be less exciting than a scoundrel, but he wears better.

Mme. Storey says: "Girls are such fools about men! If they only knew it, it is the shy man who is the delightful rake at heart."

THE END

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By MILTON PROPPER

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“Keith turned up, right after Mrs. Rowland interrupted you. I’ve come to let you reconsider that statement, and add to it if you wish.”

The secretary stiffened, on guard. “Add to it?” she repeated, affecting perplexity. “No, it’s still a puzzle to me what brought him there or where he came from. I’ve already told you I thought it was purely a coincidence.”

Rankin recognized her obstinacy and his features set in a stern frown.

“Yes, I know you did; but you don’t believe that yourself and you are hiding the truth.” Harshness crept into his tone. “In fact, Miss Edmond, you kept to yourself a great deal I should have learned. For instance, that you received four thousand dollars to act as Allen Rowland’s . . . sweetheart, and correspondent in the divorce!”

He saw that the shot thrust home, as she caught her breath, her eyes full of consternation. Her slender fingers braced on the divan on which she sat.

Wisely, she made no effort to deny the charge. “Where did you learn that?”

“From Harvey Willard, of course . . . and Mrs. Rowland,” Rankin returned provocatively. “They informed me of your entire part in the collusion—how, as secretary, you agreed to pretend an affair with the husband; how you had dates with him and simulated intimacies for the servants to see and detectives to spy on. And how you climaxed the ‘intrigue’ with the affair at the Inn.” He smiled contemptuously. “You sold your reputation comparatively cheaply, Miss Edmond.”

As he intended, anger burned in the girl’s eyes, as much directed against her erstwhile confederates as against his insulting comments.

“They told you that? But it was their plan; I had nothing to do with it and had no interest in it, until I innocently took the job as secretary.”

“Just the same, you’ve conspired to defraud justice and commit perjury under oath,” the detective put in coldly. “For such serious charges the penalties are severe. You went into it with open eyes and are equally guilty with them, regardless.”

Jill Edmond’s resentment, increasing with her alarm, loosened her tongue.

“I never considered it very wrong or criminal,” she protested. “There’s a lot of . . . fiction in every divorce case. But Mr. Willard and that woman aren’t going to put all the blame for it on me, if I can help it.”

“Then I advise you to be frank with me about everything,” Rankin said persuasively. “It isn’t worth protecting them, especially when they don’t hesitate to involve you. If you give me the information I want, I may forget your offense altogether.”

He had goaded the girl into a fury of which her outwardly sedate appearance hardly gave any sign.

“No, I won’t be a fool for them.” She clenched her fists. “They may have told you a lot, but they left out even more. You haven’t heard yet that they tried to double-cross Mr. Rowland. There was a woman he really loved—for whom he wasn’t faking an affection; and they attempted to catch him with her—his real mistress.”

“His real mistress? What do you mean—he was unfaithful, after all?”

“Yes, he had a mistress; and here is more news to surprise you.” Miss Edmond spoke triumphantly. “They didn’t tell you her name, either, Mr. Rankin; it was Barbara Keith—Mrs. Mortimer Keith! It was with her, not me, that he went to the Sunset Inn February first, to spend the night!”

“Mrs. Keith!” Rankin ejaculated. “Good heavens, how can that be possible?”

He could hardly credit his ears. He had expected information from the girl, but never, in his wildest speculations, such a startling, overwhelming revelation. A bombshell, it scattered logically marshaled theories and contradicted previous investigations; his mind raced wildly for some tangible link. But confused though he was, he also realized that the secretary had already begun to explain; and to make sense of this chaotic statement, he must concentrate on her words.

“To clear up this whole business for you, Mr. Rankin,” she related, “I had better begin at the beginning. What they said about hiring me and planting the impression Allen and I had an affair is probably correct; they’d have no reason to lie about that. Up to the day we chose for the final discovery, everything went according to plan. It was arranged to catch us together, Thursday, February second; you know, as secretary, I had every Thursday off and usually spent it with Allen to increase suspicion. He was to write a note, making an appointment to meet me that night at eight o’clock in town. Mrs. Rowland would supposedly discover it, turn it over to her brother and Dorkin, and the three of them would watch our meeting. Then, to produce proofs of our relations, Allen and I were to drive to the Roadside

Hotel, thirty miles out along the Lancaster Pike, and there be trapped in a bedroom together.”

The detective’s face screwed into a baffled, uncomprehending frown.

“This was set for Thursday, the second? But according to Mr. Willard and the testimony,” he objected, “the climax really was acted the day before, Wednesday, February first. And it took place at the Sunset Inn, instead.”

Jill Edmond smiled vindictively. “Yes, that’s so; that is where the double-crossing comes in. The whole program was advanced one day by Mrs. Rowland’s treachery in trying to drag Mrs. Keith into the scandal. She failed only because I was too much for her. At the hearing afterward, she couldn’t prove anything against Mrs. Keith, so she, Mr. Willard and Allen had to stick to the story they originally planned and change only the necessary minor details, such as the date and the scene. After all, so far as Dorkin was concerned, he wit-

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

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

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Dangerous Cargo* by Hulbert Footner]