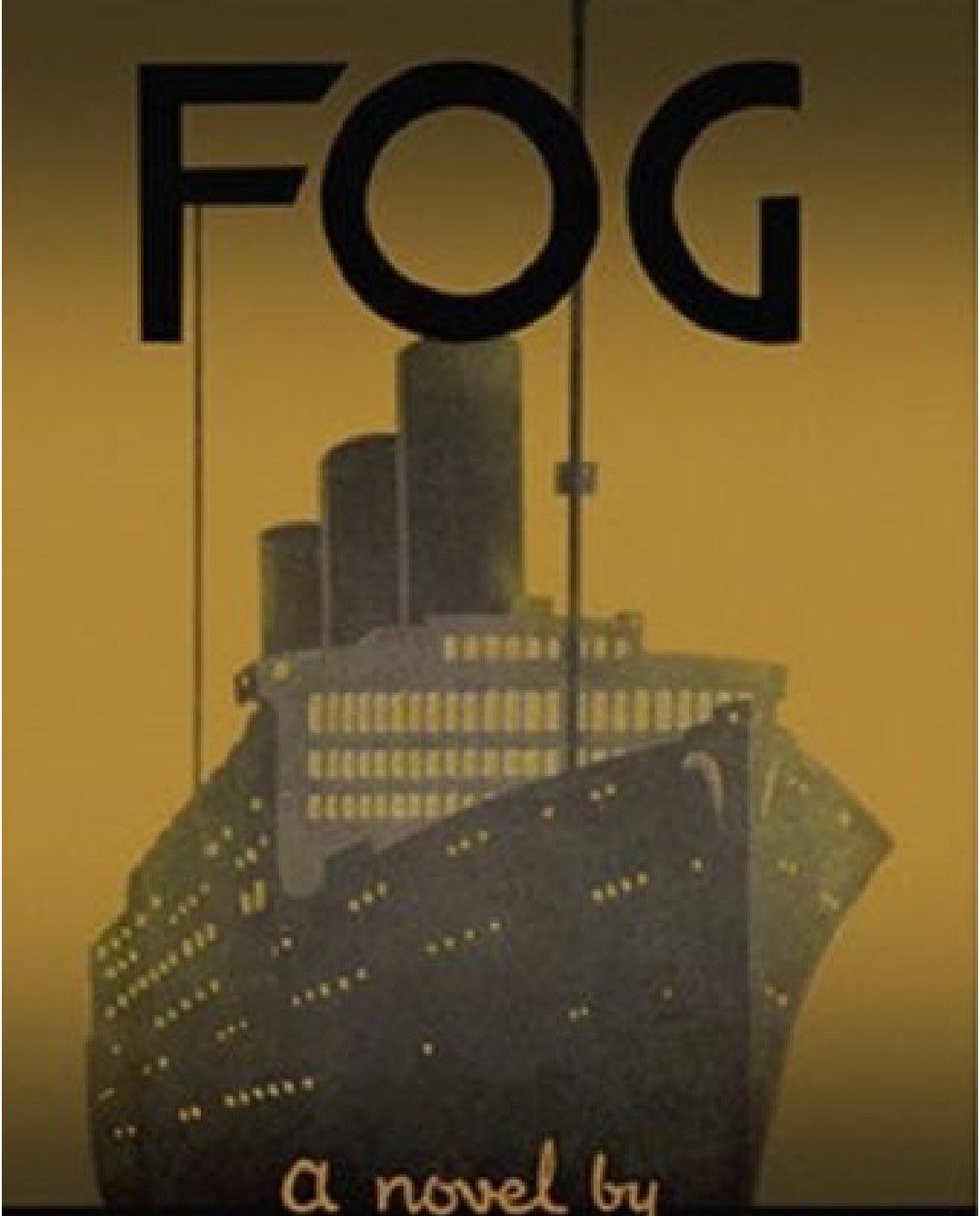
FOG



a novel by

VALENTINE WILLIAMS

and DOROTHY RICE SIMS

Title: Fog
Date of first publication: 1933
Author: Valentine Williams (1883-1946); Dorothy Rice Sims (1889-1960)
Date first posted: Jan. 3, 2024
Date last updated: Jan. 3, 2024
Faded Page eBook #20240103

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

· F O G ·

VALENTINE
WILLIAMS

His "Clubfoot" Books

The Crouching Beast
The Gold Comfit Box

His mystery, spy, and detective books

The Three of Clubs
Death Answers the Bell
Mannequin
The Eye in Attendance
The Red Mass
The Key Man
Mr. Ramosi
The Knife Behind the Curtain

HODDER AND
STOUGHTON
LTD., LONDON

VALENTINE WILLIAMS
AND
DOROTHY RICE SIMS

FOG

LONDON
HODDER & STOUGHTON LIMITED
1933

First published 1933

Made and Printed in Great Britain
For Hodder and Stoughton Limited,
by Wyman & Sons Ltd.,
London, Reading and Fakenham

The characters in this book are entirely imaginary, and have no relation to any living person

CHAPTER ONE

It had rained all day in New York, a fine, persistent drizzle, which at nightfall had become condensed into a steamy, white mist. Sidewalks and roadways were greasy with it. It melted eerily into the wisps of vapour that mounted from the man-holes and draped itself, like gauze upon a wedding-cake in a confectioner's window, about the soaring skyscrapers. Hanging sluggishly on the mild October air, it drifted this way and that, trailing gossamer plumes, here blurring a light, there strewing a mere suggestion of cloudy greyness against the nocturnal radiance of the seven-million metropolis. Above the hubbub of the after-theatre traffic the lugubrious lowing of foghorns resounded spasmodically from the encircling waters of Manhattan.

Fog!

Down on the water-front men raised their heads and sniffed significantly, gazing out to where the ferry boats, tiered with lights, shuttled to and fro across the bay, each in its little pocket of luminosity dug out of the surrounding greyness. On lonely lightships flares and signals were laid ready and, as night closed in, lighthouses sent their deep booming voices reverberating along the rays streaming from their lanterns to answer the melancholy calls sounding all about.

Fog!

While automobiles hooted and rattled and jarred amid the lights of Broadway, and the trolly-cars went bumping through Times Square and the traffic cops turned up the collars of their greatcoats against the all-pervading damp, a whitish vapour rested upon the hoary Atlantic. As yet it hovered high up, intangible, elusive, shifting capriciously, like a company of wraiths risen up from Davy Jones's locker to dance an infernal saraband in the sky.

Fog!

The captain of the *Barbaric*, due to sail at midnight for Southampton and Cherbourg, was having a belated chop in his cabin. "We'll pull out on time all right if it don't get thicker than this," said Captain McDiarmid, one hundred and eighty pounds of brick-red, sandy-haired Scot, with the slightly defiant air he always displayed towards the company officials. "The forecast

says ‘Mist locally,’ ” the passenger agent put in deferentially. “That don’t help us any,” retorted the captain, reaching for the Worcestershire sauce.

The agent coughed apologetically. “You know that Alonzo Holt is travelling with you?”

Captain McDiarmid’s blue eyes kindled. “And what do you want me to do about it if he is? D’you think his millions’ll call the fog off?”

The agent giggled nervously. “N-no, Captain, of course not. I merely mentioned it as, of course, Mr. Holt is a friend of the President and I only thought——”

“Mr. Jellaby,” said McDiarmid sternly, “I’d like you to understand that the life of the most insignificant steerage passenger is every bit as important to me as the life of a millionaire, even one with all Mr. Alonzo Holt’s money. I run this ship. The passengers are your show. And now, if you’ll excuse me,” he rose from the table, wiping his lips on his napkin, “I’m busy. . . .”

Fog!

Out of the bay came echoing the sad, warning voices of groping ships. They seeped into the endless passages of the *Barbaric*, where, under the yellow electric bulbs, stewards and stewardesses busily pattered to and fro, with pillow-slips and sheets and blankets on their arms.

“Fog about, Mr. Parsons,” said Mrs. O’Sullivan, who was a stewardess on A deck, to a swarthy, powerfully-built man in a white jacket who passed as she emerged from A131. “You’re right,” growled Parsons, who was a steward on A. “We shan’t ’arf cop it off the Banks!”

Oom-oom-oom! grunted the foghorns out of the October night.

Far below the towering black sides of the s.s. *Barbaric* the dock was spangled with mist. From masthead to the water’s edge the great ship herself dripped with it. Woodwork and metal and canvas were sopping to the touch, and in the lobbies druggets protected the carpets from the muddy feet that went incessantly up and down. Every deck was warm with light, and in the Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro they produced below the dock, under its gaunt, high roof, was a mass of swarming, dim figures.

It was half an hour before sailing-time and the huge vessel pulsated with life. There was the rustle of feet, the thudding of trunks, the scream of winch and donkey-engine. High above the boat deck, idly, as though with a deliberate effort of self-control, the squat funnels sent forth a quivering,

diaphanous vapour of dirty brown against stars that wept through holes in the drifting mist-wrack.

From the covered gangway, striped in rain-sodden red and white, that ran from shore to ship a constant heavy rumble of footsteps reverberated, punctuated by a chant monotonous, recurrent, of "State-rooms to the left! Keep moving, please, and don't obstruct the gangway!" In a slow, steady stream the passengers came plodding up the steep inclined plane, fretful and eager to exchange the dank bareness of the customs shed for the warmth and comfort of the ship. At the head of the gang-plank under a naked, brilliant arc-lamp there was the gleam of gold on uniform cuffs, the flash of a steward's white jacket.

Parties of revellers, many in evening clothes, some carrying bottles protruding from brown paper, hung on the tails of the heavy ulsters, the fur coats, that marked out the departing travellers. In an explosion of laughter and singing and ribaldry a young girl in a tweed suit and furs, her lips a crimson smear in a chalk-white face, was swept up the gangway, the centre of a jostling group of friends. "Baby, you slay me!" chuckled a youth, and "Let's all have a little drinkie!" cried another, while a fat man, carrying an extravagantly-dressed doll and an immense sheaf of roses, who brought up the rear, was singing discordantly:

"He was my ma-an
And he done me wro-ong!"

"State-rooms to the left! Don't obstruct the gangway, please!"

Oom-oom-oom-oom! the foghorns moaned.

A tall man in a heavy coat, a pipe clamped firmly between his teeth, had seen fit to disregard the stewards' antiphon. He stood behind the circle of ship officials at the top of the gang-plank, a dark, stalwart silhouette in the obscurity of D Deck, by which access was obtained to the ship. Although jostled and shoved by people who continually passed him, he stayed obstinately there, leaning against the rail that ran along the outside of the cabins, his eyes fixed upon the funnel of bright light that led to the shore. Once or twice, to make passage for a more than usually insistent individual, he stepped forward, and then the light at the gangway revealed a strong, well-modelled face, as stern and imperturbable as any Roman centurion's. By his attitude he seemed to be waiting for someone, for he scarcely lifted his glance from the slow ebb of the procession up the gangway.

Presently, as, making way for a laden porter, he stepped into the light, a man with a bundle of newspapers protruding from the pocket of his raincoat

stopped in front of him. “Say, you’re W. H. Brown, aren’t you?”

For an instant the stern eyes left the gang-plank to fix themselves upon the other’s face. “Well?”

“I’m Harrod, of the *Sentinel*. Don’t you remember, I blew in on you once at the Vanderbilt Institute about a paper you read on . . . gees, what was it again? At—atomic research. . . .” He chuckled. “I got so tangled up you had to take and write the story yourself, remember? You’re not in the passenger list, are you?”

“No. I decided to sail only at the last moment. . . .”

The reporter looked wise. “Going to take a peek at what these German guys are doing? They’ve split the atom, didn’t I read somewheres? Professor, give us a break, will you? I could do with a peppy scientific story. . . .” He pulled out his bundle of papers and, producing a pencil, prepared to write. “What do I say?”

“Nothing”—crisply. “I’m going over on a short holiday. And that’s of no interest to anyone. . . .”

Harrod guffawed. “Sez you? Didn’t Millikan speak of you the other day in an interview as one of the most promising of the younger American scientists?”

“I’m afraid I don’t follow the newspapers as closely as I might. . . .” The tone was stiff. “And in any case, you’d personally oblige me by leaving my name out of your newspaper altogether. . . .”

“But see here, Mr. Brown. . . .” At this moment, however, a breathless young man stormed up and caught Harrod by the sleeve. “It’s O.K., Jerry,” he whispered hoarsely. “He has reserved. . . .”

“Alonzo Holt, d’you mean?” Harrod’s eyes snapped.

“Yep. The royal suite. A deck. The cameramen are all there. . . .” The two reporters hurried away.

Turning back towards the gangway, Brown bumped into a small, chubby individual in horn-rimmed glasses, who, on recognising him, emitted a whoop of joy and seized him by the coat. “W. H.! What luck!”

“Hullo, Willie!” Brown’s tone was not enthusiastic.

“Mulliner told me you were sailing to-night. You’re just the fellow I want. I’d like to have you meet Mary Fulton, who’s going to Europe for the first time. She’s travelling alone and doesn’t know a soul on board. Mary, my dear”—he swung round to a slim figure that stood behind him—“this is Wentworth Brown I was telling you about. . . .”

A slight girl, dressed in fawn, with a little hat perked at a coquettish angle on her small head, came shyly forward. Brown bowed and murmured formally, "Miss Fulton. . . ."

"One of Willie Vachell's amateurs," he thought to himself furiously. Vachell was a dilettante, a man of considerable private means, who was for ever mixed up with forward movements in art—Vorticist picture galleries, Impressionist sculpture, country playhouses. He did not know Willie Vachell very well—they merely happened to be members of the same old-established New York club. It was like Willie, he told himself, to stick him with a young and unprotected female for the whole of the voyage. But worse was to come.

"Mary's travelling tourist third," said Vachell confidentially. "She'll have to eat tourist third, of course, but—I needn't tell you—if a word is slipped in the right quarter, tourist third passengers are given the run of the ship, especially if they have friends in the first." He nudged Brown with his elbow. "A word from a celebrity like you, old boy, will do the trick. . . ."

Brown's glance had shifted back to the gangway. He did not speak. "I'm sure I don't want Mr. Brown to do any such thing," said Miss Fulton quickly. "Why on earth should he be saddled with someone he has never seen in his life before?"

"Aw, shoot," Vachell returned. "W. H. is a good scout. Of course, he'll be tickled to death to fix it with the purser, won't you, W. H.?"

"Of course, I'll be delighted, though I'm afraid you've got the wrong idea about my drag with the purser. . . ." Brown spoke absently, his gaze directed over their heads towards the mounting stream of passengers.

The girl was plucking her companion by the sleeve. "Come on, Willie, let's find my bunk," she said briskly. "You'll have to go ashore in a minute. . . ." A sharp, rather nervous note in her voice arrested Brown's attention, and for the first time he considered her. His first reaction towards strangers was always towards their coloration. This girl gave him the impression of old amber, with eyes oddly golden looking out of a creamy-brown face, and clustering honey-coloured hair revealed by the rakish angle of the quaint little hat.

A siren spoke out of the haze and was immediately echoed by another. A ferry tooted thrice, hysterically. "Looks like this fog had spread outside," Vachell remarked to Brown. "If there's one thing gives me the heebyjeebies, it's a fog at sea. Here's hoping you'll run out of it. . . ." He held out a plump hand. "Well, so long, old top! Keep an eye on Mary for me! You'll like her—she's a grand girl. . . ."

“Good-bye, Willie. . . .” The two men shook hands. The girl had moved away. Brown had already forgotten her. With an impatient air he resumed his watch upon the gang-plank. Now, with sudden, unconcealed eagerness, he took a step nearer the group assembled at the head of the covered way.

CHAPTER TWO

A CERTAIN flurry had broken out upon the dock. A voice bellowed peremptorily, "Stind back there!" Of a sudden, magically, the gangway was clear. The group at the head, under the bright arc, stiffened to attention as, below on the quayside, a policeman, his black rubber cape shining with wet, drove through the press of spectators and halted in a deferential attitude at the foot of the inclined plane.

A little procession showed itself. It was headed by a ship's official, on whose heels trod, with a sort of furious zeal, a perspiring individual easily identifiable as Captain McDiarmid's late visitor, Mr. Jellaby, the company passenger agent. Behind him a quiet man in a yellow oilskin coat cast challenging, suspicious glances before and behind and aloft, where, from the towering tiers of decks, line upon line of eager, absorbed faces gazed down.

There was a pause. The gangway was empty. The passenger agent and his companion, landed on the deck, conversed in whispers. "D'you think he'll make it, Mr. Mullaney?" Mr. Jellaby said hoarsely. "Sure," the other replied. "He has the strength of an ox, that one, for all he's so sick. . . ." "I offered him a stretcher," the passenger agent put in. "But he bawled me out. . . ." Mullaney laughed. "It's the devil's own rage he's in! I thought he'd have socked little Dickens one, coming down in the car! Easy, now, here he is!"

A short, gnome-like figure, almost as broad as it was long, in a cap with ear-flaps tied under the chin, and with a rug thrown across the shoulders, was visible at the foot of the slope. Ice-blue eyes, small and incredibly shrewd, peered out irascibly from under the peaked cap above the high bridge of a powerful, jutting nose. It was the face of an old man, waxen yellow, with fallen cheeks which glistened with a sparse growth of silvery stubble. The mouth was like a trap, the lips so thin and tightly compressed that they made a single hair line, the corners peevishly and fretfully bent down. With the close-set eyes, beak-like nose and that merciless mouth, the whole countenance had a hard-bitten, wooden appearance, which persisted, notwithstanding the many signs of failing health it disclosed. Dark shadows lurked under the eyes, the features were sharply peaked and there was a blueish tinge about the lips.

A name flew from mouth to mouth in the sudden silence that had fallen. Alonzo Holt! With that dominating beak and powerful jaw, with his steely, relentless regard, he looked like a Roman emperor, or, better still, with his yellowish hue, some old Pharaoh. And he ruled like a monarch over the vast interests he controlled—mines, cattle, a huge investment trust. His life was a page of American history, stretching from the days when young Al Holt led a string of mules prospecting in the hills of Montana to modern Wall Street and the forty-floor Holt Building that perpetuated his name. Although his health was known to be failing, he was still a power in finance, flitting in his special train between his old-fashioned mansion in New York, his vast estate on the Hudson, his villa at Palm Beach and his Montana ranch, a grim, bitter, lonely and foul-mouthed old man. His was one of the great fortunes of America, and so, as word spread all over the labyrinthine interior of the big liner that Alonzo Holt was coming on board, everybody scampered on deck and flocked to the rail.

Drawing on his long-cold pipe, the clear-cut, rather rugged features inscrutable, Brown, from the height of his six foot two, stared intently over the heads of the crowd down upon the figure of the millionaire. One or two people sniggered faintly at the old man as he stood there supporting himself on the arm of a little man in a black overcoat who accompanied him. There was, indeed, something grotesque about this sedulously swathed puppet, something curiously sexless, like an Egyptian mummy—the smooth waxen face might have been an old woman's. A muffled, jeering voice murmured behind Brown, "Will you pipe the old image!" and the answer, *sotto-voce*, snapped back crisply, "I wouldn't want to be in his shoes, not for all his jack!" A laugh. "You're telling me. . . ." People about Brown smiled rather shamefacedly.

But there was no hint of laughter in Brown's earnest gaze. His eyes, dark and thoughtful, had momentarily shed their sternness as he contemplated the millionaire. He pressed forward so insistently that a blue-jerseyed deck-hand standing in front of him turned about indignantly. "Say, what's eatin' ya? D'you want to have me in the dock?"

Like an old turtle Holt had thrust his lean and scraggy neck forth from his wrappings. With a violent wriggle of the body he sought to cast off the little man whose arm was linked in his. "Let go my arm, d'you hear?" the old man snapped. "D'you think I can't walk?"

His attendant did not loosen his grip. "It's just to see you up the gangway, Mr. Holt. It's greasy and you might slip. . . ."

Old Holt's pipe rose to a thin squeak. "You leave me be, Charles Dickens. When I can't walk I'll buy me a crutch. Take your hands off me,

d'you hear?"

But the other maintained his hold. "Don't go exciting yourself now! You know what the doctor told you. . . ."

The old man shook himself free. "I'm going to walk on board this ship or I'm not sailing. Let go my arm, damn it!"

He shouted the last remark so that the crowd heard, and there was a laugh. "Ride 'em, cowboy!" a dryly humorous voice drawled. "Good for you, Al!" chortled another. The millionaire chuckled shrilly and waved a bony hand in feeble acknowledgment. Then, gripping the rail and dragging one foot after the other, he slowly began the ascent.

He came up panting and wheezing, and his face, dank with perspiration, gleamed like wet ivory. But, as he set foot on deck, he glanced around him with a defiant, assertive air, as though to say, "There's life in the old man yet!" He had the swift, searching regard of one accustomed to making decisions rapidly, and it sent its challenge into every face in the attentive circle. Then Mullaney and the passenger agent and a cloud of ship's officials closed in to escort him to the elevators.

Flashlights flared and there was a rush of reporters towards the group. But a line of stewards and deck-hands held them away from the cortège and they found themselves confronted by the insignificant figure of the millionaire's companion. "Now, boys," the little man said gently, "you've got to lay off Mr. Holt this time. He's none too well, as you've seen for yourselves, and certainly not strong enough to answer a string of questions. I'll tell you anything you want to know. . . ."

"What's he going to Europe for?" a voice demanded.

"For his health. For a complete rest and change. On the doctor's orders. . . ."

"Aw, nerts to that, Charlie," said Harrod of the *Sentinel*. "Isn't the real reason for the trip that he's going to confer with J. P. Morgan about the Nachita oil merger?"

The little man gave the speaker a mildly reproving smile. "You know me, Jerry—I wouldn't tell you any lies. This is a health trip pure and simple. Mr. Holt isn't even taking any of his secretarial staff along. . . ."

"What's the matter with him, anyway?" one of the group inquired.

Dickens spread his hands. "Mr. Holt has lived a hard life. He's not as young as he was, and at his age a man has to spare his nervous system as much as possible. He has never stopped working for more than fifty years, and at sixty-eight, you know, it begins to tell on the heart. . . ."

A steward rushed up. “Mr. Dickens, Mr. Holt’s asking for you!”

“I’ll be right along. . . .” Raising his hand in farewell to the reporters, the little man hurried away.

Gongs were booming through the ship and the cry went ringing along the docks: “Visitors on shore, please!” At Brown’s elbow, as he lingered irresolute at the head of the gangway, two women, middle-aged and fashionably dressed, were talking. One said, as the seaman with the gong passed: “This means we’re sailing on time, anyway. Thank the Lord the fog’s lifting. Frank was all for cancelling my reservation. . . .”

“Perhaps Madame Alva has decided not to go?” her friend suggested.

At the sound of the name Brown drew down his rather heavy eyebrows in a suspicious scowl. Once more his eyes travelled to the gangway. Passengers were still coming up. The to and fro on the deck had edged him to the head of the gangway. Now, as he stood there, looking down, a woman, about to set foot on the deck, stumbled. Brown shot out his hand and saved her from the fall.

Haggard eyes, tragic and passionate, flashed him a look of gratitude out of a face that yet retained traces of classic beauty. She was a statuesque figure, no longer young, with proud, austere features and a frigid, commanding air. Her hair, dark and thickly clustering, was heavily streaked with grey. She was dressed rather oddly, her clothes, under the somewhat shabby fur coat she wore, hanging loosely upon her. Like her looks, they had seen their best days, and altogether the impression she gave was one of wilted beauty and fallen grandeur. Two deep furrows between the eyes marred the smoothness of her high, white forehead and lent the whole face a brooding, distracted air. She was clasping a leather jewel case, a well-worn affair of blue morocco, with the initials “R. H.” stamped on the side.

There was a label attached to the jewel case. Brown’s eye, which had fastened upon the initials, mechanically sought out the label. “Chase National Bank” was printed at the top, and below, written in, was the name “Mrs. Riba Craven.” Gathering her coat about her, the woman stood for a moment, gazing around, quite in the manner of a tragedy queen. A steward sang out: “State-rooms to the left! Don’t obstruct the gangway!”

Brown stirred from the reverie into which he had fallen. He glanced up to find the woman’s dark eyes resting interrogatively upon his. “I wonder if you can tell me,” she said in a low and thrilling voice, “whether Mr. Holt, Mr. Alonzo Holt, is already on board?”

The man stiffened. “Why, yes,” he replied tonelessly. “He arrived a few minutes ago. . . .”

She inclined her head gratefully. Then, folding her wrap about her, she turned and left him without a word.

The visitors were starting to leave the ship. Now once more the name of Madame Alva struck upon Brown's ears. The women he had heard talking before were still there. "There's ten minutes yet," said the first woman. "People like Madame Alva always cut it fine. The artistic temperament, you know!"

"My gracious, I hope you're right," sighed the other. "I'm simply crazy to see her. I've never been able to afford her prices—I mean, a hundred dollars just for a reading in the crystal—I ask you! But Sarah Foster has been to her lots of times, and she says she foretold everything—all about Harry losing his money and Betty's trip out West and. . . ."

"I thought her simply fascinating when I met her at the Lomaxes," the first woman broke in. "A bit creepy, you know, but full of magnetism. At lunch or dinner—any old time, you know—she'll go into one of her trances and talk to her controls. There's one called Florence, and a Venetian poet—Aldo, I think his name is—and Mohannes, the Indian chief—it absolutely gives you creeps all up your spine to hear her. I mean to go up and recall myself to her the very first chance I get. And I'll introduce you, Ethel. . . ."

"Oh, Lou, that's simply swell of you. . . ."

"Hush," said the other; "here she is. . . ."

So this was Madame Alva, the famous medium and New York society's latest craze, was Brown's reflection. He saw a short, blousy woman in a nondescript overcoat with a collar of rubbed fur, and untidy, mouse-coloured hair straggling out from under the brim of her stained felt hat. She had a heavy, puffy countenance with cheeks that hung down in pouches on either side of a large, determined-looking mouth. In the comparative dimness of the covered way the face was insignificant—she might have been a midwife or a washerwoman as she plodded up the slope, her eyes on the ground. It was only when she emerged into the pool of light on the deck and raised her head to gaze about her that Brown perceived how the simple action of lifting her eyelids changed the whole character of her face.

The eyes, large and set wide apart, were extraordinary. In hue they were greenish, with shades that came and went like the lustre of an opal. Their depth was unfathomable. There was hypnotic power and a trace of insanity, the scientist in Brown appraised, in the unrevealing fixity of their regard. There was high intelligence, purpose and, he thought, considerable business acumen, of which the vacuous countenance and gross body gave no hint, in Madame Alva's eyes.

A curious thing happened as she stepped upon the deck, carrying a battered hat-box and a lamentably-rolled rug in a strap. She suddenly stood stock-still and, dropping her belongings on the ground, began to shake all over. Then, in a strange, strangled voice like a ventriloquist's, she started to groan and mutter to herself.

Instantly a ship's official called sharply, "Now then, ma'am, if you please. You're blocking the gangway!" and at the same moment a red-cheeked woman, who was following, caught Madame Alva by the arm. "*So, kommen Sie, Madame!*" she said in German, and gathering up the medium's packages, led her, still muttering, away.

The waxing commotion as the hour of departure grew nigh fell unheeded on Brown's ears as he stood there, sucking at his still unlit pipe. A cross-section of humanity, he summed up the stream of passengers whom for the past half-hour he had watched pouring incessantly into the ship. All the hopes and fears, the lofty ideals and petty weaknesses of human nature, he reflected, were concentrated in the innumerable little cells of the immense hive which, for the next six days, was to be their common home. Always the shuttle of fate was busy, weaving human destinies together. He wondered what pattern it would contrive out of the skeins gathered there.

The last of the visitors had left the liner, and preparations were being made to cast loose when, below on the dock, a man was visible thrusting his way through the crowd. At the foot of the gangway he paused to take an attaché case from a liveried chauffeur who accompanied him, and then, very composedly, came on board, a sedate and well-groomed figure in grey tweed with white buckskin gloves. "That was a near thing," said the official who helped him to the deck. The new-comer glanced at his watch and laughed. "Thirty seconds to go," he remarked easily. "Where's my state-room? I reserved at the last minute. The name is Winstay. . . ." "They'll tell you at the purser's office," was the brisk reply. Already the gangway was being drawn in.

At last the ship was moving. The lights of the customs shed swam in the haze; waving hands and handkerchiefs were a blur. The air dripped moisture.

From out the pall of greyness where the Atlantic lay, a foghorn sent its mournful, slow plaint.

CHAPTER THREE

THE coat of his Jaeger pyjamas gaping open upon his hairy old chest, a tweed cap crammed on his grizzled head, Alonzo Holt sat propped up among his pillows, a long black cigar cocked at an aggressive angle from the corner of his mouth. The vastness of the great gold bed seemed to dwarf the squat, broad figure as he reclined there in the dimness of soft, silk-shaded lights mirroring themselves in the inlaid *boiserie* of the royal suite. The ceiling was a riot of sprawling nymphs and flying cupids. Resting quietly, with the distant tremor of the turbines in his ears, the old man contemplated them.

Upon one nymph in particular he fixed his steely blue eye. She sat, wreathed in roses, displaying an expanse of milk-white back. Leila had had skin like that. Odd, how often lately he had found himself thinking of Leila: it must be—what?—thirty years since she had divorced him. A bad sign, to go delving into the past: it showed he was losing his grip. If only he didn't feel so cursedly weak! Even his cigar didn't taste right!

He looked very frail as he lay there. But the rather wizened face, for all its pallor, was full of fight. That was Alonzo Holt—a fighter. It showed in the terrible stubbornness, the fierce tenacity, of the mouth. For fifty-eight years, ever since the days when, a barefoot boy of ten, he had ploughed his father's wretched Ohio farm, he had battled with life, taking hard knocks and dealing them, and always coming back for more. One glance at that flinty, crabbed countenance showed a man who, at sixty-eight, was immune to human suffering, immune in his own sensibility to pain, immune to the pain he caused to others.

Now he raised up his voice and shouted, "Dickens!" and again "Dickens! Where the devil are you?" The little man who had come on board with him appeared from the sitting-room. "Here I am. . . ."

He spoke soothingly but without servility, in the tone of one who is a privileged confidant. No one knew exactly Dickens's precise position or the scope of his duties. His stunted form, always neatly dressed in dark clothes, was never very far from the thick-set figure of his employer. All day long it was "See Dickens!" or "Ask Dickens!" or "I'll have Dickens call you!" For ever the rather frightened eyes, the sunken, putty-coloured face, were

hovering about behind old Holt. Dickens was valet, secretary, sick attendant and courier all in one. Holt's enemies—and their name was legion—declared that the millionaire used Dickens to perform jobs which were too dirty or too dangerous for him to perform himself.

"What d'you mean by leaving me alone?" the old man demanded. "What are you doing?"

"Unpacking. . . ." Sullenly.

"Can't I unpack for myself? To hear you, you'd think I was at death's door. You're not shot of me yet, Charles Dickens, and don't you think it. Where's Mullaney?"

"Gone to bed. . . ."

"Damn it," the millionaire exploded, "you're all alike. You see Mullaney, first thing in the morning, and tell him he's fired. . . ."

"You sent him off to bed yourself. . . ."

But the old man disregarded the rejoinder. He was peering about the room. "Why haven't you put out my toilet things?"

"Because I haven't got to the dressing-case yet. . . ."

"Damn your eyes, Charles Dickens, what do I pay you for? I only gave you a job out of charity, didn't I? Didn't I? D'you know anyone else who'd have hired you? Do you? Answer me!"

"No." Sullenly.

"Then get the hell out of here and finish unpacking the trunks." With an imperturbable face the other tiptoed away. But no sooner was he gone than Holt called him back. "Dickens! Dickens!" The little man reappeared.

"No sulking," the millionaire piped. "Sit down there"—his skinny finger indicated the foot of the bed—"where I can see you. Wait! Give me my wallet on the desk behind you!" From the wallet the old man drew a wad of money, stripped off a bill and flung it on the bedspread. "Stick that in your jeans!"

The colourless face registered nothing. "Thanks, Mr. Holt. . . ." The little man pocketed the note—it was for a hundred dollars. Old Holt chuckled. "You must be a rich man, Charlie, with what you've managed to tuck away since you've been with me. . . ." Suddenly he put his cigar down and clapped his hand to his side. "I feel so weak," he whimpered.

Dickens rose. "I'll get your medicine. . . ."

"Sit down!" the millionaire barked. "I'm low to-night. It's that damned fog. It always gets me. . . ."

"Fog depresses everyone," the other put in soothingly.

"Don't talk foolish. I'm not everyone. D'you know what they used to call me in Montana? Old Hickory-face. I was tough, see, and a glutton for punishment, and they knew it—yes, sirree! The boys'd get a good laugh if they could see me now, squealing about a little fog. But I'm not myself; I get to imagining things. Will you listen to those damned sirens! Every time I hear them I think of the *Titanic* rushing through the fog to meet that iceberg. I don't want to die yet, Charlie. There's so much to do. And who's to come after me? Who's to carry on the business?"

"There's your son. . . ."

"If he's still alive. How long is it since Leila took him away with her?"

"Thirty-one years, you told me. . . ."

"That's right. That'd make him thirty-two, if he isn't dead. Odd to think that, somewhere in this country, there's a travelling salesman, maybe, or a bank clerk, who has millions waiting for him. . . ." He lifted his head sharply. "Who's that outside?"

Dickens went to the door. "Nobody. . . ." He returned to the bed. "You open your trap about that new will of mine, and I'll strangle you with my own hands," old Holt rasped savagely. "It'll be time enough to shoot off your mouth about it when I'm ready for the boneyard. . . ." He caught his side again. "Gosh, I feel terrible. If only those cursed sirens would stop. Madame Alva warned me of the water. . . ."

His companion sniffed. "You don't want to pay any attention to what that fake told you, Mr. Holt. . . ."

The millionaire's face crimsoned. "You're right. But I can't help thinking of it. And when I hear those sirens I'm afraid"—his voice rose almost hysterically—"I'm afraid!"

There was a light tap at the door communicating with the sitting-room. Dickens went to it. The steward was there with a tray. "The White Rock you ordered, sir. . . ."

The other closed the door softly behind him. "Was that you creeping about outside just now?" he demanded severely. "Why couldn't you put the tray down without bothering me?"

"Well, sir, I knocked several times without getting no answer. . . ."

"All right." Dickens shut him off. "What's your name, my man?"

"Parsons, sir!"

"Well, Parsons, don't you ever come knocking at the bedroom door again. Mr. Holt mustn't be disturbed when he's resting. That'll be all now. . . ."

The steward departed. Inclining his ear towards the bedroom and hearing no sound, Dickens returned to his unpacking. He was thus occupied when the door giving on the corridor was rapped and gently opened.

At the sight of the tall figure that looked in upon him from the corridor, Dickens quickly laid aside the pile of shirts he was carrying and went forward. "Dr. Winstay!" he exclaimed in considerable astonishment. "Why, sir, this is a surprise! Do you mean to say you're going to Europe too? Does Mr. Holt know?"

With a laugh Dr. Winstay shook his head. "I didn't know myself until the last minute. I only caught the boat with thirty seconds to spare. . . ." He lowered his voice. "Well, how is he?"

"Not so good," the other replied in the same tone. "I had a rare lot of trouble getting him to take his drops. He's restless to-night. It's the fog—it scares him. . . ."

"It's much clearer outside," the doctor said. "Haven't you noticed that we've put on speed?"

A raucous shout of "Dickens!" from the inner room interrupted him. Winstay put down his soft grey hat. "I'll go," he announced.

The millionaire was straining a wrathful, crimson face towards the door. He had obviously been on the point of withering the unfortunate Dickens with another blast of invective; the fact that it was not Dickens who entered found him at a loss. He greeted the doctor's breezy "Good evening, Mr. Holt!" with a sour scowl. "How the devil do you come here?" he growled.

In a posture of unstudied ease, legs straddled, hands in jacket pockets, Dr. Winstay surveyed him with complete good-humour. "Well," he remarked, "I promised you I'd try and run over to pay you a little visit while you were on the other side, didn't I? All that's happened is that I've advanced the date. . . ." He seated himself on the edge of the bed. "It struck me suddenly, while I was eating a lonely dinner in my apartment to-night, that I hadn't had a holiday in three years. I had a look at my diary and decided I really could get away. So I had my secretary cancel all my appointments for the next three weeks, and telephone for a berth on this ship. . . ."

Old Holt grunted. " 'Pears like I can't go to Europe for a vacation without you running after me. And don't think you can charge me with all your cancelled appointments, Caryl Winstay, for I won't have it!"

The doctor laughed. "No fear of that, Mr. Holt. For the past three years I've been promising myself this trip to Europe. It won't be a long holiday—

a week each way and a week over there—and I intend to enjoy every minute of it. And that means—no patients!"

"That won't get you out of prescribing for me if I want you," the millionaire grumbled. "It was you that insisted on my taking this vacation, and if you think I'm going to have a lot of foreign doctors pawing me about. . . ."

"All right, all right," Winstay laughingly pacified him. "We'll see how you get on. You're not looking too grand, you know—you've been overdoing things again!"

"It's this weakness," Holt sighed irritably. "It seems like I can't get my strength back. . . ."

The doctor drew into his the gnarled old hand that lay outside the silken coverlet. "What was the first car you ever owned?" he asked.

"A Ford, I guess. . . ."

"When did you buy it?"

" 'Way back. Nineteen-o-two or three. . . ."

"What do you suppose would happen if you had your old T model to-day and fitted it with a brand-new eight-cylinder engine?"

Holt grinned. "She'd rattle herself to pieces, I reckon. . . ."

"Exactly. Yet that's what you're trying to do with your organism. You have the engine of a young fellow of thirty, bless you, and the—er—chassis of a man of sixty-eight. You've got to take it easy. . . ."

"Isn't that why I'm going to France?"

"Yes. But you can wear yourself out in France just as easily as in America if you won't follow my instructions. . . ."

"Well, I do, don't I? Isn't this trip your idea?"

The millionaire was much calmer now. He had even lit a fresh cigar and was puffing away with evident enjoyment. The bedroom was very quiet—from time to time they could hear Dickens moving about behind the closed door leading into the sitting-room. The great ship was forging rapidly through the night in a dead calm sea.

"Sure," said Winstay. "It's all right as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough. You've got to reorganise your whole mode of living. In the first place, you really must engage a first-class secretary and a competent valet. . . ."

Old Holt's teeth gritted hard on his cigar. "Fire Dickens, d'you mean?"

The doctor shrugged his broad shoulders. "You'd pension him off, I suppose, he has been with you for so long. When I dropped in to see you at

the house this morning I found you doing your own packing, because, you told me, Dickens is such a muddler. Well, at your time of life, my friend, we really can't have you stooping over trunks—it won't do. And Dickens, with all his excellent qualities, is not a fit person to take charge of all your correspondence during a prolonged stay abroad. . . ."

The man in the bed shook his head obstinately. "I can't get rid of Charlie. Why, he's 'most the only friend I've got. Besides, I'm used to him and he knows my ways. Why, darn it, I don't believe the little runt would know what to do with himself if we parted, he's been with me that long. . . ."

Winstay smiled down at the wrinkled face. "All the same, I do think he's getting past his work. . . ."

The grim mouth set tight. "He's useful to me. And he's cheap. D'you know what I pay him? A hundred dollars a month and his keep. Where'd I get anyone else for that, will you tell me?"

"My only idea. . . ." the doctor was beginning, but the other would not be interrupted. "Besides, he looks after my interests. If it hadn't been for Charlie that damned Alva woman would still be stringing me along for a sucker. When I think of the thousands of dollars she's had out of me with her phony crystal-gazing and her fake séances, by golly, I feel that the old man's about ripe for the booby hatch. . . ." He stuck out his chin. "But I've learned my lesson. I'm through with spiritism for good. . . ."

His companion hoisted his shoulders. "You're a rich man: you can afford to pay for your experience. After all there was a time, wasn't there? when you derived a lot of consolation and . . . and inspiration from your investigations into survivalism—that's the latest word for it, isn't it? Didn't you tell me that this Madame What's-her-name had put you in touch with your dead mother?"

"I'll say she did," old Holt declared wrathfully. "And got away with it till Charlie and I caught her red-handed with the gramophone horn in her fist. She's smooth enough, I'll grant her that. And right smart. First and last, she must of had the best part of a hundred thousand out of me. . . ."

Winstay posed his lips in a noiseless whistle. "Well," he said gently, "the best thing you can do now is to forget all about it. You get so easily excited—you must learn to calm down. . . ."

The old man, crabbed and suspicious, responded to the note of almost filial affection in the doctor's tone. He had been drawn to Winstay from the first because the doctor gave himself no airs—he always seemed to start out from the premise that everybody liked him. He was smiling now and, irritated and fuming though he was, the old man returned his smile.

But he had to have the last word. “No one ever had Al Holt for a sucker twice,” he piped stubbornly. “I’m through with the whole damned shebang!”

Winstay laughed good-humouredly and stood up. “Good for you! Now I’m going to turn off the lights and let you get some sleep. I’ll be along to see you in the morning. . . .”

He touched the switch and darkness fell in the great, pompous chamber. The movement of the ship was livening. Loose objects jarred gently to the throb of the screws as he passed through the trunk-littered sitting-room and, nodding good night to Dickens, made his way to the end of the corridor where his cabin was located.

CHAPTER FOUR

In an inside cabin on D deck, Madame Alva, her shapeless body loosely covered by a faded pink *négligé*, was crouched on her bunk, writing a letter in pencil. A wardrobe trunk, gushing a variety of garments, stood open against the wall. The washbasin was filled with a mass of magnificent pink roses thrust into water, and on the seat under the port-hole a basket of fruit, tied up with red ribbon, a five-pound box of candy, and a parcel of books loosely freed from their wrapping, were ranged.

As the door was lightly rapped Madame Alva popped her letter into an envelope which was already addressed, licked the flap and thrust the envelope under the pillow. "Come!" she cried in her fruity baritone.

The red-cheeked German maid was there. "Well," said Madame Alva crisply, "what did the purser say?"

Helplessly the woman spread her hands. "To-night, he say, it is impossible to change you. But in the morning he will see. . . ."

"The dirty bum!" the woman on the bunk declared with feeling. "If I'd given you a twenty spot to slip the fat slob, he'd have changed me fast enough. Two hundred bucks for a dump I wouldn't put my dog to sleep in. Uh!" She emitted an exasperated snort.

The maid shrugged her shoulders. "You go to bed now, I think. You acting like you was crazy to-night. What for you want to go throwing a trance when you come on board, *hein*? There wasn't nobody but me and a couple of stooards to look at you. . . ."

Madame Alva grunted. "It's funny, but I never remember a thing like that happening before. . . ."

The other yawned. "Oh, yeah?"

"You know me, Minna," said the woman on the bed. "As God is my judge, that trance to-night was no fake. Just as I stepped on board the fog seemed to rise up and catch me by the throat and I had the godawfullest sensation of fear. The next thing I knew I was in the cabin here and you were rubbing my hands. Did I say anything?"

"Sure," rejoined Minna composedly. "A lot of foolishness. Something about 'death in the fog'. . . ."

Madame Alva nodded sombrely. “I remember now. The moment I set foot on the ship I smelt death. It was a warning. I wish to God we’d never come. . . .”

“*Ach, wo!*” exclaimed the maid. “You imagine things: your nerves are upset. Ever since your last séance with the old man you are so nervous. . . .”

The woman on the bunk grunted. “That was the worst slip-up I ever had. It got me badly rattled. Well, Holt’s on board, that’s one good thing. I’ve got six days to make my peace with the old buzzard. . . .” She gazed about her with disfavour. “I can put up with the hell of a lot of discomfort for a million bucks, I guess. What did you do with that quart of scotch?”

The maid routed about in a hat-box and passed the bottle across. But at that moment the door was lightly scratched and a woman’s voice spoke caressingly, “May I come in?” Hastily Madame Alva handed the bottle back. When Minna had restored it to the hat-box, “See who that is, will you?” she bade the maid.

Minna opened the door an inch. “It’s Mrs. Hawksley,” she said in an undertone and, on a sign from Madame Alva, admitted a fluffy matron, expensively coated in mink, with two rows of large pearls about her neck. “Darling Alva,” the visitor bubbled effusively, “I hope it’s not too late for a little call. But on my way to bed I couldn’t resist the temptation to pop in and see if you’d had my flowers. . . .”

A curious change had come over the woman on the bunk. Every trace of ill-humour had vanished from the heavy face, leaving it grave and placid. “Indeed I did, dearest Mrs. Hawksley,” the medium answered in a slow, sonorous voice. “You and the other darling friends spoil me dreadfully. See what a beautiful basket of fruit the Princess sent. The chocolates are from sweet Mrs. Cadwallader Firbank. . . .”

Mrs. Hawksley was looking about her. “But, Alva dearest, you can’t possibly stay here. An inside cabin! I never heard of such a thing!”

The medium smiled wanly. “It’s all my poverty can afford, dearest. In any case, in the transcendental life I lead, I take no heed of my surroundings. Minna there will tell you, it makes no difference to me where I sleep or what I eat and drink. Why, just before you came in she wanted to order me a little bottle of champagne because she knows I get seasick so easily. ‘Why, Minna,’ I told her, ‘even if I could afford it, I wouldn’t let you do it. It’s not the comfort of the body that matters,’ I said, ‘it’s the peace of the soul.’ What we eat and drink is of no account as long as we try and think beautiful thoughts. . . .”

"You say such lovely things, dear Alva," cried the visitor ecstatically. "But all the same you must have your champagne. As it happens, Mr. Hawksley sent me a case on board and Minna's coming with me right away to fetch you a bottle. And to-morrow I'm going straight to the purser myself to see that you get a decent state-room. . . ." She sighed. "It's such a comfort to have you on board. We must have some long talks. . . ." She extended her hand. "Bless you, my dear. That last reading you gave me made me so happy. Until to-morrow, then. . . ."

Madame Alva lifted Mrs. Hawksley's hand and kissed it. "Go in peace, dear friend. The crystal has never failed me yet. Great happiness is in store for you. . . ."

Waiting until her visitor and the maid had disappeared, the medium slipped her overcoat over her *négligé* and, taking her letter out from under the pillow, crept out into the quiet corridor. By an inside companion she made her way up to A deck where she paused, peering at the numbers. Treading noiselessly in his list slippers, a steward came along the passage. Madame Alva, the letter clutched in her hand, approached him. "Excuse me. . . ," she began, then broke off abruptly.

The steward, a swarthy, powerfully-built man, was smiling at her craftily out of a great gash of a mouth. "Well, well, well," he murmured softly in a snarling, Cockney voice, "I'm blowed if it ain't Ada!"

Every tinge of colour had drained out of the woman's face. Her strange green eyes were shadowed with a nameless fear. "You!" she gasped. She looked as though she were about to faint. "Jest a minnit," said the steward. "Me an' you 'as got to 'ave a word, milady!" He had a blanket draped across his arm. He went to a cabin close by and rapped. "It's the stooard, Mr. Brown, with the blanket you arst fer. . . ." The door gaped and he passed the blanket in, then went to the bell-register, clicked it, and came back to where Madame Alva, her hands clasped to her breast, stood like a statue.

The steward eyed her contemptuously. He was a hirsute fellow, his face from cheekbone to the collar of his white drill jacket darkened with a bluish growth of beard, with a gimlet, shifty eye. "Come up in the world, 'aven't yer?" he sneered with an unpleasant laugh. "First class and 'ang the expense. 'Strewth!" His ferrety gaze continued to muster her. "Puttin' on weight, aren't yer, ole girl? Well, we none of us don't get no younger. It must be—what? five years since you wuz parted from yer loving 'usband. . . ."

She clutched his hand. "Stop it! Are you crazy?" She cast an apprehensive glance along the corridor. From the far end a tall figure was approaching—it was Dr. Winstay on his way to bed. The door of an

unoccupied state-room stood open and without a moment's hesitation she slipped inside. Her companion followed after. " 'Ere, wot's the gyme?"

Swiftly she closed the door. "There's someone coming. What d'you suppose people will think of me gossiping with a steward at this time of night? Now, listen to me, Fred Parsons! You've got to lay off me, d'you hear?"

"Sure," he jeered. "Me with my measly thirty bob a week and you pullin' in the dollars. I've got me rights, 'aven't I?" he went on with sudden irascibility, "not to mention wot I know about yer. . . ." He cocked his eye at her. "What'd yer posh Park Avenoo friends say if they knew 'ow Madame Alva, the fymous medjum, used to earn 'er bread-and-butter. . . ."

Her face clouded over. "You know my name?"

"I rekernised yer as you come aboard. . . ." He chuckled. " 'Swelp me, Ada, it wuz like ole times seein' you again. Remember the larst job we pulled, that ole geyser at the South-Western at S'uthampton? 'Wot, may I harsk, sir, is my lawful, wedded wife a-doin' of in your bedroom? You shall 'ear from my solicitors in the morning!' Coo, 'is fyce!" He simmered silently.

Her eyes distraught, she caught his arm. "Quiet! There's someone outside!"

Noiselessly, he moved to the door and with a sudden, quiet movement opened it. The corridor was empty but somewhere close at hand there was the sound of a door gently closing. They exchanged a glance. Madame Alva was burrowing in her purse. "There's two hundred dollars," said she, giving the steward a couple of bills. "I'm not rich, Fred, but I'll treat you right. Only lay off me, will you? or you'll ruin everything. I'll be seeing you. . . ."

With an understanding nod, Parsons pocketed the money, his saturnine countenance avid with greed. Then his companion slipped away.

In a narrow cabin communicating with the second bedroom of the royal suite where Dickens slept, that gentleman, glass in hand, faced Mullaney across a table where a bottle of White Label, a siphon and a plate of sandwiches were disposed. For many years it had been Alonzo Holt's habit to keep a private detective in constant attendance upon him. Chris Mullaney was the latest in a long series of these personal guards. The curious delusion that the ability to amass wealth implies a disposition to distribute it in charity, deserving or undeserving, attracts shoals of beggars to the millionaire's door. In addition to these, Alonzo Holt's highly individual

method of doing business not infrequently brought him callers with grievances, real or imaginary, to air, with their silence for sale at a price, or, on occasion, with a well-nourished grudge to repay and perhaps a six-shooter under the left armpit as a handy means of settlement. Dickens took care of the properly accredited visitors in quest of subscriptions or donations, the organising secretaries, the society patronesses: the professional mendicants, the blackmailers and the lunatics were Mullaney's affair.

His large feet comfortably stemmed against the table as he sat on his bunk, the detective gravely contemplated his visitor. Mullaney was a hefty individual with the round eyes, button nose and red cheeks which are found in the centre of Ireland. He was given to taciturnity, having discovered in his twelve years' service with the New York Detective Bureau that your professional criminal is usually talkative and most effectually disconcerted by an enigmatic and forbidding silence. Also Mr. Mullaney's mental processes were on the slow side; it came easier to him to listen than to talk.

With faint audible masticating sounds Dickens was eating a sandwich. He munched with a faintly apologetic air. That was Dickens's way—he seemed always to be apologising for something. The darnedest little old cuss. He went through life as though saying, "Pardon my shadow! Excuse me if I breathe a little of your air!" throwing quick glances about him out of those bright, bird-like eyes of his as watchful as a robin on a lawn. He spoke almost in a whisper, his voice muffled as though with a soft pedal, and he had a trick of scarcely moving his lips when he talked. A friendly enough little son of a gun, Mullaney would tell himself, but oddly stand-offish—you never got anywheres with him.

"This is the first bite I've had since lunch," he mumbled now with his mouth full. "He's been a terror all day. . . ." He wagged a head as grey as a badger. "Sometimes I wonder if his mind isn't going back on him, Chris. What d'you think happened to-night, after I got him to bed? I'll be darned if he didn't start talking about his first wife. . . ."

"His first wife?" echoed Mullaney in surprise. "I never knew that the old man had been married twice. . . ."

Another sage headshake. "There's not many knows it—I don't suppose he's thought of her in thirty years. Going on for thirty-one, it is, since she divorced him, over some Broadway actress. From the South, she was, a sweet girl, I've heard say. It was the old story, I guess, of the young fellow who marries for love and makes his pile so fast that the wife can't tag along. Anyway, when he picked up with this New York jane, she lit out and took the kid with her. Then she divorced him. . . ."

"There was a kid, you say?"

The other's nod was wary. "Yes, but we don't talk about it. The boy's dead, for all that the old man knows. The woman, too, I dare say. . . ."

Mullaney laughed and stretched for a sandwich. "Well, it was the second Mrs. Holt was on his mind when he talked to me yesterday. Say, give us a line of this business, willya, Charlie? Divorced, are they?"

Dickens shook his head. "That's what makes the boss so piping wild. She won't give him a divorce. . . ."

The detective laughed again. " 'Wild' is right. Gosh, how he hates that woman! Why's she stalling? Religious, is she?"

"It's not that. She's always hoping to get him back, I guess. . . ."

"Who was she? Not this Broadway floosie you was telling me about?"

"I'll say not. From a good old family she was, New Yorkers. . . ." Dickens sipped his highball and put the glass down. "You know how it is, Chris, when the social bug bites a guy—well, it seems like the boss, having got shut of his first, thought he'd grab himself his second out of the top of the basket. She'd scarce a nickel to her name when he took and married her. But that didn't faze her any. They know how to chuck the money around, that New York lot, and she stepped out. The old man's tight for all his jack. . . ."

Mullaney's laugh was dry. "You're telling me. . . ."

"And he wouldn't stand for it. In the end he ups and walks out on her. That was five years ago. She's been at him ever since. There was a time when she was for ever coming round to the house or the office, calling him on the phone, writing him letters. It's been better since she went to Paris to live, though she's been back to see him once or twice and still keeps writing, the nuttiest stuff. . . ."

"The boss says she's touched. . . ."

Dickens sighed. "She's one of these masterful women that don't know when they're beat. She never got over the old man throwing her out. It kind of soured her, I guess. . . ."

"She's always at him for money, isn't she? She's a crazy spender, the boss says. . . ."

"Gambling's her trouble. Giving her money is like dropping it over the side of the ship here. Plays the markets, all that stuff. . . ."

"The old man told me she'd had thousands out of him. . . ."

"That's right. But when the Wall Street crash cleaned her out, the boss struck. Up to then she'd always had the allowance he'd made her when they

lived together and I'd paid the bills. She wouldn't have it any other way, no legal settlement, I mean, because she was always sure he'd have her back. But when she went down in the market the old man threatened to cut off the allowance altogether unless she went to Europe to live. . . ."

"She still keeps at him, doesn't she? What about this letter the other day?"

Dickens glanced up sharply. "He told you about that, did he?"

"Sure. I didn't understand him so well. She'd read something in some newspaper about his will, wasn't that it?"

The other nodded. "It was a piece about him leaving his money to some institution or other—a lot of boloney. But she was all worked up about it. . . ."

The detective laughed. "So the boss told me. Wrote him she wishes he was dead, didn't she?"

Dickens smiled wryly. "That's nothing new. You see, as long as Holt's alive, she's kept out of her money. . . ."

"Inherits from him, does she?"

"Ten millions. Under the marriage settlement. But she has this nutty idea that she ought to come into the whole estate. . . ."

Mullaney shrugged. "She should worry. He can't live for ever. . . ."

The other sighed gently. "I believe it's the thought of Mrs. Holt blowing that ten millions when he's gone that keeps the old man alive. . . ." He looked rather narrowly at his companion. "What else did he tell you about her?"

Mullaney yawned. "He said that if she ever showed up, when we was over on the other side, to give her the air, pronto, that if he even set eyes on her, it was the gate for me!"

With a movement of the head Dickens beckoned his companion to draw nearer. "We don't want any scandal with Mrs. H., Chris. I'm telling you—she's apt to be violent. I can handle her—I've handled her before. If she drops around when we're in Paris or any place else, tip me off, see? But not a word to the boss. . . ."

"Okay, Charlie," said Mullaney, and gaped again. He stretched expansively. "It must be late. What about hitting the hay?"

From his vest pocket Dickens drew an old-fashioned watch with a cover that flew up. "Dear, dear," he said, after a glance at it, "it's after two. . . ." He stood up. "See you in the morning, Chris. Nine o'clock as usual. . . ."

"Okay. Good night, Charlie!"

Mullaney was in his pyjamas when the outer door was softly tapped. He went to it. A large, bald-headed man, in a blue serge uniform tunic, was there. “My name’s Harris. I’m the chief inspector on this ship,” he introduced himself in an unmistakably English voice. “As it might be, the ship’s detective, that’s to say, me and my men are the ship’s police. The purser told me to look you up. I happened to notice the light under your door. With Holt, aren’t you?”

“Sure. Step in, Mr. Harris. The name’s Mullaney. Take a drink!”

Mr. Harris did not drink on trips; it was just a little rule of his. He had almost as many friends at Center Street, he told Mullaney, as at Scotland Yard—he had done eighteen years in the Criminal Investigation Department. And so Mr. Mullaney had gone from the New York Police to the Department of Justice at Washington?—a smart chap, William J. Burns, a real, smart chap. And now Mullaney was with Holt, a pretty soft job, eh?

“The job’s all right,” said Mullaney.

Mr. Harris fluttered an eyelid. “I know. I’ve heard things from your predecessors. How often has he fired you?”

“Only four times. This is my fifth week with him. . . .”

The other chuckled silently. “Well,” he said, “I won’t keep you. I’m just taking a look round before I turn in. Let me know if there’s anything I can do. . . .”

“I surely will. . . .”

The Englishman creaked out.

Rimmed in madder, a great round moon beamed peacefully down upon the ship placidly furrowing her way through an untroubled sea. The smell of fog yet lingered in the air and the horizon was a smear of smoky grey. As Mr. Harris emerged from the companion and saw the boat deck, drenched in silvery light, stretching away before him, he raised his head and sniffed. “We’re running into more fog, or I’m a Dutchman,” he murmured to himself.

A woman stood at the rail, between two life-boats, gazing at the moon. She was wearing a long, dark coat and a scarf was bound about her head. As the detective drew near it seemed to him that she was holding a conversation with herself, for her lips and hands moved. At the sound of his firm policeman’s tread she swung sharply about, and he saw, in the moon’s pallor, that her hair under the scarf was iron-grey. For an instant she

contemplated him out of mournful, suspicious eyes, then, turning, walked quickly away.

He watched her disappear down the adjacent companion and from the foot of the stair let his glance follow her along the promenade, until she vanished into the main lobby. Well, there were all sorts on the ships, just as it took all sorts to make a world. Humanity, in his simple philosophy, was divided into three classes—the potential crooks, the active ones, and the nuts. Automatically, his mind classified the nocturnal rover in the last category. Well, as long as she didn't go jumping overboard. . . . The first-class passengers were a privileged class. They got away with the darnedest things—state-room doors that creaked at night, whoopee parties, and these flappers drinking cocktails all over the place—it was disconcerting to a man who was chapel. Still, see everything, say nothing, except on rare occasions, and forget nothing, was a pretty good rule for a ship's detective. It was George Harris's.

With a mental note to identify next day the lady with the staring eyes, he went off to bed.

CHAPTER FIVE

NEXT day the *Barbaric's* passengers awoke to a raw and sunless morning. It was freely predicted that the big money would be on the low field when the customary smoke-room pool on the ship's daily run would be auctioned off after dinner, for the *Barbaric* was loitering along at half-speed, the centre of a wide axis of sea and sky indistinguishably blended.

Wentworth Brown, stepping out for a brisk constitutional along the deck, found himself accosted by one of the ship's officers. It was a hearty, youngish man, with an inquisitive air, who introduced himself as Alloway, the ship's surgeon. Clapping the other smartly on the back, he recalled their meeting, ten years before, at an inn at Freudenstadt when Brown, on vacation from the University of Virginia, was on a walking tour in the Black Forest.

Brown vaguely remembered the rather blatant medical student who had forced his company upon him. Even in his college days he had had a tendency towards seclusion, which, in his later years, his mother's failing health and the absorbing nature of his work, had only enhanced. While his mother lived, all the leisure he had been able to spare from his New York laboratory had been spent with her in the small Virginian town where she led a peaceful, rather solitary existence on her small income supplemented by what his scientific writings brought in. Her death, two years before, had found him at a loss. Though still in the early thirties, he had few men and fewer women friends, and he seemed to lack the incentive to make new friendships.

His growing reputation as a scientist made it impossible for him to shun society altogether. There were conferences to attend, with their inevitable rounds of dinners and receptions, and one or two hostesses, on the wave of the Einstein vogue, had tried to lionise him. But not very successfully. It was not that he was a misanthrope, a hermit. People who knew him liked him. He played a good game of bridge; and when the subject interested him he was an excellent talker. But he was hard to know: his instinct was always to repel intimacy. Women, irritated by his taciturnity and eyeing his untidy hair, spoke of him behind his back as boorish, uncouth—one said snippishly that it was evident he understood bugs better than women. "Quite," he had observed cheerfully when the remark was repeated to him. "Bacilli are much

easier to understand!" But at heart he was neither a boor nor a misogynist—it was merely that his own interior life satisfied him. There were moments, it is true, when he was conscious that something gracious and alluring in life had eluded, was still eluding, him. But on the whole he was not unhappy—he had all the savant's liking for his own company.

He had passed the whole grilling summer in New York, putting the finishing touches to an intricate piece of research work, and he had looked forward to the ocean trip as a chance for a quiet meditation over the results he had reached, supplemented by restful and recreative reading. The so-called amenities of shipboard had neither meaning nor interest for him. He eyed the doctor, therefore, with considerable dismay.

Dr. Alloway was entranced to see him. Old W. H. was getting quite famous, he was always reading about him in the newspapers. He must absolutely toddle round to the doctor's cabin one evening for a short snifter and a good crack about old times—he'd invite some of the boys up to meet him: there were some very cheery chaps on board.

Brown was appalled and, while Alloway rattled on, glanced about him desperately for a means of escape. He caught a glimpse of the florid woman who had the state-room opposite his, chatting with the nosy man who had insisted on talking to him at breakfast—Travers, or some such name, a retired banker; but no other known face was within view. Then a slight figure in bright green came swinging along, and he recognised Willie Vachell's young protégée, the Amber Girl.

Oddly enough, the sight of her reminded him that he was on holiday and with interest he watched her approach. She was like a breath of high summer in the wintry rawness, her skin was so golden brown, her hair so yellow, like ripening wheat. A scrap of long-forgotten college slang drifted into his mind—she was "easy on the eyes." Little things about her pleased—the natty grass-green béret, the charming angle at which she tilted her small face, the neatness of her feet. There was humour and the joy of life in the demure glance she gave him as she tripped by, so quickly that she was gone before he had time to raise his hat. Her manner was hesitant—it stressed a certain forlornness about the slight figure among the self-centred groups about it. It gave him courage to forget his habitual reserve and remember only his promise to Willie. Besides, the doctor was still drooling on.

Swiftly Brown knocked his pipe out on the rail. "It's been grand, seeing you," he interrupted Alloway without ceremony. "We must get together for a long talk. Now, you'll have to excuse me—someone I must speak to. . . ." He fled.

He overtook the girl on the far side of the deck. She appeared faintly surprised to see him. “There you are,” he said rather shyly, “I was just coming to look for you. . . .” He fell into step with her and groped for a conversational opening. “How—er—how did you sleep?”

“Not a wink. . . .” Her air was reserved. “I was too excited. I’ve never been to Europe before. You’ve been lots of times, I expect. . . .”

“Well, yes. . . . Where are you going?”

“Paris!” Her voice was thrilled.

“Going to study art?”

She shook her head.

“Music?”

“No. . . .” She looked at him. “I don’t do anything. . . .”

“But all Willie’s friends. . . .”

She laughed. “I’m not one of Willie’s high-brows. He’s merely my godfather. I’m going to Paris to have a bust. Willie put up the fare. Wasn’t it sweet of him?”

Brown smiled. “I can’t think of a more suitable place. Are your people over there?”

She shook her head mysteriously. “I ran away from home. . . .” And when he made no comment, she went on, “A girl I know has an apartment in Paris. I was fed up with America. I wanted a change. So when the family stalled I cleared out. . . .”

“Aren’t you rather young to be fed up with America already?”

“There was something I wanted to forget,” she answered. “Do you mind if we don’t talk about it?”

To change the subject, he said rather awkwardly, “I promised Willie to see the purser about—about your accommodation. If you’d care to come along to the office now. . . .”

“You needn’t trouble,” she rejoined, not without asperity. “It’s fixed!”

He realised then that she was in the first-class quarters, promenading at her ease. “But I thought Willie told me you knew no one on board. . . .”

She affected to be adjusting her vivid scarf. “Mr. Holt arranged it.”

“Alonzo Holt, do you mean? You know him?”

Her stiffness seemed to evaporate in a sudden gust of confidence. “I shall simply burst if I don’t tell someone,” she exclaimed in a ripple of laughter. “It was the oddest adventure. I was up ever so early and, as no one was about, I thought I’d take a chance and come for a walk up here. A very

rude man suddenly appeared from nowhere—I can't imagine how he knew I was tourist third—and ordered me off: he was the ship's detective, I guess. Then the weirdest voice you ever heard piped up behind me and said, 'You stick right where you are, sister!' and there was a funny old man poking his head out of the window. He bawled the detective out properly, said it was a free country, and I don't know what else. 'The young woman's a friend of mine,' he said, 'and you can tell the purser I said so!' The detective just said, 'Very good, Mr. Holt!' and that was how I knew who the old fellow was. Wasn't it sweet of him?' "

Brown laughed. "It certainly was. . . ."

"Then he came out of his cabin and made me walk with him—oh, for ages. He wanted to know who I was, where I live, who my father is, even how much daddy earns—too quaint. We got on like a house on fire until I pulled the most frightful boner. . . ."

Her companion smiled. "The old man has the reputation of being rather difficult. What did you say?"

"We were talking about the trip, generally, and I happened to mention that Madame Alva, the famous medium, is on board—the stewardess told me. I thought the old man had gone crazy. 'What's that you say?' he roared, and started to hobble towards his cabin entrance, bellowing and shouting like a madman and using the most terrible language. His servant or someone came out and fetched him in. I just faded away! I was simply scared to death. Can you see the old nut?" She laughed merrily. She looked very young when she laughed. "What's Madame Alva to do with him, for the love of Pete?"

The scientist did not speak: he was gazing fixedly out to sea. A trumpet call brayed cheerfully along the deck. "Lunch," cried the Amber Girl, "and I'm ravenous! My first meal tourist third. Shall I have to eat peas with my knife, do you suppose? and inhale from the saucer?" The golden eyes danced mischievously.

"Come and lunch with me in the Parisian café," he suggested suddenly.

"Mercy, no! I shouldn't know what to talk to you about, a famous scientist like you. Besides, you're much too busy!" With this final shot, she wiggled her fingers at him and darted, laughing, away.

It had been a morning of storm in the royal suite. Mullaney, arriving as usual to report, soon after the millionaire's precipitate return from the deck, had walked into a veritable hurricane of abuse. The old man had a savage

tongue and, propped up in the great gold bed, he cruelly lashed his guard. “You’re all the same, you shanty Irish, a pack of grafters. You’re in league with her! How much did she pay ye to tell her I was sailing? How much, eh? How much?” And before the detective could stammer out a denial, a fresh spate of invective, mingled with it the foulest expressions of cattle-ranch and lumber-camp, descended about his ears.

After Mullaney’s departure Dickens, not very happily, intervened, passenger list in hand, to show the old man that Madame Alva had registered in the name of Herzog, the name of her maid. The millionaire turned on him in a fury; indeed, he became so violent that Dickens, watching his opportunity, rang for the steward and sent the man for Winstay. Winstay came and was closeted with Holt for a while. When he came out he told Dickens he had given the old man a sedative to make him sleep. Dickens hung about for an hour until, hearing the bugle for lunch and perceiving that Holt was asleep, he slipped off to the dining-saloon.

Scarcely had he taken his departure when a letter was pushed under the sitting-room door.

Old Holt, looking like an aged convict in his drab, loose-fitting pyjamas, swung his legs to the floor and shuffled into his slippers. A phial, half filled with a colourless fluid and covered with a clean envelope, stood beside the bed. It was his medicine which the doctor had left ready for him. With a grimace he gulped it down, then pattered softly to the sitting-room door.

The suite was very quiet. He trod softly with deliberation—it amused him thus to take Dickens unawares. But on reaching the door between the two rooms he perceived that the salon was empty. It was a quarter to two the clock on the wall showed—evidently the fellow had gone to his lunch. Peevishly, the folds of the old mouth were deflected; it was like the ungrateful dog to leave him just because he had lain down for a nap. With angry eyes he began to poke about, opening drawers and ferreting at random. Then he saw the letter lying on the carpet in front of the door. Stooping with an effort, he picked it up. It was addressed to Dickens in an extravagant, ornate hand.

At the sight of the writing on the envelope a terrible change came over the old man’s face. His eyes were like pin-points, the thin lips flexed in a vindictive line. Casting frantic glances about him, he called “Dickens! Dickens!” over and over again. There was a bell-push in the wall and scrambling towards it, he kept his finger on it while he continued to cry out in his cracked and high-pitched voice.

A scared, dark-jowled face was framed in the outer door. It was the steward, Parsons. “Good ’eavens, Mr. ’Olt, sir . . .” he gasped at the figure confronting him, letter in hand.

“Don’t stand there staring, damn you! Find my man, find Dickens!” “At once, sir! D’reckly, Mr. ’Olt!” At that moment Dickens who, returning from lunch, had heard the old man’s cries, came running up and entered the room, the steward at his heels. On seeing Holt’s face, Dickens, turning, bundled Parsons into the corridor and closed the door.

Passing the royal suite a few minutes later, Chief Inspector Harris heard the cracked voice, shrill with anger, within, and paused, with eyebrows upraised, to listen. But almost at once the voice broke off on a gasping cry, and a moment later a figure burst out of the bedroom door and went flying down the passage.

It was Holt’s man, Dickens. The chief inspector was scandalised. With all due licence accorded to the first class, such scenes of violence belonged to the category of “Goings On.” Presently the passengers would be coming up from lunch; something must be done about it. “Hey, Mr. Dickens,” he called out; but Dickens did not hear him. With a resolute air Mr. Harris turned the handle of the sitting-room door and went in.

The sitting-room was empty, but there was the sound of heavy breathing in the main bedroom. Poking his head in at the communicating door, Mr. Harris saw Holt lying with eyes closed on the bed. The inspector coughed; the eyes fluttered, then opened. “Aren’t you well, sir?” Mr. Harris demanded.

The man on the bed made no reply, but closed his eyes wearily; his face was the colour of clay. Hearing a step in the passage, Mr. Harris opened the door into the corridor; peered out. There, providentially, was Alloway, the ship’s surgeon, his cap set at a nautical angle, sauntering by. “P-sst, Doc!” Mr. Harris called.

Alloway turned and, seeing Harris, came back. “Old Holt in here has had a fit or something,” the inspector explained. “You’d best take a look at him while I try and find his guard. And here, you,” he added to Parsons who had suddenly appeared, “you know Mr. Holt’s man, Dickens. Fetch him back and tell him the doctor’s here. . . .”

The steward hurried away and Mr. Harris followed after. With alacrity—for Holt was likely to prove a lucrative patient—the surgeon entered the bedroom.

Dickens came upon Winstay on the boat deck, playing shovel-board with a pretty girl with amber eyes. Hurrying below, the two men met Parsons outside the royal suite. “The doctor’s jes’ left,” the steward confided.

Dickens stopped dead. “What doctor?” he demanded irritably.

“The ship’s surgeon. Mr. ’Arris fetched him in. ’E said for me to tell you. . . .”

“Who’s Harris?”

“Chief Inspector, they call him. He’s the ship’s detective. . . .”

Dickens turned to Winstay. “That’s a bad break. He loathes strange doctors. . . .”

The steward sniggered. “You’re right. I ’eard ’im tell the doc to get to ’ell out of it. . . .”

Winstay laughed. “That doesn’t sound as if he were so ill. . . .” He went into the bedroom.

CHAPTER SIX

AFTER dinner that night the smoke-room was crowded. Of one accord the bulk of the passengers seemed to have found their way there, eschewing the less intimate surroundings of the big lounge and the other public rooms. The herd instinct, Wentworth Brown told himself as he surveyed the thronged seats from the bridge table—the fog had done it.

Fog! It seemed to be on everybody's mind, as it was on everybody's lips. Like an unspoken menace it bore down upon the spirits of the whole ship; its presence materialised in the beads of clinging moisture that frosted every port-hole. Since tea-time, when the early dusk had driven all but the hardiest from the deck, the weather had been thickening. At dinner that evening the chair at the head of the captain's table was unoccupied; the captain was on the bridge, it was generally understood. At intervals all through the meal, the wailing boom of the foghorn drowned the murmur of voices, the rattle of knives and forks. The *Barbaric* was already a good six hours behind her scheduled time, Travers, the retired banker who was Brown's neighbour at meals, claimed to know.

The smoke-room, with its warmth and bright lights and cosiness of oak wainscot and blazing log fire, was in cheerful contrast with the raw dampness outside. From time to time one or other of the two doors giving on the deck would open, admitting with a blast of chill, dank air some enterprising soul who had ventured briefly forth to con the weather. "It's thicker than ever," said one of these to a group of men at the table next to Brown's. "We're hardly at more than quarter-speed, I'd say!"

Travers, who was Brown's partner, overheard the remark. "It's the bad season for fogs," he pronounced gloomily. "God knows when we shall make Southampton at this rate. . . ." "I remember crossing in the *Aquitania* once in October," Mrs. Jackson remarked, "and we were twenty-four hours late getting in. . . ."

Contract was Wentworth Brown's chief relaxation. He was a shrewd and intelligent player who might have been in the top class but for a lack of the necessary leisure, and the fact that his main interest in the game was less in its technical intricacies than in the opportunity it afforded for the study of human nature. Travers had invited him to make up a game with a woman

friend, a Mrs. Jackson: ". . . a very experienced player, Mr. Brown. We play a lot of bridge together at Larchmont, where we both live. Between ourselves, Emily Jackson spends so much time at the bridge table that behind her back she's commonly known as Sitting Bull!" He tittered. Mrs. Jackson, he confided, had undertaken to procure a fourth.

Mrs. Jackson proved to be the florid woman with the state-room opposite Brown's. She said that a Dr. Winstay, whom she had met at a charity bridge tournament at the new Waldorf, was going to play with them. "He's a psychiatrist or a psychoanalyst or something," she informed them, "with a large practice in Park Avenue and all kinds of tony people for clients. But," she added expansively, "he plays quite a good game of bridge. . . ." When presently Winstay came to the table Brown recognised the unflurried individual he had seen catching the *Barbaric* by so narrow a margin. He had a quiet, professional air, and his evening clothes were in excellent taste. They cut for partners, and the doctor fell to Mrs. Jackson.

Brown derived a good deal of quiet amusement out of Sitting Bull. She was a type—much more clear-cut than either Travers or the doctor—and types always interested him. A tough old campaigner with the light of battle in her eye, she was the essence of businesslike concentration. It was she who proposed the stakes of five cents a point—Brown played for a cent at his club, but he agreed without demur, as did the others. She reminded him of a pouter pigeon the way she breasted herself whenever she held a good hand, and glanced complacently about her on making the most obvious play. Hers was the hard-boiled, negative game of a specific genus of inveterate bridge-hound. She dominated her partner who, however, remained unruffled by her bland assumption of command on all occasions. Though it was evident to Brown that Winstay possessed an intimate knowledge of the finer points of contract, the doctor suffered in silent suavity not only Sitting Bull but also Travers, an inferior player, who never failed to intervene at the completion of a hand with criticism or advice delivered with all the ponderosity of the bridge pundit.

They had been playing for some time, and Winstay was dealing when someone brushed against Brown as he sat with his back to the door leading to the lounge and the other public rooms. It was the red-cheeked woman he had seen coming on board with Madame Alva. Glancing across the smoke-room, he perceived the medium installed in a corner playing patience. The red-cheeked woman went up to her table and, silently placing a box of cigarettes at her elbow, departed.

Having sated his curiosity regarding Brown at breakfast, Mr. Travers was now applying the same process to the doctor. "Didn't I see you going

into Mr. Holt's suite last night?" he questioned, with his ferrety air.

"Probably," Winstay replied. "Mr. Holt is one of my patients. . . ."

Travers was greatly impressed. "Is that so? A remarkable man, doctor, and a remarkable career. You're travelling with him as his medical attendant, I suppose?"

The doctor laughed rather ruefully as he gathered up his cards. "Well, I'm not really—I'm supposed to be having a holiday. It's more or less a chance that we're on the same boat. But I suppose it'll end in my having to go to Vittel with him. . . ."

"It must be a great privilege to associate with one of the outstanding financial brains of the country," Travers opined sententiously.

"Privilege your grandmother!" Mrs. Jackson remarked, arranging her hand. "I've always heard he was nothing but a durned old skinflint. Why, they say he's so tight that Hetty Green would seem like Santa Claus beside him. . . ."

In the ears of the retired banker this was rank treason and Travers glowered. Brown and the doctor laughed. "Well," said Winstay, "I can only tell you that it isn't my experience of him. . . ."

"You mean he pays your bills," Sitting Bull interjected. "Well, some of us do pay our doctors, even in these hard times. . . ."

"It's more than that," Winstay replied. "Thanks to Mr. Holt, I've made a great deal of money in the market, and I don't care who knows it. . . ."

Travers nodded importantly. "Naturally a man in his position has sources of information at his disposal. . . ."

"Mr. Holt," the doctor went on, thoughtfully flaking the ash from his cigarette, "has shown himself a good friend to me. I earn a lot of money, but I spend a good deal, too, I'm afraid, and if Mr. Holt were to die, it would mean a serious curtailment of my income. So, you see," he added with his quiet smile, "perhaps my motive won't be so disinterested after all if I do have to give up my vacation to take him down to Vittel. Especially as Mr. Holt has been good enough to let me in on a deal which, if it comes off, should enable me to. . . ." He stopped short in some embarrassment. "I say, I shouldn't have mentioned that. Do you mind forgetting it?"

Travers gave his grating laugh. "I went out of the market for good when I retired. And Brown here is more interested in bugs than bulls and bears, hey, Brown?" He glanced slyly at his neighbour. "I don't know about Mrs. Jackson. . . ."

“If we’re playing bridge, let’s play bridge,” Sitting Bull interposed tartly. “We’re waiting, Dr. Winstay. . . .”

“By me!” said the doctor.

A slight commotion had broken out in a corner of the smoke-room. There was a momentary, strained lull in the conversation. Someone said: “Get her a glass of water!”

Travers swung round in his chair. “What’s up?” “Just a dame who don’t feel so good,” explained a paunchy man, one of a group of three who were playing pinochle at the next table. “She’s all right now. Look, she’s going below. . . .”

A large woman was threading her way in and out of the tables, dabbing at her forehead with a handkerchief. She said to a woman who was assisting her: “I’m all right now, really I am. My maid will look after me. Please don’t trouble. . . .” The other stood back.

It was Madame Alva. Travers spotted her first and pointed her out to the others. “Do you know who that is?” he said impressively. “It’s Madame Alva, the famous medium. . . .”

Madame Alva had disappeared in the direction of the lounge. Winstay looked after her with a certain interest. “So that’s the famous Alva!” he murmured.

“Is this bridge or is it a tea-party?” Sitting Bull demanded caustically. “Your bid when you’re ready, Mr. Travers. . . .”

Travers bid a heart and eventually bought the hand for four hearts. The game proceeded, and Travers, through a misguessed finesse, failed to make his contract. He seemed much put out. “Minus a hundred,” he said gruffly, and marked the score. Then, turning sharply to Winstay, he inquired crossly: “Say, just what was the big problem? Why did you hesitate like that before covering my jack of clubs with your singleton?”

Brown, looking rather fixedly at the doctor, seemed to await his reply. “I’m terribly sorry,” Winstay exclaimed with a contrite air. “My mind was a thousand miles away. Look here, if by any chance I misled you, I do beg of you to replace the trick. . . .”

“Fiddlesticks!” Sitting Bull broke in sharply. “Don’t let him bully you, doctor. . . .” She rounded on Travers. “Have we got to sit through an inquest every time you miss your guess? Whose deal is it?”

Travers, who was rather red in the face, said no more, but busied himself with relighting his cigar. With eyebrows slightly raised, Brown began to deal. Rather absently he bid a no trump, which Winstay doubled. Travers passed, and Mrs. Jackson, with an arch glance at her partner, left it in.

A silence fell upon the table, broken only by the snap of the cards audible against a confusion of sounds in the overheated, crowded room—the buzz of voices, the chink of ice in glasses and, underlying everything, the faint, staccato thump of the screws and the rattling, jingling vibration that went with it. Suddenly, without warning, a harassed-looking steward was in the midst of them. "Excuse me, please," he panted, raising his voice above the hubbub, "is there a doctor here?"

At once all conversation ceased. Winstay's calm voice rang out across the lull. "I'm a doctor, steward. What is it?"

The steward hurried over. "If it's not troubling you too much, sir," the man said confidentially, "there's a lady taken ill on D and the ship's surgeon's nowhere to be found for the moment. And Dr. Yarrow, his assistant, is in bed with 'flu. . . ."

Winstay flung his hand down on the table—it landed face up—and rose to his feet. "If you'll forgive me," he said to Mrs. Jackson. "I'll be as quick as I can. . . ." He went quickly out with the steward as the smoke-room stirred into life again.

Sitting Bull snorted audibly. "Wouldn't you know it?" Her puffy fingers fished a couple of aces out of the doctor's discarded hand, and showed them to Travers. "With what I've got, you'd have been four down. . . ."

Travers was up in arms at once. "Four nothing! You're cracked! Though probably, if you'd been playing the dummy, you'd have gone down six. . . ."

"Six!" Mrs. Jackson gasped. "Say," she cried wrathfully, "when I want a lesson from you I'll pay for it. See here. . . ." She spread her hand. "I'll bet you fifty dollars you're down at least four. . . ."

Perceiving that the battle was engaged, Brown pushed back his chair quietly and went out.

It was evident that Travers's heart was not in the wrangle. While Sitting Bull laid down the law to him, he fidgeted in his seat, fingering his upper lip, a trick of his when nervous. At the first opportunity he mumbled, "If you'll excuse me—want to fetch my pipe," and, without waiting for the other's permission, hastily left the table. As he crossed the floor he paused to consult the clock above the bar. A paunchy individual who stood with two men at the bar followed the direction of Travers's gaze and said something in an undertone to his companions. Silent and unsmiling, they exchanged a significant glance. Setting down their glasses, they filed out in the banker's wake.

Left alone Mrs. Jackson adjusted her lorgnette and proceeded to take a leisurely survey of the room. She soon wearied and with a discontented air

folded the lorgnette and bestowed it in her bead bag. As she did so the diamond-studded watch garnishing her still shapely arm caught her eye and, gathering up her bag, she left, rather hurriedly, by the door leading to the lounge. The bridge table with its litter of cards, torn score-sheets and brimming ash-trays remained deserted.

Mrs. Jackson was the first back. Scarcely had she taken her seat than Travers appeared. "Now Brown's missing," Sitting Bull said crossly. "I passed him in the lounge just now talking to a man," Travers rejoined. "I'll get him . . . ah, here he is!"

As the scientist dropped into his seat, they saw Dr. Winstay close behind him. "So sorry," the doctor said, sliding into his chair. "It was nothing serious. Just a nervous attack. These mediums, you know, they live on their nerves. . . ."

"Mediums?" Brown echoed curiously.

Winstay laughed. "Sorry, I was forgetting I didn't tell you. It was Madame Alva who was taken sick. . . ."

Sitting Bull, who was shuffling, sniffed. "She might have chosen a better time. And anyway, isn't there a ship's doctor on this boat?"

"Sure," said Winstay. "But he seems to be taking a night off. And his assistant's ill. A curious creature, Madame Alva," he went on, tapping a cigarette to rights, "a bit phony, of course—all these mediums are. . . ."

"Far be it from me to interfere with a metaphysical discussion," Mrs. Jackson broke in acidly, "but I was under the impression that we were playing bridge. . . ."

Penitently Dr. Winstay turned his eyes on her. "I'm terribly sorry. I'm afraid I'm an incorrigible gossip, Mrs. Jackson. . . ."

"We play the hand over, I suppose," said that lady. "Your deal, Mr. Brown. . . ." She cut to him.

Brown passed. With lips pursed up Winstay scanned his cards. "Two hearts. . . ." At that moment three ear-splitting blasts from the siren, in quick succession, resounded through the ship. Two more blasts followed rapidly and on them the faint, melodious clang of the engine-room telegraph. The whole vessel seemed to shudder; then the incessant tremolo of the turbines died.

"Hallo," Travers exclaimed, "we've stopped!"

"Oh, for the love of heaven, Mr. Travers," Sitting Bull exploded, "can't you ever concentrate? Two hearts are bid. . . ."

"No bid," said Travers meekly. Sitting Bull seemed to swell. "Six no trumps," she barked defiantly.

Outside a scream. . . .

Fog on the deck and fog all about and, looming through it, the blurred shape of the ship that, blundering across the *Barbaric's* bows, had brought the great liner to a sudden stop. . . .

Tiered radiance forging past; a searchlight that held the *Barbaric* relentlessly in its beam; and in the glare the figure of a girl, rooted to the deck, with hand extended pointing at a sack-like object dangling from a rope outside the glass screen. Before the brightness died they all saw that it was a man hanging there, spinning and bobbing to the heavy swell, with head that limply drooped within the noose and arms pendulous and swaying. . . .

Brown found himself beside the girl. Amber eyes, wide with horror, gazed into his. She clutched his arm and gasped, "It's Mr. Holt!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

FOOTSTEPS scurrying all about. A hubbub of voices suddenly unloosed: "What was it? . . . What happened? . . . Oh, my God, it's a man hanging! . . . Don't look, don't look. . . . Who is it? . . . Do something, why don't you? . . . Call the captain!" Cries. A woman's plaintive whimper. A forward surge of people. Panic. As the press swept Brown out of sight of that grim, oscillating packet bumping gently against the glass of the screen, subconsciously his ear registered the hurried ting ting-a-ting of the engine-room telegraph, the flurry of water, the long tremor, that told of the *Barbaric* getting under way again. A man had died; but life went on. . . .

Heavy feet came thudding along the deck; a whistle shrilled; people jostled. The glint of a gold-laced cuff, a curt order, "Get all these people off the deck! Look alive there!" a voice, several voices, droning in patient unison, "Come along, *please*, everybody. You can't stop 'ere. Deck 'as to be cleared. Pass into the smoke-room, *please*!"

Brown looked for the girl: she was nowhere to be seen. A cordon of strong arms linked was inexorably driving the passengers back upon the smoke-room. He was carried along with the rest. The doors slammed, were locked. In the tobacco-charged, close air of the place, in a litter of chairs overturned, of glasses overset to dribble their contents on the floor as the mad rush for the deck had left it, passengers stood about and in shocked voices whispered a name: Alonzo Holt.

Like a lighted train the news spread through the great liner—from deck to deck, from class to class, up and down stairways and ladders, in and out of the labyrinth of passages and flats: Alonzo Holt, he's dead. From smoke-room it flashed to the big lounge where Mr. Fewlass, the chief officer, resplendent in blue-and-gold mess dress, had already been mysteriously plucked away in the middle of a bridge game; from lounge to writing-room and ladies' drawing-room and library, so that letters remained unfinished and books were laid aside. And in the ball-room, while the band played on, the tidings flew from couple to couple.

And then a strange whisper came treading on the heels of the first. The elevators carried it from level to level. It played havoc with the rubbers in progress in the lounge; it put an end to letter-writing and reading in the

public rooms. It disrupted a social evening in the purser's cabin (Mr. Mellow, the host, was momentarily absent, having been summoned to the captain); it broke up a quiet party of high-power roulette in C29; it stopped the impromptu concert going on in the third saloon. Down in the spotless engine-room among the quietly whirring turbines the stokers heard it. The whole ship rustled with the whisper: Old Holt . . . suicide . . . hanged himself from the rail.

Someone had seen the body dangling . . . a woman had discovered it and gone raving mad . . . no, she had fainted . . . outside the smoke-room it was, on the promenade . . . pardon, it was the boat deck: a man I know was in the smoke-room when it happened. . . .

Whispers. . . .

From all parts of the ship passengers flocked to the deck, found all doors locked or barred by mute and stolid guards. "No one allowed on deck—captain's orders. . . ." No officer was visible and the stewards, beset by hordes of excited questioners, shook their heads.

Nerves already strained by the fog, the unexplained stopping of the ship, cracked. There were angry altercations. A paunchy man, not very sober, denied permission to go to the wireless-room on the top deck to send a radio which he declined to entrust to a messenger, waxed indignant, shouted, thundered of what he would write to his political friends. "This means thousands of dollars to me," he trumpeted. "Do you know what'll happen when the market opens to-morrow? I gotta get through to N'York!"

Mr. Travers, stopped at the saloon entrance, expressed the opinion that the captain was grossly exceeding his powers. The wildest scene, however, was created by a tall, eccentric-looking woman—someone said it was a Mrs. Craven—who insisted that she must see the captain immediately. When the steward on the door proved obdurate, she began to storm and rage and, finally, tried to force her way past. It was Travers who averted a regrettable collision. He managed to lead Mrs. Craven to a seat and pacify her. He told her confidentially that even Mr. Holt's doctor had been refused all information—they had actually declined to let him send a message to the captain.

No one thought of going to bed. The passengers sat about in groups, whispering. Strangers talked to strangers—all ice was broken. The quarantine notwithstanding, driblets of news kept trickling through. Passengers on A deck reported that the royal suite was isolated with a guard on the door. The body had been hoisted to the boat deck. The ship's

detective and Mr. Holt's private guard—Mulligan or some such name—were with the captain.

And so the hands of the clock crept on while the clammy mist swam against the ports and from time to time the *Barbaric's* foghorn sent its melancholy warning forth above the rhythmic thump of the screws. In the stealthy silence of the royal suite, a little man with tortured eyes and hands that twitched paced incessantly up and down, raising his head in terror at every sound from without. Down in the tourist third, in a tiny cabin, a girl sat on her bunk staring haggardly in front of her. In the almost deserted smoke-room Wentworth Brown, his features a stone mask, let his fingers idly stray among the cards strewn over the abandoned bridge table.

Figures moved on the boat deck, busying themselves about one of the forward life-boats. In the glow of a caged bulb above a nearby entrance dim forms, erect upon the top of the boat, were silhouetted against the russet night.

Slowly, gingerly, the limp bundle that dangled there was drawn up until it rested, lamentably sprawling, on the lashed-down boat cover. A flashlight gleamed upon a hawk-like, predatory nose, upon razor-edge lips tight-stretched in mortal agony. The dead man was bareheaded. The dark overcoat he wore and the neat blue suit visible beneath were undamaged. The slack of a long rope, the two ends of which disappeared through the block of one of the davits, drooped in coils about him, a loop still imprisoning the neck.

Flash-lamp in hand Harris fingered the rope, then glanced at Mullaney who, with set face, crouched beside him. "It's the damnedest, craziest way of committing suicide I ever saw," Harris growled at last. "The old boy must have taken a turn in one of the fall ropes, shoved his neck in the loop and jumped the rail. As far as I can see he must have held the rope in place with his hand or it would have jerked free as he went down. . . ." So saying, he unwound the rope from the dead man's neck and cast it clear.

"Let's have that torch a minute," exclaimed his companion. He took the light from Harris and switched it on the cuff of the overcoat beneath which there was the glint of metal. "His watch," said Mullaney, pushing up the cuff and showing the silver watch clasped on a leather strap about the thin wrist. "The glass is busted"—he bent his ear suddenly to the limp arm—"yes, and it stopped the watch. . . ." He brought the torch nearer and showed a sliver of glass arresting the hands. "He must have struck his arm going over. And, say, that gives us the exact time it happened. . . ." The beam blazed on the little hands undamaged under the cracked crystal. They pointed to eight

minutes past eleven. Suddenly Mullaney whistled. “Gosh, he certainly hit something. . . .” The beam moved up. “Will you look at that? His neck’s all black. . . .”

In the bright ray the bruises were clearly visible, discoloured patches graded in shade from a livid purple to a greenish brown on the front and sides of the throat. Harris grunted. “That’s the mark of the rope, I reckon, though, come to think of it, I never saw rope that did that to a bloke’s neck before. Of course, he took a ten-foot drop. Well, we’ll hear what the doctor says. . . .”

A voice came out of the dark. “Mr. Harris there?” An officer, in peajacket and muffler, binoculars pendent on his chest, as he had stepped from the bridge, was below. “You and Mullaney are to report to the old man when you’re through,” he announced. Harris scrambled down. “We’ll come right away. . . .” He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. “What about him?”

“He’s to be taken to the captain’s quarters. The doctor will make his examination there. . . .”

Harris nodded and signed to two seamen who waited with a stretcher. “All right, lads. . . .”

Legs spread wide, cap on the back of his head, hands gloved in brown, massive in greatcoat and muffler, Captain McDiarmid loomed menacing behind the desk in his state-room. His face was brick-red; grizzled eyebrows bristled over angry blue eyes. His mood was sufficiently indicated by the rigid postures of the two officers who confronted him across the writing-table—Fewlass, a dark-haired Welshman, frozen stiffly at attention, and Mellow, in monkey jacket and medals like the chief officer, very ill at ease, with his chest stuck out as he rocked perceptibly on his toes.

“I don’t want his medical attendant,” the captain was saying, stressing each word irately, as Harris and Mullaney were admitted, “I want Alloway. . . .” He glared at the purser. “What do you mean, he can’t be found? He’s off in some dark corner, I suppose, telling the tale to a skirt. . . .”

Squeezing his palms together nervously, Mellow spoke up. “All I can say, sir, is that a lady on D was taken ill to-night and her steward hunted the whole ship for Dr. Alloway but. . . .”

“Damn it, Mr. Fewlass,” McDiarmid exploded, glowering at the chief officer, “here’s a passenger goes and hangs himself and, although we carry two doctors, there’s none available. . . .” He swung back to the purser. “Dr.

Alloway has got to be found, do you understand, Mr. Mellow? Put a couple of stewards on to it. In the meantime, get his assistant out of bed and send him up here at the double—I can't help it if he has got the 'flu. And when you find Alloway," he added grimly, "I want to see him. All right—carry on!"

With alacrity the purser scuttled out. "I shall have to ask you to take the bridge, Mr. Fewlass," said the captain. "I want a word with the doctor—I may be some time. Let me know immediately if the weather gets any thicker. . . ."

"Aye, aye, sir. . . ." The chief officer withdrew. McDiarmid signed to the two detectives to approach. "This is an unpleasant business, Mr. Harris. . . ."

"You're right, sir. . . ."

"What did he want to do a thing like that for, a man with all his money?"

Harris flashed a glance at Mullaney. "I understand from Mullaney that the old gentleman had been ailing for some time. He'd been very difficult of late. He kicked up such a dido in his state-room this morning that I had to get the ship's doctor to him—I didn't know then that he had his own physician on board—Dr. Winstay. I haven't had the chance to see him yet. . . ."

McDiarmid grunted. "I don't see why he should go and hang himself on my ship. He wasn't in any financial trouble, was he?"

Mullaney laughed. "I should say not. . . ."

"He didn't get a radio or anything to upset him?"

"Not so far as I know, Captain. . . ."

The door was rapped. "Dr. Yarrow, sir," the captain's steward announced.

"Is the body there?" McDiarmid questioned.

"On the sofa in your bunk as ordered, sir!"

The captain nodded and went out. In a minute he was back. "He's pretty badly knocked about," he said sombrely. "Well, what happened?"

It was Mullaney who answered. "Mr. Holt liked to take a walk before going to bed, Captain. He had dinner served in bed to-night, and afterwards got up and dressed himself, saying he was going for a turn on deck. . . ."

"Wait a minute! What time was this?"

"Soon after ten. He left the suite at about ten minutes of eleven. . . ."

"And the body was discovered?"

"Round about eleven-twenty," said Harris. "But it don't signify. He broke the glass of his wrist-watch going over and stopped the hands. That gives us the exact time—eleven-eight!"

The captain nodded. "Go on, Mr. Mullaney. . . ."

"Dickens. . . ." Mullaney was continuing, when the captain pulled him up. "Who's Dickens?"

"His man, sir," the chief inspector explained. "I'd have had him up here, only he's in such a state—half crazed, he seems to be. . . ."

McDiarmid nodded and Mullaney resumed: "Dickens tried to dissuade him, on account of it was foggy, see? But Mr. Holt wouldn't listen, and he wouldn't let Dickens go with him, neither. They'd had words that morning and Mr. Holt was as sore with Dickens as a bad finger. So Dickens slips out to where I was waiting in the corridor and asks me to keep an eye on the old man. I followed him to the boat deck, but I wasn't careful enough, I guess, because he spotted me and bawled me out; said he wouldn't be followed. So I left him walking up and down there. That was about eleven. . . ."

"Did you notice anybody else on the boat deck?" the captain asked.

"Not a soul, Captain. Mr. Holt had the deck to himself. . . ."

"Who found the body?"

Mullaney left the answer to Harris, who flushed. "It was a woman passenger, sir, leastwise that's what the smoke-room steward says. Everybody in the smoke-room heard her scream. We haven't identified her yet, but I'm on to it. . . ."

Again that terse nod. "And he hanged himself on a fall rope, did he? Just how did he manage it?"

With the aid of his pocket handkerchief the chief inspector was about to launch forth upon a highly technical explanation when a knock came at the door. It was the steward once more. "Excuse me, sir," he said. "Dr. Yarrow would like to see you, urgent. . . ."

"Show him in, Humphries. . . ." With a preoccupied air the captain cast off his muffler and, slipping out of his greatcoat, flung it on a chair. Then he seated himself at the desk.

Half an hour later, after the main lobby had been cleared, because, it was whispered, the body was to be brought down in one of the elevators, a fresh and terrifying rumour began to circulate.

It was not suicide—it was murder. Alonzo Holt had been strangled.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WITH his fresh complexion and sandy hair, the *Barbaric's* assistant surgeon looked like, and until comparatively recently had been, a medical student. Dr. Yarrow had the broad shoulders and narrow hips, a little rounded off now by shipboard life, of one who in his day had played stand-off three-quarter for Bart's. He was suffering—palpably—from an abominable cold in the head, and his uniform greatcoat inadequately concealed the fact that he was wearing pink-striped pyjamas. He was young, but he stuck to his guns obstinately. "If this man had hanged himself in the circumstances you describe, sir," he was saying to the captain, "his neck would be broken. Well, it isn't. The autopsy—you'll want an autopsy, I take it—will undoubtedly bear me out."

The atmosphere in the big state-room was electric. The hush was so profound that they could hear the drone of voices on the bridge. McDiarmid's square face was set in grim lines, as, elbows propped on desk and chin resting on his crossed hands, he gave the young doctor his careful attention. Yarrow spoke with an impassive, almost jaunty mien, and it seemed to McDiarmid as he listened, that there was something essentially unbecoming, subversive to discipline, as it were, in a disclosure of this magnitude coming to him from the lips of a mere youth.

The captain suppressed an involuntary expletive. This thing to happen to him, of all people, after his twenty-eight years at sea! Already, no doubt, as the result of the radio he had promptly dispatched to the head-quarters of the line, the presses in New York and London were running hot with the news of the millionaire's death. When the newspapers discovered it was not suicide. . . .

He passed his handkerchief across his forehead and brought it away damp. He had never shirked responsibility, but it just happened that murder on the high seas had never come his way. On the high seas the captain of a ship was an autocrat, in the case of crime he was policeman, detective, judge, rolled into one. The safety of passengers and crew of the s.s. *Barbaric* were in his, James McDiarmid's, hands. One of those entrusted to his keeping had been barbarously and treacherously slain: the moment had arrived for him to exercise his far-reaching and complex authority. Because

he still shrank from the prospect, he asked rather huskily, “I suppose you’re sure you’re not making any mistake?”

“Quite.” The young man spoke with bold assurance. “This man was strangled—he was dead before ever he went over the side. This isn’t the first case of strangulation I’ve seen, sir. I did a certain amount of medico-forensic work, filling in as locum in Glasgow last year, and I know what I’m talking about. Those finger marks on the throat are absolutely characteristic. And I’ll tell you something else. Quite exceptional strength was used—the murderer must have had remarkably powerful fingers. . . .” He broke off to sneeze violently.

“That’s all very well, but the man was found hanging. How do you account for the rope?”

The young man finished blowing his nose. “You say he was walking on the boat deck. The way I see it, someone pounced on him, strangled him and threw the body overboard. In falling, the body became entangled in one of the life-boat ropes and remained suspended. Incidentally, there’s a lump on the back of the head where he struck the boat or the side of the ship as he went down. . . .”

“But a fall rope hangs straight down in a single loop. How could it have twisted itself about his neck in a noose?”

“The motion of the ship would have done that if he fell into it,” Harris volunteered. “He was spinning this way and that when I first saw him, with the rope all twisted up. . . .”

McDiarmid nodded glumly. He looked inquiringly at Yarrow. “Can you make an autopsy?”

The assistant surgeon flushed. “Yes, sir, of course. But won’t Dr. Alloway expect. . . .”

“Dr. Alloway has seen fit to take himself off somewhere,” the captain intervened sternly. “You’re in charge of the case. Where do you want him brought?”

“The operating theatre on D would be the best place. . . .”

“See my steward about taking the body down. Wait!” He turned to Harris. “Mr. Harris, you’ve heard what the doctor said. This man has been strangled. The murderer must be found. Any assistance I can give is at your disposal. If there are any witnesses you wish to cross-examine, you’ll do so in my presence. Now, do you want any help?”

“With your permission, sir,” said Harris, “Mullaney here was Mr. Holt’s private guard. He hasn’t been long with Mr. Holt, but he’s an old New York detective, and I’d like to have him with me on the case. . . .”

"If Mr. Mullaney has no objection," rejoined the captain, and looked at that individual. "Sure," said Mullaney, with a somewhat embarrassed air. Unused as he was to British ways, he found the stolid calm with which the doctor's horrifying disclosure had been received no less disconcerting than the disclosure itself. It left him monosyllabic and floundering.

"The first thing to do," the ship's detective remarked, "before the doctor gets busy, is to make a thorough examination of the body for any clues the murderer may have left, and especially to see whether any of the dead man's valuables are missing. Dickens, Mr. Holt's man, should be able to help me there, if I can get him to pull himself together. . . ."

"All right," McDiarmid agreed absently. Then Yarrow asked if he might be excused—he had certain preparations to make—and the three men went out together. An instant later the door was rapped. Humphries, the steward. Might Mr. Mellow have a word?

The purser was flustered. All over the ship it was being put about that Mr. Holt had been murdered. Of course, one couldn't confirm or deny the rumour, having been told nothing—this was not strictly accurate for Humphries, who was Mr. Mellow's ear-phones at head-quarters, had overheard the doctor's revelation and immediately notified the purser, his hierarchical chief; but Mr. Mellow was on his high horse. The passengers were getting out of hand; very indignant some of them were. If the guards could now be taken off the doors and the normal life of the ship resumed, perhaps people would start going to bed. . . . Dr. Winstay, Mr. Holt's medical attendant, was outside, demanding to see the captain.

It was no longer possible to conceal the truth, the circumstances of Mr. Holt's death pointed to murder, McDiarmid replied curtly. It would be all right to remove the guards, but the boat deck must remain isolated, as, no doubt, Mr. Harris and Mr. Mullaney, who were conducting the preliminary investigation, would want to examine it further—also the royal suite. Mr. Mellow pointed out that Dickens was occupying it. Mr. Dickens would have to be moved, the captain said. The suite must be shut up. In the morning Mr. Mellow had better seal up the deceased's effects. Dr. Winstay could come in. The purser departed to transmit the order and Winstay was admitted.

He marched straight up to the desk. "What's this I hear about Mr. Holt?" he demanded tensely and in a tone cold with anger. "The whole ship's buzzing with the most fantastic rumours, that he has committed suicide, that he's been murdered. Why have I been refused permission to see you until now? Are you aware that I'm Mr. Holt's medical attendant? I insist on being told the truth. . . ."

The captain pointed to a chair. “Sit down, please, doctor, and calm yourself. . . .”

His visitor ignored the invitation. “What has happened to my patient?”

McDiarmid shrugged.

“The ship’s doctor thinks he was strangled. . . .”

“Strangled?” Winstay stared at him incredulously. “There must be some mistake. . . .”

The captain looked away. “I wish I could think so. . . .”

“You mean, it’s *true*?”

“I’m afraid so. . . .”

“But it’s—it’s incredible!” Blindly he groped for the chair, dropped into it and raised his face, blank with dismay, towards the captain. “How could it happen?”

Briefly McDiarmid related the facts. “But who could have done such a thing?” the doctor demanded. The captain squared his jaw. “That, Dr. Winstay, is what I intend to find out. . . .”

“But have you no clue, no suspicion?”

McDiarmid hoisted his shoulders. “The ship’s detective and Mr. Holt’s private guard are examining the body now. I’m waiting to hear their report. . . .”

“What a shocking business!” The words broke like a moan from the doctor’s white lips. Wearily he passed his hand across his forehead. “You must forgive my excitement just now, Captain, but really. . . .” His voice trailed off.

McDiarmid’s glance was tinged with compassion. Winstay sat so limply there, all his hectoring demeanour gone out of him. “It has given us all a bad knock,” the captain ventured gently. The doctor raised his hand. “Do you mind, for a minute? This thing has quite broken me up. . . .”

“Can I order you something? A little brandy?” McDiarmid fingered the bell-push on the desk. But the other waved him aside. “Don’t trouble; I’m all right. But just for the moment. . . .” He raised distressed eyes. “You don’t realise what this means to me. . . .”

“You knew Mr. Holt very well, I suppose?”

The doctor was calmer now. “For some considerable time now,” he said with a heavy sigh, “I’ve been seeing him almost every day. Mr. Holt was a great deal more than a patient to me—he was the best friend I ever had. I dare say he seemed a bit uncouth to those who didn’t know him, but he and I always got on well together. I talked to him straight, you see, and he liked it

—he was that sort of man. I had a real affection for the old boy—I felt towards him almost like a son towards his father. And I think he was fond of me: he was always going out of his way to do me a good turn. You've no idea what his death means to me from every point of view. . . ."

"He was a sick man, wasn't he?"

Now that he was on his own topic, the physician seemed to regain his professional poise. "Mr. Holt," he said, leaning back in his chair, "had reached the stage where, having worked hard all his life and made a fortune, he was confronted with the problem of spending it, a problem, let me tell you, Captain, which has sent many a rich man to a premature grave. Mr. Holt had lived hard and his heart was in bad shape. But with care there was no reason why he shouldn't have lasted another ten or fifteen years. Ninety-five per cent. of his trouble was the fear that he'd die before he had time to enjoy his leisure, the other five was this heart of his and the high blood-pressure, which is not uncommon in men of his age. The combination made him crotchety, bad-tempered. The smallest thing would upset him, he'd fly into one of his rages, and then his heart would go back on him. Only this morning I was sent for, to calm him down and the same thing happened after lunch. . . ."

"When did you see him last?"

"Then, just after lunch. He was very irritated because the ship's surgeon had been to see him. . . ."

"I know. The chief inspector sent him. He heard the old gentleman shouting. What had upset him?"

"I knew better than to ask. Some trifle, probably. He was always rowing with Dickens or Mullaney about something: when he became too impossible they'd send for me. The only way to handle the old man was to pretend to notice nothing. They had a difficult time with him yesterday, I gather. . . ."

"You saw him last at lunch-time, you say?"

"That's right. I left him asleep. I looked in before dinner, but he hadn't moved. . . ."

With a rather distracted air the captain was fidgeting with his papers. Dr. Winstay took the hint and stood up. "You'd like to see the body, I expect," said McDiarmid, and rang the bell. "You'll find it in my cabin across the way—it'll be taken down to the operating theatre presently for the autopsy. And that reminds me, I dare say Dr. Yarrow, who'll be making the autopsy, will be glad of your assistance. . . ."

"Anything I can do, of course. . . ."

Left alone, McDiarmid stood up, stretched, and with a haggard air walked to the window. He was standing there when Humphries reappeared. One of the passengers was asking to see the captain—a Mr. Brown, in the first class.

The captain swung about. "Mr. *who*?"

The steward repeated the name.

"Who is he? What does he want?"

The visitor declined to state his business.

McDiarmid's patience had snapped. "I can't see him," he cried angrily. "I'm too busy. Tell him to come back in the morning. . . ." He dropped into his chair at the desk. At that moment, shouldering the steward aside, Brown appeared in the doorway.

At once the captain, all gold lace and dignity, was on his feet. "I must remind you, sir," he enunciated very stiffly, "that passengers come here only at my invitation. . . ."

Brown did not lose his composure. "I'm truly sorry, Captain, but I had no choice. I must speak to you immediately. . . ."

McDiarmid froze. "I'm sorry, it's impossible. I have no time at present. . . ."

Still the other stood his ground. "I'm afraid I must insist. . . ."

Blue eyes glared. "May I ask who you are?"

"My name is Wentworth Brown. If I might see you alone"—he glanced at the steward's shocked face—"I'll explain more fully. . . ."

With his imposing height and regular, rather stern features the visitor had an air of authority which did not fail to impress the captain. For a full second Brown bore unflinching the scrutiny of the bright blue eyes. Then McDiarmid said, "All right, Humphries. . . ." And the steward, with a puzzled air, withdrew. The captain indicated a chair and sat down. "Now then, Mr. Brown. . . ."

They were still closeted together when, twenty minutes later, Humphries put his head in again announcing Mr. Harris. The Inspector entered unaccompanied—he had sent Mullaney to the purser's safe with Mr. Holt's valuables, he explained. Then he caught sight of Brown sitting there, and, with an inquiring glance at the captain, stopped short. "You can speak freely in front of Mr. Brown," said McDiarmid. "He's going to help us in the investigation."

Mr. Harris made no comment, staring stolidly to his front. Only the tips of his ears grew rather red.

"Well," the captain questioned, "what have you found out?"

His subordinate's face was grave. "All I can tell you at present, sir," he replied, "is that robbery was not the motive. . . ."

The captain flashed a rapid glance at Brown. "Ah?" he said rather tensely.

"Mr. Holt's valuables are intact, Dickens says. And the murderer left no clues. . . ." The detective addressed himself pointedly to the captain.

"Then what?"

Mr. Harris cleared his throat. "We have to establish the motive, sir. 'Establish the motive,' Chief Inspector Manderton, my late chief at the Yard, was in the habit of saying, 'and you're half-way to success!' Mr. Holt was a rich man. Maybe he was blackmailed. . . ."

"Mullaney should be able to help us there," McDiarmid suggested.

"I'll question him, of course, sir. But he was only the guard—they didn't tell him much. It was Dickens who was in all the old man's secrets. . . ."

"Holt was a roughish customer, by all accounts," said the captain. "A man like that makes enemies. One question we have to ask ourselves, it seems to me, is whether he went in fear of anybody on this ship. It shouldn't be hard to answer—after all, the murderer's on board and can't get away. . . ."

"Quite so," Mr. Harris agreed. "And with your permission, sir, I'll get a passenger list and we'll have Dickens up at once. . . ."

"Before you do that," a quiet voice broke in, "I have a suggestion to make. . . ."

Wentworth Brown had spoken. The two men turned their eyes on him expectantly. "I think you should first send for Miss Mary Fulton in the tourist third. . . ."

Mr. Harris flushed. "What's she got to do with it?" he asked bluntly.

"Miss Fulton was the first to discover the body," was the impassive rejoinder. "I also have an idea that she can help answer the captain's question!"

CHAPTER NINE

MARY FULTON did not go to bed. When at length she lay down fully dressed on her bunk and closed her eyes, the face of the dead man seemed to stare at her out of the darkness. She had been so elated when Willie had managed to secure her the little two-berth cabin to herself. She was sorry now; if she only had a room-mate to talk to, anything to be rid of the mental image of that ghastly puppet that still went round and round, and to and fro before her eyes.

With a pang she realised that she knew nobody in the tourist third to speak to. This was her first trip abroad: she was not versed enough in the ways of transatlantic travel to have seen to it that the second steward placed her among congenial companions at meals. Her neighbours at table were returning emigrants, elderly Italians and such, with scarcely an intelligible syllable of English between them, and the only other persons she had met were in the first class—Willie Vachell's surly friend, Brown, and that rather thrilling Dr. Winstay.

At last, merely for the sake of human company, she went up to the third class saloon. Every seat in sight was occupied—the passengers were huddled in whispering groups. To the girl's morbid imagination it seemed that people stared at her oddly, as though they were aware that it was her scream which had aroused the ship. She consoled herself by remembering that, in the ensuing hubbub, she had crept away unperceived by anybody except Brown and he, characteristically enough, had made no attempt to follow her.

The saloon was stifling and she thought she would go into the fresh air. But a steward stopped her—no passengers were allowed on deck. As she faced the crowded room again she heard a man drawl casually to another, "Queer to think, ain't it, that the murderer's here on board?" She did not comprehend at once; but realisation came like a thunder-clap when, with a laugh, his friend retorted, "Well, you're my alibi, Ed, that *I* didn't strangle the old bozo!" Then, as she stood there, her ears, sharpened by her growing sense of horror, began to pick up fragments of the conversation all about, and she knew the truth.

Holt had not hanged himself: he had been murdered, strangled; and she had been the first to find him! What should she do? Murder meant police, the district attorney—did they have district attorneys on ships?—inquiries, suspicion—would they suspect *her*? She had been seen talking to Holt. Which would be better, to go to the captain frankly and admit that it was she who had given the alarm, or say nothing? The first course meant questions, cross-examination—she thought with distaste of the disapproving gaze of the detective who had accosted her on the promenade that morning; if she lay low, nothing could happen to her—unless Brown gave her away.

She had the urgent craving to be alone, yet she was afraid to go back to her lonely cabin where her dressing-gown, swinging on its hook, kept assuming the lineaments of that terrible mannikin. In a passage leading to the crew's quarters, leaning against a bulkhead, she gave herself up to her thoughts. In all her twenty years death had never come close to her—she had never even looked on a dead face. Then this thing had befallen!

How ugly life could be! A few hours since, in the pale sunshine of the October afternoon, she had been laughing and talking with Dr. Winstay. She could not recall exactly how he had got into conversation with her—he told her afterwards that he had spoken to her because he had an idea that she was feeling homesick. She had been quite touched. It was true; but she wondered how he had guessed, and asked him.

He had laughed and screwed up his eyes in a funny way he had and said, "You mustn't believe a word I say. If you'd had carroty hair and glasses, I shouldn't have come near you!" but she was sure he had spoken like that only to cover up a rather nice gesture. Then he had inquired her name and, brandishing the cue, exclaimed, "Well, Mary, I warn you you're up against the inter-ocean shuffle-board champion. Come on, let's shoot a game!"—just like that. He put her at her ease at once: they might have been friends for years; he had such a simple way with him, unaffected without being presuming, informal without being what, in her own mind, she would have called fresh.

He did not trouble to introduce himself, and she learned his name only when an excited little man, addressing him as "Dr. Winstay," said he must come to Mr. Holt at once, and dragged him away. She decided then that her new acquaintance must be Mr. Holt's doctor, and felt sorry she had not known it before—she could have told him about her bizarre encounter with the millionaire. She looked the doctor up in the passenger list afterwards. Caryl Winstay! Rather a nice name—she hoped she would see him again. Now, as she thought about him, she had a sudden wild idea of hunting him

out, of confiding her dilemma to him, and asking his advice. But she ruled against this course. Better let sleeping dogs lie.

A current of air along the passage suggested that the door to the deck was open. Returning to the saloon she found that the order had been lifted—the passengers were outside again. She went out, too, and stood by the rail, her small face lifted to the starless night. It was here that Harris descended upon her.

She did not see him coming, and the harsh, official voice struck her with dismay. "Miss Fulton?" Veering swiftly about, she recognised the official who had questioned her so unpleasantly on the promenade deck before breakfast, and recoiled violently. In a tiny, frightened voice she faltered, "Yes?"

"Come with me, please!" was the forbidding reply.

"Why? What is it?" she managed to stammer out.

"The captain desires to see you. . . ."

Her face, under its warm tan, was pale. "Me?" she questioned tremblingly. "What is it about, do you know?"

"He'll explain that. This way, please!"

A knot of people who had witnessed the detective's approach gathered round, eyeing the pair with curious glances. With a sinking heart she followed the captain's emissary. He led her in silence up a series of companions to the boat deck where, outside a door marked "Captain," he bade her wait, and vanished up a stair.

He seemed to be a long time away. The boat deck where, only that afternoon, life had seemed so pleasant in the sunshine, now wore a forlorn and desolate look, its feeble lights ringed about with haze. The wind whistled in the wireless aerials and flapped the canvas dodgers about—there was a succession of little sounds that fretted at her nerves. As she stood there, in the mist and gloom, her spirits slowly ebbed. Fear of the ordeal before her seemed to rise in her throat and choke her, and when at last she heard a step upon the stair she could have screamed.

But it was not the detective who emerged from the entrance. Mr. Harris was short and thick-set, and wore uniform; this man was bareheaded and tall, and the gleam of the light above the door on silk lapels and glazed shirt-front told her that he was in evening dress. With head bowed and eyes brooding he came through the door, caught sight of her standing there, and stopped.

A great surge of relief flooded her heart. Never had she been so thankful to see anybody: she could have wept for joy. It was Dr. Winstay. He

recognised her at once. “Why, hallo,” he said, “what are *you* doing here?”

For a moment she could not speak. The shock she had undergone, and now the long suspense of waiting on the dark and lonely deck, were too much for her. He took her small, cold hands in his and warmed them in his firm grasp. “But, my dear, you’re shivering,” he told her, gazing at her compassionately. “What’s the matter? Why aren’t you in bed?”

She gulped, and her eyes filled. A tear rolled down her brown cheek. “The captain,” she faltered, “he sent . . . his detective . . . for me. I know it’s silly, but . . . but I’m so terribly scared. . . .”

Without a word he drew her into the shelter of the entrance out of the chill wind. Under the light she saw how pale and grave his face was. Very gently he made her sit on one of the lower steps of a staircase that mounted to a lighted landing. “Sit down there,” he said, “and tell us all about it. And, wait, I’m going to give you a cigarette. . . .”

He held out a slim, gold case, sprung his lighter, then, with a glance at her face, whipped out a gossamer fine handkerchief from his outer pocket and handed it to her. With a forlorn air she dried her eyes. “Why should the captain send his detective for you?” he asked.

His calm enunciation was very soothing: it comforted her.

“It’s about Mr. Holt,” she said.

“What about him?”

“I was the first to see him. I was coming along the promenade deck and suddenly saw him hanging there, outside the glass, and . . . and I screamed. Now they’re saying he was murdered and the captain has sent for me. The detective came up to me in front of everybody—he suspects me, I know he does, he looked at me so strangely. He means to—what do they call it?—grill me, I feel sure, and I don’t know a thing about it.”

“Now, now, now,” Winstay pacified her, “there’s nothing to be alarmed about. What can you tell the captain about Mr. Holt’s death?”

“Nothing. No more than anybody else. All that happened was that I was on the promenade, and screamed, and everybody came running—a hundred people saw him as well as me. I don’t know why the captain should pick on me, unless Mr. Brown told him. . . .”

“Mr. Brown? You mean W. H. Brown, the scientist?”

“Yes. He came up to me when I screamed, and I told him it was Mr. Holt. . . .” Her amber eyes entreated him. “Can’t you get me out of it?”

He shook his head doubtfully. “I wish I could, but I don’t see how I can. After all, you were the first to discover him, you say. They’ll have to take

your evidence: that's the law, and there's no getting away from it. It's unpleasant, I know, but I'm afraid you'll have to go through with it. It's only a formality. . . ." He clapped her gently on the shoulder. "Buck up, my dear, we've all got to be brave at a time like this. . . ."

She sniffed forlornly. "I suppose I am being stupid. And frightfully inconsiderate boring you with my troubles. You were his doctor, weren't you?"

He nodded. "I've just come from viewing the body. . . ."

"Oh," she cried contritely, "how selfish you must think me!"

He gave her hand a little pat. "That's all right. . . ."

"But it isn't. I do apologise. I should have thought. You must have had a dreadful shock. . . ."

"I was fond of the old man," he said simply. "I'll have to leave you now," he went on, "the doctor's waiting for me for the autopsy. . . ."

A step sounded on the landing above. A voice said, "All right, steward, I'll bring her up myself. . . ."

She sprang to her feet. "Oh," she ejaculated indignantly, as she recognised the tall figure that descended, "he did tell the captain after all. . . ."

"Oh, hallo, Brown," said Winstay. "Are you going to take Miss Fulton to the captain?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Well, listen, don't let them bully her. She's nervous! And no wonder. . . ." He smiled encouragingly at Mary and passed out on the deck, while rather tremulously she followed Brown up the companion.

CHAPTER TEN

"THEN you recognised Mr. Holt, Miss Fulton?"

"Oh, yes."

"How was that? Had you seen him before?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"He'd spoken to me on the promenade deck that morning."

"Will you tell the captain what happened on that occasion?"

The ordeal was not as terrifying as Mary Fulton had anticipated. The Captain, who examined her first, was very considerate. The big state-room, too, with its cream walls and Chippendale furniture and soft Wilton carpet that deadened every sound, had a restful atmosphere. Her chair was placed so that the rays of the desk lamp, the only light in the room, were on her face —the faces of the group confronting her were in the shadow. The captain and Brown were seated at the desk, with Harris and a man she did not know standing up behind.

It was not until the captain had drawn from her her story of finding Holt's body that Brown struck in to lead her back to her meeting with the millionaire. At his request she recounted how Holt had intervened on her behalf with Harris—"that man behind you," she called him rather disdainfully. "Did you mention to Mr. Holt a certain name which appeared to upset him?" Brown then asked.

There was indignation in the glance she gave him. . . . What right had he to make use of a private conversation? "Yes, I did," she answered with a shade of defiance in her voice.

"Would you mind telling the captain what that name was?"

"It was Madame Alva. . . ."

The captain interposed. "Madame Alva, the medium, you mean?"

"That's right. . . ."

"You mentioned that she was on board?"

"Yes."

"How did you know?"

“My stewardess told me. . . .”

“This Madame Alva, is she a friend of yours?”

The girl drew back. “Why, no! I wouldn’t even know her if I saw her. I’ve only read about her in the newspapers. . . .”

“What did Mr. Holt do?” It was Brown speaking again.

She had barely finished describing the millionaire’s extraordinary outburst when the man beside Harris exclaimed excitedly: “And me and Dickens was wondering how he knew. He went on the whole morning about it. Accused me of tipping her off that he was sailing, and me not knowing her more than I’d know the Queen of Sheba. . . .”

“Just a minute, Mullaney,” the captain broke in. “Dr. Winstay told me that when he called in to see Mr. Holt this morning he found the old gentleman in a highly excited state. Was this disclosure about Madame Alva being on board the reason?”

“I’ll say it was. . . .”

“Then I think you might have mentioned it before,” Harris remarked severely to his colleague.

“You didn’t know the boss,” Mullaney retorted serenely. “He was always fighting people. If I was to start giving you the low-down on all the folks he’d fallen out with we’d be here till daylight. When he was at outs with anyone he’d blow up just at the mention of the name. Then me and Dickens and everybody would be in a conspiracy against him. Ask Charlie Dickens!”

“But what was the trouble between him and this woman?” the Captain questioned.

Mullaney shook his bullet head. “I wouldn’t know the right of it. It all happened before I was hired, I guess. Dickens should be able to tell you. . . .”

McDiarmid stooped to his neighbour’s ear. “No,” Brown replied aloud, “I’d say see Dickens first!”

The captain leaned back and spoke in an undertone to Harris. Then he turned to the girl. “I needn’t detain you further, Miss Fulton. Mr. Harris will take you back. I must ask you to say nothing to the other passengers about anything you may have heard in this room. Is that understood?” He stood up and Brown followed suit. “Good night, and thank you!”

His black suit hanging bag-like on his small and bony frame, Dickens faced the captain and his aides. He was in a condition of extraordinary

agitation. His face was as white as a dead man's, and his fingers picked at lips so compressed in an agony of apprehension that they were as blue as the cluster of little veins that stood out at his temple and throbbed in rhythm with his laboured breathing. He was like a man dazed by a blow, and at every question his sunken, restless eyes shifted nervously from face to face of the four men confronting him. His manner was so distraught that the captain had considerable difficulty in getting him to corroborate Mullaney's statement regarding the last movements of the murdered man.

"Mr. Holt left his state-room at ten minutes to eleven. Is that right?"

"I think so—I wouldn't know the time to the minute. . . ."

"Mullaney here says he did. . . ."

"Then that's right, sir. . . ."

"And you asked Mullaney to keep an eye on him?"

"Yes, sir. . . ."

"What did you do?"

"What did I do?"

"Yes. . . ." Sharply.

"I went for a turn on deck. . . ."

"What deck?"

The little man squeezed his hands together, casting glances about him like a frightened rat. "B deck, I think. . . ."

"How long did you stay there?"

"I—I don't know exactly. . . ."

"Did anybody see you? Did you talk to anybody?"

A pause. "No, sir. . . ."

"And then?"

"I went back to the suite. . . ." He hesitated. "I don't rightly know the time, but it was about a quarter of an hour before Mr. Harris came and fetched me out. . . ."

"That'd make it about eleven-ten, sir," Harris put in. "I reached the promenade deck at eleven-twenty-five and went straight down to him." After a word with the captain, Brown took up the cross-examination.

"How long have you been with Mr. Holt?"

"Going on twelve years, sir. . . ."

"What were your duties?"

The little man ran his tongue over dry lips and said: "What?"

Brown repeated the question. “You mean what did I do for Mr. Holt?”

“Yes. . . .”

“I don’t exactly know. I did everything. . . .” He caught himself up. “I mean, I was sort of his secretary. . . .”

“You were in Mr. Holt’s confidence?”

Dickens nodded shrewdly. “As much as any man was. . . .”

“Your employer was inclined to be difficult?”

“Difficult?”

“He used to row with people, Mr. Brown means,” the captain amended rather impatiently. “He used to row with you and Mullaney, didn’t he?”

“Yes, sir. But that was only his way. His bark was worse than his bite, as the saying goes. . . .” The tone was wistful.

Brown’s deep voice chimed in. “But he was a man of strong likes and dislikes, wasn’t he?”

A reluctant nod. “I suppose you might say that. . . .”

“Now pay attention to me and think carefully before you answer. Do you know of anybody on board this ship who bore Mr. Holt a grudge?”

The little man started. “Do I know . . . would you mind saying that again?” His bony fingers played nervously with his old-fashioned watch-chain.

“You heard what I said, Dickens. I asked you whether you knew of anybody on board this ship who desired Mr. Holt’s death, either out of revenge or because they stood to profit by it. . . .”

“How should I know?” The answer rang nervous and shrill. “There was a lot Mr. Holt didn’t tell me. He may have had private feuds I didn’t know anything about. . . .”

“Answer the question. . . .”

Again that terrified glance. Then: “No!” sullenly.

“Do you know a woman called Madame Alva?”

The weak eyes were suddenly wary. “Yes. . . .”

“Were you aware that she was sailing by this ship?”

Dickens raised trembling hands in protest. “No. That’s on oath. I didn’t know anything about it until the boss brought it up. . . .”

“What was the trouble between Mr. Holt and this woman?”

“He used to consult her; he was one of her best clients. Then we caught her out and he broke with her. . . .”

“How do you mean ‘caught her out’?” the captain inquired.

“Fake séances, and that. She never deceived me. I could see she was phony through and through, but the boss wouldn’t listen. . . .”

“Did she get money out of him?” said the captain.

Dickens nodded vigorously. “Sure. I never knew how much, ’cos he never let on to me, seeing as I disapproved. But it was a tidy sum. She was always trying to get Mr. Holt back. . . .”

“How?”

“She’d write or she’d send friends of hers—smart society dames, they were, mostly—to talk the old man over. But he was through. . . .”

“Then at least she didn’t stand to profit by his death. On the contrary. . . .”

The little man humped his shoulders. “I don’t know anything about it. . . .”

“Do you know whether she attempted to see Mr. Holt after we sailed?” This from Brown.

“That I’m sure she didn’t. She’d have had a hot reception if she had. . . .”

“She didn’t write to him, did she?”

“No, *sir*!” Positively.

There was a momentary interruption as Humphries appeared with a note for the captain. “Tell Mr. Fewlass I’ll be right out,” McDiarmid bade the steward. “I’m wanted on the bridge,” he said to Brown. “Any more questions?”

“Not for the present. . . .” Brown’s air was reserved.

“You needn’t wait, Mr. Dickens. And listen, I don’t want this affair talked about with other passengers, do you understand?” The captain’s tone was authoritative.

“Yes, sir! Of course, sir. . . .” Dickens shambled out.

The captain’s eye followed him. “That bird knows something. He was scared out of his wits. Did you notice how nervous he was?”

“He’s the deep one,” Mullaney grumbled. “Knowing all that about this Alva dame and never spilling a word to me. . . .”

“They’re in this together, that’s a cert,” Harris declared. Brown said nothing; his expression was preoccupied.

McDiarmid glanced at the clock. “We can’t dig the Madame out at this time of night. Besides, I want to be present when she’s questioned. Will nine o’clock be too early for you, Mr. Brown? Good; then have her warned,

please, Mr. Harris. And listen, you and Mullaney had better question everybody who was about between ten-thirty and eleven-thirty last night, to see if any light can be thrown on Holt's movements between the time he left the suite and the finding of the body. Start with any of the stewards and crew you can pick up to-night, and work through the passengers in the morning. . . ." He looked spryly at Brown. "That O.K. with you?"

"Sure," said Brown. "And if Mr. Harris could have Dickens here again, say, at half-past nine, I'd like a word with him after we're through with Madame Alva."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MULLANEY and a strange steward—it was not Humphries—were waiting outside the captain's cabin when, shortly before nine next morning, Brown climbed the stair. He was immediately admitted to the presence.

The purser and Harris were with the captain. It was evident that McDiarmid had not been to bed. His eyes were heavy and the lower part of his face was dark with stubble. Harris was saying: "I left him going in to Mr. Holt. When I came back with Mullaney, Parsons, the stooard, told us that he'd gone and that Dr. Winstay was with the old gentleman. Parsons said he wasn't with him more than five minutes—Mr. Holt ran him out before ever Dr. Winstay appeared. . . ."

"And that was the last time he was seen, you say?" the captain asked Mr. Mellow.

"Yes-sir, that's definite," the purser answered.

"We're talking about the ship's surgeon, Dr. Alloway," McDiarmid explained to Brown. "He was fetched in to old Holt at lunch-time yesterday, and since then he seems to have completely disappeared. . . ." He frowned. "Taken in conjunction with this other business, I don't know what to think. . . ."

"Was Dr. Alloway a friend of Mr. Holt's?" Brown inquired.

"He was not," Harris retorted. "I was just telling the captain here that Holt wouldn't let him treat him. . . ."

"He may have fallen overboard, sir," Mr. Mellow suggested.

"In a sea like this?" was the impatient retort. "That would be suicide. And if you're suggesting to me that a sane, level-headed fellow like Alloway. . . ." He broke off. "It's preposterous. But he may have met with an accident—tumbled down an open hatch and remained unconscious somewhere. . . ." He paused. "You'll take the plan of the ship, Mr. Mellow, and you'll divide it into sections, and you'll put a search-party to work. I want every nook and cranny examined, every cupboard opened, every inch of space explored, the hold as well. Get busy!"

With a gesture which seemed to signify that he had put the matter momentarily from his thoughts, he dismissed the purser. Harris said: "I've

got that stooard outside, sir, if you'd care to hear him before you take Madame Alva. . . ."

Curtly the captain nodded assent. "Some statement Harris has got hold of," he observed to Brown as the detective hurried out.

"Now then, Smethurst," said Harris when the witness, a smart-looking man, stood before the captain, "I want you to repeat what Parsons told you. . . . Parsons," he explained, turning back to the desk, "was Mr. Holt's stooard. . . ."

"It was the night we sailed," Smethurst began. "Fred Parsons, who works along of me on A, come into the pantry while I was there and told me that, as he was taking an order of White Rock into the royal suite, he heard Mr. Holt crying out, very alarmed-like: 'I'm afraid, I'm afraid!' . . ."

"Just a minute, my man," McDiarmid interrupted. "Who was with Mr. Holt at the time?"

"Mr. Dickens, Parsons said. . . ."

There was a moment of impressive silence, during which Harris cast a triumphant look at Brown as if in assertion of his proficiency as a professional over the amateur. Brown, who was not in ignorance of the Scotland Yard man's resentment at his intrusion, affected to ignore it; at any rate, his face remained expressionless. "Did Parsons hear anything further?" the captain asked.

"He didn't tell me no more, sir. . . ."

McDiarmid's nod released the witness, and Harris escorted him to the door. "We'd better see this man, Parsons," said the captain. The same idea, it appeared, had occurred to the ship's detective. But Parsons was off duty, asleep; Mr. Harris had waited to take the captain's order. "Get him," said McDiarmid, "and, hey, if Madame Alva's there, send her in!"

The garish light of a misty morning pouring in from the wide prospect of sky and sea, which the captain's windows commanded, was not becoming to Madame Alva. Early rising was evidently not in the medium's habits, for she looked yellow-eyed and peevish. She had dressed herself with some care for the interview in a purple woollen dress a good deal stretched, and a new, rather severe black hat. With considerable dignity she accepted the chair the captain offered and, taking a clean handkerchief from her bag, pressed it to her closely-folded lips.

"It was about Mr. Holt I wished to speak to you, Madam," the captain began. "You've heard what's happened to him?"

She nodded solemnly. "I warned him three months ago to beware of water," she replied in a full, deep tone.

"Quite," McDiarmid agreed rather hastily. Then: "You and Mr. Holt had a disagreement, I believe?"

She gave the captain a cold look. "Mr. Holt saw fit to make a vulgar brawl at my house. . . ."

"Why?"

"Mr. Holt was a business man. He always wanted value for his money. If he attended a séance, there had to be manifestations or he felt he'd been cheated. If you gentlemen know anything about survivalism, you will understand that our spirit controls are not invariably at our beck and call, to be summoned as one would summon a servant. . . ."

"Isn't it a fact that Mr. Holt accused you of arranging fake séances for his especial benefit?"

Disdainfully she brushed a speck of dust from her frock with her handkerchief. "Mr. Holt made a number of disgraceful allegations against me. What really set him against me was the fact that I saw his impending death in the crystal, and warned him. . . ."

"Mr. Holt used to pay you for séances and so forth, didn't he?"

"He paid the usual fees, I understand. I have nothing to do with money. My secretary attends to that. . . ."

"Is your secretary on board with you?"

"No, she is not. . . ."

"Did Mr. Holt ever promise to leave you money in his will?" It was Brown who had taken up the questioning. Madame Alva stared at him haughtily. "Not that I'm aware of. . . ."

"You're sure of that?"

"If such was his intention he never mentioned it to me. In any case, it's extremely unlikely, considering the things he said about me. . . ."

"I was referring to the period when you were still friends. . . ."

"If you knew me better, young man, you'd understand that money means nothing to me. On the plane on which so many of my waking hours are spent your mundane values have no significance. Mr. Holt said nothing to me about leaving me money and it would never have occurred to me to question him. . . ."

"You know Mr. Holt's man, Dickens, I expect?"

"I used to see him with Mr. Holt," coldly.

"Did he tell you Mr. Holt was sailing in the *Barbaric*?"

"Certainly not. I didn't know it until I was on board. . . ."

"Who told you?"

"Someone spoke of it at table. . . ."

"Did you make any attempt to communicate with Mr. Holt?"

"I did not. . . ."

"You didn't write to him or send him a message?"

"Indeed, no. Mr. Holt had made statements about me which rendered all further relations between us impossible. . . ."

"Have you spoken to Dickens since you came on board?"

"Most certainly not. I wouldn't demean myself. . . ."

"You don't like Dickens, I gather?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I try to be Christian. But Mr. Dickens was a bad influence on Mr. Holt. It was undoubtedly he who poisoned his mind against me. . . ."

It was Harris who broke the ensuing pause by asking the captain's permission to put a question. "What is your nationality, madam?" he inquired.

"I am Spanish. . . ."

"I mean by birth. . . ."

She hesitated and a little colour crept into her puffy cheeks. "I see no necessity to answer that question. . . ."

"You're German or Austrian, aren't you?"

She was silent. Harris jerked up his chin. "Oh, all right. But I suppose you know that police head-quarters in New York are pretty well posted on all mediums operating in the city. It won't be hard to find out. . . ."

Fury seized her and she sprang up, her heavy cheeks trembling.

"You allow this man to insult me?" she cried to the captain. "The police have nothing against me. I have friends on board. Ask them. Ask Mrs. Hawksley, ask Lady Faucon, telegraph to my friend, the Princess de Marcilly at the Plaza. . . ."

"Calm yourself, madam," said the captain. "It was a perfectly proper question. If you choose not to answer it. . . ." He shrugged.

"All right," she retorted rather shrilly, rounding on Harris, "cable the New York police—I don't care. And ask them at the same time if they know anything of Mr. Charles Dickens!" With which final shot she turned back to the captain. "And now if you're quite finished with me I'd like to go to breakfast!"

McDiarmid stood up and bowed, and Harris, with inflexible features, showed her out. “Dickens is right,” the detective exclaimed as the door shut on her, “she’s fake all through. Spanish my hat! She’s a Yank, that’s certain, probably of German extraction, if I know anything about my job. I’d like to find out whether the Yard can’t give us the dope on her. . . .”

“Just a minute, Harris,” McDiarmid checked him. “That was a straight tip she gave us about Dickens—trust an angry woman to spill the beans. See if you can get New York on the transatlantic telephone; or wait, Mullaney had better do that, as he’s known at head-quarters. What do you say, Mr. Brown?”

“I agree, sir. But I also think that Mr. Harris should send a radio to Scotland Yard about the woman. . . .”

Mullaney departed as Humphries announced that the steward, Parsons, was outside, also Mr. Dickens. The captain’s glance brushed Brown’s. “Parsons first, I think, sir,” the latter murmured. “Write your message at that desk,” McDiarmid bade Harris, pointing to a writing table against the wall. “I want you to hear what Parsons says. . . .” He told Humphries to show the steward in.

CHAPTER TWELVE

PARSONS was very glib. It hadn't really occurred to him to connect the words he had caught, accidental like, with the pore gentleman's death, else, a'corse, he'd have reported them afore going off dooty at midnight. "Did you gather from anything you overheard exactly what it was that the deceased was afraid of?" asked the captain.

The steward hesitated, rubbing his large, hairy hands together. "No, sir, not then. But next morning—yesterday, that was—as I was going by the bedroom, I 'eard Mr. 'Olt 'aving words, as you might say, with 'is man, an' there was talk of some woman, sir. . . ."

The atmosphere in the cabin was suddenly tense. "What did Mr. Holt say?"

"Well, sir, I didn't catch only a word or two in passin', it not bein' my 'abit to listen at doors. He was angry—very 'ot, 'e was. 'I'll not see 'er,' 'e ses. 'She's 'ad all she's goin' to get outer me,' 'e ses, 'an' so you can tell 'er. . . .' "

"Did Mr. Holt mention any name?"

"No, sir. . . ." The steward was about to add something, but the captain's question cut him off. "He didn't speak of Madame Alva, by any chance?"

A shadow seemed to fall across the swarthy face and above the linen collar the man's rather prominent Adam's apple suddenly rose and fell. The steward cleared his throat. " 'Ow was the name, please, sir?" McDiarmid repeated it and Parsons shook his head solemnly. "No, sir, I never 'eard no sich name. Nach'rally, I thought it was the other lady. . . ."

"What other lady?"

"The lady as give me the letter for Mr. Dickens."

"Rather stout lady, was she, and pale in the face?"

"This lady was pale, but not stout. What I'd call skinny, beggin' yer pardon, sir, and tall. Kinder funny-lookin' she was. She was talkin' to 'erself as she come along the corridor. . . ."

"Excuse me, sir." Harris had broken in. "Had a sort of wild look about the eye, hadn't she, my man, and dressed in black?" he questioned briskly.

"That's right, Mr. 'Arris. . . ."

“It’s a Mrs. Craven on C, sir,” the detective told the captain. “Rather an eccentric person. I’ve noticed her around. . . .”

“Know anything about her?”

“No, sir. . . .”

The captain nodded. “And she gave you a letter for Mr. Dickens?” he said to Parsons. “Wait a second, what time was this?”

“Soon after the bugle went for lunch, sir. She stopped me in the corridor and arst me if I knew which was Mr. Dickens’s cabin. A seven, eight an’ nine, I tells her, but with that she pushes the letter into me ’and an’ sez, sez she, ‘’Ere’s a letter for ’im,’ she sez, an’ gives me a quarter. As I’d seen Mr. Dickens go to ’is dinner and I didn’t want to disturb Mr. ’Olt, I slipped the letter under the door. It was only arterwards, when Mr. ’Olt took on so about it that I. . . .”

“Not so fast,” the captain checked him. “The letter was addressed to Dickens and Mr. Holt got hold of it. Is that what you’re trying to tell us?”

“That’s right, sir. An’ seeing the ole gen’elman with the letter in ’is ’and, screechin’ like ’e was bein’ murdered or somethink. . . .”

“Stop!” McDiarmid cried peremptorily. “Let’s get this in order. You slipped the letter under the door. What happened next?”

“I was takin’ A47 ’is lunch—about an ’arf-hour later, that’d be—when I ’ears Mr. ’Olt shoutin’ at the top of his voice for Dickens. An’ with that his bell kep’ ringin’ like the ship was afire. I downs me tray prompt and nips along to the suite and there, in the sittin’-room, is the ole gen’elman in ’is pyjamas, with ’is finger on the bell, ’ollerin’ like mad for Dickens. The first thing I notices is that he ’as the letter in ’is ’and. ‘Git out of ’ere,’ sez ’e, swearing at me somethink chronic, ‘an’ find my man,’ ’e sez. The next moment Mr. Dickens comes running an’ pushes me outside. An’ that’s all I knows about it. It only come to me, sence I been in the room ’ere, that the lady as give me the letter must, a’corse, ’ave been the same one as I ’eard Mr. ’Olt gittin’ so ’ot about. . . .”

“That’ll do, my man,” McDiarmid shut him up abruptly. “Any questions, Mr. Brown?” With an abstracted air his neighbour shook his head. “You, Mr. Harris?” “Not for the moment, sir. . . .” The detective was contemplating the steward moodily. “You can go,” the captain dismissed Parsons.

“That’s a slimy fellow,” McDiarmid commented when they were alone again. Brown persisted in his rather gloomy reticence but Harris said, “You’re right, sir. He’s a sight too pat for me. . . .” He frowned. “I can’t help feeling that I’ve seen him before. . . .”

"*Did you notice his hands?*" Brown put in suddenly. With one accord the captain and the detective turned to the speaker and there was a significant silence. For an instant McDiarmid seemed to hear Dr. Yarrow's rather juvenile tones again: "Quite exceptional strength . . . remarkably powerful fingers. . . ." But Brown did not enlarge upon his thought. With an exasperated ejaculation, the captain pushed his cap back from his forehead. "Well," he exclaimed, "there's two of 'em now—Madame Alva and the Craven woman. If Parsons is telling the truth, this lets the Madame out. . . ."

"*Why didn't Dickens mention that letter?*"

The question came from Brown. But it remained unanswered for at that moment the entrance of Mullaney interrupted them. "I got through to police head-quarters, sir," he announced. "I asked if they had anything on the records against Dickens or the Madame. They couldn't say off hand, but they'll call me back. And there's this"—he glanced at the door and lowered his voice. "Dickens is outside," he exclaimed, "and I don't want him to hear me. One of the radio operators told me that, as he was going on duty last night, just before eleven o'clock, he happened to notice Dickens talking to a woman. . . ."

"Madame Alva?" The captain and Harris put the question simultaneously.

"I asked him that. No, it wasn't the Madame. He couldn't see the woman very well, but she was tall and thin, he says. It was on B deck. . . ."

"Dickens said he spoke to no one," McDiarmid pointed out.

"Sure. That's why I questioned Andrews when he brought it up," Mullaney replied cheerfully.

"It was obviously this other woman, Mrs. What's-her-name," the captain pronounced.

"Mrs. Craven," Harris supplemented.

"Mrs. Craven, exactly. We'd better have her up at once, eh, Mr. Brown?"

But Brown, with the same inscrutable mien he had displayed throughout, said as before, "I'd say, see Dickens first!"

So McDiarmid touched the bell and, for the second time that morning, Dickens appeared.

The captain and Brown were conferring in whispers. Dickens, halted uncertainly before the desk, seemed to divine that the atmosphere was heavy with suspicion for, as the minutes slipped by and the voices rustled on, he

grew more and more apprehensive until, at last, producing a bandana handkerchief, he began to mop his face and the back of his neck.

It was Brown who spoke first and his manner was friendly. “Sorry to trouble you again, Mr. Dickens, but there were one or two points. . . . Sit down, won’t you?”

“Hallo!” exclaimed the captain, glancing round, “what’s become of the others?” The two detectives were nowhere to be seen. “It’s just as well,” Brown’s undertone replied. “We don’t want him scared more than he is already. . . .” His clear eye rested on the man in the chair. “Mr. Dickens,” he began, “a terrible crime has been committed. The captain here has asked me to help him get at the truth. I’m anxious to clear up the whole of Mr. Holt’s background. You’re the best person to help us there. If you want the murderer arrested, as I know you do, I’m confident we can rely on your assistance. Am I right?”

“Sure,” the little man murmured and shuffled with his feet, his hands clamped feverishly on the arms of his chair.

“Good. You were twelve years with Mr. Holt, didn’t you say? How did you come to join him?”

“I was a clerk in his mines office at Butte. . . .” The tone was sullen.

“How long were you there?”

“Two years. . . .” Reluctantly.

“What were you doing before that?”

A pause. “Working out West. . . .”

“Where?”

A longer pause. “Chicago. . . .”

“Are you from the Middle West? Where were you born?”

“Wisconsin. . . .”

“You have a very famous name,” Brown said with a smile. “Who was your father?”

Silence. “I asked you who your father was,” the speaker reiterated gently. The little man was gazing down at his feet—splay feet encased in shapeless shoes of soft black leather. “I don’t know,” he muttered at last.

“Oh! How’s that?”

Another silence. Then, sulkily, “I was raised in an orphanage. . . .”

“You were a foundling?” A brief nod. “Is Dickens your real name?”

He shrugged. “It’s the only one I ever had. . . .”

“How did you come by it?”

“That was the Supe. . . .”

“The what?”

“The superintendent. That was what we kids used to call him, the Supe. He was a great one for reading, was the Supe. There’s a book by Dickens about poor children in a workhouse. . . .”

“ ‘Oliver Twist’. . . .”

“That’s right. It seems like the foundling kids at this workhouse were named alphabetically as they turned up. The Supe thought a lot of this guy, Charles Dickens. So he named me for him. . . .” He frowned. “There wasn’t anyone to stop him, I guess. . . .”

Brown’s face softened suddenly. “So Mr. Holt found you working in his office at Butte and took you into his service, is that it? He was a rough man to serve, wasn’t he?”

“He was rough all right. . . .”

“He used to abuse you, didn’t he?” A sour nod. “What sort of things would he say to you?”

“He’d call me a charity brat. And worse’n that. . . .”

“He knew about your past, then?”

The little man licked his lips nervously before replaying. His “Yes” was barely audible.

“That must have been rather hard to bear. But I suppose the job was worth it. What did he pay you?”

“A hundred a month and my keep. . . .”

“A hundred a month, did he say?” the captain echoed in astonishment.

“And you mean to tell me that you put up with his insults for a miserable salary like that?” Brown demanded.

Dickens made an unwilling movement of the shoulders. “I was used to him,” he mumbled sullenly. “He wasn’t so bad. . . .” But his eyes darted unhappily from Brown’s face to the captain’s.

Brown’s eye dropped to the captain’s blotter where he had made a note or two. “Did Mr. Holt go in fear of anybody on this ship?” he next asked.

The witness shifted his position. “Not that I know of,” he answered huskily. “But then, as I say, he didn’t tell me everything.”

“Never mind about that. What did he mean by saying to you in the bedroom the night we sailed, ‘I’m afraid, I’m afraid,’ or words to that effect?”

“He said that?”

"Certainly. I have evidence to that effect. . . ."

A wan smile broke out on the furtive face. "I remember now. He was talking about the fog. He didn't like the foghorn going all the time, said it reminded him of the *Titanic*. It was the fog he was afraid of. . . ." Dickens's glance rested expectantly on the other's face.

"I see. . . ." The tone was non-committal. "Now, Dickens," he went on while his pencil made idle scratches on the blotter, "I want to take you back to last night. From roughly ten minutes of eleven until ten minutes past you were walking on B deck. Right?"

"Yes."

"And in that half-hour you spoke to nobody? Correct?"

The little man wriggled uneasily. "I might have told someone it was foggy or something like that. . . ."

"You assured the captain a while ago that you spoke to nobody. Which is it?"

"If I said that, I guess it's right. . . ."

"You stick to that?"

He moistened his lips. "Sure. . . ."

"Then if anyone claimed to have seen you speaking to a woman, he'd be making a mistake, eh?"

A gulp. "I don't know any women on this ship. . . ."

"Except Madame Alva. . . ."

"I haven't seen or spoken to her, I told you before. . . ." His voice rang shrill in protest.

"All right. Now pay attention! When you returned to the suite after lunch yesterday you found Mr. Holt in a very excited state, didn't you?"

There was an evasive look in the sharply-pointed face as he retorted: "He'd get mad so often, I guess I didn't notice. . . ." The captain, who was rather pink about the gills, was about to interrupt. But Brown's touch on the gold-laced cuff stayed him. "I want you to tell us what was the trouble this time," Brown persisted. "You can remember if you try, I'm sure. . . ."

Dickens shrugged his shoulders. "He was still all burnt up over Madame Alva, I guess. . . ."

Brown leaned forward quickly. "Then it was Madame Alva who wrote that letter?"

"What letter?"

“I’ve had enough of your fencing,” the captain barked with such suddenness that the witness seemed to leap in his chair. “It was a letter addressed to you that the steward put under the door. Holt had it in his hand when you went in to him. And I’ll tell you who wrote it; it was Mrs. Craven. . . .”

The little man seemed to shrink together. His face was livid and the pale eyes were dead. For a moment he looked as though he were about to faint. “Out with it!” McDiarmid trumpeted. “What was in that letter?” Erect on his feet, a massive figure in blue and gold, he seemed to tower over the diminutive form cowering in the chair.

Thin hands outlined a feeble gesture of supplication. “It wasn’t anything, gentlemen, I swear it. She just wanted to see the boss. . . .”

“But who is this Craven woman? And what had she to do with him?”

“I can tell you that,” a quiet voice at his side put in. “She’s Mrs. Holt!”

“Excuse me, sir. . . .” The captain’s steward was in the doorway.

“What is it, Humphries?”

“It’s a lady asking for you, sir. . . .”

“I can’t see anyone now. Who is it?”

Humphries hesitated. “She says she’s Mrs. Holt, sir. But I think she’s a bit touched!”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

McDiarmid stared blankly at Brown. “I never sent for her. . . . When I ring,” he snapped at the steward and the door closed. He seemed dumbfounded. Glancing from Brown to Dickens, who had risen to his feet, and back to Brown again, “His wife, eh?” he murmured. “But look here,” he said to Brown, “you told me she inherited under the old man’s will, didn’t you? How much was it, again?”

“Ten millions. . . .”

“But . . . then she. . . .”

“Exactly. . . .” Brown’s tone was confident. “In other words, Captain, we’re getting down to the motive. . . .”

A wild voice interrupted him. “I swear to God, gentlemen, she’d no more to do with this murder than I had,” Dickens cried passionately. “I lied, I admit it, but it was to shield her, a poor, half-crazed thing that never did harm to living creature—the only mistake she made was to marry that man, God help her. . . .”

“You wanted to shield her all right,” McDiarmid told him sternly, “because you’re up to the neck in it yourself. What have you done with that letter?”

“I tore it up and threw it overboard. . . .”

“I bet you did. . . .”

“It was only to prevent the boss from seeing it—you’ve got to believe me. He recognised her writing on the envelope, but I got the letter away from him before he could open it. I was sorry for Mrs. Holt, gentlemen—I’d write to her once in a while to let her know how her husband was going on, and she’d write to me. He’d have killed me if he’d found out about it, he hated her so. . . .”

“I suppose you didn’t know she was on board, either?” McDiarmid suggested dryly.

“No, sir, not until I saw her writing on the letter. . . .”

“What did the letter say?”

“A lot of crazy stuff. She wanted to see him, to save him from himself—I never paid much heed to what she wrote. . . .”

“But you were careful to destroy the letter? And to lie about it afterwards?”

“That was only to safeguard her—Captain, you must believe me. I knew she was due to inherit all that money under his will, and she always talked so—so wildly about him that I made sure, if this letter of hers came out, she’d be the first one you’d suspect. That’s the only reason I lied, sir. . . .”

A voice, loud and jeering, rang out: “Is zat so?” Mullaney stood just inside the room, his red face so darkly menacing that Dickens, as he whipped about, instinctively dropped back a pace. “With your leave, Captain,” said the detective, advancing to the desk, “I’d like to ask this bird a few questions.” And, suddenly thrusting his face into Dickens’s, he demanded, without further ado, “What year did you join Holt?”

The little man smiled feebly. “Why, Chris, you know that. Nineteen twenty, it was. . . .”

“Never mind the soft soap. And my name’s Mullaney. Where was you working before you went to Butte?”

The weak eyes were ragged with pain. “I told you a dozen times—Chicago. . . .”

Brown struck in. “We’ve been over all that, Mullaney. . . .”

“One moment, sir, if you please. . . . When did you leave your last job in Chi?” he asked Dickens. “And this time,” he added, his face nakedly hostile, “we’ll have the real date. . . .”

They all saw the last flicker of hope fade out of the despairing eyes. Dickens did not speak at once. Then, “Nineteen twelve,” he murmured faintly.

“And from nineteen twelve to nineteen seventeen where were you?”

No answer. The ship’s foghorn, breaking in upon the instant’s hush, was like a voice wailing out of the dead years. “I’ll tell you where you were,” Mullaney proclaimed triumphantly. “You were at Joliet Penitentiary, doing a seven stretch. . . .” He pitched a sheet of paper on the blotter before the captain. “You’ll find it all there, Captain—N’York’s been on the phone again. He went up in February nineteen twelve for grand larceny: released on parole in seventeen: rejected for military service on medical grounds an’ went to Arizona. It’s a pip. . . .”

McDiarmid’s expression was flinty. “So that’s why you didn’t leave Holt? He knew this, of course. Well, my man, what have you to say?”

The little man was casting desperate glances about him. “It’s true,” he quavered. “You’ll never believe me, I know, but I was innocent. They

framed me. . . .” His tortured eyes implored the mask-like face.

Mullaney’s laugh was contemptuous. “Framed—that’s what they all say. . . .”

Brown drew the captain aside and for a moment they whispered together. Then McDiarmid rang.

“Are you the captain?”

McDiarmid bowed. “Madam. . . .”

“I am Mrs. Holt. . . .”

The dignity of her carriage, the hauteur of her tone, were in almost ludicrous contrast with the figure she presented. She bore herself like a queen and her emaciated fingers glittered with rings in heavy, old-fashioned gold settings; but the atmosphere of old trunks and mothballs seemed to cling to the odd collection of garments she was wearing—it was evident that she was reduced to the last survivals of a once large and fashionable wardrobe. A cleaner’s tag protruded from the neck of the faded green jumper she had drawn over a black serge dress which ended, in the mode of yesterday, just below the knee to display sunburn stockings and white canvas deck shoes. She was bareheaded, and the untidy knot into which her iron-grey hair had been hastily gathered up suggested that she had only just left her bed.

“They tell me that my husband has been murdered. . . .” She spoke without any emotion. The captain looked at her in surprise.

“You’ve only just heard?”

She inclined her head imperiously. “They said last night that he had taken his own life. I tried to see you then, but the steward refused to give you a message. I made a note of his name—Ponder, a most insolent man. I am writing to the Company to have him dismissed. I shall also complain that the captain of this ship is not accessible to the passengers. . . .” She paused. “Who killed my husband?”

“That, madam, is what I am endeavouring to establish,” the captain replied. He turned to Brown, who was gazing with rigid intensity at the woman. “This is Mr. Wentworth Brown, who is assisting with the inquiry. . . .”

She inclined her head imperiously. “Mr. Brown. . . .” She took the chair which McDiarmid offered. Then, for the first time, she appeared to observe Dickens, who was eyeing her apprehensively. She let her regard rest upon him, but said nothing.

“I’m glad you came to see me, Mrs. Holt,” the captain said in matter-of-fact fashion, “because there are certain questions I wished to put to you. You and Mr. Holt have been separated for some years, I think?”

“The story of my relationship with Mr. Holt is soon told,” she replied coldly. “Mr. Holt wished to subjugate everybody. When I resisted him, he thought he could treat me as he had treated the wife and child he abandoned in his early manhood. But I held him to his marriage vows. Then he imagined he could starve me into submission by stinting me of money, but still I stood firm. I was the only person in his life whom Alonzo Holt was unable to master and it enraged him. He always had to have his own way. He was a man of violence, and he died by violence. And I, for one, am not surprised. . . .”

“Then you admit that there was bad blood between you? . . .”

“There was not a day of his life,” the answer rang calmly, “that Alonzo Holt did not devoutly wish my death and I his. . . .”

“Was that why you booked your passage under an assumed name?”

“Yes. He’d have killed me if he could, just as I tried to kill him. . . .”

Dickens sprang forward. “Captain,” he cried, “don’t listen to her. She don’t know what she’s saying. . . .”

But McDiarmid ignored the interruption. “Are you telling me that you tried to kill your husband, madam?”

“Well, not really to kill him, to frighten him, to make him suffer. He had insulted me before our guests; he had to pay for it. Dickens knows all about it. You remember that day at Irvington, Dickens?”

“I can see by your face that she’s telling the truth,” the captain told Dickens. “Let’s get to the bottom of this, my man. . . .”

“She’s out of her mind,” Dickens wailed. “She’s always been out of her mind, and I don’t wonder, the way he behaved to her. Mr. Holt was taken with vomiting after lunch one day, and she told him she’d put something in his food. I always thought she’d imagined it. . . .”

“No!” she cried excitedly. “No! It was true! That was the way to treat him—an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth—his own tactics. He tried to have me committed to an institution afterwards, but I was too many for him. He had no evidence, not a scrap. I threw the remains of the omelette on the fire and washed his plate myself. But from that moment he was determined to be rid of me, because he saw that I could beat him at his own game, and he was afraid to die. I knew him so well. . . .” With a darkly brooding air she fell silent.

"Was it with the intention of killing your husband that you shipped on this boat?"

She stirred from her reverie and with a secretive air shook her head. "No. My object was to save him from himself. I was willing to risk death at his hands in order to make a last appeal to his better nature and rescue from dissipation in unworthy causes the great fortune which I have been chosen to distribute. . . ." Her melancholy eyes lit up and her utterance grew more rapid. "Shall I tell you what happened? In my loneliness and poverty in Paris, this cross laid upon me to fit me for my task, I had a vision of a world in which there was no poverty but everywhere villages of little houses, pretty gardens and smiling babies. Then one day I heard a voice that bade me rise and go back to America. I was to seek my husband out and claim from him the millions he had made by robbing the people and grinding down the faces of the poor and clean this money of its taint by building the new universe of my vision. I lost no time, but caught the next steamer. On arriving in New York I discovered that Mr. Holt was sailing next day by this ship. Then I knew that fate had delivered him into my hands. As my fellow-passenger on the Atlantic, he could not elude me as he was able to do in New York. 'Go with him,' the voice whispered, 'for you are the appointed instrument of his salvation!' " She broke off dramatically.

Captain McDiarmid was a strictly practical person. His visions were restricted to infrequent nightmares in which the *Barbaric* was in collision with an iceberg or running down a ferry in the North River, the only inner voices he heard that of his digestion or his conscience whispering that the next instalment of income tax was overdue. With a distracted air he passed his hand over the back of his grizzled head and said: "Mr. Holt was killed at eight minutes past eleven. What were you doing at that time?"

She gave him a queer look. "Are you suggesting that I killed my husband?"

"I'm suggesting nothing. Please answer the question. . . ."

She shook her head. "I know nothing of my husband's death. . . ."

"What were you doing with Dickens on B deck at about eleven o'clock?"

She glanced at the little man and smiled. "Poor Dickens! My letter scared him. He came up to me while I was walking and begged me not to write to him or try and see Mr. Holt. . . ."

"After that he left you?"

"I took her to the library," Dickens put in. "She wanted to change her book. . . ."

“Kindly let the lady answer for herself,” the captain rasped.

“He’s quite right,” Mrs. Holt said calmly. “I stayed there reading until I heard someone say that Mr. Holt had committed suicide. I asked to be taken to you at once, but, as I say, this stupid man. . . .”

“Did you tell him who you were?”

Her stare was crushing. “I am not in the habit of discussing my private affairs with servants. . . .”

“What did you do then?”

“I retired to my cabin. I was greatly upset, so I took some amytal to make me sleep and got the stewardess to refill my hot-water bag. It was she who told me when I awoke late this morning that Mr. Holt had been murdered. I dressed immediately and came up to you. . . .”

The state-room door was violently burst open. Harris was there. “Excuse me, sir . . .” he said to the captain. “Not now, Mr. Harris,” the latter cut him off; “I’m occupied.” “I’m sorry, sir, but this is urgent. . . .”

Only then did McDiarmid perceive that the chief inspector had shed his usual stolidity of mien and was breathless and agitated. “One minute,” he said and, beckoning to Mullaney, drew him and Brown into a window recess. “Dickens will stay under guard until further orders,” he told Mullaney. “He’s to communicate with nobody, you understand? And a stewardess is to stay constantly with Mrs. Holt, day and night—she’s obviously unbalanced, and might do herself a mischief. In the meantime, see the library steward and her stewardess and verify this alibi of hers. Come back in an hour. I’ll just see what Harris is looking so important about, then I’m going to have a bath and a shave. . . .”

“I’ve traced that chap Parsons,” the inspector announced when Mullaney and his two charges had departed. “He was with me in the *Alaric* one voyage when a lady missed a diamond bangle. I had my suspicions then, but he had a cast-iron alibi. I checked up on him at the purser’s office—I thought I recognised that ugly mug of his—and when he was serving the midday soup took a look through his things. There was nothing in his ditty-box in his quarters, but I had a word with Smethurst, who told me Parsons kept some stuff in a cupboard in an unoccupied state-room in his charge. So I went along to A and there, wrapped up in one of Parsons’s soiled jackets, I found *this*!” So saying, Harris drew a slim leather wallet from his pocket and laid it before the captain.

McDiarmid picked up the pocket-book and opened it, then caught his breath sharply.

“Leonard J. Alloway,” was stamped inside.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ALONZO HOLT's millions awaited a new master but the life of the ship went on.

In the now empty operating theatre, behind locked doors, a form was shapeless and still under a sheet: down in the workshops the ship's carpenter and his mate whistled as they fashioned a long box. On the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, two nights and a day behind the *Barbaric's* foaming wake, excited groups pressed about the trading post where dealings in mining securities took place. But, freighted with the living and the dead, the great liner, parting a white-capped sea, headed serenely into the persistent mist.

The band was playing in the lobby outside the restaurant. "You're the one, you bee-eautiful, beautiful son of a gun," saxophones crooned to the listless murmur of conversation, the click of knitting needles and the rattle of backgammon dice. In long rows on the promenade deck muffled figures in chairs, snug under their rugs, attended the strains of "The Roast Beef of Old England" from the bugler that should usher in lunch. In the captain's cabin the lonely figure of the master pored over his private code-book, constructing a cipher message addressed to the company, which presently he was with his own hands to bear to the wireless-room, an infallible sign that the most particular discretion was enjoined.

The chief operator ran his eye over the message. "Beresford, Smythe, Throckmorton and Smythe, 131, Cedar Street, New York," were the only words in clear. "Holt's lawyers, I guess," he confided to young Andrews, who was on duty with him, as he reached for the sending key. "They're one of the oldest firms in the city."

Someone dropped into step with Mary Fulton, as, hands in jumper pockets, wisps of gold straggling out from under the dark blue béret, she tramped round the deck. It was Dr. Winstay. "Well," he said, "how did you get on last night?"

She made a little face. "It wasn't so bad, really. The captain was awfully nice. If it hadn't been for that man Brown. . . ."

"Brown? What did he do?"

"Why, it was he who sicked the captain on to me—I told you he came up to me last night when I screamed. . . ."

"So you did. . . ."

"And, as if that weren't enough, he made me tell the captain all about my meeting with Mr. Holt. I was terrified of what the captain would say, because, you know, I'm tourist third, really, and I had no business on that deck. . . ."

"I didn't realise you knew Mr. Holt. . . ."

"I'd only met him that morning—some man tried to send me off the promenade and Mr. Holt intervened and made me walk up and down with him. . . ." She paused and looked at her companion. "You knew Mr. Holt well, didn't you? Can I ask you something?"

"Go ahead. . . ."

"Why did he get so excited when I told him that Madame Alva was on board?"

"It's simply that Madame Alva was one of his *bêtes noires*. At one time, it appears, he became interested in spiritualism and used to consult her. Then they had some kind of falling-out—I don't know what happened exactly, but he says she gypped him. You know what these mediums are. . . ."

The girl laughed. "My gracious, I did put my foot in it, didn't I? But why did Mr. Brown want to tell the captain all about it?"

"Did he?"

"He certainly did. And cross-examined me as though he were the district attorney or something. . . ."

"He cross-examined you? Why, what's it got to do with him?"

"I don't know. He just takes himself pretty seriously, I guess. Although I suppose he had to report to the captain the way Mr. Holt carried on about Madame Alva. . . ."

"There was no need to drag you into it. I could have told them that the old man couldn't stick the sight of her. He was abusing her to me only the other day. But I still don't see what Brown has to do with this business. He's a scientist, isn't he?"

"That's what I thought. But there he was, up in the captain's cabin, butting in on everything. . . ."

"Odd!" Winstay mused. "But that's human nature. The world's full of officious people. Have you noticed if a fellow gets knocked over in the street or something, there's always someone in the crowd who takes charge

until the cop arrives? I don't mind telling you that last night I'd half a mind to give your friend Brown a piece of my mind, dragging a girl like you before the captain in the middle of the night to be questioned about something half the ship had seen. But one look at that long upper lip of his, that chin. . . ."

"What do they mean? Do tell me. . . ."

"Priggishness the one; bigotry the other. . . ."

She laughed. "You make him sound terrible. I think he might be nice, really. And if he'd brush his hair he wouldn't be bad-looking. . . ."

"I'm afraid I haven't much use for busybodies. But perhaps I do him an injustice. Last night, of course, I didn't know about your gaffe with old Holt. Brown was bound to report that, I guess. . . ."

She looked at him sidelong from under brown lashes. "Can you keep a secret?"

"I make my living by listening to them. Isn't a psychiatrist a sort of father confessor?"

"But seriously. . . ."

He took her arm. "Shoot! I adore secrets. . . ."

"I believe they suspect Madame Alva. . . ."

He shrugged. "I suppose that's as good a guess as any other, the whole business is so absolutely baffling. Though, of course, no woman is capable of exerting the strength that killed Holt. . . ."

"Is it certain that he was strangled?"

He nodded. "I've just come from the autopsy. . . ."

"Have you any theory about the murder?"

His face was thoughtful. "Well, I have and I haven't. . . ."

"I fancy they think Dickens did it. . . ."

"Dickens?" He laughed rather scornfully. "That's your friend Brown, I suppose? For aught I know to the contrary, every soul on the ship is under suspicion. . . ."

She shuddered. "It's rather awful to think of this horror hanging over us, like that cloud of smoke streaming out behind the funnels up there. Until the murderer is caught I know I shall always have the feeling that he may be at the next table at dinner, or sitting across from me in the lounge. And it's four days more before we reach Southampton. . . ."

Her companion nodded. They had halted at the rail. "I know what you mean. But don't let it get on your nerves, my dear. Take a lesson from that

old fellow there!"

He drew her attention to a grey-haired deck-hand, who, a little way beyond them, was phlegmatically polishing the brasswork. "He lets nothing worry him," he observed. "Sunshine or fog, he has his job to do and he does it. . . ." He laughed. "A very proper spirit. We might all be murdered in our beds and I'd lay a small shade of odds that next morning old Santa Claus here, regular as a clock, would appear with his rag and his polish to shine up the brass. . . ."

"It sounds awfully cold-blooded. . . ."

"It's human nature. After all, death is stagnation. Life is action, forward movement. It's only life that counts. . . ."

She sighed. "I wish I could be as philosophical about it as you are. You're very comforting. . . ."

"My bedside manner is well spoken of. . . ."

She flashed a glance at him. "Do you always laugh at yourself?"

"I have to, to prevent myself from crying. Like Figaro. . . ." Timidly she laid her hand on his. "You're going through a bad time, aren't you?"

He gazed into the haze. "Pretty bad. Apart from everything else, old Holt's death means something like ruin for me. We were in a big deal together—I tremble to think of the price his stocks must have opened at in New York this morning. . . . But I'm not going to bore you with that!" He put his hand on top of hers and let it rest there. "You know, I like you, Mary. . . ."

"Do you?" she smiled back. He was looking deep into her eyes.

Heads close together, they chatted on.

Released at length from his prolonged session with the captain, Wentworth Brown slowly descended to the promenade. The bray of the luncheon bugle, sounding as he left the boat deck, reminded him that to lunch in the public dining-room meant exposing his weary brain to the intolerable inquisitiveness of Travers; and, shrinking for once from his own company, the alternative of eating alone in the Parisian café did not appeal to him either. He had reached this point in his reflections when, as he came down the companion, he saw the Amber Girl standing at the rail of the promenade.

He did not perceive her companion until he was right upon them. But the discovery did not daunt him. With a nod to the doctor, he said to Mary, "I was looking for you, to see if you'd care to lunch with me. . . ."

"I was about to ask Miss Fulton to lunch with *me*," Winstay put in promptly.

"You're out of luck, doctor," Brown retorted, and turned to the girl. "I spoke first, didn't I?"

"If my opinion is of any importance," Mary Fulton remarked humorously, "I don't believe I'll lunch with either of you. I think I'll go back to the slums and improve my Italian. . . ."

Winstay chuckled. "I'll tell you what we'll do," he remarked to Brown. "We'll all three lunch together. And you and I will toss to see who pays. . . ."

"Miss Fulton is lunching with me," said Brown with unexpected firmness. The doctor shrugged, and with a glance at the girl, significantly stroked lip and chin. "Go ahead, Mary, and lunch with him," he said good-humouredly. She had coloured a little. "That's exactly what I intend to do," she replied with spirit. She turned to Brown. "I must tidy my hair. . . ."

"I'll wait for you here," he answered, and she hurried off. "Nice kid," said Winstay, looking after her, and when Brown did not reply, went on, "I hope you didn't take me seriously—about lunching together, I mean? It was only a joke"—his glance brushed the other's unsmiling face—"not a very good one, I'm afraid. . . ."

"That's all right," Brown assured him. The doctor took out his cigarette-case. "We finished the autopsy, you know. . . ."

The other nodded. "The captain showed me the report. . . ."

Winstay hesitated. "Then I'm correct in supposing that you're helping in the inquiry?"

"Yes. Why?"

"It's none of my business, of course, but I understand that you suspect Dickens of being the murderer. . . ."

"Well?"

"I can't help wondering whether you realise the peculiar relationship of friendship, almost of affection, that existed between these two men. . . ."

"That scarcely agrees with the evidence we've heard. . . ."

"Holt was always abusing Dickens, I know—I've heard him at it a hundred times. But at bottom he was genuinely fond of him. Let me tell you something! The first night we were on board I had a heart-to-heart talk with Mr. Holt. I told him frankly that Dickens was getting past his work, and I begged him to replace him by a competent secretary and a first-class valet. Holt wouldn't hear of it. . . ."

At last Brown seemed interested. "Is that so?"

“He said that Dickens was the only friend he had—in short, he flatly refused to get rid of him. What bearing this has upon the evidence you’ve collected of course I can’t say, but I did want you to know it. . . .”

“Thanks very much, doctor,” Brown rejoined with more warmth than hitherto shown. Then, Mary appearing, the doctor drifted away.

The atmosphere of the grill delighted Mary—the elegant room, the quiet, deft service, the central table, with its tiers of delectable viands displayed on blocks of ice. The caviare was impeccably fresh, the *poulet en cocette* simmering in its casserole, tender and piping hot, the Nesselrode pudding a dream of bliss. And Brown was obviously at pains to make himself agreeable. Almost at once, with that air of candour which she was beginning to discover in him, he paid her a compliment.

They were laughing about the battle as to who should take her to lunch. “I wasn’t going to let that fellow cut me out,” Brown declared stoutly.

“Why?”

“Well, for one thing, because you’re the only person I know on the boat. . . .”

“Thank you. . . .”

“But there’s another reason,” he added gravely. “I’d like us to be friends. . . .”

“You weren’t so wildly thrilled when Willie introduced us. . . .”

“That was because I didn’t have time to look at you. . . .” He paused. “I have hardly any women friends, but I know I’m going to like you. . . .”

“Can you always tell when you’re going to like people?”

“Always. . . .”

“You don’t like Dr. Winstay much, do you?”

He shrugged. “He’s not the type of man that appeals to me. But then I’m prejudiced. I have no use for inexact sciences like this psychoanalysis humbug. . . .”

“Dr. Winstay is not a humbug. He’s a very clever man and terribly good-natured. . . .”

“He’s too sure of himself. . . .”

“That’s true,” she admitted frankly. “Did you hear him tell me I could lunch with you if I liked? I hate being taken charge of. The boy I was engaged to used to do that, and I wouldn’t stand for it. . . .”

“You were engaged?”

"Yes. That's why I'm here. A family match. There was such an unholy row when I broke it off that I quit. . . ."

"I'm sorry. You were fond of him?"

Her expression changed and she nodded. "I suppose I was in a way . . ." she broke off. "But to go back to Dr. Winstay, you shouldn't have snubbed him like that. Mr. Holt's death was a fearful blow to him, and he's really a sensitive, warm-hearted creature. . . ."

"He certainly spoke up very handsomely for Dickens just now. . . ." He considered her severely. "By the way, did you tell him that I suspected Dickens?"

She nodded with rather a guilty air. "I didn't think there was any harm. After all, he was Mr. Holt's doctor, wasn't he?"

"I didn't say there was any harm. But the captain wouldn't like it. If Winstay blabs to me he's likely to blab to other passengers, and where'd you be?"

"I'll speak to him about it," she said rather hastily.

A loud voice from the adjoining table broke in upon their conversation. It was a paunchy man, who, on his way across the grill, had stopped to apostrophise a party of friends. "I'll say the market's took a dip," he was exclaiming. "Lookit here"—he fished a radiogram from his pocket—"Nachita off three and a half, Agenta Mines six and seven-eighths, Tanagra Copper five—all the old man's stocks are on the toboggan. And that's not the close!"

"Poor Dr. Winstay," said Mary. "He and Mr. Holt were in a big deal together, he told me. . . ."

Brown glanced up from his plate. "Really?"

She nodded. "He said Mr. Holt's death had about ruined him. He was right, I guess. . . ."

"Paging Mr. Brown!"

Brown stopped the bell-hop. The gentleman was wanted outside, the boy said. Brown excused himself and followed the page. In a moment he was back. "I'm terribly sorry," he said to Mary in an undertone, "I have to go to the captain. If you wouldn't mind having your coffee by yourself. . . ."

She was bitterly disappointed, for, with the breaking of the ice between them, she had hoped that over their coffee he might have taken her into his confidence regarding the progress of the investigation. More than this, she felt herself unaccountably drawn to him. For all her brave pretending, the scars of her broken engagement were still unhealed, and, having burnt her

bridges, she felt that she and this honest, rather lonely man were companions in solitude. It would be quite all right for him to leave her, she assured him, as he signed the bill.

"I was to tell you private, sir, that the captain wishes to see you immediate. . . ."

The messenger was a seaman, his manner perturbed and impressive. "The captain ain't in his cabin, sir," he explained when Brown rejoined him. "I'm to take you to where he's waiting. . . ." And with that he led the way to the elevators.

They descended to D deck and, threading a long corridor of state-rooms, came to the flat where the gymnasium and pool were situated. Here a stairway brought them down to a part of the ship which Brown had never visited. Considerably mystified he followed the messenger along a bare passage, at the end of which he descried a group of officers. Awestruck faces were turned to his as the group divided on his approach and he found himself gazing into the set, stern features of the captain.

The corridor seemed thronged. Ship's officers, stewards, and men in reefers or blue jerseys stretched away in a long line. He caught a glimpse of the black-haired chief officer with a face of death, of the purser's goggling eyes. No one made a sound: the hush was so sharply marked that his feet rang on the linoleum as, borne down by a growing premonition of evil, he went forward.

The captain was standing beside a locker that reached to the floor, its door ragged and gaping, where an axe had smashed it open. McDiarmid waited until Brown had reached him, then stepped back, motioning towards the cupboard with his hand.

Brown looked as bidden. Inside the locker a figure in officer's uniform, grimly jaunty, with cap tilted, was huddled, with glassy eyes and purple congested face. And on one side of the neck, as the head lolled forward, were visible the selfsame finger-marks as Holt's throat had borne.

Hoarsely the captain spoke a name.

"Alloway."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

In a sheltered corner of the promenade, Mrs. Hawksley, recumbent in a chair, critically inspected the passengers straggling up from lunch. In ones and twos they came—a carnal, overfed band, the lady reflected with a self-righteous glance at the tray on her knee—and settled down to enjoy the brief interval of daylight remaining before dusk.

Mrs. Hawksley beckoned a passing steward and gave him her tray. The remains of a *salade romaine*, a cup of black coffee—Mrs. Hawksley was on the eighteen days' diet; the round box of candies on the floor beside her remained unopened. Her chair, and the empty chair adjoining it, were placed so as to catch the few sparse rays of sunshine that penetrated the tenuous haze. Observing this, a woman swiftly descended upon the vacant seat. "Excuse me," said Mrs. Hawksley, shooting forth a firmly possessive hand, "this chair is engaged!" "Oh, pardon. . . ." Meekly the intruder slunk away. Then suddenly Mrs. Hawksley scrambled to her feet. Madame Alva was coming along the deck.

"Alva, dearest," she cried, taking the medium by the hand, "I'm so happy you felt well enough to get up for a little. Why, you poor thing, you look absolutely wretched. But come and sit down. See, your chair's all ready and I've brought you a box of those French chocolates you like!" So saying, she installed her friend in the vacant chair, arranging a travelling pillow behind her head, and tucking a luxurious fur motoring robe round her feet. This done, she prised up the lid of the box of candies and placed the box on Madame Alva's lap.

"I feel wretched," said the medium rather peevishly. "I scarcely closed an eye all night. . . ."

"It was very naughty of you not to let me know last night that you were ill," Mrs. Hawksley rejoined, as she settled down in her chair. "I heard about it only from Minna this morning. What happened? You had to have the doctor, Minna said. Was it this dreadful business about old Holt that upset you? You knew him, didn't you?"

"It was only a nervous attack," the other replied. "I haven't been sleeping well. I didn't hear about Holt until this morning. . . ."

Her friend was gazing at her intently. “Seriously, Alva, dear, you’re looking most dreadfully ill. Don’t you think you should go back to bed and let the doctor see you again?”

“Please don’t keep on about my health,” the medium broke out irritably. “Talking about it doesn’t do any good. . . .” With a fractious air she helped herself to a chocolate.

“There, there, honey, I didn’t mean to upset you,” Mrs. Hawksley pacified her. “I only spoke for your good. You forget how highly-strung you are: you don’t rest nearly enough. You’re too good-natured; you let people impose on you. If I’d been with you this morning I’d have given the captain a piece of my mind. The idea of sending for you at nine o’clock or some such unearthly hour. . . .”

“Who told you the captain sent for me?”

“Minna. I popped in on you for a little visit, and found you were already up and out. . . .”

“Minna, eh?” Madame Alva’s green eyes drooped to the box on her lap as she took another chocolate. Then she looked at Mrs. Hawksley. “Forgive me if I was cross just now, dear friend, but I’ve had a terrible morning. Yes, it’s true—the captain did send for me. He seemed to think I could tell him who’d killed Alonzo Holt. . . .”

“Alva! You?”

She nodded sombrely and sighed. “It’s just another of those crosses which all prophets have to bear. I told you how abominably this old man treated me: well, someone went to the captain with a story that I had extorted immense sums of money out of him and I don’t know what. . . .”

“And the captain believes this?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “You’d think so by the way he questioned me. I know whom I have to thank for this—it’s Dickens, his man. He never forgave me because I refused to enter into a conspiracy with him to rob the old man—I was to send in false bills through Dickens and we were to share the profits. . . .”

“But, Alva, this is outrageous. Did you tell the captain?”

She shook her head. “Sin brings its own punishment—there was no need. At the very moment Mr. Holt was killed I was sick in my cabin, with the stewardess and the doctor looking after me. Mr. Holt treated me shamefully, but I’ve always tried to harbour no malice against him. To be unjustly suspected, however, tries the meekest spirit, and all the morning I’ve been greatly upset. . . .”

"But, Alva, dearest, it's your duty to open the captain's eyes about this man Dickens. Don't you realise that he may have killed Mr. Holt? A man who'd put up such a scheme to you would be guilty of anything. . . ."

The medium shook her head and picked a chocolate. "Let's not judge him, Alva, dear. And please don't repeat what I've told you. . . ."

She broke off, for a brisk, elderly man in grey had stopped to greet her. She introduced him to Mrs. Hawksley as Sir Henry Faucon, a retired Indian official. "Lady Faucon's an American," Madame Alva explained, "and one of my dearest friends. . . ."

"There's something devilish odd going on in this ship," Faucon remarked. "What do you think is the latest? The doctor's missing. . . ."

"What doctor?" Mrs. Hawksley asked.

"The ship's surgeon. They've been ransacking the ship for him. Just before lunch I was wandering about on one of the lower decks, trying to find the baggage-room, when a seaman told me I couldn't go any farther. Beyond him I saw what was obviously a search-party at work. The feller wouldn't say much, but I got this much out of him, that they were hunting for the doctor. It seems he has been missing since lunch-time yesterday. . . ." He lowered his voice. "It almost looks as if there were some connection between his disappearance and the murder of old Holt. . . ."

"Good gracious, Sir Henry!"

"That's just my private opinion, my dear madam. The authorities seem to be completely in the dark. We're all under suspicion, it appears. The ship's detective has asked me to account for my movements on the night of the murder. . . ."

"Why, Sir Henry!" Mrs. Hawksley was aghast.

"It's a fact. Apparently everybody on board is to be questioned. Fortunately the chief officer is my alibi; he was playing bridge with my wife and myself in the lounge when it happened. . . ." He swung round to accost a sharp-nosed individual who was passing.

"Has the ship's detective tackled you yet, Mr. Travers?"

Travers shrank back. "Me? What about?" His voice was tremulous.

"About the murder. . . ."

"About the . . . certainly not!"

Faucon laughed. With a wink at Mrs. Hawksley he said, "Well, I warn you. Be ready with your alibi. . . ."

Travers seemed dumbfounded. "Did . . . did this man mention me by name to you?" he quavered.

"Rather. That's why I'm warning you. He seemed strangely suspicious. . . ."

"Oh, my God!" Travers muttered hoarsely. Then, turning abruptly, he walked away.

"Well, I'm dashed!" Sir Henry exclaimed, looking after him.

"It was too bad to tease him," said Mrs. Hawksley reprovingly. "You know he took you seriously. . . ."

"You bet he took him seriously," said a sallow man in horn-rimmed spectacles who had joined the group unobserved. "Oh, hallo, Breckinridge," said Faucon. Mrs. Hawksley, it appeared, had already met Mr. Breckinridge. Madame Alva, reclining, with eyes closed, had dropped out of the conversation.

"Who was that?" Breckinridge demanded, indicating the departing Travers. Faucon laughed. "His name's Travers. I was only pulling his leg, you know. The idiot took me literally. . . ."

"I wonder," said Breckinridge thoughtfully.

"Why so cryptic?" Mrs. Hawksley asked. "What's on your mind?"

The other's laugh was rather self-conscious. He was a prim man who articulated with precision. "It was just a little thing I noticed last night. I was in the smoke-room. I wasn't doing anything, but just watching the people—my eyes aren't too good and they were hurting me. This guy Travers was there playing bridge. My attention was first drawn to him because one of the players at his table was a doctor—a steward fetched him out to attend to a woman who was sick. . . ."

Mrs. Hawksley put a finger to her lips and indicated the prone form by her side. "It was Madame Alva," she whispered.

"Is that so?" said Breckinridge. "Well, at precisely eleven o'clock—you'll gather in a minute how I remember the time—I noticed Travers crossing the room. Half-way over he stopped and turned to face the bar—I saw the time by the clock over the bar; exactly eleven. Three guys stood at the bar drinking. One was a fat man—nothing extraordinary about him; but his companions were tough all right, regular gangster types, if you know what I mean—I couldn't take my eyes off them. Travers must have given them some kind of signal, for directly he stopped the fat man said something to the other two, and all three went out after this Travers bird. . . ."

"And was that the last you saw of him?" Faucon asked.

"No. At a quarter past eleven Travers came back alone and he and his friends went on with their bridge. But I'd like to direct your attention to the

fact that from eleven to eleven-fifteen he was absent from the smoke-room. . . .”

“And Holt was killed at eleven-eight. Is that what you’re driving at?”

“Yes. . . .”

There was a moment’s uncomfortable silence. Faucon broke it. “I’ve not the faintest doubt that Travers can produce a perfectly satisfactory explanation—not the faintest,” he said firmly.

“Nor I,” Breckinridge averred.

“*He was scared*,” Mrs. Hawksley murmured in an awed voice.

“All the same,” Faucon went on, considering Breckinridge with a tentative air, “I think, perhaps, there’d be no harm in informing the captain privately of what you saw. Public duty, you know. . . .” He cleared his throat pompously. “We’re all in this together. . . .”

“I guess I might have a word with the skipper at that,” the other agreed with a solemn nod.

“In the meantime,” Faucon observed severely, “I must say I resent the way the passengers have been left in the dark. I hinted as much to Mr. Fewlass, the chief officer, but he was very short with me. However, we’re not altogether without resources. . . .” He lowered his voice. “There’s a young fellow from Oxford on board, chap by the name of Rolfe—he’s been visiting some of the American universities with one of these debating teams. He’s a cousin of one of the officers. I had a word with him just now and he’s gone off to pump this cousin of his to see what he can find out. . . . Ah, there he is! Hey, Rolfe!” he called suddenly to a blond young man in a suede windbreaker and grey flannel trousers who was advancing along the deck. “Now we shall get some news,” he said to Mrs. Hawksley. “Well,” he questioned eagerly as the boy lounged up, “what did you get out of him?”

“Not much, sir,” was the languid reply, “but quite enough. The doctor’s missing all right; but they’ve found his wallet. One of the stewards had stolen it—a fellow called Parsons. He’s in irons. . . .”

“*In irons?*” Mrs. Hawksley was thrilled.

“And that’s not all,” young Rolfe went on. “It seems that this bird Parsons was Holt’s steward. There’s no evidence as yet, Bob says, but he thinks it was Parsons who did the old man in. . . .”

A movement at her side distracted Mrs. Hawksley from her rapt contemplation of the speaker. Madame Alva had cast off her rug and was on her feet. “I’m not feeling so well,” the medium said rather thickly. “I believe I’ll go below. . . .”

“Darling Alva!” Solicitously Mrs. Hawksley put her arm about her.

“Don’t bother about me, dear friend. Stay up here and enjoy the fresh air before it gets dark. I shall go back to bed. No, no, I shall be quite all right alone. . . .”

With a decisive hand she put Mrs. Hawksley from her and, the box of candies tucked under her arm, went, with her slow, waddling gait, towards the main deck entrance.

“A wonderful, wonderful woman,” Mrs. Hawksley murmured, gazing after her.

“My wife thinks the world of her,” said Sir Henry. “Are you interested in survivalism, Mrs. Hawksley?”

“Indeed I am, Sir Henry, a humble but very devoted follower in our dear Madame Alva’s footsteps. Poor thing! she needs staunch friends like you and Lady Faucon. Would you believe that this morning the captain sent for her and practically accused her of complicity in the murder of this wretched Holt creature?”

“Did he, by Jove?”

“The darling doesn’t want it talked about, you understand, but you’re to be trusted, I know. . . .” Archly she patted the vacant seat beside her. “If you’re doing nothing for a minute. . . .”

Breckinridge had passed on. Perceiving that Faucon had sat down and was inclining his head to Mrs. Hawksley’s impressive undertone, young Rolfe drifted off, too. That nice-looking American girl with the demure eyes and the yellow hair had just gone by, walking alone. She had swapped her green béret for a blue one, he noticed—a béret was absolutely right for her, he decided.

Straightening his tie, he set off in pursuit. Murdered millionaires and missing doctors notwithstanding, a girl was a girl every time.

Especially on board ship. . . .

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

By the time tea was served in the lounge that afternoon the lights were on all over the ship for, with the wane of day, the haze had grown denser and more impenetrable. The *Barbaric* was at half-speed again; the leisurely revolutions of her propellers were like the tap of a blind man's stick as she fumbled her cautious way through the clinging white mist. Twice since lunch, with siren shattering the silence of sea and sky, she had stopped: twice the captain had been summoned from his state-room where, from the lips of a swarm of witnesses, he was seeking to reconstruct the successive stages of this new and horrifying crime.

As yet the news of Alloway's fate was guarded within those four walls. By the captain's order the strictest secrecy had been imposed on every member of the ship's company; until the facts were clarified, McDiarmid confided to Brown, seated beside him at the desk, he dared not risk the effect which the disclosure would have upon the passengers.

The picture which the evidence gradually unrolled was ghastly. The locker where the body was found was in a dark passage, a dead end in rear of the doctor's quarters. In the light of the discovery, a uniform button casually picked up from the floor of Alloway's state-room gained a sinister significance. It had been violently torn away from the front of the dead man's tunic, as a bunch of frayed threads below the lapel clearly attested. The deduction was inescapable—the surgeon had been strangled in his cabin, and the corpse whisked around the corner and stuffed away in this obscurely-placed and rarely-visited cupboard.

A killer, brazen and relentless, had been at work. Twice the slayer had pounced; twice those fingers of steel had compressed a victim's windpipe. Smouldering rage as well as horror was depicted on the stolid British countenances that succeeded one another as on a frieze before the captain. A name was whispered from mouth to mouth—Parsons! for by this time it was known all over the ship that the steward had been arrested and charged with the theft of the surgeon's wallet.

A swarm of witnesses. . . .

The officer who had headed the search-party—the cupboard was locked, the key missing from its hook inside it; they had had to use an axe. . . . A

gnarled old seaman—the locker contained emergency lamps; the key had been in place when the voyage started. . . . The assistant surgeon, still wheezing and snuffling, but no longer jaunty—the deceased had been dead for at least twenty-four hours; like Holt, he had been strangled and, as in the former case, extreme violence had been used. . . . The surgeon's steward with evidence about the button, also deposing that Alloway had been missing since noon the previous day, corroborated by the chief hospital attendant, a pawky Scot. . . . The purser and Mr. Harris establishing between them the fact that the last time the doctor had been seen alive was when leaving the royal suite. . . . Dickens, looking more corpse-like than ever, called by Harris to testify that when he—Dickens—had reached the suite with Dr. Winstay it was to find Dr. Alloway gone, Parsons informing them that Mr. Holt had sent the surgeon about his business. . . .

Parsons again. . . .

Then seemingly it was Parsons, the captain suggested ominously, who had last seen Dr. Alloway alive. The purser and Mr. Harris agreeing on this, the room was cleared of all but Mr. Mellow, the two detectives and Brown, and Parsons sent for.

They brought him handcuffed from the spare hospital where he was held in custody. It was the third time that day he had appeared before the captain—the second time had been just before lunch, on the discovery of the surgeon's pocket-book in his possession. At that interview, ill at ease though he palpably was, but still lamentably cringing, he had almost tearfully denied all knowledge of the theft. It was right that he had seen Alloway enter the royal suite and leave it presently in haste, and he had heard Holt shout after the surgeon: "Get the hell out of here!" But that, so help him God, was all he knew about it.

Now charged point-blank by the captain with the doctor's murder, in a frenzy of terror he once more proclaimed his innocence. In turn McDiarmid, the purser and the two detectives strove to break down his defence: Brown did not intervene. It warn't nothing but a dirty conspiracy to ruin him, the prisoner protested, rolling haggard eyes and raising manacled hands in supplication. As God was his judge, he'd never laid finger on the surgeon—if it was his last word, he wouldn't say no different.

The captain lost his temper; Mr. Mellow blustered. "Give me and Mullaney here five minutes alone with him, sir," Mr. Harris darkly pleaded, "and I'll warrant you we'll make him speak!" while, less cryptically, his colleague extolled the merits of "three foot of rubber hose" as a well-tried aid to confession. "I'll have no third degree on my ship," McDiarmid silenced them, sticking out his chin. Then, for the second time, his presence

was requested on the bridge, and he left the state-room. This time he did not return, but presently word came for the prisoner to be taken back to his place of confinement.

In his state-room on A, Wentworth Brown faced Mr. Harris across the table. Both men, each in his individual way, were under the influence of the scene of violence they had just witnessed. The scientist was more reticent than ever; the chief inspector, on the other hand, was surprisingly communicative, as though he found relaxation in speech. Brown had sought solace in his briar; his visitor was regaling himself with strong tea, thin bread and butter and strawberry jam.

"A clear cop if ever I see one," Mr. Harris pronounced, carefully pouring his tea from its cup into the saucer. "And if you'll pardon the remark, Mr. Brown, sir, a good illustration of the sooperiority of the professional over the amatoor. You're a very clever gentleman—the analytical mind and all that—and I'm not saying as you haven't been helpful; I'm not forgetting it was you who first put us on to Mrs. Craven, and your line on the Madame was a good one, too, even if it didn't stand up. But this Parsons, now, he's the pivot. And who nosed him out? . . ." He paused and put down his saucer. "I know crooks, see? I dare say a matter of a couple of thousand of them have been through my hands since I joined the Force, but I never forget a face. That's professional experience, that is. And no sooner do I set eyes on friend Parsons than I thinks to myself: 'Hallo, my gentleman, you and I have met somewhere before!' And I was right!" On which the inspector, with little finger gracefully extended, sipped from his saucer.

"So you think that Parsons committed both murders?" Brown asked quietly.

"There's not a doubt about it," Mr. Harris replied, helping himself to bread and butter. "There's three of them in on it: Mrs. Craven—Holt, that is—who instigated the crime in order to come into her money; Dickens, who was the go-between; and Parsons, who did the killing. Did you ever see such a pair of maulies as he has? You were the first to notice them, I remember. Not bad!" He wagged his head and took another drink of tea.

"But why should Alloway have been killed?" the other questioned.

"I'll tell you," was the prompt rejoinder, "and you'll see how simple it is. That letter of Mrs. Craven's to Dickens—you remember it? the one that the old man got hold of? . . ."

"Yes."

"That was obviously to let Dickens know that the murder was planned for that night, either to say that Mrs. Craven had fixed it with Parsons—she gave him the letter for Dickens, you know, and we don't have to believe he shoved it under the door—or else telling Dickens to go ahead and arrange with Parsons about it. The letter falls into Holt's hands. What does he do? He turns to the first person handy, spills the whole story and begs for his protection. Who was that person? It was Alloway. . . ."

"Why didn't Holt speak to you about it? You were there before Alloway. . . ."

"Because he was only half conscious when I went in; but he was coming round. What happened? Parsons, who's at the keyhole, hears the old man pouring out the whole story to Alloway, and when Alloway comes out to go to his cabin to fetch some medicine or something for old Holt, our killer follows him and strangles him. And as a hiding place for the body picks a locker which, as a member of the ship's company, he knows will only be opened in case of shipwreck or some such emergency. . . ."

Brown nodded. "You make it very plausible. But how are you going to prove it?"

The inspector shook his head sagely. "That's just it. I don't worry about Parsons—the presumption of guilt against him in the case of the doctor will be strong enough, I reckon, by the time the Yard answers my radio; if he don't know the taste of skilly, I'm a double Dutchman. In the other case ——" He broke off to rub his nose with a dubious air. "If we only had the Craven woman's letter. . . ." He wagged his head again. "Cracked as she is, she has been one too many for me. Apart from this meeting of hers with Dickens a few minutes before the murder, which proves nothing, she has a rock-bottom alibi; I've been over it and I can't shake it. She was in the library, just like she said, and in evidence there's the entry in the library steward's register, eleven-three, the time she handed in her book. Besides, the steward is positive she never budged from there until the news of Holt's death began to leak around—on that, he says, she bolted out to the main lobby. There she kicked up a shindy with the steward on the door because he wouldn't let her up to the captain. I've interviewed the man in question and he remembers the incident perfectly. After that she went to bed, as her stewardess testifies. There you are, all sewn up tight! And with Dickens it ain't much better. We have his criminal record and that's about all. . . ."

"What about Madame Alva?"

"Madame Alva? She's cleared. . . ."

"How—cleared?" Brown's tone was rather sharp.

The inspector shrugged his shoulders. “She’s a wrong ’un, of course. But she’s never been convicted. At least the Yard have nothing against her. . . .”

“You’ve heard from London, then?”

“This afternoon. From the description I gave they think she may be identical with a woman called Ada Dahl who operated for a time along the South Coast—Brighton and such places. She was a fortune-teller, but suspected of doing a bit of blackmailing on the side. She disappeared from England about five years ago with a card-sharp called Banks. . . .”

“What do the New York police say about her?”

“A clean bill. They know she’s in the spiritualism racket, but that’s all. It don’t signify anyway. I’ve checked up on her carefully and she’s not in on this. I’ll tell you for why. One”—he began to tick the points off on his fingers—“she stood to gain nothing by the old gentleman’s death; on the contrary, as long as he was alive, she still had a hope of getting him back in her clutches. Two, she has scarcely left her cabin since we sailed. Three, there’s not a shred of evidence of any communication between her and Dickens; and four, at the time of the murder she was lying sick in her bunk. . . .”

Brown glanced up quickly and removed his pipe. “That’s right, too. I remember—I was playing bridge with Dr. Winstay, and he was called down to her, as the ship’s surgeon, poor devil, couldn’t be found. . . .”

“You see? Besides, I’ve spoken with the steward who got the doctor to her, and the stewardess who was in and out of the state-room all the time the doctor was there, also the maid. No, Mr. Brown, the Madame’s out. . . .”

“It certainly looks that way. . . .” He paused. “What about Dr. Winstay?”

“Dr. Winstay?” The inspector’s air was mildly surprised.

“He’s the only other person on board who knew Holt well. . . .”

“That’s true enough. But don’t you see that Madame Alva’s alibi covers him as well—since he was with her at the time of the murder. . . ?”

“I suppose that’s right. . . .”

“Further, I understand that Mr. Holt was taking care of his investments. He told one of the passengers I was questioning—a Mrs. Jackson—that the old gentleman had made a lot of money for him. . . .”

The other nodded. “That’s true. I was there when he said it. . . .”

“There you are, then. He had no object, therefore, in putting old moneybags out of the way—I suppose you’ve heard what happened to all the Holt shares on the New York market to-day? There’s this, too: it seems that Winstay was trying to persuade Holt to get rid of Dickens. . . .”

Brown's look was full of admiration as it rested on the inspector's face. "You're an astonishing person, Harris. Where the devil did you get hold of that?"

Mr. Harris beamed. "Pumped it out of Parsons after we jugged him. He seems to have spent every free minute he had listening at Holt's door. He overheard the old man and Winstay talking about it. Why? Isn't it true?"

"Certainly, it's true. I was only wondering how you knew. Winstay came up to me before lunch and told me about it. He said Holt wouldn't hear of sending Dickens away—Winstay thought it showed there was really no ill-feeling between the two. . . ."

The inspector grunted. "There I think he's wrong. Now that Holt's dead, Dickens acts like he was heartbroken or something. But he don't fool me. He hated the old man's guts. Mullaney says he was always complaining of the way Holt treated him. . . ." Wiping his walrus moustache, he stood up. "Well, I'll be running along. If I can catch the captain I want to get his permission to radio New York and Paris about Mother Craven. Dickens told Mullaney she was broke to the wide, gambling on the markets. If we can establish that fact, it's important. . . ." And when the other was silent he went on rather huffily: "Perhaps you don't agree with me as to the motive?"

"I assure you——." Brown began hastily, but Mr. Harris overtoned him. "If you don't mind my saying it, Mr. Brown, and no offence intended, the tendency of all you amateur criminologists is to look for difficulties where there aren't any. The solution of crime is perfectly simple. Five questions have to be answered—the where, the how, the when, the why, and the who? Given replies to the first three, you've naught to do but answer the fourth, and the fifth solves itself. In other words, nail down your motive and, nine cases out of ten, your man's in the sack! You may think different, but I believe I've established the why. And I'm damned certain I've laid my hands on the who!"

So saying, the chief inspector, clapping on his cap, strode from the cabin.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

HALF an hour later, in a bare cabin far below the water-line, Parsons, slumped in dejection on a stool, heard the rattle of the key in the lock. Instantly he was on his feet in a panic. He heard the purser's familiar tones outside: "I know you have the captain's permission, Mr. Brown, but I do think it would be safer——." and a resolute voice in reply: "Nonsense, Mr. Mellow. I'm not afraid of the fellow. . . ."

The prisoner recognised the tall figure that appeared as the door swung back. It was the quiet man who had sat beside the captain, taking no part in the proceedings, on each occasion on which the steward had been brought up for examination. Mutely, out of bloodshot eyes, the prisoner interrogated that unrevealing face. Waiting until the slam of the closing door had left them alone together, Brown said sternly, pointing at the stool: "Sit down there, my man, and listen to me!"

"Gawd, mister," cried the prisoner desperately, "you won't let them 'ang me fer a thing I never done. I'm innocent, I swear it. May Gawd strike me dead if I'm lyin' to you. It's all a frame-up. For the love of 'eaven, guv'nor, make them give me a chance!" In his distress he laid hold of his visitor's coat.

Brown shook him off. "That's why I'm here," he answered in level tones. "To give you a chance. But you've got to tell me the truth. . . ."

"I've told the truth. I never killed 'im. . . ."

"I'm inclined to believe you. . . ." Parsons stared at him incredulously, the surly features suddenly alive with hope. "But," the other went on firmly: "I'm also very sure that you're keeping something back. . . ."

Instantly the light in the shifty eyes flickered out. The prisoner turned away. "I've told all I know," he mumbled sullenly.

"You're in a bad spot, Parsons," said Brown crisply. "I may be willing to believe you, but all the evidence is against you, you know. Not only in the matter of the surgeon's death, but Holt's as well. You realise that, I suppose?"

"I warn't nowhere near the boat deck the night the ole man was killed. . . ."

"You were on duty on A, weren't you, not a minute away? And you were Holt's steward?"

"I never killed 'im. . . ."

"Can you prove it? Have you got an alibi?"

"An' who 'as?" the steward wildly demanded. " 'Ow many of the passengers worn't within a minute of the boat-deck as well, that night? Wot about you? 'Ave you an alibi? 'As the captain? If 'e worn't on the bridge, I reckon 'e 'asn't, neither! It's the crooks wot 'as alibis, not honest folks! If I'd known as 'ow the ole gent was to be knocked off, I'd 'ave 'ad an alibi an' a good one, you can lay to that!"

His visitor had fallen suddenly silent, moodily contemplating his feet. Now, looking straight at the steward, he asked abruptly, "What do you know about Ada Dahl?"

The man's evil face was ghastly. His jaw dropped and he stared at the speaker in consternation. Then he cried out, "No, no, I never 'eard of 'er. I dunno wot you're talkin' about. . . ."

"If I'm to help you, Parsons, we must have no more lies. Come on, out with it! I see by your face that you know her. What's Madame Alva to you?"

At the sound of that name the steward staggered back. "Gawd!" he muttered thickly. Then, sinking down upon the stool, he buried his face in his hands.

"What was there between this woman and you?"

"She was my wife!"

The visitor started. "Your wife! This was in England, wasn't it?" Brown asked at length. "She used to tell fortunes, didn't she?"

"That's right, sir. At Brighton an' other seaside places, on the pier. . . ."

"And why didn't you mention this before?"

"I didn't want to get her into no unpleasantness, seein' as we 'ad been married. . . ."

"You're lying!" Brown cut in sternly. "You kept your mouth shut about her business because you knew she used to blackmail people in England. . . ."

Parsons shrugged his shoulders. "I see it ain't no use denyin' anything to you, Mr. Brown," he said ingratiatingly. "She wor a bad wife to me, and there ain't no two ways about it. I never could control her. 'Ow could I let on to the captain she 'ad been my wife, with 'er a—a . . ."—he flashed another surreptitious glance at him—"a blackmailer an' that. Especially after wot she tell me the night she come aboard. . . ."

Brown seemed to pounce. “Then you saw and spoke to her?”

“That’s right. I ran into ’er accidental as she come along the passage on A. She told me I wasn’t to say nothing to ’er or I’d spoil a job she ’ad on. . . .”

“What job?”

He shook his head. “She didn’t say. I only ’ad to lay off ’er, she told me, an’ she’d see I’d be all right. She offered to give me two ’undred dollars, too, she did, only I wouldn’t ’ave ’er dirty money. . . .”

“And you mentioned nothing about all this to the captain so as not to incriminate yourself? Is that it?”

“Yes-sir,” the steward declared, eyeing him rather anxiously. “I thought as ’ow it would only make things worse for me if they knew I was mixed up with a blackmailer, an’ ’er on board. I knew they’d never take my word against ’er an’ ’er posh friends. A’corse it was ’er as planted the doctor’s wallet on me so as to get me out of ’er way. . . .”

Brown emitted a short laugh. “Well,” he remarked dryly, “you’ll have to make the captain believe that. And me, too!”

The steward stared at him aghast. “You mean you don’t believe me?”

“Up to a point, yes,” was the cool answer. “But you’ve convinced me that it was you and nobody else who killed Holt and the doctor!”

Parsons gasped, his swarthy face convulsed with sudden fury. “Damn you!” he shouted, springing up. Swinging the stool over his head, he sprang forward. The sight of the automatic in Brown’s hand brought him up short.

The door was suddenly flung open. The purser and two seamen were there. “Are you all right, Mr. Brown?” the purser demanded tremulously.

“You’d better handcuff him again, Mr. Mellow,” was the solid answer. “He’s dangerous!”

The purser rapped out an order over his shoulder, while Brown walked unconcernedly out.

He found the captain in his state-room. Harassed and distrait, McDiarmid was pawing among his papers and listening with unconcealed impatience to a visitor, who was excitedly haranguing him. This was none other than Mr. Travers: he was in a high state of agitation. “No, but, Captain,” he was declaiming, “I tell you positively he does suspect me. He hasn’t ventured to approach me directly as yet, but he’s going about cross-

examining my friends as to my movements on the night of Holt's murder. . . ."

"You may take it from me, Mr. Travers, that Mr. Harris has done no such thing," McDiarmid soothed him. "And, in any case, I can assure you. . . ."

"I won't have it," the passenger broke in heatedly. "I have a perfect alibi and I want it put on record that, on hearing of these insinuations against me, I came straight to you to establish it. From about ten o'clock on the night of the murder until Holt's body was discovered, I was in the smoke-room playing bridge with Mrs. Jackson, Dr. Winstay and a Mr. Brown. I didn't stir from the table until that scream rang out on deck and we all rushed outside. . . ." Then, perceiving that the captain was looking past him, he turned about and, catching sight of Brown, exclaimed, "But here is Mr. Brown. Have the goodness to inform the captain," he begged the newcomer, "that what I say is exact!"

Brown smiled at the other's eagerness. "I'm your witness, Mr. Travers, that your statement is rigidly accurate. . . ."

"Fine," McDiarmid declared. "Then that's settled. And now, Mr. Travers, if you'll excuse me—I have a great deal to attend to. . . ." As the passenger withdrew the captain said to Brown, "Yarrow's made the autopsy on the doctor. There's no doubt about it—he was strangled like the other. . . ."

Travers, at the door, overheard the remark. He turned a horrified face upon the two men at the desk, but they were oblivious of his presence. He fled precipitately.

Brown had plunged forthwith into the account of his interview with Parsons. McDiarmid heard him through without interruption, but when the tale was done took a slip of paper from the desk and handed it to the visitor. "The editor of the ship's newspaper has just sent that up," he explained. "I don't propose to let him publish it. . . ."

The other's eye glanced over the galley proof. It was a radio news bulletin. He read:

> *New York, Thursday (by radio). Madame Alva, prominent in New York spiritualistic circles, is mentioned as a large beneficiary under the will of the late Alonzo Holt, millionaire mine-owner and cattle-man, whose death in mysterious circumstances occurred last night on board S.S. Barbaric, Southampton-bound. The report, which is unconfirmed, speaks of one million dollars as the sum which the medium will receive under the Holt will for the furtherance of investigation into the occult.*

Brown looked at the captain. “This clinches it!”

McDiarmid nodded. “The real motive at last. It lets Mrs. Craven out. . . .” The ghost of a smile played about his lips. “Harris won’t like it. . . .”

“You’ll send for Madame Alva and confront her with this?”

The captain shook his head. “Too indefinite. I shall wait until I hear from the lawyers. . . .”

“You cabled them?”

A terse nod. “Yesterday. Through the company, that is. If this story is confirmed, as I’ve no doubt it will be, we’ll have husband and wife up together and confront ’em. . . .” He smiled dryly. “We shall see a fine demonstration of fancy lying, I imagine. . . .”

Brown hesitated. “You don’t think it would be advisable to question her immediately—to-night?”

“No. I can’t act on rumour—a newspaper story which may be denied to-morrow. After all, she’s a passenger; and passengers, let me tell you, Mr. Brown, have to be handled with velvet gloves. I’m expecting a reply from the company any minute. When it comes it’ll be time enough. . . .” He smiled grimly. “She can’t get away. . . .”

The news that the surgeon had been found murdered exploded like a bomb at dinner that night. The passengers were in a mood which neither the cheerful atmosphere of the handsome room, with champagne corks popping and stewards bustling, nor the lively strains of the ship’s orchestra could animate. The foggy night and the dawdling progress of the liner helped to deepen the depression which the tragedy of the boat deck had spread throughout the passengers’ quarters. Like the fog, the thought of the millionaire’s violent end was all-pervading.

Most people had reached the dessert, and even the tardiest arrivals were half-way through the meal, when Mr. Travers slipped into his place between Sir Henry Faucon and the vacant chair which marked Wentworth Brown’s accustomed seat. Faucon had brought to the table, for the benefit of those who had not already heard it, his titbit of news about the finding of the doctor’s wallet and the steward’s arrest, and was still holding forth, when Mr. Travers arrived, on the possible reasons behind the surgeon’s disappearance.

Contrary to his usual habit, Mr. Travers had not dressed. Contrary to his usual habit, instead of going into prolonged conference with the table

steward regarding the composition of his meal, he curtly bade the man bring him anything that was ready, and—even more unusual—forthwith relapsed into moody silence. He roused himself only when his neighbour, still full of his rôle of news-purveyor, asked him if he had "heard about the doctor."

The other nodded haggardly. "And what is your theory, may I ask?" Sir Henry inquired condescendingly. "What do I know about it?" was the quick retort. "I didn't strangle him, did I?"

There was a moment's glacial silence. In an uncertain voice Faucon said, "What do you mean, 'strangled'? Have they found him?"

All conversation at the table had ceased. Nine pairs of eyes were riveted with almost painful intensity on the banker's drawn and fretful countenance. "What's the idea of pretending?" Travers asked petulantly, and cast an angry glance around. "You know as well as I do that Alloway was found hours ago strangled in a cupboard. . . ."

A woman at the table screamed faintly: people at the adjoining tables turned their heads, heard the Englishman's sharply querulous, "What's that you say? Alloway strangled?" saw shocked faces, terrified eyes. . . .

In a moment the dining-saloon, even to its farthest tables under the encircling gallery, was in a hubbub. . . .

There was no bridge for Sitting Bull that night. Her Brunhilde-like form might have been descried roaming unhappily from group to group in the main lobby outside the purser's office, where the stream of passengers ascending the staircase from the dining-saloon seemed on a common instinct to have stagnated. Her partners of the previous evening failed her. Travers, whom she first waylaid, stared at her vacantly and then turned his back: the quiet man, whose name she couldn't remember, was nowhere to be seen. Dr. Winstay, whom her eagle eye picked out of a group that had beset the purser, agreed without much enthusiasm to play if she could collect a four, and suggested the Faucons. But she got short shrift from Sir Henry. "Bridge, madam," he fumed, "when a homicidal maniac is at large on this ship? You must be demented!" She had no better luck with other passengers she approached; even her last resource, the "clucks," as she dubbed them, the light-hearted plungers of the shilling-a-corner class, shied away from her. It was disgusting.

Buttonholed on his way through the vestibule, Mr. Mellow handled the situation deftly. It was true about the surgeon, poor fellow, a ghastly business. But there was no cause for alarm . . . if Sir Henry would only let him speak . . . it was not true that a homicidal maniac was at large . . . if Sir

Henry would stop shouting and listen for a moment . . . the murderer was arrested . . . certainly he was arrested and in irons at that very minute . . . yes, a steward . . . that's right, Parsons . . . no, he couldn't take a message to the captain now . . . the captain was on the bridge . . . this fog . . . Mr. Mellow broke away.

Still the throng of passengers lingered on under the bright lights of the lobby, herd-like, irresolute, afraid. Argument: theories: talk of hoodoo ships and unsolved mysteries of the sea: whispered gossip. . . . This guy Parsons . . . waited on a friend of mine on A . . . never felt easy when he was around, my friend says . . . someone called Green, or some such name, found the murderer . . . a Pinkerton man travelling to Europe on a secret mission . . . no, the name's Brown . . . not a detective—a scientist, quite famous, it seems . . . looking for accomplices right this minute . . . sure, it's possible . . . some man recognised a famous Chicago gangster in the smoke-room . . . all right, ask Sir Henry Whoosis . . . didn't I hear him with my own ears tell this man just now he ought to go to the captain about it?

So, huddled there, they whispered on, while, steadily but very slowly, the *Barbaric* threshed ever deeper into the fog.

Young Rolfe, having spent the afternoon agreeably with Mary Fulton, had slipped down to the tourist third to tell her the news and bring her over to share in the excitement. Winstay, talking with Faucon, Breckinridge and others, caught her eye as she surveyed the scene from a corner of the vestibule, and smiled at her. She was debating with herself whether she would go across and speak to him, when, suddenly, one of the doors leading to the deck was violently thrown open, and, pallid and panting, a woman stumbled in.

She was middle-aged and fashionable in her black lace, semi-décolleté and pearls and clasped an elderly pekinese to her full bosom. Faucon was the first to see her. "Good God," he ejaculated, on catching sight of her face, "it's Mrs. Hawksley!"

On his cry, everyone stopped talking. People pressed about him, as, springing forward, he led the woman to a seat. "Oh, heavens," she gasped, her hand to her breast, "I was so dreadfully frightened. . . ."

A dozen scared voices struck in, "What was it? What happened?" Mrs. Hawksley outlined a vague gesture in the direction of the deck. "Out there . . . I saw him. . . ."

"Stand back, please, and give the lady air!" Faucon cried fussily. He stooped to the woman on the sofa. "What happened? Who was it you saw?"

"Old Holt!"

"Holt?" cried Sir Henry.

A murmur of horror ran through the crowd. "But that's nonsense," Breckinridge spoke up testily. "Holt's dead. Where was this, anyway?"

Mrs. Hawksley moaned feebly. "On the boat-deck. . . ."

"But what on earth were *you* doing on the boat-deck in all this fog?"

"I was taking Chang for a run—I went up there because the deck steward complained about the poor darling using the promenade. We hadn't been walking a minute, when suddenly I caught a glimpse of something white looking out from behind a boat. I'm rather short-sighted and the deck was dark, but I know it was a face, a ghastly face, that seemed to hang there in the air, staring at me sorrowfully out of the fog. . . ."

"You mean, it had no body?" Faucon questioned abruptly.

Mrs. Hawksley's nod was solemn. "Yes, I'm psychic, you know, and I've been privileged to enjoy some very, very remarkable manifestations of the supernatural. I was at a séance once and I remember. . . ."

"But, look here," Breckinridge interposed—"how did you know it was Holt?"

"Because it was the very boat from which he was found hanging. . . ."

"Didn't you go closer to look?"

"Yes. But when I reached the spot the face had vanished. . . ." She shook her head gravely. "It was a warning, I know it! There's a curse on this ship. I think I shall go to bed and stay there. . . ." Rather unsteadily she rose to her feet.

Faucon gave her his arm. "Doctor, take the other side!" he told Winstay. Between them the two men helped her downstairs. Exchanging frightened glances, the passengers made way. "A lot of damned nonsense," Breckinridge pronounced. But his words found no echo—in silent groups the passengers began to disperse.

Looking up, Mary Fulton suddenly perceived Wentworth Brown on the edge of the circle. He had not changed for dinner; he was still wearing the grey tweeds she had seen him in at lunch. She ran across to him. "Did you hear what that woman said?" she asked, her golden eyes shining with excitement. He nodded. "We shall have people imagining things all over the ship," he answered soberly. "We're all a bit on edge, and no wonder. . . ."

"Why," she exclaimed suddenly, and touched his shoulder, "your coat's damp!" The rough surface of the cloth was gleaming with moisture, and clammy to the touch. "I was out walking," he said briefly. Then young Rolfe dragged her aside. "You don't believe in ghosts, do you?" She laughed. "I

usen't to. . . ." "Then let's go and look for Holt's. . . ." He took her by the arm. It appeared that Breckinridge and one or two of the others had the same idea. Chattering volubly, the whole party swept up the stairs.

But the boat-deck, shrouded in mist, was deserted. Lashed beneath its canvas, the boat at which the millionaire had met his end was undisturbed. Neither there nor anywhere else was there trace of any visitant, human or ghostly.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A FORBIDDING frown on her face, a slim volume open in her hand, Mrs. Jackson reclined in bed, awaiting the arrival of her breakfast. It was nine o'clock, but the bedside lamp was burning, for the third morning of the voyage, like its forerunners, had broken dully. From time to time, as though she felt the atmosphere to be chilly, she drew the satin quilt more closely about the pink flannel dressing-gown which draped her ample form.

Sitting Bull was not in the best frame of mind. For twenty-four hours—ever since, in fact, as she wrathfully reflected, that singularly ill-timed cry on the deck had robbed her of her slam—she had totally failed to coral a bridge game. It was not for want of trying; she must have tackled every likely prospect; but the gloom cast by those inexplicable and tiresome murders seemed to prevent people from behaving like human beings. The book in her hand—the latest addition to the already extensive bibliography of contract—was proving a poor substitute. With a snort she flung the book face downward on the bed. "Call that a system!" she vociferated. "And they hung Crippen!" Sourly she considered the volume on her lap. "I wonder how that cluck values a two-bid. . . ." She picked the volume up again.

"Another dull day, Mrs. Jackson. . . ." The stewardess was at the door with the breakfast tray. "Do you play bridge?" Sitting Bull demanded gruffly. The woman simpered. "Well, madam, me and my brothers sometimes gets a game when I'm on my holidays. . . ." "Then tell me what you'd do with this hand!" With a commanding gesture Mrs. Jackson thrust the book under the other's nose.

Composedly the stewardess adjusted her steel pince-nez and peered at the complicated chart set forth on the page. "I'm shore it all looks very interesting, madam," she ventured vaguely. "Of course, my brother Bert always says, when in doubt, lead trumps. . . ."

With an exasperated sniff Mrs. Jackson snatched the book away. "You should write a book on bridge, stewardess," she suggested with bitter irony. "Oh, Mrs. Jackson," the woman tittered, "I hardly think I play well enough for that!" With a low moan as of one in pain Sitting Bull cast her eyes towards the ceiling. "All right," she murmured resignedly, "let's have the tray!"

"Well," she questioned, peeping under the dish-covers, "what's the gossip to-day? You heard about that woman's adventure on the boat deck last night, I suppose?"

"There's nobody talking about nothing else, it seems to me," said the stewardess darkly, picking up Mrs. Jackson's brassière from the floor. "It fair gives one the creeps to listen to 'em. As if it weren't bad enough to have had two murders on board, they've now got to seeing ghosts!" She set her lips severely.

Mrs. Jackson was dividing her attention between her bridge book and a soft-boiled egg. "If that's a two-bid, then I'm Greta Garbo," she muttered to herself, and spooned her egg. Then she said aloud, "But that Mrs. What's-her-name was frightened out of her wits. She swore it was the old man's ghost. . . ."

"Ghost!" The stewardess spoke acidly. "A nice sort of ghost, I must say, as helps itself from trays when a body's back is turned, and pinches things out of the state-rooms!"

Sitting Bull slammed down her book. "How can they sell such trash?" she demanded irately, and turned to the stewardess. "Don't you *really* know anything about contract?" Then, perceiving that the woman was edging towards the door, she asked absently, "What were you saying about ghosts?"

"I merely passed the remark, madam, that ghosts don't lift fruit off trays," the stewardess retorted with dignity, "nor yet steal rugs out of cabins, neither. . . ."

"What on earth are you talking about . . . what is your name?" the woman in the bed asked crossly.

"Mrs. O'Sullivan, madam. . . ."

"Mrs. O'Sullivan, then. . . ."

"I'm saying no more than the whole ship's saying this morning. The lady in twenty-five had her rug stolen while she was down at dinner last night, and a few hours later, when I put down my tray for a minute, someone made off with a plate of oranges I was taking to thirty-seven. And I hear they've missed things on B too. . . ."

Sitting Bull was at last aroused: her book lay neglected on the coverlet. "But this ship is a disgrace—I shall certainly never travel by this line again. Who is it? What are they doing about it?" She sat up and gathered the quilt about her. "Just look in the drawer of my wardrobe like a good woman and see if my amethyst brooch and my coral ear-rings are still there! They should be under the soiled handkerchiefs at the back. . . ."

Mrs. O'Sullivan routed in the drawer indicated. "They're still there, madam. But it's not joolry he's after. . . ."

"He hasn't seen mine," Sitting Bull observed with importance. "My amethyst brooch is an heirloom," she explained proudly. "It was the last present Mr. Jackson bought me before he passed on. I shall get up immediately and put all my jewels in the safe. . . ."

With that she threw off the bed-clothes and heaved her massive shape to the ground. Her book slid to the floor. Seeing it lying there, as she turned to reach for her comb, she bestowed a vicious kick upon it. Her eye lingered on it, however, and presently, stooping over, she retrieved it, opened it with a sigh, and clambered laboriously back into bed.

Fog, always the fog. No sun, no horizon, no glimpses of passing ships. Hour by hour word came crackling out of that world that lay beyond the rim of their clouded vision—radio reports from the shore giving the *Barbaric* her position. Noonday past, the bulbs in their wire cages still glowed on the almost deserted promenade, and from the rail the view was narrowed down to the line of whitecaps foaming by, that seemed to lick the nether fringes of the cloaking greyness.

The decks were shunned, public rooms sparsely frequented. The sense of horror that rested over the liner seemed to have slowed down her life, even as the fog had slowed down her progress. People lingered below that morning as though fearing to leave the intimacy of their cabins and face the whispers that began to rustle wherever two or three passengers were gathered together. Stewards and stewardesses, and the rare officers to be met with, went about their duties quietly and with grave faces as in a house of death. A notice on the board outside the purser's office announced that the ship's concert arranged for that evening was abandoned.

About five o'clock that afternoon Dr. Winstay was making his way along the corridor of D deck when he ran into Mrs. Hawksley. He stopped and asked her how she felt. "I thought you were going to spend the rest of the trip in bed," he chaffed her gently. But Mrs. Hawksley did not rally to his mood. She was concerned about her friend, Madame Alva, she explained: Madame Alva was not at all well.

"But I happened to meet her maid only yesterday," Winstay said, "and she told me that Madame Alva had quite got over her attack. . . ."

"It's not her health, doctor," Mrs. Hawksley rejoined solemnly, "it's her psychopathic state. She gave me a terrible fright this afternoon by suddenly going off in a trance. I'd run in to tell her about my experience of last night

—I wanted to see how she would interpret it. You know, I've witnessed some quite extraordinary materialisations at her séances, particularly in the way of ectoplasms but, of course, this was my first independent visitation. But no sooner did I mention Holt's name than she passed right out, trembling like a leaf and talking the wildest stuff. What do you think of that?"

The doctor shrugged. "I'm afraid I'm an incurable sceptic about such things, Mrs. Hawksley. . . ."

"You wouldn't be if you'd heard her. . . ."

"What did she say exactly?"

"She talked so fast I couldn't make out very clearly—of course, it wasn't her talking, it was her control. It seemed to be about Holt's murder and the old man's money—I didn't wait to hear but rushed off and got her maid. Only then did the stupid creature tell me it was the third time since yesterday that her mistress had gone off like that. She had a terrible time with her this morning, Minna said. The poor thing insisted on getting up and going upstairs. She looked so queer that Minna decided to go with her. It was lucky she did, for in the lounge Madame Alva passed right out, groaning and crying out about old Holt. Fortunately there were very few people around and Minna was able to get her back to her cabin without creating a scene. I feel so sorry for the poor darling. Holt was one of her clients, you know, and behaved very badly to her, though I must say she always spoke about him in the kindliest terms—I think his death was a great shock. Of course, if I'd stopped to think, or if Minna had given me the slightest warning, I wouldn't have said a word about last night. . . ."

"It's not very professional as there's a ship's doctor on board," Winstay said tentatively, "but if you'd care for me to take a look at her. . . ."

"You're very kind, doctor—perhaps another time. I do feel that strange faces are likely to upset her just now. The poor thing is subject to these spells—she gets them whenever she's had a bad mental upset. I've persuaded her to get up for dinner—just the two of us are going to dine cosily in the grill away from the mob. I think a little change will do her good. . . ."

"I dare say you're right," said Winstay. "Well I'm off to the gym for a bout of medicine ball before dinner. Don't *you* go seeing any more ghosts or we shall have you going the same way as Madame Alva. . . ." He smiled at her and passed on.

As he neared the small lobby where the gymnasium was situated he saw a girl run across the open space, and disappear down a stairway beyond. It

was Mary Fulton. She was gone before he could hail her, so, instead of going into the gymnasium, he followed her down the companion. But the bare passage in which he found himself was empty. It occurred to him then that she was probably making her way through to the tourist third, and he was about to retrace his steps when a sharp cry fell upon his ears.

It came from the end of the long vista of woodwork and gleaming linoleum where the passage bent at a right-angle to the left. The next moment there was the swift patter of feet and the girl came flying towards him.

"Oh," she panted, "I had such a scare back there in the dark. . . ."

He laughed. "Don't tell me you've been seeing ghosts, too. . . ."

She shook her head earnestly. "It wasn't a ghost. It was a man. . . ."

"Probably. A seaman. The fo'c'sle's on that deck, you know. . . ."

Another desperate headshake. "I don't know who it was. All I can tell you is that a hand shot out from behind a pile of packing-cases and tried to grab me. I didn't wait to look—I just fled. Oh, it was horrible!"

Then he perceived that she was trembling. He tucked a protective arm into hers and led her up the stairs. "You come with me," he told her decisively. "I'm going to prescribe for you. . . ."

They had reached the top of the companion when there was a step in the passage below. With a violent start the girl swung about. A tall figure stood at the foot of the stairs, a man in grey tweed. On seeing the couple gazing down on him, he turned on his heel and walked off along the passage.

"Hallo," said Winstay to the girl, "your friend Brown, wasn't it?"

She nodded. "What's he doing nosing about down there?" the doctor asked.

She shrugged. "Investigating, I guess. . . ."

Winstay said nothing, but conducted her along D to the elevators where they ascended to the promenade level. There, in Corridor A, he ushered her into a cabin. "Sit down there a minute," he said, flinging his hat on the table, and went through to the bath-room.

With its rosewood panelling and shaded lights the cabin was a great deal more luxurious, much larger, too, than her cubby-hole in the tourist third. There were roses in a vase and the doctor's evening clothes were neatly laid out on the bed. She was installed on the couch under the window when Winstay presently returned. He handed her a medicine glass. "Drink that down," he bade her. "And afterwards you shall have a cigarette!"

She drained the bitter draught and with a little shudder gave him back the glass. He presented an open box of Egyptian cigarettes and snapped his lighter for her. Then he dropped into the seat beside her. "Now relax," he said, "and let that cocktail of mine do its work. Then you shall tell me all about it!"

"I'm all right again now," she told him. Settling down in the soft seat and crossing one slim leg over the other she went on: "It was all my own fault, I guess, for going where I had no business to be. There's a boy on board called Leslie Rolfe—he's a cousin or something of the fourth officer, Mr. Austin. Well, this morning Mr. Austin showed Leslie the locker where the surgeon's body was found—I wanted to go along, but they wouldn't take me. I made Leslie describe to me exactly where the locker was situated, because, whether they liked it or not, I was determined to see it. There was nobody about when I came out of the gym just now, and it seemed like a good opportunity, so I slipped down to E. I was going through a sort of open space, between a lot of crates and things, when suddenly a great hand seized my shoulder. I screamed and twisted myself free: then I ran for my life. . . ."

"You weren't followed?"

"No. . . ."

"And you didn't see who it was?"

She laughed. "Believe me, I wasn't curious. I just wanted to get away. . . ."

"I wonder what Brown was doing down on E," Winstay remarked thoughtfully.

"He was going along to take a look at that locker, I expect—he's helping on the inquiry, you know. . . ."

"That's just the point. He's not!"

"But he told me himself. . . ."

"He told *me* himself. But that was yesterday. Something has happened to-day, some new development. Anyway, Brown's out of the inquiry. . . ."

"How do you know this?"

He gave her a quizzing glance. "Under the hat, eh? It was something Harris said—he's in charge of the ship's police, you know. I don't think Harris altogether liked Brown being brought in—at any rate, the captain sent for Brown this morning and told him he was through. . . ."

"But why?"

"Harris pretended not to know—he was just being discreet, I guess. But the fact is that Brown's frozen out. . . ." He paused. "Queer fellow, Brown!

What do you make of him?"

"I think he's rather nice. But terribly lonely. He told me he had very few women friends. . . ."

The doctor nodded. "Sex-starved, eh?"

She stared at him. "What a horrible expression!"

He seemed to stir from a reverie. "I was only speaking scientifically. The average man of science, you know, is full of inhibitions. . . ."

"I don't agree with you in the least that Mr. Brown is full of inhibitions. . . ."

"You mean he hasn't tried to kiss you. . . ."

She laughed. "You don't suppose I'd tell you if he had. . . ." She glanced at his wrist. "Is your watch right? I promised to meet Leslie at six. . . ."

"What's your hurry?"

She had stood up. "I must go, really. Thanks awfully for the . . . the cocktail!"

Winstay took her to the door. "Drop in again some time. Consulting hours five to seven or by appointment. . . ." They laughed together. "By the way," he went on, growing serious, "if I were you I shouldn't say anything about your adventure this afternoon. . . ."

"I'm not likely to—I don't want to be hauled up before the captain again. . . ."

"Not even to your friend Leslie, eh? People are scared enough already: we don't want to alarm them unnecessarily. I'll make some discreet inquiries. . . ."

"All rightie!" She ran off down the corridor.

Closing the door behind her, Winstay stripped off coat and vest and dropped into the arm-chair beside the table. Lighting a cigarette, he leaned back and watched the smoke drift upwards to the ceiling, his brow clouded in thought.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Mr. Mellow was dressing for dinner. He stood before the mirror, tying his tie, and the face that looked out of the glass at Allan, his assistant, who stood behind, was red and angry. "Does the old man realise that there are three hundred and eight first-class passengers on this trip?" he demanded. "How does he expect us to produce one of 'em at sight, right off the bat?" Peering critically at his reflection, he dabbed irately at his sleek hair with his brush.

"The only thing is that he asked for her first a good twenty minutes ago," his assistant pointed out with diffidence. "I notified her steward and ten minutes later the skipper sends down again. I had her steward up and he says he told the maid. I've seen the maid and she says she can't find her. Her story is that her lady left the cabin around eight o'clock to dine in the grill. The maid went to the grill, but her mistress isn't there. . . ."

The purser was putting on his monkey-jacket. "And is the grill the only place on the ship where passengers get to? What about the lounge? What about the smoke-room? What about . . . Good God, man, use your initiative and don't bother me. . . ." He snatched up a clean handkerchief.

"I've sent round all the public rooms, sir, but she's not to be found. And Humphries has been back for the third time. He says the old man's spitting blue murder because she hasn't turned up. . . ."

"Then find her, damn it, find her," rasped Mr. Mellow, gathering up his cigarette-case, keys and loose change. "I'm half an hour late for dinner as it is, and the old man gave special orders that all officers should dine at their tables to-night—good for the passengers' *moral* or something. . . ." He paused to make a fleeting survey of himself in the glass and straighten his row of medals. "If the skipper wants the old girl, I advise you to produce her P.D.Q.—he's been as sweet as a boil all day. And remember, it's your funeral—you haven't seen me!" With which he firmly removed his assistant from his path and hurried out.

On a faint aroma of "Une Nuit avec toi" Mrs. Hawksley emerged from the corridor of A, crossed the deserted vestibule, and went into the lounge. Her grey georgette evening frock was new and the scent of the silken red

rose pinned to her shoulder was pleasant in her nostrils. In Madame Alva's honour she had decided to break away from the boiled fish and salad, which was the appointed evening meal of her eighteen day regimen, and, with agreeable anticipation, for she was ravenously hungry, was composing in her mind the dinner menu. On catching sight of the clock beside the notice board she hurried her pace. It was twenty minutes past eight, and the rendezvous with her guest was for a quarter past.

Save for a solitary steward, who was setting up some screens against the after-dinner coffee invasion, the lounge was empty. Putting up her lorgnette, Mrs. Hawksley walked to the end of the room and, perceiving that Madame Alva had not yet arrived, sat down in an arm-chair. Smoked salmon, she thought, might be an improvement on caviare—the third day out, one never knew whether one would get a freshly-opened jar; a *truite au blue*, perhaps; then what? Chicken was so banal—why not Long Island duckling? The rich brown fat was delicious and she was so hungry. Madame Alva might like to choose her own sweet—for herself, she was torn between a *peach Melba* and one of those enticing French concoctions—she couldn't recall the name—all flaked chestnuts and whipped cream, with a crystallised violet on top.

Discovering presently that it was half-past eight, she rose and asked the lone steward whether he had seen anything of her guest. There hadn't been nobody in the lounge, but only the lady herself since he come in at eight-fifteen, the man lugubriously assured her. With a somewhat forbidding mien, Mrs. Hawksley sailed out of the lounge by the farther door and entered the adjacent writing-room. A large woman, with her back turned to her, was just sitting down at one of the desks. Screwing up her eyes, Mrs. Hawksley hurried towards her. "There you are!" she proclaimed a trifle tartly. "I thought we were to meet in the lounge. . . ."

But the heavy face raised to hers was not Madame Alva's. It was that of a florid woman with untidy grey hair, who wore, somewhat coyly, a pair of elaborate coral ear-rings and sported a large amethyst brooch, pinned in the centre of her well-strapped and swelling corsage. These details the lorgnette duly registered. "Oh, excuse me," Mrs. Hawksley faltered. "Wait a minute!" said Coral Ear-rings in an impressive contralto. "Do you play contract?"

The lorgnette fixed her in cold scrutiny. "I beg your pardon. . . ." Mrs. Hawksley spoke in the 32° Fahrenheit voice she reserved for use on social intruders. Coral Ear-rings was unabashed. "I asked you if you played contract," she observed, "because, if you do, you might care to make a fourth after dinner!"

Mrs. Hawksley drew herself up. "I never play cards with strangers. . . ." "Neither would I unless I had to," was the gruff retort. With an almost

audible snort, Mrs. Hawksley swept on towards the smoke-room.

She was feeling decidedly put out. Had that blessed Alva gone into another of her trances? Psychic gifts were all right, but it was overdoing it to indulge in them at meal-times. She supposed she'd have to go all the way down to D and see what was keeping her.

The man called Brown was the only occupant of the smoke-room. Whisky and soda was in front of him, and he was eating a sandwich. After a moment's hesitation, Mrs. Hawksley, with an ingratiating smile, accosted him. "I wonder," she said, "whether you know a lady called Madame Alva by sight. . . ."

Brown had stood up. "Oh, yes. . . ."

"You don't happen to have seen her anywhere about? She was supposed to dine with me. . . ."

He shook his head. "I'm sorry. I don't believe I've seen her all day. . . ."

"Thank you so much!"

Foggy though it was, she decided to return to the lobby and the elevators by way of the deck to avoid a further encounter with that woman in the writing-room. Brown held the door open and passed out after her. She left him standing by the blurred glass screen, filling his pipe and gazing out into the night.

He was still standing there when he heard a footstep on the planking and, turning, saw the Amber Girl approaching. She was in a long evening dress of some crinkly material, golden in colour, like her hair, with brown, high-heeled shoes. A tawny camel's hair overcoat slung from her shoulders lent her a youthful, almost boyish air.

"Hallo, there," she greeted him. "Out from dinner already?"

"I didn't go in to-night," he said. "I had a sandwich in the bar. Have you dined?"

She nodded. "We're very smalltown in the steerage. Supper at seven. I dressed after. I can't have my fellow emigrants thinking I'm trying to high-hat them, you know. Do you want to walk a bit? I haven't had a walk all day. . . ." They started off along the dim promenade.

"Were you meaning to dance?" he asked her, with a glance at her frock.

"I don't suppose there'll be any dancing to-night, will there? I mean, since the concert's off. I got all dolled up really to please myself—to raise my *moral*, so to speak. This ship's as lively as a funeral—I mean to say, one has to *do* something about it. . . ."

His nod was unsmiling: he did not speak. “They were saying at dinner to-night that the real murderer hasn’t been arrested yet,” she went on, “that he’s still at large. That’s on account of these thefts from the state-room, you know. . . .”

He shrugged. “I shouldn’t pay any attention to nonsense of that sort. . . .”

“What about this ghost, or whatever it was, that Mrs. Hawksley saw?”

“Imagination. If you dabble with spiritualism and all that mumbo-jumbo, as Mrs. Hawksley does, you can make yourself see anything. . . .”

“But. . . .” She broke off. It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him about her own adventure, to ask him, since he had been on E deck at the time, whether he had seen anything of her mysterious assailant. Winstay’s warning was in her mind, however, and she remembered that, once before, Brown had reported to the captain a confidence of hers. . . . “Do you believe yourself that Parsons is the right man?” she amended.

He did not reply at once. “I did until to-day,” he said at last.

She glanced at him quickly. “There has been some fresh development to-day, hasn’t there?”

He stopped short. “Where did you hear that?”

“Dr. Winstay told me. . . .”

“What does Dr. Winstay know about it?” He was frowning.

She paused. “He said you’d been frozen out of the inquiry. . . .”

“Who told him that?”

She hesitated, looking at him dubiously. “I promised not to say. . . .”

Brown laughed dryly. “I think I can guess. . . .”

She said: “I’m sorry. I knew you were upset about something directly I spoke to you. What happened?”

He was leaning with his back to the rail, his eyes staring past her at the long line of portholes in the deck-house behind. Right and left the deck stretched away, empty in the gloom.

“Parsons was arrested in the first place,” he said, “because the doctor’s wallet was found in his possession. It was never very clear why he should have murdered Alloway unless it was to cover up the theft, but it seemed definitely established that he was the murderer of Holt when it was discovered that he was Madame Alva’s husband. . . .”

“What!” the girl gasped. “But why should Madame Alva—or rather, her husband—want to kill Holt?”

“It was this way. We had a radio message from New York stating that Holt had left Madame Alva a million dollars in his will. Holt and Madame Alva, as you know, had quarrelled, and it was, therefore, definitely to Madame Alva’s advantage to get rid of Holt before he could alter the will. Here, then, was the motive for the murder clearly apparent. . . .” He paused. “Or so it seemed until this morning, when the captain had a message from Holt’s lawyers. They said nothing about any legacy to Madame Alva, but stated that, by a new will executed the day before he sailed, the old man left everything to his son. . . .”

“You mean that Madame Alva is exonerated, and therefore that Parsons is not guilty?”

“That remains to be seen. It may well be that she acted in ignorance of the new will. In any case, at present the story about this legacy of hers is only a newspaper report and until we hear officially that there never was any question of her inheriting, the suspicion against her and Parsons remains. I believe the captain cabled the lawyers again this morning to clear up the point, but now I don’t suppose I shall hear the reply. . . .”

Timidly she touched his coat. “It’s true, then, what Dr. Winstay said?”

He inclined his head. “The captain sent for me this morning and told me I should have to drop out of the inquiry. . . .”

“Didn’t he give any reason?”

“He said he couldn’t allow anyone who benefited by Holt’s will to be associated with the investigation. . . .”

“But why? I don’t understand. What have you to do with Holt?”

His dark eyes were on her face as he answered:

“I am his son!”

At the same moment a bugle sent its alarm shrilling along the deck.

CHAPTER TWENTY

He broke off abruptly. “That’s the boat call!” Swinging round, he glanced behind him into the swirling mist beyond the rail. All over the ship, or so it seemed to him, as they lingered there, bugles, close at hand and more distant, were ringing in sharp, staccato notes. Yet the steady vibration of the deck and the rhythmic pounding under foot told them that the liner was still under way.

“I wonder what’s happened,” he said. “They can’t be having boat drill at this time of night. Come on, let’s find out. . . .” Hand-in-hand, they raced along the deck.

As they opened the door into the main lobby, they heard the scamper of feet, the confusion of many voices, while the bugles added an hysterical touch to the growing tumult. At the door of the lounge a ship’s officer was calling out, “All passengers into the lounge, please! Never mind your lifebelts!” Like frightened sheep coming over a hill, the passengers climbed the stairs and were herded into the big room. Some wore lifebelts, others clutched portfolios or jewel-cases. “Are we sinking? Is it a fire? Are we lost in the fog?” they asked each other in stricken voices, and, thinking of the fog closing in upon them, cast frightened glances at the closed doors and dark portholes.

Mr. Harris stood at the head of the staircase watching the crowd. He had a careworn look and his eyes were troubled. The bugles had ceased their clamour. Brown crossed to the detective. “Why the boat call?” he asked. “What’s going on?” On recognising the speaker, Harris seemed to stiffen. “Captain’s orders, sir,” he answered briefly. “They’re going to take the roll of the passengers. . . . The first class passengers,” he added, his bulging eyes dwelling significantly upon Brown’s companion, and, facing about, he walked off. “I’ll see you later,” the girl whispered to Brown, and slipped away.

The lounge was filled to its utmost capacity. It was a noble room, running the height of two decks and decorated in the Old English manner, with panelled walls, a vast carved oak fire-place and mullioned windows. The early arrivals had commandeered all the seating accommodation, and were posted on chairs drawn out into the centre of the hall or on couches

against the wall or in the alcoves. The late-comers had to content themselves with standing up round the walls. The atmosphere of the place was electric with expectancy. All eyes were directed towards a table set up on the orchestra daïs at the far end of the room, where the purser and one of his clerks were conferring in whispers.

Brown waited to enter until the last of the long stream of passengers had passed in. From the doorway he let his gaze rove over the throng. As far as he could judge, the whole of the first class was assembled there. Familiar faces emerged, here and there, from the mass. He picked out Sir Henry Faucon, scowling heavily and holding himself gloomily aloof from the crushed-looking woman at his side, who could only be her ladyship; Travers, plucking at his long upper lip with a jerky insistence that suggested a nervous reflex; and Breckinridge polishing his glasses. Young Rolfe was visible, looking over the assembly as though in search of someone, and Dr. Winstay, bending over a table for a light for his cigar. He caught sight of Mrs. Craven, a sombre figure in shabby black, enthroned in solitary majesty on a chesterfield in an alcove. Rigidly immobile she sat, her thin hands folded on her lap. There were other faces, too, that he recognised without identifying them, faces glimpsed in the promiscuity of their cramped shipboard existence, but all, known or unknown, wearing the same look of strained apprehension. The one passenger who seemed to be enjoying herself was his late bridge opponent, Mrs. Jackson, who was chatting brightly with a bored and listless clergyman.

The doors were shut and conversation trailed away as it was seen that the purser was on his feet. The captain's stalwart figure was visible behind him. Mr. Mellow was palpably ill at ease, as the convulsive way in which he kept opening and shutting his hands suggested. "Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, "the assistant purser is going to call the roll. Will you all be good enough to answer your names?" He sat down and instantly the murmur of voices sprang up again, to die away as the first name rang out.

"Mr. Abner?"

"Here!"

"Mrs. Abrahamsohn and infant?"

A beady-eyed matron spoke up. "Dot's me. But you gotta let me answer for baby. He's in his bed!"

Strained nerves found vent in a ripple of laughter. The sing-song English voice proceeded: "Colonel Adcock?" "Here!" "Mr. Agar?" "Okay!" "Mr. Akawa?" A little Japanese was on his feet, beaming through gold spectacles and catching his breath after the fashion which Japanese good manners

prescribe: “Very honoured, thank you!” With a polite bow he sat down. “Madame Alva?”

A pause. Again the name was called. Silence. “Is Madame Alva here, please?” the assistant purser called down the room. No reply. “Carry on!” Mr. Mellow’s brisk undertone was audible in the ensuing wait. . . .

“Mr. Breckinridge?”

The sallow American was on his feet. “Before we go any farther,” he said in a slightly nasal tone, adjusting his spectacles with a fighting air, “I’d like to ask the captain, whom I perceive on the platform, just what is the meaning of these proceedings. The boat call is sounded, passengers are scared out of their wits, and when we get here we’re told it’s merely for the purpose of checking over the list of passengers. Is there, or is there not, something back of this? I demand to know. . . .”

His challenge was the spark that lights a fuse. Like a train of fire, his protest seemed to spread itself to all parts of the crowded room. A burble of voices broke out; people were on their feet shouting and gesticulating. Single sentences framed themselves out of the din: “What’s the big idea, telling us nothing? . . . We’ve paid our passages and we have the right. . . . Why doesn’t the captain answer him?”

Captain McDiarmid had stepped to the front of the table. But before he could respond, Sir Henry Faucon bobbed up from his chair. “I beg to associate myself as strongly as possible with Mr.—ah—Breckinridge’s remarks,” he declared pompously, raising his voice above the din. “I—ah—feel sure I speak—ah—on behalf of all the other passengers. . . .”

There was an outburst of approval; one or two passengers clapped. The noise died down as the captain’s stern voice resounded. “I must ask you, sir,” said McDiarmid, looking at Breckinridge, “and you, Sir Henry, not to interrupt the proceedings. Everything will be explained in due course. . . .” And before the murmurs could begin again he said to the purser: “Get on with the roll, Mr. Mellow!” and stepped back.

The checking of the roster proceeded. “Mr. Brown?” “Here!” “Miss Bruce?” “Yes!” “Mrs. Burnley?” “Here!” “The Reverend Dr. Cayley?” “Here!”

Brown had found a corner against a pillar at the side of the room not far from the alcove where Mrs. Craven sat alone. It struck him that her reputation for eccentricity must have got abroad, for he noticed that, although there was place for two others on the couch, she throned there in solitude. When her name was called she rose and answered with a silent nod,

then relapsed upon the chesterfield, twisting and untwisting at one of her old-fashioned rings.

"Mr. and Mrs. Dawson?" "Here!" "Mr. Dickens?" A pause, and the purser's angry undertone to his aide: "All right. Get on!" "Sir Henry and Lady Faucon?" "Here!"

The roll-call went on in growing disorder. Late-comers squeezed themselves in, and the proceedings were interrupted while it was ascertained whether names had been reached. "Mrs., Miss and Master Freedman?" "Here!" "Professor Gregory?" "Here!"

The room was very close. The heat and the excitement began to tell. Two women had a violent altercation about a chair. The buzz of talk waxed louder, and above it the voice of the man at the table droned monotonously down the list: "Mr. Hart?" "Present!" "Mrs. Hawksley?"

A commotion had broken out in the far corner of the lounge. The fashionably dressed matron in grey who had just answered her name had burst into a fit of uncontrollable weeping. At the sound of her faint sobs a shudder seemed to run round the room. But the roll-call proceeded and presently the flurry subsided, the woman remaining in her place, forlornly dabbing at her eyes.

"Miss Herbert?" "Yes!" "Mr. Hiller?" "Hier!"—in guttural German tones. "Mrs. Himmelpfennig?" "Yess!"

Instinctively the noise had diminished as the H's were run through—it was as though a certain name was awaited. But from Mrs. Himmelpfennig the roll skipped to Mrs. Jackson and, with a significant glance at one another, the passengers started talking again.

At last they were reaching the foot of the long list. "The Marquesa de Villa Roya?" "*Ici!*" "Dr. Winstay?" "Here!" "Mr., Mr., Miss Violet, Miss Rose and Miss Josephine Zimmerman?" "Here!"

The roll was at an end. But at first the assemblage did not realise it. The buzz of voices went on until the purser rapped loudly for a hearing. An impressive hush descended. Gazing out across the hall, Mr. Mellow said, very loudly and distinctly: "Has Madame Alva arrived yet?"

The silence that ensued was broken by a full, solemn voice that cried imperiously: "Wait!" All eyes shifted to the alcove whence the interruption had proceeded. Mrs. Craven had risen to her feet. With convulsive movements she kept twisting and twisting at her ring. "You have forgotten someone!" She paused dramatically and, raising her hand, cried in clarion tones: "Where is Alonzo Holt?"

An unwilling murmur mounted from all around. People called out "Hush!" The purser was pounding the table. "Order, *please*! Has anybody seen Madame Alva?"

But Mrs. Craven remained standing, her gaunt figure outlined in the mullioned window at her back. "Why didn't you call his name?" With hand flung wide she declared: "Out there on the deck I saw him walking, but he wouldn't speak to me! I came to save him from himself, but I was too late!"

As she threw out her hand, one of her heavy gold rings slipped from her finger and rolled away under the couch at her back. The woman dropped groping to her knees. All over the lounge people were standing up, craning their necks. "She's crazy!" Above the din Mr. Mellow shouted stentorianly: "Ladies and gentlemen, I really must beg you . . ." and through the subsiding hubbub his rather falsetto voice could be heard, with growing anxiety reiterating the question: "Is Madame Alva present?"

A low gasping cry answered him. It came from the alcove where Mrs. Craven, the lower part of her figure concealed from view by the high back of the chesterfield, stood erect with hand extended, pointing downward. "There's a woman here!" she exclaimed in a whisper, which nevertheless penetrated in the oppressive silence to the farthest corner of the thronged hall. Then she swung about and faced the awed assemblage. As her gaze fell upon the face of the captain who stood, with hands firmly planted on the table, staring towards the alcove, she broke into a whimper. "Captain, please come here. I'm frightened—oh, Captain, I think she's dead!"

A wave of horror swept over the crowded hall. The passengers seemed rooted to their places, where they sat or stood, paralysed as by a nameless fear. The captain had to elbow a passage as with rapid strides he came down the room, the purser at his heels.

But Brown had forestalled him. With a steward that stood near, he had sprung forward and drawn the couch from the wall. The limp body of a woman that was squeezed behind it rolled forth with a thud, and lay face downward on the carpet.

Brown, crouching there, heard the captain catch his breath as he dropped to his knees beside him, and heard him whisper to the purser: "Merciful Heaven, she's been strangled, too!"

A woman shrieked aloud: "It's Alva!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE spell that held the crowd in ban seemed to snap. On the instant the whole great hall was a seething mass. Panic gripped the passengers; their instinctive surge towards the exits was like the ripple of wind on standing wheat. The lounge was a pandemonium; above the clamour of stentorian orders, of stewards shouting as they strove to stem the rush, resounded the nerve-racking screams of a woman who had collapsed in hysterics.

But the discipline of the sea was swift to assert itself. The powerful voice of the captain overtoned the turmoil: "Let no one leave the lounge!" A second later a cordon of stewards, with arms interlinked, had cleared a space about the alcove and the corpse upon the floor. There were angry protests, shrill cries of expostulation, as the frightened herd of passengers, swaying this way and that, was driven back upon the lines of empty chairs.

Mr. Breckinridge's lanky form towered above the crowd as he was swept along, shaking his fist and gesticulating to Sir Henry Faucon at his side, who was groping for his monocle with one hand and clutching his terrified spouse with the other; Mrs. Abrahamsohn, with voice uplifted in lamentation, was wailing: "*Ach, Gott! Ach, Gott!*" and "*Oi, gewalt!*" as she was carried forward; the Reverend Dr. Cayley, with arm gallantly outstretched, strove to protect Mrs. Jackson, who was at last reduced to an uncomprehending silence; young Rolfe, with blazing eyes, was in heated argument with a steward, whom he accused of pushing him. The three Misses Zimmerman were trying to soothe Mrs. Hawksley, whose peals of laughter and ear-splitting shrieks added to the general hysteria; Mrs. Burnley and Miss Herbert had led Mrs. Craven, muttering to herself, away from the cluster of tense figures grouped about the body on the floor.

A screen presently hid the dead woman from view, and the captain was observed forcing a way through the press to the daïs. Officers cried: "Sit down, please, everybody!" but no one obeyed. In a conglomerate mass the passengers stood huddled together, a solid block spreading out clear across the lounge, a rabble angry and turbulent with fear. For with the passing of their first sense of panic came the realisation, chilling and inescapable, of what the still form behind the screen portended.

In a sullen silence they at last accorded the captain a hearing. McDiarmid's voice was grave as he said: "I summoned this meeting to-night because Madame Alva was unaccountably missing when I sent for her. . . ." With hand uplifted to quell the hostile murmur that arose, he went on: "I decided to call the roll of the passengers to obviate the necessity of making an organised search of the ship, but also"—once more his hand stayed the crowd—"to make sure that no other passengers are missing, with a view to the measures henceforward to be taken for your protection. . . ."

A storm of voices greeted him. "It's outrageous! . . . You should have thought of that before! . . . How many more of us are to be strangled before you find the killer!" Facing them unflinching, the captain let the tempest beat about his head. "I've given orders that no one is to leave the lounge at present," he went on, "because, as the whole of the first class is assembled here, I wish to discover, before you disperse, whether any one of you saw the murdered woman to-night. Our information is that she left her cabin at about five minutes to eight to dine with a friend in the grill. When I sent for her ten minutes later she was nowhere to be found. . . ."

A middle-aged man in a brown suit raised his hand. "I believe I can tell you something," he said. The captain looked towards the speaker. "My name's Hart," the passenger went on. "At about eight o'clock to-night I was in that alcove"—he pointed across the room to where the body lay—"with my friend, Mr. Martin, who's standing across there at the fire-place, waiting for a call I'd put in to New York on the transatlantic telephone. We had the lounge to ourselves when my call came through, but when I got back I noticed Madame Alva seated in that chair there!" He indicated a chair beside the alcove.

"What time was this, Mr. Hart?" the captain asked.

"I can tell you that—it was five past eight. I remember that Mr. Martin remarked that they must all be in at dinner, and I looked at my watch. We chatted for a minute or two, and then went down to the restaurant. . . ."

"Leaving Madame Alva there?"

"Correct. . . ."

"Was there anyone else in the lounge at the time?"

"No, sir. . . . That's O.K., isn't it, Jeff?" he called across the lounge.

"It sure is," his friend agreed. "There wasn't a soul about, not even a waiter. . . ."

"Did Madame Alva come in alone?" the captain inquired of Martin.

"Yes, Captain. . . ."

"Did anyone speak to her while you were there?"

"No, sir. . . ."

McDiarmid turned to the purser. "Who was the steward on duty here at that time?" Mr. Mellow conferred with his assistant, and a name was called. A steward came forward. From eight o'clock on there was no steward on duty in the lounge, as they were all serving at dinner, he stated. He had come on at eight-fifteen to straighten the room as usual. There was no one in the lounge when he arrived. A few minutes later a lady—a Mrs. Hawksley, he believed—had come in looking for a friend and, not finding her, had gone away.

The captain gazed out over the crowd. "Has anybody else anything to say?" There was no answer, but now there was a stir at the far door. Mr. Harris had appeared with two stewards bearing a stretcher. They vanished behind the screen, and the captain, accompanied by the purser and his aide, hurried down to join them. When, in a moment, McDiarmid and his subordinates filed out it was in the wake of the stretcher over which a blanket had been spread.

The lounge doors were now opened, but none of the passengers attempted to leave. Breckinridge, his eyes flaming behind their glasses, had leapt to the platform. "I don't know how you people feel about it," he cried, "but I consider that the time has come for us passengers to take matters into our own hands. The captain of this ship has been fiddling about with a lot of tinpot little clues while a homicidal maniac is loose strangling his victims at will. Do you realise what these mysterious thefts from the state-rooms signify—this pallid face which a woman passenger saw on the boat deck? It means, friends, that a dangerous madman is at large, and if we don't do something about it, any one of us here in this room"—he pounded his palm impressively—"may be the next victim. . . ."

A thin, spinster-like woman with sandy hair emitted a faint shriek. "Oh, mercy," she moaned, "and he stole my rug! And to think he was in my cabin! A-ah!" She tumbled limply into a chair.

"And that's not all," a boyish voice chimed in—young Rolfe was speaking. "A girl on board was attacked only this afternoon—a figure pounced out on her on one of the lower decks and tried to strangle her. . . ."

A long shudder of fear eddied over the crowd. A woman screamed suddenly: "No, no, I can't bear it! That poor Madame Alva, and now . . . this! Henry, you've got to do something about it!"

"Don't worry, Lady Faucon," Breckinridge declared belligerently, leaning down to the speaker from the daïs; "we're going to do something

about it right now. . . .”

“Is this story really true?” Sir Henry demanded, glaring at the young man.

“You bet it’s true, sir,” young Rolfe retorted. “The girl wouldn’t tell me what was wrong, but I got the whole story out of Dr. Winstay, who met her directly after it happened. Why, he had to give her bromide, she was in such a state. . . .”

Gathered round in a wide circle, the passengers listened breathlessly. Mr. Akawa, the little Japanese, spoke up. “I think,” he said, hissing gently, “this is very dangerous ship. I shall not go . . . to bed!”

“I guess he’s got the right idea at that!” Mr. Hart remarked to his friend, Mr. Martin.

“No later than yesterday,” Breckinridge resumed impressively, “the purser assured me, in the presence of my good friend Sir Henry Faucon here and other passengers, that the murderer was arrested and that we had no further cause for alarm. They put a poor devil of a steward in irons, and twenty-four hours later the fiend claims his third victim. That gives us a pretty good idea of how well the ship authorities are safeguarding the passengers! If we want to protect our women from the fate of that poor creature to-night, gentlemen, we’ve got to organise!”

A chorus of approval arose from his audience. “I suggest that a committee be immediately appointed to wait on the captain with a definite scheme of defence,” the speaker continued. “And I suggest that Sir Henry Faucon, who has great experience as a colonial organiser, be asked to act as chairman. . . .”

The applause with which this proposal was greeted encouraged Sir Henry to mount the platform. He would be most happy, he told his grave and attentive audience, to—ah—head a deputation to the captain. “In the meantime,” he added, “I propose to—ah—arm myself with the revolver without which I have never travelled for the past thirty years, and I—ah—advise any of you gentlemen who possess firearms to follow my example. In this—ah—manner we shall be able to form, as it were, an armed camp out of this room with a regular roster of—ah—sentries found among the men passengers for the protection of our womenfolk. . . .”

The appearance of Mrs. Abrahamsohn, a sleeping infant in swaddling clothes on one arm, a pile of bedding on the other, interrupted him. Breathless she broke into the circle. “Ach!” she wheezed, “so frightened I haf been! There are men with guns all ofer the ship!”

As if in confirmation of her words, there was now the tramp of feet on the linoleum of the vestibule and the sound of rifles grounded. An officer, cap on head, a revolver strapped about his waist, appeared at the far end of the lounge. “Pay attention, please!” he cried, addressing the assembled passengers. “I have a certain number of revolvers and pistols here, which will be distributed to those gentlemen who are accustomed to the use of firearms. Those who wish to be armed, please come forward!” Most of the men obeyed: with frightened faces, the women sat about on the couches, whispering. Framed in the doorway behind the officer was the silhouette of a seaman, rifle in hand, a bandolier of cartridges slung across his jersey.

This wholly unlooked-for anticipation of their demands, showing that their worst fears were shared by the authorities responsible for their safety, completed the passengers’ disarray. The meeting melted like snow in the sun; even Breckinridge, staring fixedly at the large automatic in his hand, found himself bereft of speech. By tacit consent it seemed agreed that no one would sleep below. Passengers descending to their cabins in quest of pillows and blankets, came upon armed guards everywhere—at the entrances to the public rooms, on all the decks, in the state-room corridors.

Intangible, bewildering, even as the fog outside, and like the fog pregnant with hidden menace, the presence of the killer rested over the ship. Passengers made the excursion to their cabins in twos and threes, with creeping steps and hushed voices, and returned with all speed to the lounge for the mere companionship of the awestruck throng that huddled there under the blaze of lights. Notwithstanding the bedding that lay about, no one settled down to sleep. In clusters they sat, in mute terror, for the most part—if they spoke it was scarcely above their breath.

So quiet was it, that presently they could hear the faint clang of the engine-room telegraph that, in a flurry of churned-up water, brought the liner to a stop. The mournful blast of the foghorn swelling into the deathlike stillness, told them that they were still in the grip of the fog. In the lull that the last engine throb left in its wake they all heard the measured pacing of the guards on the deck.

They listened, quailing. No sound but that sad, slow keening from the bridge, that heavy tramp without; no movement but a stealthy tremor as the great liner met the waves.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

BROWN was the first to leave, as he had been the last to enter the meeting. His exit was in the nick of time. A steward tried to stop the lithe figure that broke through the cordon. But Brown eluded him and in an instant was outside.

Swiftly he darted along the corridor of A, dropped by the forward companion to B, gained the deck below by a second stair, and rapidly traversing the now disused second class saloon, came to a third flight, which brought him to D. No one was about and, with a glance at the numbers painted on the wall to guide him, he ran along, in a sort of feverish haste, until he came to the cabin he was evidently bound for.

He knocked softly and, obtaining no answer, looked in. His manner was cautious and uncertain as he halted on the threshold to gaze about him. Only the bedside lamp was on. It revealed the bed still unmade, a purple woollen dress trailing upon the crumpled bed-clothes; a black kimono draping the chair before the dressing-table, where bottles and boxes of face powder and manicure instruments strewed the glass slab; a wardrobe trunk, half closed, propped against the wall. At the sight of the large A painted on the side of the trunk the visitor stepped in quickly and closed the door behind him. Forthwith he began a hasty but methodical search of the cabin, opening drawers and cupboards, and from these proceeding to the wardrobe, the trunk, and a hat-box. When at the end of his hunt he remained still empty-handed, he paused and glanced, with a questioning air, about him.

As he stood thus, his eye lit upon the edge of a blotter protruding from under the green silk curtain drawn across the port-hole. He pulled the curtain aside. The blotter lay in the window niche, on it a pad of radio forms and some ship's stationery. The stationery, which was unused, he placed on one side. He was about to treat the message pad in the same manner when he perceived certain marks upon the blank paper, as from the pressure of a pencil. On the instant he ripped off the blank and, rolling it up, thrust it into the inside pocket of his coat. Then he turned his attention to the blotter.

The blurred impression of a letter was visible on the thick white blotting paper. He bore the blotter to the mirror and, holding it up to the glass, sought to read in reverse the words reproduced there. The light was dim, the imprint

faulty—he could make out "*on board*" and "*outside*" and the numeral "*7*" and a little farther on the words "*every*," and, after a space, "*even*." With a resolute mien he put the blotter down and carefully detached the outer sheet from its corners. Then he looked up and saw in the mirror a face gazing over his shoulder.

It was Dr. Winstay. Brown swung sharply about, holding the sheet of blotting paper behind him. The doctor was in the doorway, regarding the other with a look of cold astonishment. From Brown his gaze swung rapidly round the room. But there was nothing to arrest his attention—the search had left no traces—and his eyes returned to Brown. "What on earth are you doing here?" he said.

The other's expression was inscrutable. "I might ask you the same question. . . ."

"I was looking for Madame Alva's maid. . . ." He paused. "I needn't ask you if you know what's happened to Madame Alva, because I saw you in the lounge just now. . . ." He paused again. "Was this woman a friend of yours?"

"No. . . ."

"Then why. . . ?" He glanced about him and back to Brown.

"I'm not aware that I'm accountable to you for my actions. . . ."

"There's no need to take that tone. This woman has been murdered—strangled, if you don't know it—and five minutes after her body has come to light you're discovered shut up alone in her cabin. If you don't see that that requires some explanation. . . ."

"If I have to explain, it will be to those entitled to demand an explanation. . . ."

"You'll be asked to explain all right if I report this to the captain. For a very good reason. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. . . ."

"I'm asking you to tell me. . . ."

"Because the late Mr. Holt left the whole of his fortune to his son, who, for reasons best known to himself, goes under the name of Wentworth Brown. . . ."

Brown's face darkened. "Did Miss Fulton tell you this?"

"She did not. The news is out in New York. A man named Hart, who was talking on the transatlantic telephone to his broker in New York, heard it. The story's all over the ship. . . ." He broke off. "Dash it all, man, don't you

see I'm trying to help you? Your father was my friend, and anything I can do for his son. . . ." His glowing eyes rested on the rugged face. "Won't you let me in on this? I know that your father fell into the hands of this woman and broke with her when she was exposed as a common cheat. What have you found out about her, and what are you looking for here?"

Brown did not answer. "It's a friendly offer," said Winstay. Still the other did not speak. The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "All right. But you force me to draw my own conclusions. You were estranged from your father, but he was my friend, and I tell you frankly that I for one am determined that his murderer shall be apprehended and brought to justice. I may not be a trained investigator, but I believe I can put two and two together as well as the next man. . . ."

Brown scowled. "Are you trying to threaten me?"

Winstay flicked a speck of fluff from the lapel of his dinner-coat. "You may interpret my words exactly as you please. . . ."

His companion hesitated. "What you or anybody else thinks is quite immaterial to me," he said slowly, "but I must ask you to cease discussing me with my friends. . . ."

Winstay stared. "But. . . ." Then he laughed. "Oh, I see. You mean Mary Fulton. . . ."

"Exactly. And there's one thing more. I happened to catch sight of Miss Fulton leaving your state-room this afternoon. Do you think it fitting that a man in your position should invite a young girl like that to his cabin?"

For the first time in the interview Winstay's eyes grew angry. "Miss Fulton was frightened, and I took her to my cabin and gave her some bromide," he retorted. "I think it takes a thoroughly nasty mind to see anything wrong in that. . . ."

"She was frightened, you say? How?" Brown seemed to wait eagerly for the other's answer.

A note of reserve crept into Winstay's tone. "I don't know—she fancied she saw someone dodging about on one of the lower decks, or something. . . ." His glance challenged Brown. "I don't see what Miss Fulton has to do with you, anyway. . . ."

"She was committed to my charge. I was especially asked to keep an eye on her. . . ."

"So you insisted on dragging her out in the middle of the night to see the captain?"

"That's nothing to do with it. I object to your forcing your attentions upon her. . . ."

"Oh, be yourself, will you?" Winstay turned away. "This discussion has gone on long enough. . . ." As he spoke there was a footstep in the passage and Mr. Harris came into the cabin. He stared in surprise from one to the other of the two men. "What are you gentlemen doing here?" he demanded suspiciously, while his rapier glance flashed over the room.

"I was looking for Madame Alva's maid," the doctor answered. "She's ill and has asked for me. As for Mr. Brown. . . ." He shrugged his shoulders and went out.

"I came straight down here as soon as they found her," Brown said hastily in reply to the brooding inquiry in the inspector's eye. "I wanted to see if I could find anything to throw any light on this latest horror. . . ."

"Then perhaps you'd better give me that paper you're hiding behind your back." Mr. Harris suggested sternly.

Brown hesitated, his colour deepening. Silently he handed the sheet of blotting paper over. At the sight of the blur of writing, the detective's round eyes snapped. "A letter, eh?" he murmured, and, going to the glass, held the sheet up to it. "A woman's hand, by the look of it—her writing, I reckon. . . . I suppose you couldn't tell us who it's written to?" he said sarcastically over his shoulder.

Brown went to where the other stood before the dressing-table. "I tried to read it in the mirror, but I couldn't make out much. . . ." He was about to take the blotting paper from Harris, but the latter snatched it away, and, folding it, thrust it in his pocket. "You can safely leave that to me, sir. And now, what else have you taken from this lady's cabin?"

The other's eyes clouded over. "Nothing," he said impassively. "I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to turn out your pockets," the inspector announced in stern, official tones. A pause, then Brown slowly obeyed. Presently some letters, a blank radio form, a gold-edged wallet, pipe and pouch, some loose silver, a bunch of keys, made a small heap on the glass slab. With inscrutable Scotland Yard visage, Mr. Harris rooted among the pile. He glanced through the letters cursorily and examined the contents of the wallet—a wad of bills, a driving licence, one or two personal papers and some cards—after which he restored it to the heap and faced Brown again. "If you'll allow me, sir. . . ."

Brown frowned as he realised the other's intention; but he suffered the detective to run expert hands over him. Every pocket, however, was empty. Mr. Harris stood back and Brown, with features imperturbable, returned his

possessions to his pockets. “And now, Mr. Brown,” the inspector said crisply, “I must request you in future not to interfere in the investigation, according to the captain’s order. . . .”

His companion shrugged. “All right. . . .” He seemed about to add something, but changed his mind and slowly left the cabin.

The ever-watchful eye followed him through the door. Then, stolid as ever, Mr. Harris drew the blotting paper from his pocket and returned to the mirror.

Little by little the crowded lounge had settled down, if not to slumber, at least to relative quiescence. The lights blazed: here and there, with mouth open and head lolling, a passenger dozed; elsewhere people still whispered on.

From the corner where he and his friend Hart had taken refuge, Mr. Martin surveyed the scene with disfavour. “There’s not going to be much sleep for anybody to-night, George,” he told his companion gloomily. “But I guess ’most anything’s better than being cooped up below decks with the strangler running wild!”

“You’re sure right,” Hart agreed. “Still, I like my sleep. I could do with a drink, too!”

“The bar’s closed,” the other pointed out.

“I’ve a quart of rye in my state-room,” his friend announced. “There’s a spare bed, too. How about it, old man? What say we double up together?”

Martin shook his head firmly. “Not me, George. I don’t know where you bunk, but I’m on D, and I wouldn’t face those passages not for all the rye in America, and that’s a long drink. No, sirree, I’m staying right here with the folks. I like to sleep, and a little snifter sounds mighty good to me, but I’d rather breathe easy any time. . . .” With a slight shudder he ran his finger round the inside of his collar.

“I wouldn’t care about going too far below myself,” Hart rejoined. “But my state-room’s right on this deck—A, a piece along from the lobby I’m just around the corner from old Holt’s quarters—the royal suite. It’s been under guard ever since he died, so we shall be well looked after. . . .” He paused. “It’s good rye, too. What d’you say, Jeff?”

Martin licked his lips thoughtfully. “If you’re no lower than A. . . .”

The officer on duty in the lobby insisted on giving them a seaman with a rifle as escort. Following the quiet length of A along, they came upon the

lonely figure of an armed guard pacing to and fro. Hart nudged his companion. “Holt’s suite. I’m just beyond!”

The cabin was down a little alleyway—a cul-de-sac running off the main corridor. Parting with their escort, they went in and Martin shot the bolt while his friend produced the whisky from a suit-case and fetched two glasses from the bath-room. The ship was moving again and groaning and shivering to the beat of the propellers. For the rest, the silence was oppressive. Only the recurrent footfall of the sentry, as he crossed the mouth of the cul-de-sac, turned and went back, punctured the stillness.

The eerie quiet was not without its effect upon the two passengers. Their pistols before them, they huddled at the table over their drinks and spoke with lowered voices. Neither seemed anxious to make the first move to go to bed—not, at any rate, as long as any whisky remained in the bottle. They talked over the events of the evening. It was obvious, Martin declared, that the murderer must have come upon Madame Alva immediately after their departure for the dining-saloon. Hart opined that a man who would risk murdering a passenger in one of the public rooms must be a lunatic, upon which his friend affirmed that all murderers were insane, and the conversation rambled off into a discussion of insanity and crime.

Martin had been drinking already that evening and gradually became a little fuddled. He was in the act of giving his friend a somewhat confused account of the Ripper murders when Hart, suddenly raising his head, caught the other by the wrist. “What’s matter now?” Martin demanded in an aggrieved voice.

“Quiet!” his friend said tensely. “I thought I heard a step!”

“S’only the guard,” Martin rejoined with a deprecatory gesture of the hand. “Well, as I was saying, this maidservant was going along a street in Whitechapel and. . . .”

“Pipe down, can’t you?” Hart whispered sharply. “There’s someone outside!”

Martin, raising uncomprehending eyes, saw his companion rise silently and swiftly and, snatching up his pistol, glide softly to the door. In the stagnant silence, against the little noises of the ship, both men now caught the faint, creaking sound in the passage. This was not the brisk, distant tread of the sentry in the corridor—it was a stealthy footfall, cautious and deliberately muted, and very close at hand, as of someone creeping down the alleyway towards their door.

The two friends exchanged a horrified glance. With their hearts pounding they strained their ears for that surreptitious step to draw nearer.

Hart, whose state-room it was, was the first to remember that the alleyway ran to a dead end. “He’s coming here,” his lips framed almost noiselessly. “If he tries the door, I’m going to shoot!” He jerked up his pistol.

Gentle and rackingly slow, the footsteps came on. Hart began to count under his breath—one, two, three, four, five! He had reached nine when, without warning, the sound died away and an instant later there came to their ears the crisp tramp of the guard at the mouth of the cul-de-sac.

In the deathly quiet they heard him turn, go back. On a sudden impulse, Hart shot back the bolt, plucked the door open and, pistol in hand, peered fearfully out. The alleyway, spick-and-span in its gleaming white paint, was empty. With Martin at his heels Hart ran out into the corridor and met the sentinel returning. “Was it you who was in the passage outside A11 just now?” he demanded tremulously.

Blankly the seaman shook his head. “Not me, sir!”

“Someone went creeping past the door—we both heard him!”

“When?”

“Just now. Not an instant ago. He seemed to come from the corridor and go past my door!”

Again that blank headshake. “I ’aven’t moved from this corridor sence I come on dooty a hour and an ’arf back, sir. I ain’t seen nobody!”

“And you heard nothing shush—nothing sushpicious?” Martin questioned, bending forward.

The guard recoiled before the other’s breath. “No, sir,” he retorted stiffly.

He went back with them to the state-room. “There ain’t no way out ’ere,” he remarked, looking towards the port-hole that barred the end of the cul-de-sac.

“What’s that door?” Hart demanded, pointing at a solitary door beyond his, on the opposite side of the alleyway.

“That’s the royal suet, that is, as Mr. ’Olt used to ’ave,” the man replied. “It’s been locked up ever sence the old gent was murdered. The proper entrance is on the main corridor along where I ’ave my beat. This is one of the bath-rooms, I reckon. . . .” So saying, he tried the handle; but the door did not yield. “You see, gents, locked, like I told you. . . .”

He smiled indulgently and they perceived that he was glancing past them, through the open door of the state-room they had left, at the whisky bottle and glasses on the table. “If I wuz you, gents,” he suggested confidentially, “I’d go to bed. There ain’t nothing going to ’appen to you with me outside!”

“I’m going to bed all right, all right,” Hart declared with feeling. “But not here. Come on, Jeff, let’s beat it back to the lounge!”

A minute later the frightened herd of passengers was again in a turmoil with the news that the killer was still roaming foot-loose through the ship.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE fog lifted before daybreak, and by noon the ship was at full speed again, rising and falling with disconcerting regularity in a broken sea. Fully attired but for a black silk dressing-gown, Dr. Winstay was paring his nails in the cold, hard light under the window when a knock came at his cabin door. It was Mary Fulton. "Oh," she cried, with a touch of shyness in her manner, "I hope it's not too early to come calling—I waited until it struck twelve for fear of disturbing you. . . ."

"Come in," said the doctor. "If you'll give me a moment I'll just slip on my coat. . . ."

"Don't trouble—I won't stay a minute. . . ." She paused. "I wanted to ask you—what are these stories that people are spreading about Mr. Brown?"

"What sort of stories?"

"That he murdered Holt, that he killed the doctor and Madame Alva to prevent them giving him away. . . ."

Winstay did not reply. With rather a troubled air he walked to the port-hole and stood there, gazing out.

"Surely you don't believe these terrible things of him?" the girl demanded tremulously. "It's . . . it's monstrous that people should be allowed to tell such outrageous lies. I can't find Mr. Brown to ask him himself, so I came to you. . . ."

The doctor had turned and was facing her. "Sit down a minute," he said. "I want to ask you something. . . ." Rather tensely she took the chair beside the table. "You remember that first morning on the deck when Mr. Holt spoke to you and afterwards Brown came up? Did you gather from Brown that he had met Mr. Holt on board already? I ask, because it was generally understood that old Holt had not seen his son since the latter was an infant. . . ."

The girl shook her head. "I'm afraid I can't tell you—he didn't say anything to me about it. He seemed to know all about old Mr. Holt, about him being crotchety and so forth. . . ."

"Did he appear to be personally acquainted with Madame Alva?"

"I can't answer that, either. He seemed to know who she was. . . ."

"Obviously, since he reported your conversation about her to the captain. . . ."

"Now I come to think of it I did ask him what Madame Alva had to do with Mr. Holt. But I don't remember whether he replied or not. . . ." Her glance searched the other's face. "But why all these questions? You've got to tell me, before I answer any more—do you believe that Mr. Brown is guilty?"

He met her gaze very soberly. "Frankly, my dear, I don't know what to think. But the best way to clear him is to get at the truth. Unfortunately, he doesn't seem disposed to help one. . . ."

"You mean, you've tried?"

He nodded. "Not very successfully, I'm afraid. He doesn't like me much. . . ."

"Why ever not?"

"I think I know the reason. But I'm not going to tell you. . . ."

She coloured up. "Surely . . . it's not about me?"

"It doesn't matter. But," he went on, "I wish you'd try and recall everything you can about that first interview. It might be important. . . ."

"The only other thing," she said rather dubiously, "is that as soon as I'd told him about my adventure with Mr. Holt he asked me to lunch. . . ."

"Did you go?"

She shook her head. "To tell you the truth, he rather annoyed me. It seemed so, well, snobbish to want me to lunch with him simply because I'd scraped acquaintance with the richest man on the boat. At least, that's what I thought at the time—I realise now that he simply wanted to talk about his father. . . ."

Winstay nodded. "There are a lot of queer things about Brown in this case. In the first place, did you know that he and Dr. Alloway had met before?"

"No!"

"It's a fact. I myself saw them laughing and chatting on deck together that very morning. It seems they were students together in Germany. . . ."

"But what does that prove?"

He spread his hands. "I don't know . . . yet. Then there's this. Do you know that Brown was playing bridge in the smoking-room on the night of Holt's murder, and that he left the table a little while before the old man was attacked?"

Her nod was scornful. “Yep, I heard that one. It’s just another of the lies that those old hens in the lounge are circulating. . . .”

“My dear,” said Winstay gently, “it’s true! I was there!”

She gazed at him in dismay. “You can’t mean it?”

“We were playing bridge at the same table. I was called away and Brown went out after me. . . .”

“Where did he go?”

“I can’t tell you—I didn’t see him go myself. But he came back just before I did. And that was a few minutes before you screamed. . . .”

“You mean he was away from the table at the time that Mr. Holt was killed?”

“Yes. . . .”

She laughed rather contemptuously. “What does that prove? I’m quite sure he has a perfectly satisfactory explanation. He probably went out to get some air. The atmosphere in that smoking-room gets terribly thick after dinner. . . .”

“I dare say you’re right,” he said; but there was that in his face which made her ask quickly: “Is there something else?”

He nodded. “Yes. And it’s so—well—odd I don’t know what to make of it. . . .”

“Tell me!” she pleaded.

“Well,” he said slowly, “after the discovery of Madame Alva’s body last night I was sent for to see to her maid who’d fainted—she remembered that I’d attended her mistress and when she came to, asked for me. In the confusion I never discovered who brought the message, and as no one could tell me where the maid was to be found I went down to Madame Alva’s cabin on the chance that she might be there. She wasn’t, but Brown was. . . .”

“What was he doing?”

“I asked him, but he wouldn’t say. All I can tell you is that he was in her cabin with the door shut. He couldn’t claim he was there on behalf of the investigation because I knew different. . . .”

“Was he a friend of Madame Alva’s?”

“He says not. . . .”

“Then what does it mean?”

The doctor was silent. “Well, I don’t care,” she pronounced stubbornly, “I like this man Brown and I’m going to stick up for him. I’m sure he’s

unjustly suspected—oh, the thing's unthinkable!" As Winstay still did not speak, she stood up, clutching the table against the violent movement of the ship. "There's one thing before you go," the doctor said suddenly—he raised his face to hers and she saw that it was grave. "Don't go poking around into any more dark places. . . ."

She stared at him affrighted. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," he rejoined stolidly. "There's a killer loose. Until he's captured"—he paused—"whoever he may be, I don't want you to run any risk. . . ."

Two images danced before her brain as she gazed fixedly at the doctor—of Brown, as she had seen him in the vestibule two nights before, after Mrs. Hawksley's dramatic irruption, with the damp of the deck still pearling on his coat; of Brown again, as she and Winstay had come upon him on the previous afternoon, emerging from the dimness of E deck where that clutching hand had driven her to flight. Without speaking she turned and made blindly for the door, her eyes dazed.

But she forgot the list of the cabin floor. A violent lurch of the vessel caught her unawares, and if the doctor had not grasped her, she would have fallen. She thanked him with a look, then, rubbing her wrist, went on her way.

While the chief officer, whose appearance had interrupted his noonday conference with the captain, was reporting, Mr. Harris covertly studied McDiarmid. All the resilience seemed to have gone out of the well-knit figure that sat humped in the desk chair with features fine-drawn from strain and want of sleep.

"The ship has been searched from smokestack to stokehold, sir," the chief officer was saying.

"And you found no one?"

"No one, sir. . . ."

"The guards are still posted?"

"Yes, sir. . . ."

"Let them remain until further order! Report to me at once if there are any fresh developments! All right, Mr. Fewlass. . . ." The captain's nod dismissed his subordinate.

McDiarmid's voice rang flat and depressed as, resuming his conversation with the detective, he said, "You may be right, Mr. Harris, but, on the other hand, we may have been working on a false presumption from

the start. Suppose, after all, there's no pattern in all of this: suppose it's a homicidal maniac at work who strangled Holt and the others as he'd strangle anybody whom he came upon alone when the frenzy was on him. These experiences of passengers seem to confirm it. First this Mrs. Hawksley and then the Fulton girl—you heard about that, I suppose? Why the devil she was allowed to go prowling in the fo'c'sle, I don't know, but Dr. Winstay told the purser that some man tried to grab her. . . ."

"I know all about that, sir," the detective agreed, with his customary phlegm, "but it don't upset my theory. On the contrary. Most mass murderers are mad—that's to say, they feel privileged to put out of the way anyone who inconveniences them. Whether these ladies imagined their experiences or not, the fact is there's a dangerous killer at large and no man, woman, or child on this boat is safe until he's laid by the heels. There are chain murders, sir. The way I look at it, each one is linked to the killing of old Holt. Dr. Alloway has a few minutes alone with the old gentleman and is strangled. Why? We find the answer in what happened to the Madame. We'd got the goods on her, hadn't we? We had her husband under lock and key and we'd definitely established that, under the old will, Holt's death was worth a cool million to her. You get the cable from the lawyer's confirming her legacy under the old will and send for her and what happens? She's strangled, same as Holt, same as Alloway. Why? To prevent her from blabbing. And the surgeon was croaked for the same reason to keep his mouth shut—how it was, we can't say yet, but he knew too much. I missed my guess about Parsons, I don't mind admitting—the mere fact that the Madame was knocked off lets him out, apart from the fact that he was in the clink when she got hers, for these three murders were the work of the same pair of hands. That wallet was planted on him for a purpose—to throw us off the track. And the person who did it was the person to whom she wrote this letter. . . ."

While he was speaking the detective had opened a brief-case he had with him and extracted some papers. "You deciphered that blotting-paper then?" the captain inquired.

"Not entirely," Mr. Harris replied, laying two sheets of foolscap on the desk. "But we made some of it out and the rest we guessed. Mullaney and I spent most of the morning on it. . . ."

Mr. Harris held the blotting-paper in his hand. "To save time, sir, we typed out what we were able to read off this sheet in the mirror"—he placed one of the foolscap sheets before the captain—"and on another sheet we put down what we were able to make of it with the gaps filled in. . . ."

"I suppose there's no doubt about it being in her handwriting?" McDiarmid questioned.

"No, sir. I got one of her letters from Mrs. Hawksley and compared it. . . ."

The captain took the blotting-paper from the detective and laid it beside the typed page, comparing the two. The typed page ran:

Wedne . . . .ight.

. . . . st . . . . t . . . . kn . . . . on board. Mak . . .
no . . . . mpt . . . . ate with . . . . use . . . . told h . . .
outsid . . . . 7 every . . . . even . . . . going to act
act soon . . . . spense . . . . killi . . . .
da.

The Captain's forefinger underlined the truncated signature. "That's not 'Alva'," he declared.

"Quite right, sir. It's 'Ada.' Ada was her first name—Ada Dahl, don't you remember?"

McDiarmid nodded. "Correct. I'd forgotten."

"And here, sir"—Mr. Harris drew forward the second typed sheet—"is how we've filled in the blanks. It's not complete but I reckon it's near enough. . . . ."

The captain read:

Wednesday night.
(Ju)st to (le)t (you) kn(ow) (?I) (am) on
(?Holt) (is)
board. Mak(e) no (atte)mpt (to) (communic)ate
with (?me) (It would be) use(less). (I)
(?him). (It would be of no use
am) told h(e) (is) outsid(e) (at) 7 every (morning
and) even(ing). (If you are) going to act act soon.
(This su)spense (is) killin(g) (me)
(A)da.

"Very ingenious," was McDiarmid's comment. "It seems clear enough. What have you been able to find out about it?"

"Not a great deal, sir. The maid says her mistress sent her with no note, nor does she remember the Madame writing to anybody. And there's no

trace at the purser's office. . . ."

"When was it written, do you suppose?"

"The night we sailed, I'd judge by the context. . . ." The detective rubbed his chin thoughtfully, eyeing the captain. "About the only clue we have, sir, is the fact that Mr. Brown was sufficiently interested to tear that sheet out of the blotter. . . ."

"I know. You told me." His harassed regard consulted the detective. "Said he was trying to help the investigation, didn't he?"

Mr. Harris's expression was vacuous, his eyes dull and cod-like. "That's what he said, sir. . . ."

"Are you suggesting that that letter was written to *him*?"

The other hesitated. "With your permission, sir, I'd prefer not to answer that question just now. . . ." He made a break. "If my theory's right and these three crimes are all of a piece, to find the murderer we have to go back to the night of old Holt's death. There are two parties on this boat whose movements on that evening will have to be very carefully checked. One is Mr. Brown—the other Mr. Travers. They were playing bridge at the same table. It's common talk on the ship that they were both out of the smoke-room at the time of the murder. . . ."

"I can't speak for Brown," the captain observed with a thoughtful air. "But I can for Travers. He informed me himself in this very room that he never left the table. He forced his way in on purpose to tell me about it. Said he wanted to establish his alibi. And, by the way, Brown corroborated him. . . ."

"You mean that neither of 'em left the table?"

"That was certainly my impression. . . ."

Mr. Harris grunted. "An alibi, eh? Trust a gangster to have an alibi handy. . . ."

McDiarmid's temper was short that morning. "What do you mean?" he snapped. "Mr. Travers is not a gangster. . . ."

"Oh, no?" said the detective. "Well, I hear he's in with Ed Mankiewicz and Joe Vitale, a couple of hot numbers from Chi, who, I'm pretty sure, have been running a roulette game in C29. And it's stated positively that he was out of the smoking-room when. . . ."

"The facts are easily established," the captain broke in impatiently. "Get this bridge four up here and let's hear what they have to say. . . ."

"The very thing I was about to suggest, sir," was the smooth rejoinder. "What time would be convenient?"

The captain glanced at the clock. “Better make it directly after lunch. Who are they?”

“Mr. Brown, Mr. Travers, Dr. Winstay and a Mrs. Jackson. . . .”

“Right. Have them here at two-thirty sharp. . . .”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

BOLT upright in her chair, her knees well spread, her eye spry and alert, Sitting Bull contemplated the captain. It was the first time she had set eyes on that august personage—she wondered vaguely whether he was a bridge player. The quiet of his big state-room was in pleasing contrast with the smoke-room or the lounge, with their constant interruptions. Its rarefied atmosphere appealed to her as affording an ideal medium for the renewal of her bridge hostilities, especially as, with Dr. Winstay and Mr. Brown accommodated with chairs at her side she perceived that she had at last corralled a four. She was measuring with her eye the distance separating her from Winstay, with a view to a whispered inquiry as to whether the captain was a bridge addict, when that functionary's voice brought her to order.

"Mrs. Jackson," he said very deferentially, "I'm sorry to have troubled you on a rough day like this—incidentally, it seems to have proved too much for Mr. Travers. He's on his way up, but we can begin without him. Last Thursday night—it was the night of Mr. Holt's murder, to be precise—you were playing bridge in the smoking-room, I understand?"

Sitting Bull inclined her head majestically. "That is so."

"These gentlemen here and Mr. Travers were playing with you. I want you to try and recollect the particulars of the game."

Mrs. Jackson snorted. "All I can tell you is that there were two interruptions and I got fixed on both. That scream on deck gypped me out of one of the best slams I ever held. How would you like to have your partner open with a two-bid when you held——" She broke off apprehensively. "You play bridge, of course?"

The captain smiled. "Sometimes." Then, sighting a sudden gleam in Sitting Bull's eye, he added hastily: "When I'm on shore."

Mrs. Jackson beamed at him. "Well, then, I held four spades to the ace, jack; the queen and one heart; four diamonds to the ace."

"One moment, madam." McDiarmid strove to stay her, but in vain.

"And my partner," she swept on, drowning his voice, "goes and opens the bidding with two hearts. What do you know about that?"

"Just a minute. What was the first interruption you spoke of?"

"It was every bit as bad," she declared dramatically. "Our opponents—Mr. Travers and Mr. Brown—were about to go down a thousand when a steward came in and called my partner out."

A thick-set man in uniform, who stood behind the captain's chair, spoke up. "That was Dr. Winstay, sir," Mr. Harris explained. "You remember, he was fetched away to Madame Alva, who was sick."

McDiarmid nodded. Then, addressing Mrs. Jackson again, he said: "What happened then?"

"That man Travers had the nerve to lecture me instead of taking his medicine. He'd have got it, too, because I bet him fifty dollars——"

"I must really ask you to keep to the point," the captain adjured her sternly. "Dr. Winstay went away, and you, Mr. Travers and Mr. Brown, remained at the table—is that it?"

"No. Mr. Brown went out. And I'll make another bet right now——" Sitting Bull was getting into her swing again when the opening of the door interrupted her, and Travers came in. His thin face was a greenish hue, his mien profoundly dejected; he was scarcely recognisable as the talkative, bustling individual whose persistent chatter had disturbed Brown's first breakfast on board. Pressing his handkerchief to his lips, he dropped silently into the chair which Mr. Harris brought him, and directed his scared gaze toward the desk.

The captain had turned to Brown. "Is that correct—that you went out?"

"Yes, Captain."

"For what reason?"

"The game had been interrupted by Dr. Winstay leaving; I thought I'd get a breath of air."

"Where did you go?"

"My intention was to go out on deck. But it was so bleak and foggy that I changed my mind. I walked through to the lounge, stood about a little, then came back."

"What time was it when you left the table?"

"I'm afraid I didn't notice."

"Excuse me, Captain," Dr. Winstay broke in. "I can tell you approximately. I was called away at five minutes to eleven—I noted the time. It was a quarter past when I got back to the table."

"Was Brown there?"

"Yes. They were all there except me. As soon as I appeared we resumed the game."

McDiarmid addressed himself once more to Mrs. Jackson. “Mr. Brown went out, you say. What happened then?”

“I was telling you,” Sitting Bull replied impatiently. “Mr. Travers there lost his temper with me because I undertook to prove to him that with what the doctor and I had between us, he and his partner would have been four down. He was very positive that I was wrong until I offered to lay him fifty dollars. Then he thought better of it and walked out on me.”

“You mean he left the table?” the captain inquired sharply.

“That’s an absolute falsehood, and you know it!” Mr. Travers was on his feet. “I never ran away from a bet in my life.”

“Are you going to tell me that you didn’t?” Sitting Bull demanded, trembling with exasperation.

“I certainly am.”

“Perhaps you didn’t leave the table?”

“I did not!”

Sitting Bull flung herself back in her chair. “Well, of all——” Then she bounced erect again. “Say, you can’t get away with that stuff, Henry Travers,” she flared up at him. “If you think I’m going to let you stand up there and call me a——”

“One moment, please, Mrs. Jackson,” McDiarmid put in.

But Sitting Bull would not be stopped. “Why, you poor fish,” she cried at Travers, “half a dozen people saw you leave the smoke-room! The whole ship’s talking about nothing else. What about Mr. Breckinridge? Is he a liar too?”

The captain thumped the desk. “Let me get this straight, please. What does Mr. Breckinridge know about this matter?”

“He saw Mr. Travers leave the smoke-room that night,” Sitting Bull answered emphatically. “He’ll tell you about it quick enough, if you ask him —he’s been talking about it ever since!”

Travers said no more. He had relapsed into his chair, his face a blank.

Mr. Harris stooped to the captain’s ear. “Mr. Breckinridge was asking for you, sir, just as I came in. I told him to wait. I reckon it’s about this business.”

“Then bring him in at once,” said McDiarmid. After a puzzled glance at Travers, he looked toward Mrs. Jackson again. “According to you, then, Mr. Travers left the table. How long was he away?”

“I can’t say exactly. He came back soon after I did.”

“Did you also leave the table?”

Sitting Bull inclined her head graciously.

"Why?"

"I'd forgotten my tablets."

"The score cards, do you mean?"

Mrs. Jackson's smile was compassionate. "My reducing tablets. I take one every two hours. I found it was eleven o'clock; so, as the game was held up, I popped along to my cabin."

"Eleven o'clock, eh? And how long were you away?"

"Not long. Five or ten minutes, I guess."

The captain's glance swung round the circle. "Then it would seem that all four of you were out of the smoke-room at the time of the murder."

Mr. Breckinridge, whom the inspector now ushered in, was obviously prepared to enjoy himself. He had shed his aggressive mien of the night before for an air of mystery which he had compounded for himself out of the less objectionable mannerisms of Sherlock Holmes and Philo Vance. He expressed his gratification at being permitted to submit what he described as "a humble attempt at inductive reasoning" as his contribution toward the investigation. The discovery at that moment, as he adjusted his thick-lensed glasses, of Mr. Travers at his elbow, shook him a little, but did not materially diminish the enthusiasm with which he launched forth into his oft-told tale. It had lost nothing in the telling, and stood out now as a highly polished piece of dramatic narrative. The presence at his side of the hero of his tale led him to discard certain colourful details which had thrilled his audiences of the promenade and lounge, as, for instance, the furtive craftiness in Mr. Travers's face as he had slunk from the table, and the cryptic signal of a handkerchief brandished in a certain fashion to the men at the bar. But, taken all in all, it was a highly creditable performance, which produced a profound impression on the listeners, especially Mr. Harris.

When Breckinridge had finished Travers stood up. For a moment he was unable to speak. "Captain," he brought forth at last, "I know that appearances are against me, but I give you my solemn word of honour that I am not acquainted with any of these men of whom Mr. Breckinridge speaks."

"Just a minute," the captain, who was consulting with Mr. Harris in undertones, stayed him. McDiarmid scribbled on a pad and rang the bell. "I want those gentlemen brought here at once," he told the steward, giving him the paper. His stern glance rested on the shrinking figure of Travers. "Now then, Mr. Travers——"

“I fear I unwittingly misled you,” Travers faltered. “I was honestly under the impression that I had remained at the table—my memory’s not so good as it might be, and all this distressing business has upset me very much. I remember now that I did leave the room.”

With a snort of triumph Sitting Bull glanced round the circle. “And I’m sure,” the banker went on, “I wish to offer my apologies to my friend Mrs. Jackson for contradicting her. I can only say——”

The captain’s deep voice struck in: “You wish me to believe that your memory’s so faulty that you can discuss the matter with me, and listen to the whole thing being thrashed out again here without remembering that you were out of the smoke-room at the time of the murder. Is that it?”

Travers moved his hands feebly. “It was an honest error, I assure you, Captain.”

“Wasn’t the real reason that you were afraid of being incriminated?” And as the other was silent: “Come on, Mr. Travers, I want the truth.”

But at that instant the door opened and the steward announced: “Mr. Scholefield.”

“Come in, Mr. Scholefield,” said the captain. He turned to Breckinridge. “Is this the gentleman to whom you allege Mr. Travers made a private sign?”

Mr. Scholefield, who was so excessively paunchy that the top of his light grey trousers displayed a fringe of white shirt under his waistcoat, started violently.

“That’s the man!” Breckinridge declared solemnly.

“What do you know of this gentleman?” the captain asked Scholefield, and indicated Travers with his hand.

Mr. Scholefield shook his head blankly. “I never saw him before.”

“Do you know two men on this ship”—McDiarmid’s eyes dropped to his blotter—“Mr. Mankiewicz and Mr. Vitale?”

The other’s face changed. “I do.”

“Do you remember drinking with them at the smoke-room bar last Thursday night—the night of the murder?”

Mr. Scholefield laughed dryly. “I’m not likely to forget it. They and their friend Mr. Gansblatt, in C29, set me back eighteen hundred dollars at roulette. I’m not squealing; they had me for a sucker and I can stand it. But those are just the facts, see?”

Humphries appeared again. “Mr. Mankiewicz and Mr. Vitale.”

They were a colourful pair. The one whom shrewd eyes, high cheekbones and a fleshy nose proclaimed to be Mr. Mankiewicz, was

tastefully arrayed in a bright purple suit, while Mr. Vitale's swarthy Latin features were strikingly set forth by a jacket of tawny brown worn with a vivid scarlet tie, striped flannel trousers and black-and-white shoes. The two men seemed vaguely disconcerted by the presence of the captain. However, with great aplomb, they each raised a hand in salutation to Mr. Scholefield, and in a rather uneasy silence awaited developments.

"Do either of you know this gentleman?" the captain pointed to Travers.

"No, sir," Mr. Mankiewicz declared very emphatically, and his companion echoed him.

"On Thursday night," the captain went on, "it is alleged that this gentleman made a sign to you as the two of you and Mr. Scholefield were drinking at the bar in the smoke-room, and that you three immediately followed Mr. Travers out."

Solemnly Mr. Mankiewicz shook his head. "You sure got us wrong, Cap. We don't know nothing about him."

"I nevva seena da guy," vociferated Mr. Vitale temperamentally.

"I think I've got it," said Mr. Scholefield, breaking in. "I remember the incident now. I did see Mr. Travers. He crossed the smoke-room that night and stopped to look at the clock. I looked at the clock, too, and noticing the time, I turned to this man here"—he indicated Mr. Mankiewicz—"and told him if the game was set for eleven o'clock, we'd best be getting down. That's all I can tell you about it."

"And you three gentlemen went down to C29, is that it?"

"Sure," said Mr. Mankiewicz, and added, ingratiatingly: "For a friendly hand of rummy in Al Gansblatt's suite."

McDiarmid's nod was brief. "All right, I won't detain you, gentlemen. Or you, Mr. Breckinridge." As the four men filed out he rounded on Travers. "This seems to clear you," he declared, "but it doesn't get over the fact that you lied to me. Why? What do you know about the killing of Mr. Holt?"

"Nothing! Nothing, I tell you!" The thin voice rose to a scream. "But I was scared. I knew I'd left the smoking-room just before the old man was strangled, and I was afraid I'd be sent for and—and grilled. My nerves wouldn't stand it."

"Why did you leave the table?"

"To fetch my pipe."

The stern glance shifted to Mrs. Jackson. "Did he tell you that?"

"I believe he did say something about it," Sitting Bull muttered—her encounter with Travers still seemed to rankle. "But he didn't have any pipe

when he came back that I can remember."

"Did you?" McDiarmid asked Travers.

The other wavered. Then he stammered, "No. That was only an excuse."

"What was the real reason?"

Travers gazed desperately about him. "It's not generally known, even to my intimate friends," he articulated faintly, "that, owing to alopecia, I am compelled to wear a certain appliance. . . ."

"Owing to which?" the captain rasped.

"Alopecia," Winstay broke in with a smile. "It means baldness. I think that he's trying to tell you he wears a toupet."

"A wig, d'you mean?"

"It's only a bald spot," Travers explained anxiously, "and I wear a small toupet combed into my own hair to cover it. When I looked into the mirror in the smoke-room that night, I discovered it had slipped, so I went down to my cabin to fix it." He paused. "I hope very much that Mrs. Jackson will treat anything she has heard in this room as confidential."

"Don't worry," Sitting Bull remarked succinctly. "You could be as bald as the ace of spades and I shouldn't lose any sleep."

"I wasn't away more than a few minutes," Travers went on hastily to the captain, "and part of that time I was in the lounge, as Mr. Brown can testify." His glance appealed to Mr. Brown. "Do you remember, I passed you when you were talking to some man?"

"What man?" was the captain's blunt inquiry. He turned to Brown.

Brown shook his head. "Mr. Travers is mistaken. I didn't see him, nor do I remember talking to anybody when I was away from the table."

"You may not have noticed me," Travers declared very emphatically, "but I certainly saw you. I can even tell you what you were talking about. It was the fog."

The other laughed easily. "Now that I come to think of it, some man did come up and ask me for a light and we exchanged a few words about the weather."

Mr. Harris's harsh voice chimed in: "Perhaps Mr. Brown would tell us who this man was?"

Brown shrugged his shoulders. "I'm afraid I barely remember the incident, and that's about all."

"You'd never seen this man before then?" the detective pursued.

"No."

“What was he like? Young or old, tall or short?”

“I haven’t the least idea. I didn’t pay any attention to him.”

“Then you wouldn’t be able to bring him forward in support of your statement.”

“What statement?”

“That on leaving the table you went to the lounge.”

“Does that statement require corroboration?”

Mr. Harris fixed him with his eye. “It certainly does, Mr. Brown.”

The rugged face coloured a little. “In that case, I can’t.”

“If I might put in a word,” Winstay remarked suddenly. All eyes were turned to him. “Mr. Travers has rather a penetrating voice,” the doctor said. “In justice to him, I think I should say that, as I came up to the table on my return to the smoke-room, I heard Travers telling Mrs. Jackson that he had seen Mr. Brown talking to a man in the lounge.” He looked across at Mrs. Jackson. “I think that’s right?”

Sitting Bull nodded, but with reluctance—it was evident she still regarded her late assailant with extreme disfavour.

The captain now rose. “I needn’t encroach further on your time,” he informed his visitors collectively.

Mr. Travers’s departure was in the nature of a flight; Mrs. Jackson and the doctor followed more composedly after. Brown lingered on the chance of a word with the captain. But Mr. Harris had drawn the latter out of ear-shot to the long window behind the desk and, glancing from time to time toward the third occupant of the room, was stressing some point earnestly.

The sudden flinging open of the door cut him short. With eyes popping and hand pawing the air, the purser stood there. “The killer!” he panted. “He’s been seen again!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE captain looked up angrily. “Don’t stand gibbering there, Mr. Mellow,” he cried out. “Come in and explain yourself!”

The purser advanced to the desk. With a gulp, he said: “It was Mrs. Burnley, the lady in A15. Most of the passengers had picnic lunches in their state-rooms to-day. Mrs. Burnley was having hers alone in her cabin when she thought she would join a party of friends along the corridor. As she stepped out of her cabin carrying her tray, she suddenly came face to face with a man.”

“What man?”

“She says it was old Holt.”

“What?” the captain roared.

“I’m only telling you what she said, sir,” Mr. Mellow expostulated. “She swears it was the old man himself, in the brown cap and dark overcoat he wore when walking on deck.”

“Bosh!” captain McDiarmid’s face was crimson. “Have you nothing better to do than waste my time with such old wives’ tales, Mr. Mellow?”

“Old wives’ tale or not, sir, it sent Mrs. Burnley into fits. She dropped her tray and fainted clean away.”

“Tehah!” The Captain glowered. “And by this, I suppose, the story’s all over the ship.”

“No, sir. They got her back into her state-room without anyone noticing, the steward says.”

McDiarmid grunted. “It was some passenger, of course. We can’t have these hysterical women encouraged. You’re not much better than they are, it seems to me, the way you come rushing in here.”

“That may be, sir,” returned Mr. Mellow, ruffled. “But I’d have you know that when they picked up Mrs. Burnley’s tray, a plate of chicken and ham and a roll were missing. As this isn’t the first time that eatables have disappeared from that corridor I thought it my duty to report it. That’s all.” Stiffly he retired within himself.

The captain’s face changed. “Then it was this man again!” His glance sought out Harris. “So much for your story about. . . .”

The detective coughed discreetly; for the first time McDiarmid appeared to notice Brown standing by the door. “What became of the clothes Mr. Holt was wearing when he was killed?” the captain asked the detective.

“They’re in the purser’s safe, sir,” Mr. Harris answered.

“Could anybody have got at them?”

“Out of the question, sir!” Mr. Mellow put in promptly.

“What about the royal suite? Didn’t I give orders to have it locked?”

“Yes, sir,” the purser replied. “And locked it has been since Mr. Harris and I sealed up the old gentleman’s things in there, Friday morning.” He paused. “About this man wearing old Holt’s clothes, I expect the lady was romancing. After all, lots of passengers wear caps on board ship.”

“I agree. But there was someone there, otherwise the food wouldn’t have been taken. And, by the way, it was near there that this man Hart thinks he heard someone prowling about last night. There’s a guard on that corridor, isn’t there? Didn’t he see anybody?”

“He says not.”

“Can this Mrs. What’s-her-name give any description of the fellow?”

Mr. Mellow shrugged his shoulders. “Mullaney questioned her. He couldn’t get much out of her. She says the man had a white face and staring eyes, but I think she was just repeating what this Mrs. Hawksley has been spreading all over the ship, about the figure she saw on the boat deck.”

The captain grunted. “I guess you’re right. Mass hysteria, eh? What have you done about it?”

“I’ve sent a search-party out again, but with guards everywhere, I don’t see where he could have hidden himself.”

McDiarmid turned to Harris. “You and Mr. Mellow had better see Mullaney and find out what he has to say. And for God’s sake keep this woman’s mouth shut!” His stern gaze stopped at Brown. “You hear me, Mr. Brown?”

“Very good, Captain.”

With a muttered ejaculation, McDiarmid snatched up his cap and went out quickly by the door in the side wall that was his private exit to the bridge. Perceiving that Mellow and Harris were deep in whispered argument, Brown left the cabin.

He descended to the vestibule. The muffled sound of hymns, the wheeze of a harmonium, issuing from the closed doors of the lounge, reminded him that it was Sunday and that the Rev. Cayley, having failed to muster a congregation that morning, after the ship’s sleepless night, had announced a

special service of intercession for the afternoon. A number of men passengers, holster on hip, stood about the lobby. Breckinridge, with Sir Henry Faucon at his elbow, was haranguing one group, but broke off on Brown's approach. Brown was conscious, as he passed, of furtive glances, nudges and whispers, and noticed that people melted from his path as he advanced. It had been his intention to go out on the promenade. But now he changed his mind and went down the main staircase to B. B deck, with its low roof, was little frequented; he was not likely to meet anyone there.

But B deck had its solitary stroller—a diminutive figure slowly pacing with head down. It was Dickens, hands in pockets, overcoat collar turned up against the wintry nip in the air. On a sudden impulse Brown stopped before him. The little man started, shrank away, but, on recognising Brown, faced up to him and said gravely, "So you're his son?"

The other nodded.

Dickens went on. "Of all that lot up there"—the grey head jerked backward—"you were the only one to treat me decent. Now that Madame Alva's gone the way of my poor master, they've taken the guard off my door and given me back my freedom. But you—you never thought me guilty, did you?"

"Not once I'd heard you speak, I didn't." Brown was considering the worn face thoughtfully.

"Not even when I lied about that letter?"

The other shook his head.

"Or when you learned I'd been in prison?"

The tall man shrugged. "We all make mistakes, Dickens."

"I don't care what the others think," his companion declared earnestly, "but I want you to know the truth. They shopped me for another man's crookedness. I was bookkeeper in this chain store in Chicago where I was working, and the manager was embezzling the receipts—he'd stop behind, nights, and fake the books, see? I was young in those days and not so careful as I should have been, I guess; we were friends and I never suspected him. Anyway, he fixed it so cleverly that, when it all came out, the blame fell on me. I acted like a fool, but I never robbed them of a nickel, and. . . ."

"There, there," said Brown, sliding his arm in his, "don't let's talk about it any more. I believe in you, Dickens, and from now on I'm going to take care of the most loyal friend my father ever had. What you and I have to do at present is to try and discover the murderer."

Arm-in-arm they began to pace the deck. "And gladly I'd help you, Mr. Holt, sir," Dickens responded warmly, "only I'm in the dark, same as the

captain, same as the rest of us. First it was me that killed him, then Parsons, and now—forgive me, sir—it's you. Or was until an hour ago."

"You've heard about Mrs. Burnley's adventure, then?"

"Sure. Even Mullaney says it let you out, seeing as you and those others were with the captain at the time."

Brown laughed dryly. "The passengers don't think so."

"The passengers don't know about it yet—or so Mullaney says. They're trying to keep it quiet."

Brown nodded. "Suppose this woman's right. How could anyone have got hold of Mr. Holt's cap and overcoat, when they're locked away in the purser's safe?"

The little man chuckled. "That's what Mullaney came and asked me a while back. I told him I knew no more than he did. He reckons the dame in A15 just imagined it." He paused. "I might have told him different, but that big-mouthed mick's so clever at finding out things, I reckoned I'd leave him think this one out for himself. I'm through with being suspicioned for everything I do."

"You have a theory, then?"

"Sure, I got a theory." He glanced behind him along the deserted deck and lowered his voice: "Mr. Holt had half a dozen of those caps. They were specially made for him; he'd been buying the same pattern for years—he was like that, you know. Used to wear one in bed—said it kept his head warm. The same with his overcoats—three or four of 'em he had, all made alike." His tone dropped to a whisper: "There's two of his caps and an extry overcoat hanging right now in the closet in my cabin off the parlour, where I put them to have them handy—or were," he added, "when they moved me out Friday."

"You don't know if they're still there?"

"I sure don't." He paused. "But one might find out."

"How? The suite's locked."

Dickens halted and looked his companion searchingly in the eye. "If I tell you I ain't been near the suite since they arrested me, will you believe me?"

"Of course, Dickens."

With that, the little man dipped into an inner pocket and produced a key, which he laid in Brown's hand. "They forgot I had it," he confided hoarsely.

His companion darted a sharp glance at him. "And you're sure this key has never left your possession?"

“Positive. Except for about an hour that morning when the captain sent for me. I had a sort of idea it might incriminate me if they found it on me, so I hid it in my tooth powder. It was lucky I did, or they’d have discovered it when they searched me. I dug it out of my tin of powder again when they brought me my washing things to the cabin on D where they locked me up. Purty smart, eh?” He wagged his head.

“Do you mind if I borrow this?” Brown balanced the key on his palm.

“It’s okay with me, if you don’t give me away.”

“Mum’s the word!” The key vanished into Brown’s pocket. “And now, Dickens,” he went on, “I’ve a lot of things to ask you about. Let’s begin with Doctor Alloway.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE couple, so curiously matched, had been walking for a good hour, deep in conversation, when Dickens, interrupting his companion, said: "Excuse me, Mr. Holt, but I think there's a young lady looking for you."

"What young lady?" Brown demanded, gazing rather blankly around.

"She's on the other side of the deck by this. She passed us once or twice, and each time she stared at you so hard I thought she was going to speak to you. But you were so busy talking, you didn't notice her. Here she is now, coming round again."

It was Mary Fulton. Now that Brown perceived her, she stopped and said: "I've been watching for a chance to talk to you for ever so long. But it doesn't matter if you're busy." Her candid glance rested on Dickens.

"That's quite all right," the little man put in hastily. "I guess this cold air ain't none too good for my lungs, anyway." He raised a thin hand in salute. "I'll be seeing you, Mr. Holt."

"Of course it's Mr. Holt now, isn't it?" Mary remarked to Brown, as she gazed after the vanishing figure.

Brown nodded, his eyes averted. "I guess that's right," he replied; he seemed suddenly to have grown strangely ill at ease.

"I wanted to tell you," said the girl in a husky little voice. "I was in the vestibule when you came through a while back, and I couldn't help noticing the way everybody sheered away from you." She paused—her air was constrained. "I'd like to say this—I think it's a shame that anybody on this ship should suspect you of these horrible things, and—and I want you to know that I don't believe a word of it." She stopped again—the man's silence gave her no encouragement. "I couldn't get away before—I was playing backgammon—and when I did, you'd disappeared and I've had, oh, ever such a business to find you."

Still he did not look at her. "Have you heard about Mrs. Burnley?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No." She gave him rather a scared glance; he was looking at her now. "What's happened to her?"

"Nothing. She's all right. I was just wondering. Then you decided about me right off your own bat?"

She nodded.

"It was sweet of you to come and tell me," he said. "You're a real friend. . . . What sort of things are they saying about me?"

She shrugged. "A lot of poisonous gossip. . . . What does it matter? Let's walk, shall we? I'm freezing." As they moved along she continued: "I wish you'd tell me something. What were you doing down on E Deck yesterday afternoon?"

"Just having a look round. Why?"

"And were you also having a look round out on the deck the night before, when Mrs. Hawksley was so frightened?"

"As a matter of fact, I was. I was on the promenade deck when she came rushing down the companion, and by the time I reached the boat deck this man or whatever it was she saw had vanished. But why all these questions?"

Then she told him of her experience. His face grew grave as he heard her. "But why didn't you tell me this when we were together last night?" he demanded rather severely when she had finished.

She blushed. "I was afraid you might tell the captain. Besides, it might have looked as if I suspected you."

"And did you?" he demanded bluntly.

She hesitated. "No, I didn't really."

He laughed rather dryly. "Well, I bet Winstay did. Didn't he?" And when she was silent, he asked: "You didn't tell him that I was Holt's son, did you?"

"Of course not!" Her tone was indignant.

"Well," he said, "he knew it the same night. He'd also heard about the new will. Besides the captain and me, only Harris was in the secret. I guess he told Winstay."

"There you're wrong," she struck in promptly. "The news about the new will was out in New York yesterday. A man named Hart, who was speaking to New York on the radio telephone at dinner-time last night, heard it."

He looked up quickly. "But that's the fellow who was the last person to see Madame Alva alive?"

"Yes. He was talking about her in the lounge after lunch just now, saying what strange eyes she had and how oddly she looked at him when he mentioned Holt's name."

Brown had stopped dead. “You mean he told this friend of his about the new will in her presence?”

“So he says. He’d just come from the telephone.”

With a brooding face her companion dropped down upon a sail locker that stood under the rail and, with hands that groped mechanically, produced pipe and pouch, and began to cram the bowl.

“To go back to what we were saying,” the girl, sitting down beside him, bridged the pause. “You know, you’re partly to blame if people gossip. Why didn’t you tell anyone you were Mr. Holt’s son?”

He awoke from a reverie. “I told the captain—that was why he let me in on the inquiry. It was no concern of anybody else.”

“That may be. But why not call yourself Holt? After all, people are pretty cagy about an assumed name.”

“It was my mother’s maiden name. She dropped the name of Holt when my father deserted her. I was only a baby at the time.”

“Then you never knew your father?”

“I didn’t even know his name until my mother told me, just before she died, a few months ago. She was very bitter about him. You see, they’d had a hard struggle when they first married, and she couldn’t get over his abandoning her when success first began to come to him. She asked nothing of him, not even alimony when she divorced him; she had a small private income, and on that she brought me up. She had no near relatives, and I believed up to the day she died that my father’s name was Brown. She taught me to hate the memory of this man who had treated her so badly, and I used to make up stories to myself of what I’d do to him if ever we met. It was only on her deathbed that she told me Alonzo Holt was my father, and gave me the papers to prove it.”

“And did you go and see him then?”

“When I returned to New York after the funeral, I went to places where he was likely to be, just to get a glimpse of him; but he was away in Montana. I made inquiries about him, however, and discovered that he was a lonely, savage old man, with no idea of how to spend this gigantic fortune he had accumulated except on cheap swindlers like this Alva woman. It made me glad to think he’d never found the happiness he’d robbed my mother of.”

“Did you know he was travelling by this ship?”

He nodded. “Yes. I heard accidentally that he was going to France, and on the spur of the moment made up my mind to go along too. I wanted to study him”—he shrugged—“to gloat, perhaps. Who knows!”

He broke off to light his pipe. “The first time I ever set eyes on my father,” he went on, puffing his pipe to a glow, “was when he came aboard this boat. Was it his blood stirring in me? I can’t say, but I was touched at the sight of him, so friendless and so frail, and somehow all my mother’s teachings, all the accumulated rancour of the years, seemed to evaporate and —well, there was no hate left in me—only pity—a great, consuming pity. It seemed like disloyalty to my mother’s memory to make myself known to him, but now, looking back, I feel miserable to think that had I been surer of myself I might have saved him from this sordid and damnable murder plot against his life.” He broke off, his rough-cast features sombre, his eyes smouldering with passion.

His violence disconcerted her. “A plot?” she echoed in an awed voice.

“Yes, a plot,” he repeated almost savagely. “It’s dark, and obscure, and horrible. But dark as it is, I’m on my way to unravel it.” He shook himself as though to be rid of the picture his words had conjured up, and he went on in a gentler voice: “But that’s a secret between us. Not a word to anybody, you understand? Let them say what they like about me. We don’t care, do we, Mary?”

She shook her head, her eyes tender.

“You don’t mind my calling you Mary, do you?” he questioned.

She laughed. “Not unless you insist on my calling you Wentworth! And Wenty—or is it Wendy?—isn’t much better!”

He wagged his head and grinned. “Wentworth Horncastle—it’s the hell of a name, isn’t it? I was named for some gallant and dashing Confederate. But at college I was usually known as John—after the gentleman with the ambulatory soul, you know!”

“John? That’s much better,” the girl pronounced decisively. “Wentworth —I ask you! It sounds like a college professor. I mean to say, you can’t picture anyone called Wentworth doing anything human, like getting pinched for speeding, or kissing a girl, or something!”

Brown’s glance was full of humour. His face was very well-proportioned, she reflected, summing him up, and she liked its suggestion of swift and nervous resolution. The sparkle in his dark and intelligent eyes, too, when—as now—something amused him, was very human. With a meditative air he removed his pipe.

“I keep a chauffeur to drive me now,” he remarked, considering her boldly, “but as to the other thing, I’d say it depended on the girl.”

“I was speaking generally,” she hastened to assure him.

He stifled a sigh. “I know,” he said.

“Have you ever kissed a girl, John Brown?” she demanded.

“Oh, yes,” he told her simply, and added: “Though not very lately. I’m a man like any other, I guess. Men don’t differ much, you know.”

“Oh, don’t they? If you were engaged to a girl in a small town and you had a bust-up with her, would you rush off and get married to her best friend, just to make her feel cheap?”

“Oh, my dear,” he said gently, “is that what happened to you?”

Her nod was brief. “I’m well out of it, really. But it—well, it kind of sickened me at the time. I didn’t realise that people could be so petty.”

He had taken her hand, small and well-shaped, and was contemplating it as it lay on his big palm. She did not attempt to withdraw it. “The world’s full of hatred,” he told her. “But it’s full of love, too, if we only know where to look for it.” He raised his eyes to hers rather wistfully.

“You say nice things,” she answered.

He was looking down at her hand again. “It’s quite possible,” he went on quietly, “that within the next twenty-four hours I may be arrested.”

She gave a little cry. “Oh, John, no!”

He nodded. “I don’t deceive myself. They’ll probably turn me over to the police at Southampton.”

“But why?”

He shrugged. “I have no alibi and an excellent motive. That’s enough for our Mr. Harris, and, frankly, I don’t blame him. He asked me to show him my hands this morning.”

She drew hers away. “Your hands!” she cried in horror.

He extended them. “They are large, aren’t they?” He flexed his fingers. “And my fingers are pretty strong.”

“It’s ridiculous!” she cried. “If this Harris dumb-bell is going to arrest every man that has large hands or strong fingers on this boat, he’ll find himself pretty busy. Why, this Ospedale wop, or whatever his name is, who sits next to me at meals, has hands like a gorilla; and Leslie Rolfe—this boy I know on board—you’ve no idea how strong his fingers are—he was showing me some feats of strength. And Dr. Winstay, he’s got fingers of steel—from chiro-what-do-you-call-it, you know. He caught hold of me yesterday when the ship lurched suddenly, and I thought he’d snapped my wrist. And how about the captain? He’s got paws like a grizzly.”

Brown laughed and stood up. “Well,” he said, “I’m going to take you inside now. I shall be pretty busy for the next twenty-four hours. My time’s getting short and I must use my liberty while I can.”

“It’s hard to fight one’s battles alone,” she said in a low voice as they walked along the deck, already shadowy with the dusk. “I wish I could help you.”

“But you have helped me!” he cried. “Something you told me this afternoon has solved a problem I’ve been puzzling my head about all day.”

“Something that I told you?”

He pressed her arm as it lay in his. “Don’t ask me any more now!”

It was dark within the entrance, for the light in the little lobby was not yet lit. His arm in hers, he turned her to him and looked into her face. “I may not be seeing you again. If they arrest me, will you still believe in me, Mary?”

“Oh, John,” she told him softly, “you know I will.” Her fingers idly stroked his coat. “My dear,” she whispered, “I shall be so very anxious about you.”

And then she was in his arms and his lips were on hers. Outside, in the gathering darkness, a sudden spatter of rain lashed the deck and the wind tore fiercely at the canvas screens.

At last she glanced up at him wonderingly, her eyes shining. “Why did we do that?” she asked him.

He smiled down at her and shook his head. “I don’t know—I just couldn’t help myself.”

She laughed. “And we’ve known each other for just four days.”

“Don’t you believe it,” he answered. “I’ve been waiting for you all my life.”

She cooed a little laugh. “Dear John!” Then her face grew troubled. “Dear,” she whispered, “I’m so afraid for you. Is there nothing we can do?”

“Leave it to me,” he bade her. “I’m like a man walking in a tunnel. It’s all dark about me, but at the far end there’s a little pinhole of light. If only they keep their hands off me for the next twenty-four hours.” He bent and kissed again the lips she sweetly surrendered.

“I’ll be thinking of you and wishing you luck,” she said.

His face was suddenly grave. “For God’s sake, Mary,” he murmured, “take care of yourself until this horror has lifted. Go to your cabin and stay there—at least until daylight comes again. Promise me!”

She nodded. “All right!” She stepped back. There were steps on the staircase at the foot of which they stood. Sir Henry Faucon and Mr. Travers came down. They lifted their hats to the girl and stared rather hard at Brown as they continued on their way to the deck below.

Young Rolfe was waiting restlessly in the vestibule. He scowled on recognising Mary's companion as she and Brown appeared round the turn of the main staircase. Rather frigidly he undertook to see the girl back to her quarters, while Brown went along to his state-room on A.

Arrived there, he bolted the door and, taking an automatic from his pocket, verified the magazine, and drawing back the breech, slid a cartridge into the firing position and returned the gun. Then he took out his wallet, and extracting from it a plan of the ship, sat down at the table to study it. He was thus occupied when the expected summons from the captain came.

"I'll make no bones about it, Mr. Brown," Captain McDiarmid said. "I'm anxious to spare a man in your position as much as possible. We shall dock at Southampton late on Tuesday evening, and I must ask you to make no attempt to leave the ship, but to hold yourself in readiness for the visit of the Southampton police, whom I'm notifying by wireless."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THEY were serving breakfasts along the A corridor next morning when Brown's door was rapped. Brown glanced up from the sheet of foolscap over which he was peering, and cried: "Come in!"

Freshly shaved, his red face shining with soap, Mr. Mullaney presented himself. He seemed somewhat embarrassed. "Nine o'clock, you said, Mr. Holt," he observed to Brown, "and here I am!" Brown jumped up from the table and drew him into the room. "Sit down, Mullaney," he said, shutting the door and pulling up a chair; "I want to talk to you. . . ." And when the detective had obeyed, he went on: "What arrangements have you made about your future, Mullaney?"

The detective massaged his knees with his hands. "Well, sir, I hadn't thought about it much as yet. . . ."

"What did my father pay you?"

"A hundred and twenty-five a month. . . ."

Brown considered the man unobtrusively, fingering his chin. "Married, are you?"

"Yes, Mr. Holt. . . ."

"Children?"

"Four, sir. . . ."

Brown nodded. "Well, I think we shall have to do better for you than that—if you want to stay on, that is. . . ."

"I sure do, Mr. Holt. Jobs aren't easy to come by nowadays. . . ."

"I'm not likely to need a private guard," said Brown with a smile. "But my father had a big place on the Hudson, and I could probably use you there. We'll talk about it another time. . . ." He paused. "Mullaney," he went on, "I need your help. . . ."

The gooseberry eyes narrowed warily. "In what way, Mr. Holt?"

"In no way that's likely to embarrass you, my friend. . . . Oh, it's all right," he went on lightly; "I don't mind your suspecting me—all I ask is to be given the chance of proving that you and everybody"—he corrected himself smilingly—"almost everybody else on this ship are wrong. By nine

o'clock this evening I've undertaken to produce the killer for the captain. I believe I can do it, but I can't do it alone. Are you willing to assist me?"

"Sure," said Mullaney, "if you'll give a fella a line. . . ."

"I'll give you a line all right. Did you tell anyone I'd asked you to come and see me?"

"Not yet I didn't. . . ."

"Then don't. Stop! What about Mr. Harris?"

Mullaney scowled. "That guy's too high and mighty to bother about me any more. I'm just the cop on the beat to him. He sits up with the captain acting the district attorney, and expects me to take his orders. . . ."

"If you and I are going to play ball, Mullaney," Brown cut in briskly, "from now on you'll take orders from nobody but me. And my first order to you is to keep anything you hear in this room under your hat. The second is to ask no questions, whatever you may see or hear, but to carry out my instructions implicitly. Is that clear?"

"Sure. . . ." The blue eyes gleamed. "What's it to be, Chief? A man-hunt?"

"A man-hunt's the word! With ten to one on the quarry getting away, and only twelve hours in which to bring him to earth. . . ." He broke off and dropped into a chair facing Mullaney across the table. "Now listen! What are the chances of getting a look at a radiogram dispatched from this ship by a certain passenger?"

The detective's headshake was positive. "Not a hope, boss, in the ordinary way. I guess the captain could order the original to be produced. . . ."

"I don't want to go to the captain. Would it be possible to find out merely whether a certain message was handed in?"

"It'd depend on the operator. When was the message filed?"

"On the night of Holt's murder. Probably around midnight. . . ."

"On the night of Holt's murder, eh? Sa-ay, young Andrews went on duty at eleven that night. He's a friend of mine. I can fix that. But he'll want to know the sender's name. . . ."

"The message was signed 'Alva'. . . ."

Mullaney opened his eyes wide. "Okay," he said briefly, and was about to rise when Brown stopped him. "I haven't finished yet. . . ." He drew from his dressing-gown pocket a folded sheet of ship's note-paper, opened it out, and laid it before the detective. "This note was pushed under my door some time between nine and eleven o'clock last night in a blank envelope. . . ."

Mullaney glanced over the note and whistled "A threatening letter! The old touch, eh? Made of letters cut from a newspaper. . . ." He read out slowly: " '*Lay off, or look out for your girl friend. . . .*' Signed '*The Killer*'!" He gazed blankly at his companion. "Gee, boss, you'll have to show this to the captain!"

"Not until I know who it's from, Mullaney. . . ."

"But what about the girl? Who is she, anyway?"

"It's Miss Fulton. . . ."

"The dame that was up before the captain? Sa-ay, boss, we got to do something. . . ."

"That note," Brown observed composedly, "is put together from single letters clipped from the ship's newspaper. If you'll compare it with this morning's edition which is under your elbow, you'll see that I'm right. . . ." And while his companion was thus engaged, he went on: "I've noticed that the number of the cabin is written on each copy of the paper for purposes of distribution. If that mutilated copy hasn't been destroyed, it must be around somewhere. Do you think you could trace it?"

"I guess I can try. . . ."

"Then see to it at once, will you? Wait—there's one thing more. Where is Madame Alva's maid to be found?"

"Minna? She sleeps aft with the other lady's-maids on E. . . ."

"I'd like a word with her privately. How can it be arranged?"

"There's not much chance for talking private down in her bunk. I guess my cabin would be the best place. They moved me down to that deck when they shut up the royal suite. I guess I can fix that, too. We're kinda friendly, Minna and me. Just before lunch would be the best time, I'd say—round about noon. . . ."

"Right. . . ." There was a knock at the door. It was the steward with a tray. "The sandwiches you ordered, Mr. Brown. . . ." He put down the tray on the table and withdrew. "Sa-ay," Mullaney remarked, eyeing the pile, "the sea air kinda makes you hungry, don't it?"

"I had an early breakfast," Brown explained briefly, helping himself to a sandwich. Then he picked up once more the sheet of foolscap he had been studying, and Mullaney hurried out.

Pencil in hand, Brown was still furrowing his brow over the foolscap when, five minutes later, the detective burst in, waving a newspaper. Brown sprang up. "Gee, what a break!" Mullaney cried. "I found it in one of the steward's pantries right on this deck. . . ."

Brown's eyes snapped. "On this deck, eh?" he remarked as he took the paper.

The newspaper revealed sundry slashes where single letters had been scissored out. Mullaney's finger pointed to the symbol A131 scrawled in pencil at the top of the front page. "Travers!" he announced triumphantly.

Brown's face lit up. Swiftly he drew towards him the cabin plan that lay on the table. His pencil hovered and descended on the cabin and private bath numbered A131. He sighed gently. "Now that," he remarked *sotto voce*, "is really interesting!"

"Why, boss? What do you mean?" the detective broke in eagerly.

His companion laughed gleefully. "I've just remembered that Travers saw Miss Fulton and me talking together yesterday afternoon. . . ."

Mullaney's eyes grew rounder. "Is zat so? Well, what do we do now?"

"Nothing," was the impassive rejoinder.

"But aren't you going to follow this up?"

Brown laughed. "All in good time, Mullaney. You were going to see Andrews for me, weren't you?"

Mullaney shrugged—he seemed disappointed. "Okay, boss!" At the door he turned. "We're off to a good start, anyway! The hunt's on!"

"Yes," said the tall figure at the table, as though speaking to himself, "the hunt's on!" The detective left him staring sombrely in front of him.

Shortly before lunch Mr. Breckinridge, who was enjoying a glass of cold beer in the smoking-room, saw Sir Henry Faucon enter with hurried step. It was evident that Sir Henry was labouring under the stress of some violent emotion. His lean face was pallid under its even tropical brownness, and his eyes burned excitedly. He stepped quickly up to the table. "Breckinridge," he said hoarsely, "something—something rather terrible has happened. You know that pretty American girl, Miss Fulton?"

"Sure. . . ."

"She's disappeared!"

"*Disappeared?*" The American's expression was blank behind the horn-rimmed spectacles. "But—but isn't she the girl who was attacked once already?" He paused. "Do you mean to tell me she's missing—like the others?" His tone was aghast.

"I'm afraid there's no doubt about it!" Lowering his voice, for there were people sitting about, Sir Henry went on: "She was to have met young Rolfe

at noon at the pool for a swim. When she didn't turn up he went along to the tourist third to look for her. She was not in her cabin, and the stewardess says the bed has not been slept in. . . ."

"When was she last seen?"

"Last night, it would appear. She was playing backgammon in the lounge with Rolfe until about eleven, when she told him she was tired and was going to bed. He took her back to her quarters and left her at the very door of her cabin after making this appointment with her for this morning. . . ." He shook his head gravely. "I don't like the looks of it, Breckinridge, I don't indeed. I think that you and I should lose no time in reporting the matter to the captain. . . ."

The American seemed dubious about the expediency of this step. "You know the way people gossip on this boat—we don't want to start anything until we know definitely that she has disappeared. . . ."

"But Rolfe has looked for her in every likely place, he says. Besides, I tell you, her bed has not been slept in. . . ."

"Humph!" Breckinridge scratched his head. "We don't want to do anything precipitate, Sir Henry. Young women nowadays are very emancipated, you know. . . ."

With a prim air Sir Henry cleared his throat. "Really, Breckinridge, there are no grounds for supposing that Miss Fulton was that kind of girl—none whatever. . . ."

The American shrugged. "She may have been off on one of these all night whoopee parties. . . ."

"Lasting until noon? Don't be absurd, Breckinridge. Besides, with people as scared as they are, who's giving whoop—whoopee or any other kind of parties? No; if she's missing it's because something has happened to her, something that will scarcely bear thinking about. I don't mind telling you I'm seriously alarmed. . . ."

"Where's Rolfe?"

"He went back to the pool to see if by any chance she'd turned up. He's almost out of his mind with anxiety, poor fellow, and I don't wonder. . . ." He paused. "The real reason I came to you, Breckinridge," he said at length, "is because I have suspicions of a certain person. . . ."

The other nodded. "The same thought was just passing through my mind. This man Brown was quite a friend of hers, wasn't he? What I mean to say, she was sticking up for him in the lounge yesterday, and I've seen them together a whole lot. . . ."

"No later than yesterday afternoon," said Sir Henry impressively. "Travers and I were coming out of the entrance on B deck, and there he was whispering to her in the dark, just inside the door. What I was going to propose to you is that you and I should call upon this man Brown and hear what he has to say. . . ."

Breckinridge did not appear to relish the suggestion. "Sure," he observed without enthusiasm. "But don't you think we'd better first be sure of our facts? What say we go along now and have a word with this stewardess of hers? You say that young Rolfe is kind of worked up about it; we ought to be certain that he's got the facts right. . . ."

"He's in a terrible way about her, it's true. I think perhaps your idea is the right one. Let's see the stewardess at once. . . ."

On reaching the tourist third they immediately perceived that the news of Mary Fulton's disappearance had spread. They had to force their way through a cluster of passengers who, with shocked faces and frightened eyes, blocked the corridor where the girl's cabin was situated. They rescued the stewardess from a group of agitated questioners, and took her into the small, neat cabin.

But the woman could do no more than corroborate young Rolfe's story. No one had seen the young lady come or go. The last time the stewardess had seen her was shortly after dinner when the girl had come down, as usual, to change into evening dress. When the stewardess had brought breakfast at nine o'clock the cabin was empty and the bed undisturbed.

Breckinridge was glancing about the room. "I don't see her dressing-gown," he observed, and then, lifting the pillow from the bed, added: "And where's her nightdress?"

"The young lady wears pyjamas," the stewardess replied, and opened the wardrobe. "You're quite right, though, sir," she went on; "her night things aren't here. Nor her bedroom slippers, neither!"

The two men exchanged an apprehensive glance. "Thank you, stewardess," said Faucon hastily, and drew his companion outside. He did not speak until they were clear of the press in the corridor, and were mounting the companion to the deck. "I didn't want to give that woman the chance to gossip more than is unavoidable," he explained to Breckinridge as he led the way back towards the first class. "But it's evident what happened. The girl was already dressed for bed when she was either kidnapped or lured away, whichever it was. . . ." His voice was ominous as he concluded: "Let's hear what Mr. Brown has to say about it!"

Once more the electric fluid of suspense was running through the ship. They found the lounge in a commotion. Young Rolfe was there, the centre of an awed and excited circle. The boy's face was flushed, and his lips trembled as though he were on the verge of tears. On catching sight of the two men he broke away from the throng besetting him and, rushing up to Sir Henry, cried: "I've hunted everywhere and she's nowhere to be found. And nobody has seen her since last night. Oh, for God's sake, Sir Henry," he went on, "let's go to the captain; let's do anything to put an end to this frightful uncertainty. . . ."

"Easy, my boy," said Faucon, clapping him on the shoulder. "Breckinridge and I have things in hand. We're just going along to see whether Mr. Wentworth Brown can throw any light on the mystery. . . ."

"Brown?" exclaimed Rolfe scathingly. "So you thought of him, too? Well, I've just come from his state-room. He went out half an hour ago and nobody can tell me what has become of him. . . ."

The passengers swarmed about the three men. Dr. Cayley, his Adam's apple pumping up and down above his round clergyman's collar, now broke in. "Is it really a fact, Sir Henry," he questioned rather tremulously, "that this young lady has disappeared?"

"That's precisely what we are attempting to establish, Dr. Cayley," Faucon was saying, when Scholefield's angry voice interrupted him. "Aw, quit stalling, can't you?" he shouted. "The girl's been kidnapped, and you know it. The next thing will be that she'll be discovered in some dark corner strangled like the others. . . ." "He's dead right," another voice put in. "It's the killer again—a victim a day!" A woman screamed out suddenly: "Oh, no, no, no! It's too ghastly! I can't bear it!" and burst into a storm of hysterical tears. "What good are the captain's guards if they don't protect the passengers?" a man on the fringe of the crowd demanded in stentorian tones, and there was a loud murmur of approval. The group was in a ferment, everyone talking at once. In the midst of the hubbub Faucon said to Breckinridge: "Come on!" and, followed by Rolfe, they hurried out.

They told the boy to lead them to Brown's state-room. But when they reached it, only the steward was there making the bed. He could merely repeat what he had already told Rolfe—that Brown had left his state-room half an hour before and had not returned. Then Breckinridge said suddenly: "Winstay's on this corridor. Let's see what he suggests. After all, he was a friend of the Fulton girl, too. . . ."

Dr. Winstay was packing. At the entry of the three men he raised a surprised face from the open suit-case over which he was bending. But his

expression changed to one of blank bewilderment when Sir Henry explained the object of their visit.

"Miss Fulton disappeared?" he repeated incredulously. "But how? I don't understand. . . ." He seemed dumbfounded.

His amazement deepened as Faucon told his story. "But I was talking to her in the lounge only last night," he said.

"What time was that?" Sir Henry demanded.

"Round about ten, I should think—she was going to play backgammon with Rolfe. . . ."

"Did she say anything about meeting Brown afterwards?" the boy questioned Winstay.

"Brown?" the doctor repeated sharply. "No, I don't think so. . . ." He paused. "But that's an idea—why don't we find Brown and ask him? He used to see a good deal of her, didn't he?"

"The trouble is," said Breckinridge, "that we don't seem able to locate him. . . ."

Winstay stared at him. "You don't mean to tell me that Brown's missing too. . . ."

"No, of course not," Faucon put in testily. "He's merely gone off somewhere and we can't lay our hands on him for the moment. . . ."

The doctor's face had grown suddenly secretive. "That's unfortunate," he commented darkly. "I'd like to have had a word with our friend Brown. . . ."

"Then you think too . . ." young Rolfe began; but Winstay stopped him. "Don't let's waste valuable time on idle surmises," he said. "After all, the only person on this boat who's entitled to question anybody is Captain McDiarmid. I agree with Sir Henry that we should go to the captain immediately. . . ."

The captain had a visitor, Humphries said. Sir Henry handed the steward his card. "Tell him it's urgent," he bade the steward categorically. "Miss Fulton, one of the passengers, is missing. . . ." Humphries gave him rather an odd look, but departed with the card. In a moment he was ushering them in.

The captain's visitor was Mary Fulton. She and the captain were laughing together as she faced him across the desk, clasping her knee. On

catching sight of Rolfe's white face, she cried out: "I'm terribly sorry about the swim, Leslie, but the captain will explain. . . ."

"There's your answer, Sir Henry," McDiarmid said laughingly, pointing to the girl with the letter-opener he was brandishing. "Miss Fulton has not disappeared—she merely changed her quarters. . . ." He paused and, with a quick glance at the girl, went on: "This young lady felt—er—nervous alone in the tourist third, and claimed my protection. The chief officer was kind enough to relinquish his state-room to her so that she can stay up here where we can look after her. Miss Fulton will be my guest for the remainder of the voyage. . . ."

An embarrassed silence followed this announcement. Sir Henry stared blankly at his companions. "In that case," he observed stiffly, "it only remains for me to apologise for this intrusion. I cannot help adding, however," he went on, glowering at the captain through his monocle "that it would have shown more solicitude for—ah—Miss Fulton's reputation and—ah—the natural apprehensions of her fellow-passengers, if you had seen fit to notify her stewardess of Miss Fulton's change of quarters. . . ."

"I'm afraid I'm solely to blame for overlooking this detail," McDiarmid rejoined good-humouredly. "But I can rely on you, Sir Henry, I'm sure, and on you two gentlemen, to dispel any rumours which are circulating about Miss Fulton. . . ."

Sir Henry took refuge in a stony silence. Dr. Winstay stepped into the breach. "Of course," he promised. His humorously reproving glance sought out Mary. "Well," he remarked, "you gave us all a proper scare. Does this move mean that we're to be deprived of the pleasure of your company for the rest of the trip?"

It was the captain who answered. "I've told Miss Fulton she's welcome to remain as long as she likes if it makes her feel any easier in her mind," he observed.

"I'm certainly going to stay on up here if the captain will have me," said the girl, turning away from Rolfe, who was whispering to her. "I don't feel safe down there in the ship. . . ."

The doctor laughed easily. "I don't blame you. . . ." His look consulted his companions. "Well," he remarked, "I think I'll go back to my packing. . . ."

With a smile for Mary and a nod for the captain, he turned about, and the three visitors filed out.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

"Now then, Mr. Brown, if you're ready to start——"

The captain's state-room, large though it was and brilliantly illuminated by the cornice lighting, seemed thronged. There was the faint fragrance of perfume and powder from the women in evening dress, and the flood of lighting gleamed on the white shirt-fronts of the men. The peremptory summons from the captain bit into an expectant hush. Installed between chief officer and purser, McDiarmid glanced toward the end of the desk, and Brown rose to his feet.

"I shan't need this," he said, and switched off the desk lamp. He paused while his eye swiftly travelled along the line of windows behind the desk, where the lights of the bridge blurred the outer darkness, and thence round the wide arc of faces attentively turned to his.

With a thundery brow, Mr. Harris, erect behind the captain's chair, observed the proceedings. No explanation from the skipper as to their meaning, he sourly noted. This nine o'clock meeting was none of his seeking; he had not even been consulted about it. This chap Brown horning in again! As yet he had not been arrested, as Mr. Harris had urged, nor had the Southampton police been notified to be ready to take him into custody; he must have some private drag with the old man. And now to be allowed to call passengers away from their after-dinner coffee to stage this dreary farce! With a jaundiced eye, the chief inspector surveyed the throng.

There they sat, suspects and witnesses intermingled, as the captain's order had convoked them. On the extreme left of the semicircle, Breckinridge—all six feet of him—lolling against the wall, two figures in uniform at his side; Parsons, pallid from his confinement, and Macdugald, the chief hospital attendant, one of Dr. Alloway's aides; then, seated, Mrs. Hawksley in black lace *décolleté*; beside her, Dickens in the inevitable dark suit, looking for him oddly tranquil, with Mrs. Craven, impassive as a statue, on his left; Sir Henry Faucon and Mr. Scholefield, Dr. Yarrow's flaming poll at their back; the Fulton girl, tremulous and palpably thrilled, in a little blue frock and blue slippers, with Travers, glancing self-consciously about him, standing up behind; and, at her side, Dr. Winstay, a faultless figure in his dinner jacket, showing an expanse of silk sock above glossy patent-leather

shoes, as he lounged easily in his chair; and on the extreme right of the line, beyond Hart and his friend Martin, Mr. Mankiewicz and Mr. Vitale, with jaws steadily moving, leaning against the wall in their chromatic day clothes.

With a glance at his watch, which he had unbuckled from his wrist and laid on the desk in front of him, Brown began. “Almost from the day this ship left port,” he said quietly, “we have been haunted by a mysterious presence on board. A phantom has been hovering in our midst, spreading a reign of terror which will persist until this spectre has been laid. With Captain McDiarmid’s permission, I have asked you all to come here this evening in order that your minds may be set at rest.” He consulted his watch again. “It’s now three minutes past nine. At a quarter past, the phantom will enter through that door!” He broke off with finger pointing at the main entrance to the state-room behind his audience.

A stir rippled round the crowded cabin. With one accord, every man and woman in the semicircle of chairs turned about to gaze at the clock on the wall and the door below it. With a sudden movement of the head, the captain sent a glance shooting along the desk in Brown’s direction. But the latter remained entirely unperturbed.

“In the meantime,” he announced, “I propose to submit certain theories I’ve formed as to the origin of this series of terrible crimes.”

He made a momentary pause and, speaking very gravely, resumed. “The pivot of the whole affair,” he said, “was unquestionably Madame Alva. She induced Mr. Holt to put her down for a million dollars in his will, to be employed in furthering investigation into the occult. No doubt she had persuaded him to believe that she would be able to get in touch with him after his death. Mr. Holt caught her staging a false séance, and broke with her. She followed him on board this ship, not, as one might suppose, to make her peace with him, but to contrive his death before he had time to alter his will.”

A hysterical voice interrupted him. “Captain,” cried Mrs. Hawksley, “Madame Alva was my friend! I don’t intend to sit here and hear her memory aspersed!”

“I can assure Mrs. Hawksley and everybody else here,” Brown observed quietly—“that I shall make no charge I cannot substantiate.” Reluctantly Mrs. Hawksley subsided. Clasping his hands before him and speaking amid a rapt silence, Brown went on: “And here we come upon the shadowy figure of her accomplice, this man who, to judge by the boldness and skill he has displayed throughout, was the master mind behind the original murder and

the two murders that sprang from it. The proof?" He took a paper from the desk. "No sooner was she on board than Madame Alva sat down and wrote to this man. I haven't got the actual letter, but a partial impress of it remained upon the blotter in her cabin, and from the facts I've gleaned about this case I've been able—accurately, as I believe—to fill in the blanks. There appears to be no superscription, and I've not been able to ascertain how it was delivered. I should explain that the Minna who's mentioned in the letter is Madame Alva's maid." He read out:

"*Wednesday Night.*

"*Just to let you know I am on board. Make no attempt to communicate with me. Use Minna. I have told her to be outside my cabin, D107, every morning at eleven. If you are going to act, act soon. This suspense is killing me.*"

"The letter," he said, putting the paper down, "is signed 'Ada'—Madame Alva's real name was Ada Dahl. The logical deduction would have been that Parsons, the steward arrested for the robbery and murder of the ship's surgeon, was its recipient, for, as most of you must have heard by this, he was Madame Alva's husband. It is disproved, however, by the fact of the woman's murder, perpetrated as it was at a time when Parsons was under arrest——"

He broke off to select another paper from the pile before him. "In further evidence of Madame Alva's complicity in Mr. Holt's death," he continued, showing them all the paper, "I have here the text of a radiogram which she dispatched from the ship some ten minutes before Holt's body was discovered. It instructs a firm of brokers in New York to sell 5,000 Nachita, which, as you know, was one of the principal Holt oil properties. In other words," he added, laying the paper aside, "Madame Alva had early notice of the tragedy and was out to profit by it."

Another wave of excitement eddied round the circle. Brown drank a little water and resumed. "Almost the first thing that struck me about this case was the fact that Madame Alva was one of the few passengers with an unassailable alibi. As you know, at the time of the murder, she was sick in her berth, with Dr. Winstay attending on her. In the constant movement of shipboard life, the best of us may find difficulty in accounting for our doings at some particular moment of the day, to say nothing of procuring corroborative evidence. In a case like this, therefore, an alibi is not a prima facie evidence of innocence. On the contrary——"

A murmur arose from the room. Dr. Winstay had risen. “I resent that definitely,” he said sharply. “I was asked to account for my movements on the night in question, and I did so frankly and without any ulterior motive. It’s outrageous to state that to do so is grounds for suspicion.”

Sir Henry Faucon sprang to his feet. “I entirely agree. I was playing bridge with the chief officer, and to say that——”

“I also beg to protest most emphatically!” It was Mr. Travers. “My steward has given the captain conclusive proof——”

“Gentlemen, please!” McDiarmid’s full bass overtoned the din. He turned to Brown. “I think you can leave that argument there, Mr. Brown.”

Brown inclined his head without comment, and proceeded: “My first thought was to inquire as to what men acquaintances Madame Alva had on board. She knew Dickens, but it was Dickens who had consistently warned Mr. Holt against her, and she was evidently bitterly hostile to him. He was not likely, therefore, to be her accomplice. As far as I could elicit, the only other man she knew was Sir Henry Faucon——”

Faucon bounced up. “Damn it, sir, are you suggesting——?” But Brown’s level voice pursued—“—who was quite obviously clear of all suspicion. We were confronted, therefore, with this mysterious accomplice whom she had expressly warned to attempt no direct communication with her.” He paused. “And then Madame Alva was killed. Why? Because the plot had gone wrong, because she knew too much, as you’ll see for yourselves if you consider the circumstances of her death. There seems to be no doubt that she was strangled where she was found, at a moment when, by a pure chance, the lounge happened to be deserted by all except her and her murderer.” Leaning suddenly forward, his voice, deep and impressive, shot a question at them: “Why did he take this insensate risk? Why did he choose to slay his victim in one of the most public places in the whole ship? I’ll tell you.”

He stopped and let his eye range deliberately over the strained, rapt faces before him. “Because,” he said, lowering his tone to a menacing whisper, “he was crazed with fear; because he dared not delay even a minute to stop the mouth of this woman who, with a single word, could have sent him to the gallows. And what prompted him to the deed? What caused him to lose the cold-blooded deliberation which up till then had diverted all suspicion from him? That, too, you shall hear. It was this wretched woman herself who sealed her fate by repeating to him the news she had just overheard Mr. Hart telling his friend—that Holt had made a new will before sailing, and that all hopes of the million-dollar legacy were finally dashed!”

He paused to draw his watch toward him and, with the rhythm of a crowd at a tennis match, all eyes swung to the clock on the wall. The hands marked twelve minutes past nine. The tension in the room was growing; it was something tangible, like a banjo wire stretched taut. No one made a sound, and when Mrs. Hawksley dropped her vanity case with a clatter, everybody jumped. The atmosphere was very close; some of the men were dabbing at their faces with their handkerchiefs. Brown scarcely varied his tone; it was grave, measured, inexorable, marching with unhurried steps from deduction to deduction. The deep, cold monotone rasped at frayed nerves. The hysteria of the crowded state-room was steadily mounting.

"The murderer immediately realised," Brown continued, "what this disclosure signified. It meant that he'd killed two men in vain—old Holt and the ship's surgeon, with whose murder I shall deal in due course—and that his security was henceforward in the hands of this woman whose mind was already showing signs of giving way under the strain. From that moment on he lost his head. In his panic he strangled this poor creature, forgetting that by so doing he was destroying the value of the false clue he had laid by planting the doctor's wallet on the steward Parsons. And late last night, discovering that I was on his track, he tried to frighten me off by threatening violence to Miss Fulton here, who happens to be a friend of mine. I parried that move by appealing to the captain, who at once had Miss Fulton brought here to his own quarters for safety."

They now perceived that in one hand he held a sheet of note-paper, and in the other a copy of the ship's newspaper. "I have here the threatening letter that reached me," he said. "It's composed of letters cut from this issue of the ship's newspaper, a device not uncommon with anonymous letter-writers. Fortunately, I've been able to trace the state-room to which this particular copy was delivered." He made a deliberate pause. "That state-room is A133."

Dr. Winstay was on his feet in an instant. "Do you mind if I see that newspaper?" he demanded rather tensely.

Brown stared at him. "Why, what's it got to do with you?"

"Because A133 happens to be my state-room." He strode swiftly from the desk and snatched the paper from Brown. "But this is marked A131!" he cried angrily. He swung to the captain. "These tactics are intolerable, sir. Are none of us immune from this man's insinuations?" He thrust the paper into the captain's hands. "See for yourself—the number is marked plainly enough, 'A131.' It's not my state-room, but the one next door, occupied, I believe, by——"

But no one heeded him. The hands of the clock were on the quarter. Ignoring the doctor's protest, Brown was staring fixedly at the door. There was an almost anguished intentness about his attitude as he stood there at the end of the desk, poised on his toes and his body thrust forward, like a sprinter waiting for the gun. Every eye followed the direction of his gaze.

Winstay's voice died away in the deathlike stillness. Even as he swung round, the door was flung violently open and a cold draught entered. At the same moment the light went out.

As darkness dropped, the windows behind the desk sprang into a feeble radiance reflected from the lighted bridge outside. In the dim glow within the cabin they all saw the uncouth form framed in the doorway, a stunted shape in cap and long overcoat, saw it with hand upraised and finger pointing at the startled figure erect before the desk and silhouetted against the luminous casements.

"It's Holt!"

Mrs. Hawksley's stifled shriek rent the silence. But a cry from the door overtoned her. A harsh voice with an unfamiliar accent spoke: "It is the man!" Then the lights went on again.

"It's the killer!"

The purser's horrified shout rang through the room as the blaze revealed an unkempt man, in tatters under the big overcoat, with strained and haggard eyes.

"No," Brown answered sternly as he stepped from the light switch. "If you want the killer, there he is!"

His accusing finger was levelled at Dr. Winstay.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

It was a new Doctor Winstay that answered him. This was not the debonair, nonchalant lounger of the promenade deck but a lion aroused, imperious and combative. The rather insignificant eyes were ugly with anger; the erstwhile pleasantness vanished from a face white and set.

"This is monstrous!" he blazed up. "The fellow's out of his mind!" He whirled round upon the captain. "How much more of this sort of thing do you intend to stand for?" With a crash he brought his fist down upon the desk. "I've had enough, do you hear?"

The captain had arisen to his full height. With large, freckled hand he put the infuriated passenger aside and, glaring at the intruder barked, "Come here!" His icy regard bore down on Brown. "Who is this man, Mr. Brown?" he questioned peremptorily.

Blinking his eyes in the bright light, the shabby figure shuffled forward. He had doffed his brown tweed cap, unloosing a cascade of dank black hair that fell about a lean and cadaverous face. He was quite lost in the big overcoat beneath which faded blue jeans and feet encased in ragged espadrilles protruded. Mullaney's massive form hovered in the background.

"This is Gaston Riou," Brown replied succinctly. "He's a stowaway."

McDiarmid frowned. "A stowaway!"

"Yes, Captain. He was hiding on the boat deck and was an eyewitness of Holt's murder."

"An eyewitness?" the captain repeated dully. "Do you mean to say he can identify the murderer?"

"He has identified the murderer!" was the inflexible rejoinder.

In a voice metallic with passion, Doctor Winstay struck in again. "Captain McDiarmid," he cried, "with no word of protest from you, this gentleman has accused me of murdering Mr. Holt. He has already made one gross blunder, as I have proved to you, in charging me with writing him a threatening letter. I don't propose to remain here and allow him to insult me further."

"One moment, Doctor Winstay," said Brown, and made a surreptitious sign to Mullaney, who quietly placed himself before the door. He addressed

himself to the captain. “I was aware that that newspaper came from Mr. Travers’s state-room——”

Travers bounded erect. “From my state-room, Mr. Brown?”

“—but I likewise know,” Brown went on smilingly, “that if Mr. Travers had really been the author of that letter, he would never have left such an incriminating piece of evidence as that mutilated newspaper lying around. My ‘gross blunder,’ as Doctor Winstay calls it, was intentional. I had to find some means of bringing Doctor Winstay over to the desk in readiness for Gaston Riou, whom I had ordered Mullaney to usher in by that door precisely at 9.15.”

Winstay was about to break out again, but McDiarmid, with a curt gesture of the hand, silenced him. “Why did you want Doctor Winstay at the desk?” he asked Brown.

“Because, at the time of the murder, the deck was foggy and although Riou witnessed the tragedy he could not see the murderer’s face. He told me, however, that he thought he could recognise him by his silhouette. That’s why, having got Doctor Winstay to the desk, I turned off the light in order that he might appear standing in silhouette against a luminous background.” He pointed beyond the captain. “I noticed last night that when this room is dark, those windows are lit from the bridge.”

“This is sheer lunacy!” Winstay declaimed hotly. “At the time of Holt’s murder I was down on D deck attending on Madame Alva—everyone on the ship knows that. To bring such a charge against me, Mr. Holt’s adviser and friend, on the strength of—of a shadow seen on a dark deck is simply criminal.”

But McDiarmid cut him off. “Sit down, doctor,” he said. “I’m going to hear this stowaway’s story.” His look questioned Brown. “Does he speak English?”

“Yes, sir, after a fashion. The poor devil was a waiter in New York until he lost his job in the depression.”

“He hasn’t been on the boat deck all this time, has he?”

“No, sir. The murder scared him off the boat deck, although he went back a night or two later to try and find one of his emigration papers or something he’d dropped. That was when Mrs. Hawksley saw him.”

“Where was he hiding, then?”

Brown hesitated. Then, with a glance at Harris, he said, “In the royal suite!”

“The royal suite!” the detective echoed aghast.

The other nodded. “He slipped in while you and the purser were there, early on Friday morning. He’d wandered on to that deck looking for something to eat. Someone was coming along the corridor, so, seeing a door open, he darted inside. He hid in the closet in the sitting-room, while you were in the bedroom, and when he tried to leave the suite that night, discovered that he was locked in. He was able to get out, however, by the bath-room door that gives on the side corridor—it was only bolted on the inside. Discovering that no one came near the suite, he made up his mind to stay there, with occasional excursions for food at night or during meal times when no one was about.”

“That accounts for these thefts from the state-rooms,” said the captain. “And how did you find him, may I ask?”

“Dickens and I figured out that if he was appearing in Holt’s clothes he must have access to the royal suite. Dickens had a key; I slipped in there last night when the sentry’s back was turned.”

McDiarmid grunted.

Brown addressed the stowaway in fluent French. “*N’ayez pas peur, Riou*,” he said. “*Il faudrait dire au commandant ce que vous avez vu du canot de sauvetage où vous vous êtes caché. Racontez-lui tout ça, bien tranquillement en anglais.*”

The stowaway made a quick movement of his hands clutching the cap. “*Eh bien*,” he said in a husky voice, “I ’ide in ze life-boat—*pas vrai?*—becos’ times ver’ hard in New York—no money, no job—and I say me, I go back to France, to Marseille. It is so cold in ze boat and I ’ave nozzing to eat; so ze second night, when I zink nobody zere and all foggy about, I get out of ze boat to warm myself. Zen I see an old man what walk upon ze deck. Queeck, I jomp back behind ze boat. I watch heem as he walk, so slowly up and down, all by heemself——”

The hoarse voice rang dramatic in the intense quiet of the cabin. The hot blood of Provençal France was telling, and unconsciously the tatterdemalion figure had begun to act the scene, with eyes that rolled and grimy hands that sawed the air.

“Behind ze boat I watch heem,” the stowaway went on, “five, ten minute, maybe. And zen I see someone who watch heem, too—a man who stand where ze stairs go down to ze deck underneaze. I look and ’e zere—I look and ’e not zere. Ver’ moch fog, M’sieu le commandant—I see ver’ bad. And zen, soddenly, zis man, ’e ver’ close to me, drawing back behind a boat like ’e ’ide. Ze old m’sieu, ’e come along so slow and w’en ’e past, zis man,

’e jomp, so!” The speaker lunged forward. “An’ catch ze old man wiz ze ’ands, so!” The outstretched fingers closed about an imaginary throat.

The stowaway broke off and, with an expressive gesture of the hands and shoulders, proceeded. “Ze old man ’e make no noise; ’e just fall, so”—he seemed to slump together—“like a marionette, an’ always ze assassin, ’e ’old ’is throat. And zen—*bon Dieu de bon Dieu*, it was terreeble!”—his voice faltered—“ ’e lift ze old man and ’e throw, heem so!”—again he mimed the action—“over ze relling into ze sea.” He broke off and brushed his hand across his forehead, murmuring in French, “*Non, il aurait fallu voir ça! C’était dur!*”

“Can you describe this man?” the captain asked.

“Hees face, it was too dark to see,” the stowaway answered. “But ’e was tall”—he raised a flattened palm a foot above his own head—“and ’e wear black, like ’e was in evening dress, wiz ze collar of ’is coat, so!”—his hands went to the upturned collar of his overcoat. “And hands so strong!” Then his finger shot at Winstay. “*Le voilà!*” he cried. “Zat is ze man!”

“It’s fantastic!” Winstay stormed. “Can’t you see the fellow’s lying, Captain?” he apostrophised McDiarmid, who was staring hard at him. “Don’t you know that he killed Holt and is lying to save his own neck?”

“I no lie,” said Riou calmly. “Zis gentleman”—he pointed to Brown —“ ’e say me I shall look at ze man who stand up at ze desk against ze window when I come in and see if I know heem. I shall tell ze truth, ze gentleman say. *Eh bien*, I tell ze truth, zis is ze man!” And with a dignified air he folded his arms.

The captain turned to the purser. “Get this fellow some clothes, and if he wants a meal, he can have it. Then lock him up!” He spoke over his shoulder to Harris: “You’d better find someone who speaks French to take down his statement in his own language, so there’s no mistake about it—and let him sign it. It’s important!” And as the inspector was about to follow the purser and his charge, McDiarmid added, “Don’t go now. It’ll do later!”

The doctor’s face was a mask of fury. “Do you mean to say you put any faith in that ragamuffin’s tissue of lies?” he apostrophised the captain. “I’ve put up with a great deal from Mr. Brown, but the moment has come for plain speaking. This is nothing but a conspiracy between him and this wretched outcast to throw suspicion upon me. Because if he didn’t kill Holt himself he hired this French rat to do it.”

Brown did not reply. With great composure he glanced across the room to where Mullaney stood at the door, and spoke a name. “Andrews.” Mullaney went quickly out. Brown turned to Harris. “I think I’m right in

saying that Doctor Winstay's alibi rested exclusively on the evidence of Madame Alva's maid, am I not?"

"That's so," the inspector rather unwillingly conceded.

Brown consulted a paper before him. "She stated, didn't she?"—he read out: " 'It was about a quarter of eleven when the steward brought Doctor Winstay down to Madame. The doctor and I stayed with Madame until she felt better. Then he said he was going back to his game of bridge. I let him out of the cabin. That was at a quarter past eleven.' . . . Correct?"

"Yes, sir."

The door had opened. Mullaney ushered in a fresh-faced young man in uniform.

"Your name is Andrews and you're assistant radio operator on this ship?" Brown asked.

"Yes, sir."

"You were on duty at ten minutes past eleven on the night of Mr. Holt's murder, I think?"

"That's right, sir."

"Was a radiogram signed 'Alva' and addressed to 'Peterkin, New York' handed in at that hour?"

"Yes."

"Who brought it to the wireless-room?"

"A woman."

"Have you since identified her?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"Madame Alva's maid."

"Thank you, Andrews. You needn't wait."

Doctor Winstay laughed rather shrilly. "You can't expect a half-educated peasant like this maid to have any sense of time. I dare say I left the cabin quite a little while before a quarter past eleven."

Brown threw him a lightning glance. "Careful, doctor," he said sharply. "You're upsetting your alibi."

Winstay did not reply, but, drawing a fine cambric handkerchief from his pocket, began to mop his streaming face.

"Doctor Winstay," said Brown, once more addressing the captain, "has been at pains to spread the story about the ship that Mr. Holt took care of his investments and even that he and Holt were involved in some very important

deal. Since Holt's death, he has told everybody who would listen to him that it meant something like ruin for him."

"That's true," Winstay began excitedly.

But a quiet voice silenced him. "It's a lie!" Dickens was on his feet. "Mr. Holt would never talk about money matters with Doctor Winstay," he declared stoutly. "The doctor said to me again and again what a lot of money he could make if only Mr. Holt would give him a market tip sometimes. And as for the boss and him being in a deal together, it ain't nothing but a downright falsehood. If they had been, I'd have been the first to know it!" He sat down abruptly.

The doctor laughed condescendingly. "I believe Captain McDiarmid will realise," he suggested with sneering nonchalance, "that my relations with the late Mr. Holt were on a different footing from those existing between him and his valet. My statement was rigorously accurate. Mr. Holt had made me a great deal of money and, as far as my personal finances were concerned, his death was an absolute disaster."

"Not altogether, surely, doctor," Brown broke in serenely. "Aren't you forgetting the joint account you had with Peters and Kindermann, Wall Street brokers, cable address"—he marked a deliberate pause—"Peterkin, New York?"

Doctor Winstay was suddenly rigid, his light eyes wary.

"I shouldn't deny it, if I were you," Brown calmly pursued. "I was given the information over the radio telephone this morning by the brokers themselves." He turned to the captain. "I found the impression of that wireless of Madame Alva's on the message pad in her cabin. She and Doctor Winstay ran a joint account with this firm."

"It's false!" the doctor cried shrilly.

"It's true," the inexorable voice drowned him. Brown was holding up a sheet of paper. "Do you want stronger proof of collusion than this radio of hers?" he asked the captain and, flinging the paper on the desk, went on in tones heavy with menace, "The moment they'd decided on his death, they sold the old man short!"

"I had nothing to do with this woman, I tell you," Winstay declaimed. "It's a mistake. Someone has been impersonating me. I don't know this firm. I never met Madame Alva before coming on this boat."

He flung his frantic denials broadcast about the room. But he met only condemning eyes, faces stern-set in lines of horror. It was as though the macabre picture which the relentlessly accusing voice in one pregnant phrase had sketched were reflected in the hostile regards directed at him

from every side. “Sir Henry Faucon, you know me!” Winstay cried. “Mrs. Hawksley! . . . Mr. Breckinridge! . . . Mr. Travers! . . . Is none of you going to rebut these libellous charges against me?” But a frozen silence was the only response.

And then Mrs. Craven rose to her feet. “You mustn’t let Doctor Winstay mislead you,” she said impassively. “It was Madame Alva who recommended him to Mr. Holt!”

CHAPTER THIRTY

No one spoke and in her heavy contralto, always with the same aloof air, she continued, "The very last time I spoke to Mr. Holt he said that in one of her trances Madame Alva had urged him to call in this Dr. Winstay because he was the only man who could restore him to health. My husband, poor, deluded fool that he was, wanted me to believe that Madame Alva had no recollection of mentioning this man's name and that she was totally unacquainted with him and he with her. When I told Mr. Holt that she and Dr. Winstay were most probably in league to exploit him he flew into one of his rages and ordered me out of the house. . . ."

"Mr. Holt spoke no more than the truth," Winstay affirmed passionately to the captain. "I know nothing about this Alva woman and this is the first I've heard of her having recommended me to him. And I'm very sure that Dickens, who," he added with a sneer, "would have us believe that he was in all Mr. Holt's secrets, knew nothing of it, either!"

"Mr. Holt kept it from Dickens," Mrs. Craven remarked calmly, "because he knew that Dickens distrusted this Alva person and would resist the engagement of anybody she recommended. That's why you wanted Mr. Holt to dismiss Dickens," she added to Winstay.

"Bah, you're crazy!" the doctor rapped out. "I'll waste no more time with you. . . ."

She fixed him with her strange, sad gaze.

"Remember, Dr. Winstay," she said solemnly, "that God always punishes a liar!" And resumed her seat composedly, arranging her flowing draperies about her. Once more Brown called out to Mullaney.

"Send in Minna!" he said.

At the sound of that name Winstay hoisted his head sharply. For the first time his aplomb seemed to forsake him. Fumbling blindly, he drew his chair towards him and sat down.

Full-bosomed and scarlet-cheeked Minna entered. Her air was sullen and vaguely defiant. It was noticeable that she carefully abstained from looking in Dr. Winstay's direction. Taking the chair that Mullaney placed for her, she plumped into it, her coarse red hands planted on her broad thighs. "Now,

Minna," Brown began in stern, brisk accents, "you told Mr. Harris here a string of lies, didn't you?"

A sulky "*Ja!*"

"But now you're going to speak the truth, eh? When you stated that the doctor left Madame's cabin at a quarter past eleven on the night of Mr. Holt's murder, that was a lie, wasn't it?"

The same grudging response.

"Will you tell the captain about the orders Madame Alva gave you when she and you first came on board?"

The woman cleared her throat. In a slow, surly voice she said: "Madame ordered me I should be always outside the cabin at eleven each morning because a gentleman might give me a note for her. I must not tell anybody she knew this gentleman. . . ."

"And who was this gentleman?"

"It was the Herr Doktor there!" Her finger pointed at Winstay.

"Had you seen him before?"

"*Jawohl!*"

"Used he to visit Madame in New York?"

She shook her head, drawing in her breath in sign of negation. "No. But once or twice he has driven Madame home. . . ."

"And did he in fact give you notes for Madame on board?"

"*Jawohl.* Every morning. . . ."

"When was the first time?"

"The first morning out. . . ."

"The day Mr. Holt was killed, that is?"

"*Ja!*"

"When she was dressing for dinner that night your mistress gave you certain instructions. What were they?"

Minna hesitated, her air suspicious. "*Ach, nein*," she murmured unwillingly. "You make me talk and the Herr Kapitan he have me arrested. . . ."

"I've assured the witness," Brown told the captain, "that if she sticks to the truth she won't be molested. She was obviously a tool in this woman's hands. . . ."

"You've nothing to fear, my girl, unless you try and deceive us again," the captain informed the maid. "Come on and tell us what Madame said."

“She said she wanted to talk with Mr. Holt,” Minna replied stolidly, “but nobody must know or Dickens might hear of it and stop it. I was to watch after dinner, and as soon as I saw the old gentleman leave his suite to walk on deck I should run to the smoking-room and tell her. I was not to speak but bring her box of cigarettes as a signal. Well, I gave her the signal, and pretty soon she comes down to the cabin and says how she’s very sick. She wants me to get the ship’s doctor. I tell the steward, but he comes back and says how the ship’s doctor can’t be found, and Madame says perhaps—who knows?—there’s a doctor among the passengers in the smoking-room, and pretty quick the steward comes back with Dr. Winstay. . . .” She halted breathless.

“And what happened next?” Brown asked.

“The doctor gives her some aspirin and tells the stewardess to fill the hot-water bottle. Then he sends me outside. When the stewardess comes back with the bottle I take it in. Madame is not any more sick—she is writing a telegram. She asks the doctor is it safe to send it, and he tells her, sure, the job’s in the bag. . . .”

A tremor of horror surged through the audience. “Madame gives me five dollars,” the guttural voice went on, “and tells me to take the message to the radio office, and then I can go to bed. . . .”

“So you went off with the telegram, leaving the doctor with Madame? At what time was that?”

“A little after eleven o’clock. . . .”

“Did Madame speak to you later on that night about Dr. Winstay?”

“*Jawohl!*”

“Wait! When was this—before or after the discovery of Mr. Holt’s body?”

“After. I was reading in my bed when the Marquise de Villa Roya’s maid rushes in and screams how Mr. Holt’s murdered. I run to Madame’s cabin because I know Mr. Holt used to be her client. She is still awake. I tell her about the murder. Then she says if anybody asks me I am to say I stayed in the cabin with her and the Herr Doktor until a quarter past eleven, when the Herr Doktor went back to the smoking-room to his game of bridge. . . .”

“Did she explain why she wanted you to make this false statement?” the captain inquired.

Minna shrugged strapping shoulders. “*Mein Gott*, Madame never explained anything,” she retorted phlegmatically, her small eyes twinkling ill-naturedly. “I think maybe the doctor is her sweetie, and she don’t want people to know he goes to her cabin alone. . . .”

Throughout the maid's interrogation Winstay had said no word, or even glanced in her direction. He sat, a little in front of the rest, one long leg crossed over the other, rigidly immobile save for the almost imperceptible swinging of the dangling foot, his eyes veiled by their lids as he concentrated his gaze upon the light mirrored by his gleaming shoe. But his face was a ghastly fish-belly white, his collar wilted by the moisture that incessantly dripped down his cheeks, his handkerchief a damp, crumpled ball tight clenched in his fist.

"One more question before you go, Minna," Brown said. "After your mistress's body was discovered, did you send for Dr. Winstay?"

The maid stared at him aghast. "*Gott bewahr'!*" she exclaimed. "Send for that one? I should say not. . . ."

"Weren't you taken ill? Didn't you faint or something?"

She laughed stridently. "Me? I am ill never!"

Brown glanced at Harris as much as to say "This is for your benefit!" But Harris was contemplating Winstay with a sort of fascinated interest. The doctor still made no sign. "Thank you, Minna," said Brown. "There remains one further point to clear up," he informed the captain, "and my case is complete!"

"Very good, Mr. Brown!"

Mullaney showed the maid out, and Brown called sharply: "Parsons!"

Smartly the steward stepped into the centre of the half-circle and came to attention before the desk. Brown turned to the captain. "We now approach," he said, "the darkest chapter of this horrible conspiracy!" So saying he looked full at Winstay.

At Brown's words, pronounced in the level, inexorable tone from which he had scarcely departed throughout the long session, the doctor had lifted his head. Their glances met, and Brown had a glimpse of fear, stark and uncontrolled, in the depths of the pale eyes. But there was no note of triumph or gloating in the measured utterance as the accuser proceeded. "The killing of Dr. Alloway," Brown pursued, "has been the most inexplicable feature of this chain of crimes. Thanks to Mr. Dickens, who remembered a chance remark of Parsons, I believe I have solved the enigma. And the discovery with which the solution confronts us is almost the most horrifying aspect of the whole affair. . . ."

He broke off to address the steward. "At lunch-time on Thursday you saw Dr. Alloway leaving the royal suite, I think?"

"Yes, sir!"

“What did he have in his hand?”

“A medicine glass. . . .”

“Had you seen it before?”

“Yes!”

“Where?”

“On the table alongside Mr. ’Olt’s bed. . . .”

“How were you able to identify it?”

“ ’Cos it were blue. . . .”

“That’s all. . . . Macdugald!” Parsons stepped back, and a perky individual in a blue reefer took his place.

“You’re the chief hospital attendant?”

“Tha’s me, sir!” The accent was broad Scots.

“The dispensary is next to Dr. Alloway’s cabin, isn’t it?”

“Aye. . . .”

“Did you at my request make a thorough search of the dispensary this afternoon?”

“I did. . . .”

“Did you open a certain cupboard with one of Dr. Alloway’s keys?”

“Tha’s richt. . . .”

“And did you discover a certain medicine glass there?”

“I did. . . .”

“Will you describe it for the captain?”

“It was a wee blue glass wi’ a car-rd over it. . . .”

“Was there anything in the glass?”

“Aye—a little stuff like water in the bottom. . . .”

“What did you do with the glass and contents?”

“I gi’e it to th’ assistant sur-rgeon, like you said!”

“That’ll be all, thanks. . . . Mr. Dickens?”

Dickens stood up.

“Did you visit the dispensary in my company this afternoon?”

“I did. . . .”

“Did you there identify a certain blue medicine-glass as Mr. Holt’s?”

“Yes!”

“Is this it?” Brown held up the small blue vessel he had drawn from his pocket.

"Yes!"

Brown had handed the glass to the captain. "How could he be so sure about it?" McDiarmid asked Brown.

"Because of its shape and colour, sir," Dickens interposed. "I've never seen another medicine-glass like this one over here. Mr. Holt got it at Bad Nauheim. . . ."

The captain nodded, and Brown resumed. "Who used to give Mr. Holt his medicine?"

"I would give him his drops as a rule; Dr. Winstay his heart tonic. . . ."

"What were these drops—do you know?"

"Tincture of digitalis. . . ."

"That's commonly prescribed in heart cases," the captain put in.

"And what was the tonic?" Brown asked the witness.

"That I can't say," said Dickens. "Dr. Winstay always prepared it from a phial he brought. . . ."

"There was no bottle of this heart tonic in your custody, then?"

"No. . . ."

"And Dr. Winstay always administered it personally?"

"That is so. . . ."

"How often used the doctor to visit Mr. Holt?"

"Almost every day. Sometimes twice a day. . . ."

"Did he administer the tonic every time he called?"

"It depended on how Mr. Holt was feeling. Usually every other day. . . ."

"Thank you, Mr. Dickens. . . . Dr. Yarrow?"

The assistant surgeon advanced.

"Have you seen that blue medicine-glass before?"

"Yes. I put that paper tag on it to identify it. . . ."

"At my request did you analyse the liquid that glass contained?"

The doctor hesitated. "On a ship even as large as this," he said, "there are no facilities for chemical analyses. In this case, however, analysis was unnecessary. The drug which that glass contained was one of those drugs which possess an absolutely distinctive odour about which there can be no possible error. . . ."

"What was this drug?"

"Tincture of aconite. . . ."

"Is aconite a poison?"

The silence was breath-taking. No one stirred; only Winstay's foot unflaggingly kept up its gentle rise and fall.

"Aconite," said Dr. Yarrow, speaking slowly and deliberately as though weighing every word, "is not necessarily a poison. But in the case of a man of Mr. Holt's years, and having regard to the fact that he was already suffering from high blood pressure, repeated doses of aconite would cause such violent dilatations of the blood vessels that his cardiovascular system would be unable to withstand their effects. . . ."

"You mean they would aggravate any existing heart weakness?"

"Unquestionably. . . ."

"And inevitably lead to death?"

"That would depend on the frequency of the doses and the general condition of the patient. The result of even one large dose a week upon a healthy person over any protracted period would be extremely serious and might even be fatal. But in the case of a man of Mr. Holt's age and known condition. . . ." His voice trailed off into a significant silence.

"Thank you, Doctor. . . ." The assistant surgeon stood back.

Brown did not speak for a moment. He broke the profound hush to say to the captain: "I believe you've heard enough to realise, sir, why Alloway had to die. From what Dickens tells me, Dr. Winstay had contrived to isolate his patient from all other doctors. It was pure chance that Alloway was able to see him. Alloway came upon Mr. Holt in a state of collapse following upon the violent stimulation produced by the dose of aconite he had recently imbibed, the dregs of which remained in the glass beside the bed. One sniff of that glass, with its characteristic ether-like smell, must have told Alloway the whole story—that is to say, his suspicions may well have been aroused at finding an old man, clearly suffering from heart disease, being treated with such a drastic stimulant as Dr. Yarrow has shown aconite to be. And so, when Holt drove him out, Alloway, as was his bounden duty in the circumstances, carried off with him that medicine-glass for examination. His devotion cost him his life. When Dr. Winstay arrived at Holt's suite he learned that the ship's surgeon had been there before him. Discovering that the glass had disappeared, he immediately guessed what had happened—knew that exposure was imminent. Hurrying out after Alloway, he comes upon him in his cabin and kills him out of hand, only to find that the glass is not there, because Alloway, as we now know, had locked it away for safe keeping in the dispensary cupboard. . . ." He made a little break. "I've good reason for believing," he resumed, "that Madame Alva never disclosed to Dr. Winstay that her husband, in the person of Parsons, was on board.

Nevertheless, Dr. Winstay seems to have found out about it—his state-room is just across the corridor from the empty cabin where Parsons and Madame Alva had their meeting, and Parsons says they heard a door close during the interview—and he seized upon this fortunate discovery to lay a false trail. . . ."

Brown paused, his eyes grave and sombre. "There's the story in outline. Captain—the details are for the Southampton police to fill in. But the successive stages are clear. Once Madame Alva had prevailed upon Mr. Holt to put her down in the will, Dr. Winstay appeared on the scene. The connection between these two was so sedulously covered up that even Dickens was not aware of it. Dr. Winstay lost no time in getting to work. Learning that Mr. Holt had been taking digitalis for some years, he wisely made no attempt to interfere with this treatment. Instead he chose this drug, aconite, which would not only neutralise any benefit Mr. Holt was deriving from the digitalis which Dickens was administering, but, by its excessive stimulative effect upon the blood vessels, would progressively weaken the heart's resistance and so achieve the desired result, which was to obtain possession of the legacy as quickly as was safe. Indeed, the risk of detection was negligible; the digitalis administered with Dr. Winstay's knowledge and approval was a sure alibi, and at the same time would be conclusive proof that Mr. Holt was a chronic sufferer from heart disease, the projected cause of death. But there was a hitch. The woman overreached herself and Holt broke with her. It became urgently necessary to do away with him before he had time to cut her out of the will. The two conspirators decided to speed up the aconite treatment and bring matters to a head. For this purpose it was necessary to get Mr. Holt away from New York and the dangerous proximity of doctors whom he had previously consulted and who were familiar with the case. Dr. Winstay therefore persuaded Mr. Holt to go abroad, and the old gentleman was hustled off to Europe, the doctor staging a dramatic last-minute arrival on the boat in order to make his presence on board appear almost accidental. Madame Alva went along because she obviously wished to keep an eye on her accomplice. I've no doubt the doctor meant to see that the aconite did its work in France before ever Mr. Holt should get back to America. Once again, however, the conspirators' hands were forced. Mrs. Holt had warned her husband against Winstay, and the discovery that Madame Alva was on board seems at last to have aroused the old gentleman's suspicions against the doctor. Dickens tells me that at the final interview between Mr. Holt and Dr. Winstay, after Alloway's visit, Mr. Holt roundly charged Winstay with being in league with Madame Alva. Mr. Holt was in the habit of making such accusations in moments of anger, and

Dickens paid no heed at the time, although he remembered the incident afterwards. But Winstay saw the red light. He must have told himself that Mr. Holt would now lose no time in altering the will. He must have realised that the aconite treatment was too slow and that more drastic methods would have to be adopted, not only to safeguard Madame Alva's legacy but also to save himself from exposure and professional ruin."

He began to gather up his papers. "One thing more. At my request the Southampton police are bringing to the ship photographs of one Charles Banks, a notorious English card-sharp and blackmailer, who some five years ago disappeared to America in the company of Ada Dahl, alias Madame Alva. I believe you'll find, sir, that Charles Banks is identical with the individual known to you and all of us as Caryl——"

But he had no time to finish. With a bellow of rage Parsons had sprung at Winstay, driving at his face even as the doctor's long white fingers flashed to his mouth. The great fist smashed solidly home on Winstay's lips with a faint tinkle of glass. At the same instant Dr. Yarrow, who had leapt to the front, snatched the crumpled handkerchief from Winstay's hand, smelt it and mutely displayed it to the Captain. Tiny slivers of glass as from a broken phial glittered on the fine linen.

A strong fragrance of bitter almonds pervaded the close air of the state-room. Breckinridge was restraining Parsons, who was struggling desperately to get at Winstay, who lay sprawled back in his chair, a thin trickle of blood running down his chin. Harris and Macdugald held him firmly pinioned by the arms.

"Prussic acid!" said Yarrow. "That was a lucky punch of yours, Parsons, my man—another second and it would have been too late!"

The crowded cabin was in an uproar. "Get all these people out of here!" the captain trumpeted to his steward, who showed an alarmed face at the door. "Find Mr. Fewlass, and tell him to send a police guard here with handcuffs!"

The state-room began to empty. Silently the shocked passengers trailed out, glancing backward to where, with mouth all bloody, the killer was huddled in his chair, glaring with eyes savage and despairing, and features convulsed with hate at the sphinx-like face of his adversary standing motionless at the desk. Through the open door that faint, cloying odour drifted out on the landing.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

WARM sunshine flooded the boat deck. The afternoon air was as mild as spring, and a greenish sea, calm as a lake, barred the pale horizon in a hard, unbroken line. The black smoke that hovered in their wake showed that the *Barbaric* was bent on keeping her pledged word to land her passengers that night at nine.

Brown and Mary Fulton drooped over the rail and talked. She had not seen him since the previous afternoon, when she had quitted the captain's cabin, leaving him face to face with the man he had tracked down; but he had sent her word that he would meet her on the boat deck after lunch. There he had brought her the news that Winstay had made a full confession; his lengthy statement, taken down in shorthand by one of the purser's clerks, was even then being typed, ready for his signature against the detectives' arrival on board.

They were both a little self-conscious when they met. Now that the suspense was over, something of the old intimacy of their meetings seemed to elude them. Brown's face and manner plainly showed the effects of the reaction from his long-drawn-out ordeal in the captain's cabin and before. He looked and spoke like a tired man.

They talked of Winstay. Mary was anxious to know when Brown first began to suspect him. Brown laughed. "If you want to know," he answered, "it was actually before he had strangled Holt."

"Why, how do you mean?" she asked wonderingly.

"Well," he said, "it was when we were playing bridge, shortly before the murder. I like to study people—it's a habit of mine—and I'd been looking Winstay over. It seemed to me that he was just a bit too smooth and plausible in the same way that he was just a bit too well dressed. However, I know I'm apt to be over-critical, and in such cases I never jump to conclusions, but suspend judgment, retaining the right, as it were, to return to my original impression if I see fit. I was prepared, therefore, to give him the benefit of the doubt and admit that he was the charming, candid fellow he appeared to be, when he did something that sent me straight back to my first diagnosis."

"What was it?"

"Do you play bridge?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, Travers, who was my partner, caught him putting a fast one over. Travers was finessing and Winstay hesitated deliberately before putting a singleton on the declarer's jack. He was full of apologies when Travers tackled him about it at the end of the hand, but he didn't deceive me, and I made a mental note that our friend the doctor was a pretty slick customer."

"And after the murder, did you remember the incident?"

"Not at once. Winstay was clever, you know; he threw me completely off the track by coming to the defence of Dickens. It was something Parsons said that first started me thinking about this alibi of Winstay's. He said that crooks, not honest people, have alibis. That's true, you know; whenever, in New York or Chicago, they take anybody for a ride, every gunman in town can produce an alibi at a moment's notice."

The girl laughed. "I guess you're right. Now that I come to think of it, I didn't have an alibi myself that night."

"Then I thought back," her companion proceeded, watching the sun striking high lights among the spun gold of her hair, "and I suddenly remembered the bridge incident. It was not the crooked play in itself that stuck in my throat; it was much more the effrontery of the fellow in ever imagining he could get away with it—that and his sang-froid when Travers took him up. A man who does a thing like that in error is humble and confused, but Winstay was as cool as an iceberg."

He paused, contemplating the line of foam washing the ship's side. "The outstanding characteristic of all murderers, you know," he added, "is their overwhelming vanity. They believe that there's one rule of conduct for them and another for the rest of the world. This incident at the bridge table, insignificant though it was, told me, as I looked back on it, that Winstay must be a man of unbridled arrogance to have felt safe in trying to put such a trick over, and that he possessed an iron nerve. But what really set me on my guard against him was the discovery that he was trying to poison your mind and other people's against me."

"He never liked you and me being friends, John," the girl put in.

"If that had been the only reason, I might have disregarded it. But it went deeper than that. I could understand his objecting to my being called in on the inquiry—other people resented it, too—but he didn't come out in the open until he discovered that I was Holt's son. All the rumours that were spread through the ship against me came from him, as Mullaney will tell you. Directly I discovered the origin of these stories, my suspicions were

fully aroused, for it was evident that, by securing my arrest, Winstay would kill two birds with one stone—he would have deflected suspicion definitely from himself and got me out of the way." He broke off and smiled at her. "But it was something you said the other afternoon when we were walking on B deck that convinced me that Winstay was the man."

"Something that I said? What?"

"About his hands. You told me something I didn't know, although I suppose I should have realised it for myself—that he was a chiropractor. These people have fingers like steel wire."

She touched her wrist and shivered. "I know," she answered in a low voice.

Gently he slipped his arm in hers. "And now," he said, "we'll put him finally from our minds, you and I. In a few hours he'll pass out of our lives for ever, and it'll be as though he had never existed. This man was no more than a shadow that darkened our paths for a moment. You knew him and I knew him, and yet all we saw was a mask that hid the real Winstay from our eyes. He killed my father, and yet I don't know that I feel any more resentment towards him than anybody else would feel towards such a cold-blooded wretch as he proved to be. He and my father dropped into my life like a pair of travellers that halt for the night at an inn and next day are gone. It's baffling—but that's life!"

She sighed. "Or fate. I suppose fate arranges these things." And after a little pause she went on: "I think you'll make a better use of your father's money than he ever did, John."

He shrugged with a forlorn air. "I shan't know what to do with it, that's certain. I wish you'd give me some advice, Mary."

"If I can, I will."

"How does a man ask a girl to marry him?"

She stared at him and began to laugh. "Oh, John, dear."

"My dear," he said, "I've made up my mind you're going to marry me, only I don't know how these things are done."

She smiled at him fondly. "You're sweet, but I'm not going to take advantage of your inexperience. We've been through a trying time together and—and of course it makes us feel romantic. But you don't know a thing about me. You're a leading citizen now, a millionaire, and you'll have to make a brilliant marriage."

"Don't you want to marry me, Mary?"

“Oh, John, you’ve got to understand. Everything’s changed; from now on, your whole life’s going to be different.”

“You bet!” He smiled at her cheerfully. “Because you’re going to marry me.”

“But it’s nonsense, I tell you! You haven’t known me a week, and in that time you’ve become one of the richest men in America. It’s out of the question!”

“Don’t you like me, Mary?” And when she did not answer, he took her face in his two hands and turned it firmly toward him. He repeated the question. She nodded rather wistfully, her amber eyes averted.

“Well, then!” he cried, and drew her to him.

“It’s all wrong,” she protested as he kissed her.

“It’s all right,” he smiled back. And kissed her again.

The shadows were lengthening when, with prowling steps, Mrs. Jackson advanced along the boat deck. Below in the lounge, the Reverend Cayley and a nameless cluck, relentlessly torn from their packing by her indomitable insistence, awaited her return to the bridge table with the promised fourth. At the sight of the two figures leaning side by side over the rail, she halted and said in her silkiest tones: “Oh, Mr. Brown, I was wondering if you’d care to make——” Realising that she had not been heard, she cleared her throat and, advancing a step, began in a louder tone: “I’m trying to get a fourth for a rubber before——” Once more she checked. Only then did she perceive that Mr. Brown’s arm encircled a trim tweed waist and that a golden head was reclining on his shoulder.

With a disgusted snort, Sitting Bull turned her back on them and stumped away.

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 *Fog* by Valentine Williams and Dorothy Rice Sims]