THE STEWARD

BY

EDGAR WALLACE

The Steward

I. — THE STEWARD AND THE SHARPS

YOU must imagine the steward—a dapper little man, in a white, short jacket, rather thin-faced, with what I would describe as a quick-change expression. His home is at Southampton, but obviously he was born in the Metropolitan Police area. He is very shrewd, rather voluble, and he has a cockney sense of humour.

You can imagine him giving his reminiscences with a duster in his hand, leaning negligently against the stateroom door. Behind him are thirty years of ocean-going experience.

"A ship (the steward speaking) is like a woman; you think you know all about her—the captain, the engineer, the fellow who launched her—and then one day she goes mad and does things that turn the captain's hair grey and drive the engineer to drink.

"I'm thinking of the Tiberia. I've sailed the Western Ocean in the Tiberia more often than I can count. She was a time-table boat, who could slip through fog and punch her way through bad weather and make Ambrose Light to the tick. You knew just when and why she'd roll, and you couldn't make a mistake about putting fiddles on the table. Usually it was like going to sea in the 9.35 to town, for a steadier boat never came down a slipway—except in a following wind, and then she rolled like a barrel of beer running down-hill.

"Most boats want a cross sea before they start laying over, and a following wind to keep them as steady as the Rock of Gibraltar, but this Tiberia was made different.

"Any ship is a reliable ship if she behaves the same way in the same circumstances, and nobody worried about her rolling, till one day she changed her habits and started to pitch in a following sea and to roll in a cross sea, the same as every other ship did. That turned the captain grey, and he was right! Three voyages after that, in a sea as calm as the lake in

Regent's Park, she lay over on her side in mid-Atlantic. They got the passengers away in boats, and they were picked up by a Blue Cross ship without the loss of so much as the captain's cat. And only just in time, for she turned turtle, and that was the last of the Tiberia.

"Nobody knew why. There was time for the engineers to find out that the cargo hadn't shifted, none of the pumps were broken—she just decided to do what she wanted to do. That's the way of a ship and the way of a woman.

"I don't know much about the United States, except the bit that's called New York City—that's an education in itself. I know there is an interior, where people go, but what it's like I only know from the talkies.

"All the best broadsmen I know come from New York City. When I say 'broadsmen' I am referring to card-sharps—the only people who make travelling pay. I have known a few of them, too : Harry the Valet, Johnny Dickins, Jo Extein, Doc Wilder, Do Simmering, Long Bill Patton from Missouri—oh, I can give you a list of them as long as your arm. Let's have a look at your arm. Longer!

"Naturally, I've met real criminals, but they aren't clever. But I have never met a broadsman who wasn't clever. In the old days, they used to have an agent in every big town who supplied the crowds with information about the swell families that were coming to Europe, where they were born, what were their hobbies, how they made their money, and a list of their personal friends. It wasn't difficult for a man with this information to stroll up to a big hardware merchant and say: 'Aren't you Mr. Schmidt of Minneapolis? Mr. Tom B. Jackson told me to look out for you. Oh yes, he's an old friend of mine. I've done a whole lot of business with him. By the way do you still breed Angora rabbits?'—or whatever his hobby was.

"Almost the first thing Mr. Schmidt would be told was that there were a lot of card-sharpers on board, and that he must be very careful with whom he played. Naturally, Mr. Schmidt didn't want to play with anybody except this bird who knew his friend Jackson, and after that it was easy.

"They've got psych—what is the word? I never can remember it. Psychology? That's right. I don't know what it means, but they've got it.

"We had a reporter travelling with us when I was on the Olympic, one of the fliest of them—at least he thought so. I can't remember his name for the minute, but you must have read his books. He writes in his sleep. And if you haven't read him, you've heard him on the wireless. Well, this fellow could have written a book on card-sharpers and yet they got him two days before he arrived in England. They got him by psych—psychology. Thank you very much. I don't suppose I shall ever use it again, but I am much obliged to you for the loan of it.

"He got to know two or three elderly men, and on Sunday night, before we reached Southampton, one of them suggested a game of bridge. Naturally,

he would have been suspicious, only another one—a fellow with white hair and the face of Peter the well-known Hermit—said: 'No, I don't play cards on Sunday. I've got an old mother who objects to it. You may think I am crazy, but those are my principles, and naturally the reporter's heart went out to him, so that when he played cards on Monday he lost £80 before he knew which way the ship was moving.

"The card men are the only gangs that are gangs. They come on board a ship, and as far as you can tell, they don't know one another. You never see them speaking together; when they are drinking in the smoke room they drink solitary. Naturally, I know them, and the smoke room steward knows them. But the point is : should a steward tell? It's a moot point, and has been debated by some of the brainiest people in the world. When I say 'brainiest people' I mean stewards.

"The card gangs are not all men. Some-times they travel a beautiful lady, and it is wonderful what a sugar daddy will do to impress somebody who he thinks is a, good woman, but hopes he's wrong. Especially daddies over fifty, who leave their wives, responsibilities and careful habits in Pittsburg.

"I saw a crowd take twenty thousand pounds, or a hundred thousand dollars— as it used to be in the good old days— from a business man who was so clever that nobody would do a deal with him except in the presence of his lawyer and a private detective. And all for the sake of a girl he had only met three days ago, who thought he was wonderful and said so, and kept asking where he had been all her life.

"There's not a ship that sails that hasn't got a big notice up in its smoke-room, asking the passengers to beware of playing cards with strangers or saying that there are notorious card-sharps on board. If that notice wasn't up the gangs that worked the Atlantic would go with a deputation to the captain and complain. As one of them said to me:

"'It's our best advertisement, because usually we are the only honest-looking people on board the ship, and as for being strangers, why, we get our living by making boy friends!'

"Shore folks have got a queer idea of how sharps work. They think they go chasing you round the ship, begging you to come and play poker, and that they carry cards up their sleeves. The real sharp doesn't attempt to palm a card—he palms the whole blooming pack, and I have seen one of them hand a pack of cards to a mug, ask him to cut it, and as he drew it back towards him to deal, change the whole pack under the eyes of the table.

"No, they don't go chasing you. They let you chase them. Their job is to get your confidence. The easiest way, especially on the homeward voyage, is to tell some obvious Englishman—and there never was an Englishman who wasn't obvious—how glad they are to be back in the only country worth living in, and to be under the only set of laws that are worth while, and what wonderful fellows the London policemen are. Nothing gets an English-man, and especially a Londoner, more surely than saying what good policemen we have and how polite they are, because he takes credit for it himself.

"There was one fellow who worked the boats for thirty-seven years, who made friends by telling middle-aged people what a bad liver he had and how he hoped he would be cremated and not buried. They used to give him advice about it.

"Another good way is to lend a fellow a book, not one of these trashy detective novels that are so popular by all accounts, but really good books on life and how to bear it, and the memoirs of ladies whose husbands have friends who know royalty. Naturally, you don't think that a man who loves what is termed literature is a man who could draw one to a royal flush and get it.

"Believe me, there is brains in that profession and there is money, too. And what is more, there is organisation, and that is why they are very seldom caught. Card-sharping on ocean-going ships is big business.

"I don't want you to get any wrong ideas about these fellows. One of our captains used to call them 'The Barons of the Nimble Pack,' and another commander used to call them 'Senators of Sin,' but they are big.

"How do they do it? There's a dozen ways, but you might say that the whole secret is that the quickness of the hand deceives the eye. If you searched their cabins you'd find dozens of packs of cards, exactly similar to the kind you could buy from the smoke-room bar, and they are all set in different ways, so that when they are palmed they can deal you just the kind of hand you don't want.

"Now, usually broadsmen keep to their own line : the Western Ocean crowd works the Western Ocean, and the Pacific crowd never know any other sea than the Pacific. There is the crowd that works the boats to the Cape, and the crowd that goes from London to Colombo as regular as clock-work.

"Which naturally brings to my mind a fellow called Linbach.

"The first time I met him was when a crowd called the Calderwood gang was making some good killing on the packet I was working in—the Milentia, one

of the crack boats of the fleet. Jo Calderwood was what you might describe as a master man. He worked on such a big scale that he would take a couple of trips across to Europe and pay all the expenses of his crowd, and there were four others beside him, and never touch a card if there was nobody on board big enough to kill. He used to say to me: 'Felix, I am not in the petty cash business. I can't afford it:

"Jo was a very tall, good-looking man, rather inclined to fat. He was what they called a good doer, but very gentlemanly. I believe he went to college. The only trouble with him, from what I have heard from some of his crowd, was that he was a bit romantic. Harry Perter, who used to work with him, said once: 'Jo's got the makings of a sugar daddy. It's lucky for him he's not honest.'

"The crowd had just made a big clean up. It was in the days when Hollywood had so much money that three leading ladies travelling on a boat put up the company's dividends. Jo's mob had taken about a hundred thousand dollars out of a crowd of saps who knew everything about the picture business and nothing else, and naturally they were feeling grand about it. It pleased Jo, because he was an artist who loved his profession, and when he heard that a man called Kindell, who worked the Vancouver-Shanghai route, had taken nearly a million dollars from a rich Chinese, he did not sleep sound for weeks. Kindell was a pretty good sharp, who worked two-handed, had a grand house in San Francisco, with a bathing pool and a beach house, and everything that a gentleman required. The fact that Jo had made such a good cleaning cheered him up, and 'Anyway,' he said to me, 'the reporters were probably exaggerating about the amount that Kindell took.' I can say that there is a lot of professional jealousy in that business, and I have a good reason for knowing that Kindell felt just as bad about Jo. They had never met.

"This particular voyage I shall never forget. We pulled out of New York harbour at midnight, with a real classy crowd, the kind that waits in queues till the bar opens, for the privilege of paying ten dollars a bottle for real champagne. Jo Calderwood was on board, and, as a matter of fact, in one of my state-rooms. As a rule he didn't make a quick trip back, and I wondered what was on board worth chasing, till I found there were two men who were anybody's fortune. One of these was a steel man from Pittsburg—a good sport who played the races and who had been well introduced and inspected before he started. The other was Linbach.

"Now, I knew Linbach. He'd taken a trip before. I didn't know whether he was a New Yorker or whether he was a real American. My luck was out, so I had him in one of my staterooms on both occasions. He was a tall man, red-

faced and fair-haired, and he was Jewish. I used to say he was the first Jew I had ever met. From what his wife's maid told me—a very high-class girl, who spoke perfect French, as a matter of fact she was French—you ought to have been able to shake gold dust out of his socks, though I never had that pleasure. According to what I heard, he was the head of a diamond agency and controlled about a thousand jewellery stores in America, Paris and London. I had several conversations with him on the first trip, and from what I gathered, though I think he was a happy man, what really made him miserable was the thought that somebody else was making money besides him. He used to sit for hours in the smoke-room, watching the gangs operate.

"'I've never played cards in my life, Felix,' he told me once, 'and it is disgraceful that the company allows these gamblers to travel the ships. They must have cleared up ten thousand dollars to-night. It ought to be stopped.'

"He had the best suite at reduced terms, and as he dined in the restaurant and got an allowance from the company, he made money out of that too. He only had one meal a day, but had a hearty tea, which was supplied free to the passengers.

"He was the sort of man who wanted a million dollars' worth of service for a five-dollar trip. He said that the company ought to pay the stewards a good salary and abolish tipping. He said it was degrading to a man to have to depend on the charity of passengers. He wouldn't have degraded me at all, only I always kept a sharp eye on him the morning he landed,

"I don't know where he got his wife from, but I believe from somewhere in New England. She was a lovely, scared-looking little thing—the last woman in the world you'd expect would make the supreme sacrifice of marrying a fat man. I can tell you that holding down the job of a rich man's wife is no cinch, and all my ideas about the cleverness of American women went west after they'd sailed with me.

"The first time I saw her covered with diamonds, emeralds, pearls and what-nots, I thought that Linbach had one good habit at least. I didn't think it strange that every night he used to take her jewel case to the purser and lock it up in the safe, until her maid told me that he did that even on shore, and that her jewellery was only loaned to her on special occasions, and that he took her diamonds away every night.

"A polite steward, who doesn't knock at a state-room until he's sure that he's wanted, can hear a lot of things; and from what I heard I gathered that Mrs. Linbach hadn't a dollar when she married her husband, that she was

the luckiest woman in the world, and that her mother and her young sister would starve if Mr. Linbach didn't keep them. He told her all these things pretty often. It got so monotonous that I stopped listening and used to knock right away. Anyway, there was no need, for he started telling me things.

"It's a curious thing that people tell their stewards and their barbers more than they would tell their dearest friends. There's a certain type of man that always likes to stand well with his servants. He opens his heart to them, and tells them things that his business partners doesn't know. And that's how he came to tell me all that I'd heard before.

"As a matter of fact, he told every-body—he told the stewardess, he told the smoke-room waiter, and we hadn't been three days out before Jo Calderwood came to me.

"'Who's that bird Linbach?' he said. 'I heard he treats his wife like a dog. Say, there's no kind of trouble that man ought not to be in. What's his weight, Felix?'

"I told him all I knew.

"'Never played cards, eh?' said Joe thoughtfully. 'Do you know what I'd like to do, Felix? I'd like to take every dollar that fellow's got and go fifty-fifty with the poor little woman that married him when she wasn't feeling quite herself.'

"That same day he met Mrs. Linbach and went down before her. There was nothing queer about that. If you didn't drop in your tracks when you saw Mrs. Linbach you were no gentleman.

"Linbach used to sleep in the afternoon, and it was in the afternoon that Jo got acquainted with her. He had all the time in the world, because the Pittsburg man was feeling seasick. The Western Ocean was as smooth as a sheet of glass, but he was seasick. There are lots of people who couldn't come on board a ship and not feel seasick, so Jo put aside the pleasure of skinning and scalping him until they met in London.

"The Pittsburg man used to come up to the smoke-room and sit looking as well as could be expected, and Linbach found him-self introduced to Jo, for apparently he knew the Pittsburg man too.

"When Linbach said he never touched cards he was probably boasting, for he understood picquet, and Jo, who knew picquet backwards and forwards, and up and down, got him into a game for five cents a hundred. He lost a

dollar to Jo, and looked as if he hated it. You'd think that Jo would have let him win, but that's where the psycho—whatever the word is— came in.

"The next day he came up to the smoke-room with his wife. She sat looking like something you are supposed to dream about, but don't, and this sort of fired Jo, and he worked Linbach into playing picquet for a cent a point, and this time Linbach won. Not much, but he won.

"'I got a feeling,' said Jo, 'that my luck's out. It's funny how luck runs in streaks. I always get a hunch when I'm going wrong, and I have got it now. Thank heavens I'm not playing bridge for my usual stakes!'

"Linbach was interested in money.

"'What are your usual stakes?' he said.

"'Anything up to a hundred dollars a point,' said Jo, 'but I don't like playing that stake with perfect strangers.'

"Well, apparently Mr. Linbach played bridge too, and they got a four, his wife being the fourth, and the way he bullied that poor girl was a shame. He was one of the inquest men, who wanted to know why you didn't lead your ace of spades when he discarded a diamond.

"It was two nights before we reached Southampton when the play began to get high. Linbach became reckless. At about eleven o'clock at night they started playing bridge at a hundred dollars a point.

"Now, I should have said that a man who was sitting in with Jo Calderwood and Harry Perter was doomed to explain matters to his bank manager. For these two lads knew the game so well that every time they passed a pack of cards it used to stand up and bow to them.

"The Pittsburg man was watching, and that made it rather hard, because he was a prospective client.

"Linbach's partner was his frightened little wife, who was always doing the wrong thing and looking appealingly at her husband before she played.

"At two o'clock, when the smoke-room lights were extinguished by order, Jo Calderwood and his partner were sixty thousand dollars on the wrong side. You wouldn't think it possible, but in those days the big men like Calderwood would carry more than that amount with them, and he paid cash on the spot.

"He was a bit bewildered, for something must have gone wrong, but there was another day to get it back. Naturally he suggested a cheque, but as they had both agreed to pay cash before the game started, the idea fell through. Jo could not afford to make any fuss—there was the Pittsburg man, who was a handsome killing in the offing.

"They arranged to meet the next morning and play from Cherbourg to Southampton, and I should say that Jo and his gang spent the whole night doing curious things to cards.

"In the morning Linbach sent up word that he was not feeling well.

"I took their baggage down on to the quay and into the car. They were not going up by train, and I got the shock of my life when Linbach handed me two hundred dollars as a tip. I couldn't believe my eyes. After I had seen the car go off, I went back to look after Jo and his bag-gage.

"When I came up to him I found one of our Scotland Yard men talking to him. There's generally a Yard man watching the ships as they come in. He knew Jo. In fact, he knew almost every sharp there was in the world.

"'Had a good trip, Jo?' he said.

"'Not so bad,' said Jo.

"'Competition must be getting a bit fierce with the Pacific crowd coming over to work in the North Atlantic.'

"I saw Jo go pale.

"'What do you mean?' he said.

"'Why,' said the busy, 'that fellow Kindell was on board. He's just gone off in the car. His real name is Linbach. I had a look at his passport, and he was travelling under his own name. Don't you know him? That wife of his is always kidding that she's scared of him, but, Jo, she rules him with a rod of iron.'

"Jo didn't say very much. It had only just come back to him that Kindell always worked with a beautiful girl who could not play cards. It had also struck him that his sympathy had been a little misplaced as regards Mrs. Linbach, and it occurred to him that she played cards much better than anybody thought.

"It nearly broke Jo's heart.

"'It's me pride that's hurt, Felix,' he said to me. 'If I hadn't got that sap from Pittsburg for a hundred thousand bucks I'd give up this business. I'm getting old and childish.'"

II. — OVERDUE

"I AM telling you," (it was the Steward speaking), " and this is the first time the story has ever been told, why the Majoric was forty-eight hours late reaching New York. You know the Majoric—she's out of Southampton on the first stroke of eight bells, and she's alongside her berth at the foot of Twenty-Third Street so punctually to the second that they set clocks by her.

"Broken propeller nothing! That bunk was all right for the newspaper reporters, but I'm giving it to you straight.

"There's a funny thing about ships: you can make them as up-to-date as you like and so big that you can carry an old windjammer on the boat deck and never know it was there; you can furnish 'em so that they're like the Hotel what's its name on Forty-Second Street; you can put electric light and swimming baths—any-thing you wish, but there's no difference between the Sally B of Gloucester and the Leviathan—they're just ships with the same sort of soul—if you'll forgive the high-brow expression—the same sort of tricks and the same way of looking at life.

"People who say that ships haven't got a mind of their own don't know anything about the subject. You remember the Likalana, the Australian packet? She was reported lost three times in exactly the same spot, and never was lost. And three years after the last report she went down on the very spot where she was supposed to have gone down three years before. Why? Because the ship knew she was going to sink and told everybody. Crazy, am I? When you've done twenty-eight years at sea and sixteen of 'em on the Western Ocean, you'll get to the same crazy ideas.

"The Majoric has always been a publicity ship—she attracts press notices just as naturally as a Hollywood queen. From the day she was launched she lived in the headlines. If anything sensational happened on the Western Ocean it happened aboard the Majoric. Wasn't Coulzen, the murderer, arrested on her? Didn't Jay Morden fix his thousand million dollar merger on her? Didn't she rescue the crew and passengers of the Iropat in a gale? Wasn't she the ship that steamed two thousand miles stern first because something went wrong with her engines? There wasn't a stunt that any living ship has done that she didn't do better. And the things that happened on her! Connie Roaks got engaged to the Duke of Liffenham—oh, I could mention a dozen divorce cases that began as engagements on that packet.

"Naturally, she was a popular ship. I've known her to be booked up six voyages ahead, and in vacation time she used to be filled with motion picture people all hoping for the best.

"Of course, she carried her full complement of sharks. Every gang that ever worked the Western Ocean took her in turn, and naturally they gave us no trouble. We had the usual notice plastered over the ship: 'Passengers are warned not to play cards with strangers,' but that made no difference to anybody. After three days at sea there ain't such a thing as a stranger.

"I am one of those fellows who believe in living and letting live—always providing they don't live on me. So when anybody says to me: 'If you know a passenger is a crook why don't you tell the captain?' I say unto them: 'Live and let live.' Besides, the captain knows. And besides, again....

"Should the steward tell? It is one of the questions that has never been answered to the satisfaction of anybody. You get stewards who have worked nothing but the steerage and second-class who say: 'Certainly. It is the job of the steward to look after the interests of the passengers'; but, then, crooks never work the steerage, nor the second class.

"People think I sympathise with crooks, but I don't. I only say that what my old captain used to call 'The Barons of the Nimble Pack' are nice fellers to deal with. They've got their graft, they give no trouble and they know how to behave themselves.

"The great Dr. Lansen once told me that there are diseases which are killed by other diseases. 'For all we know,' he said, 'measles is death to a whole lot of bugs.'

And it's a fact that the ocean-going gangs of card-sharps scare away cabin thieves.

"No card-sharp wants to hear a squeal or be lined up on the landing-stage and searched for Mrs. Emmascheim's missing pearls.

"Another thing about 'the boys' is that they know when to stop drinking.

"You can say what you like about booze, but you can't say anything logical in its favour. That is the argument I've always taken in the stewards' mess. It is only when people start talking illogical against it that you've got to stand up and argue. There wouldn't be half the sin in this world if some of the saints knew when to stop talking. We had a lady from St. Paul two trips ago who nearly turned me into a dipser—whatever the word is. Kept telling me that the beasts of the field never drank anything but water and didn't want stimulants.

"'That's right, Miss,' I said. 'And they don't wear trousers either, nor drape themselves around a soda fountain. People who take stimulants are all

wrong. Look t.s.c. at the men and women who can't get up until they've had a cup of coffee and can't get through the day without a cup of tea.'

"'Those are innocent refreshments,' she snapped. 'I take them myself.'

"It's right that one man's meat is another man's poison, but it's generally another man's meat too. And anyway, poisons are pretty good for most people if the doses are small enough.

"The buccaneer who roams the seas with three packs of cards and a pair of good hands knows just how bright the light should burn. I've only known one who seemed to take a pride in being thoroughly illuminated. Wally Vole was a solitary worker who came to the Western Ocean after a long spell in the Pacific. He used to work the Vancouver-Hong Kong route, and was quite unknown to the boys from the Eastern States, but it was the London crowd that first fell for him.

"Wally's face was his fortune. He was a big, stoutish man, and his face was in proportion—round and red. It was the reddest I've ever seen. And he giggled—just like a fellow giggles after the eighth cocktail. Nobody had ever seen him drink, but nobody had ever seen him when he didn't seem to have a skinful.

"He looked so easy that Lew Stein and Long Abe Mullins passed him; but Chalmers and Hoke, the London boys, brought him into a cabin game and took a thousand dollars out of him at stud poker. That same evening, when the smoke-room was crowded, they got him playing bridge at five dollars a point, and when you remember that Chalmers was his partner, you can guess that the insurance rate against Wal winning was 99.99 to anybody who wanted to throw away a good cent. But Wal won. He won because they thought he was easy, and he had packed his roll before Lew came out of his trance to hold the inquest.

"Wal knew more about what was happening on a ship than the captain and the chief steward rolled into one. When I got to know him he used to tell me things that made my hair stand up, and he was generally right. It was Wal who first put me wise to what was going on between

Dr. Lansen, Miss Ernestine Crewe and Peter Murray. I don't know what there is about the sea that makes people fall in love at first sight, but we weren't in Cherbourg before Miss Ernestine, the doctor and Murray were all mixed up in an internal triangle, as the poets call it.

"She was as pretty as a picture, with a face you see on magazine covers if nowhere else. I think she was the daughter of a farmer in the Middle West.

Murray was a real estate man from Los Angeles, and the doctor—well everybody knew Dr. Oscar B. Lansen. He was the greatest surgeon that America has produced, and the richest.

He took two trips a year to Europe, and always asked to be put in one of my cabins. Him and me would talk for hours about the card-sharps, but this trip he practically said nothing. He used to sit in his stateroom for hours at night, thinking and thinking—so if Wally hadn't told me that he'd fallen for this Ernestine girl, I should have known that he was in love. I've seen the symptoms before... fat men waving their handkerchiefs to fat women with tears in their eyes. Love's a terrible disease.

"For the first two days of the voyage the three of 'em went about together, and then they separated. The doctor was more alone in his cabin, and Ernestine and Peter Murray used to disappear on to the boat deck after dinner. One night the doctor rang for me, and I went into his cabin and found him sitting on the edge of his bed in his pyjamas, chewing at a long cigar which he'd forgotten to light.

"He was a middle-aged man, good looking, but slightly bald.

"'Come in, Felix,' he said. 'I want to ask you something. Do you know that man Murray?'

"'No, Doctor,' I said, a bit surprised.' I thought he was a friend of yours.'

"He shook his head.

"'I met him in London. He seems a very decent fellow. Have you had him before?'

"As a matter of fact, I'd looked after Mr. Peter Murray on two voyages. He was a quiet, retiring sort of man, who never mixed much with the passengers and was generally in bed by ten o'clock every night.

"I told the doctor all I knew about the real estate business in Los Angeles, and he nodded.

"'Yes, I think he's a fairly rich man,' he said, and then looked up at me with a half-smile. 'I saw you talking with that fellow Wally Vole. He's a pretty knowledgable chap, isn't he? You might ask him if he knows anything about Murray, and tell me to-morrow. Good-night.'

"When Wally came down to his state-room I put the question to him carelessly, but he had no information to give.

"'That bird has always puzzled me,' he said. 'He's from Chicago, isn't he?'

"I told him that Murray was Los Angeles.

"'That's no diploma,' he said. 'Almost anybody say they come from Los Angeles when they don't belong anywhere.'

"So I'd no information to give the doctor, and the next day I had it from the steward who was looking after Miss Ernestine that she was engaged to be married.

"Dr. Lansen was always a good sport—he was the first to congratulate Peter, and they had a little dinner in the restaurant that night to celebrate. I believe the doctor went to the wedding, but I heard nothing about that, for Murray wasn't the sort of man that attracted much news-paper attention.

"The next time the doctor crossed with me I thought he looked a bit older. It was he who referred to Mr. and Mrs. Murray.

"You remember that romantic engagement, Felix? Well, it has turned out very well indeed—remarkably well. A very good fellow,, Murray. He hasn't been across lately, has he?'

"'Lady happy, sir?' I asked.

"'Oh, very!'

"You could see with half an eye he was trying to pretend he was enthusiastic; but there was a sort of pull-back to it.

"'I never saw two young people better suited. I hope to see them in England this year—I've given up my practice and am retiring.

"I knew the doctor was very fond of England and had an estate in Hampshire, but I was surprised to hear his news, for he wasn't an old man by any means, and I happened to know, from what passengers had told me, that he made an enormous income.

"'I don't think you'll see Mr. Murray in England, sir. I've never known him to come aboard at Southampton.'

"The doctor chuckled.

"'He's not very keen on England. He was there for a couple of years, and I think he had some quarrel there. But he has promised to stay with me.'

"On the outward trip we picked up Wally. I hadn't seen him for the greater part of a year. He said he'd been ill in Monte Carlo, and certainly he wasn't quite as red in the face as usual.

"'I'm not working this trip, Felix. I'm a sick man.'

"He spent most of the voyage in his state-room, where I brought him his meals. One day I happened to be talking to him about the doctor, and mentioned Mr. and Mrs. Murray. I saw his eyes open wide.

"'Murray? That good-looking bird with a little black moustache? Good Lord! Married her, did he!' And then he began to chuckle.

"'Do you know anything about him?' I asked.

"He looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes.

"'Great traveller, Murray, eh? I think he must be in the secret police or sump'n'. Just like one of those fellows you see on the movies.'

"'A detective?' I said, surprised.

"'Sump'n' like that. I guess he must be chasing Stanson—ever heard of Stanson?'

"Naturally, I'd heard of Stanson. Every big bank robbery in Europe was Stanson's work, for he got the credit for it.

"'He must go over with Stanson to study these kind of things,' Wally went on, looking at me straight with his fishy eyes. 'From what I hear, he's always been around when Stanson was operating.'

"Now I knew just what Wally meant. It's a funny thing about crooks that they never make direct accusations against one another, except when it comes to a real show-down, but always speak on the slant. Yet it was pretty hard to believe that that good-looking young fellow was Stanson, or even a member of his gang.

"'Did I say he was?' Wally asked, when I put it to him straight. 'That's all I know about him. A friend of mine met him in Lyons the week that Stanson smashed the Lyons bank; and he was in Monte, staying at the Hotel de Paris, when gangsters held up the cercle privée and got away with twenty million francs.'

"'But he's got real estate in Los Angeles,' I said.

"'Why shouldn't he?' asked Wally. 'That's just the kind of investment I should make if I had my corner of twenty million francs.'

"He wasn't inclined to talk any more, but the day we passed Fire Island I got him on to the subject again.

"'If he's Stanson, he's through with that business, I guess,' said Wally. 'From what I've heard, he's crazy about his wife, and a man uses up most of his nerve when he asks a girl to marry him. Do the police know? Of course they don't. You don't suppose they'd let Peter Murray ashore at Cherbourg if they guessed? Do you think they'd reserve a compartment to Paris for this great young American?'

"'It was two trips after this that I saw in the passenger list, attached to a suite of mine, the names of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Murray of Philadelphia. It was not an unusual name, and Peters are as common as Michaels. But it was the happy married pair that I showed into their quarters one cold February night.

"Mrs. Peter Murray wasn't looking as good as when I'd seen her last. I thought her face was a little drawn, but there was no doubt about her being happy. Peter was like a kid with her—fussing round her, trying all the armchairs to find which was the most comfortable. Nobody was good enough to take off her fur coat but Peter. He had to serve the hot bouillon himself when I brought it in.

"I had a chance of taking a real good look at him. He was older than I had thought; there was a touch of grey in the hair at his temples. But he was as strong as an ox, and lifted a trunk, that two stewards had carried in, as easy as though it were a hat-box.

"All the times I travelled with Peter Murray I don't suppose I'd said a dozen words to him outside of 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir.' But on this trip he was friendly and human. Perhaps it was the trouble I took to make Mrs. Peter comfortable—I laid myself out to help her, and she needed it, for the first three days of the voyage were pretty tough. Half a gale was blowing, and the old Majoric started doing stunts. On the fourth day the sea fell and there was a little sunshine, and I helped her on to the deck. I don't think that while the storm was on Peter Murray slept a wink. He cursed the sea, the wind, the ship, the captain—everything but me. But with the coming of smoother weather his spirits rose. He told me his wife was not too well, and that they were going to consult a doctor in England. I said nothing, but I knew who that doctor was.

"He was a worried man—I know now what else was worrying him, but I didn't know then. Once he got talking about the ship and its passengers.

"'Do you have many card-sharpers aboard?' he asked me, and I gave him a list of the gangs that were working the boat.

"Now, that's a thing that I've never done before in my life, and I don't exactly know what made me do it then. He was rather amused.

"'Queer devils,' he said. 'It must be a pretty awful way of earning a living, being at sea eight months in the year.'

"I smiled at this, and he saw the joke.

"I can never understand why people take big risks for such a little reward. Suppose these fellows are pulled in by the English police, there's nine months' or a year's hard labour for them, and that shrinks the profits.'

"I said something about the big money the Barons earned.

"'Big money! They don't know what big money is!'

And then I said something which, if I had taken time to consider, I shouldn't have said.

"'Do you think Stanson earns big money?' I asked.

"Not so much as an eyelid flickered.

"'Stanson—who is he?' he asked. 'Is that the man who robs banks in Europe?'

"If I hadn't got a complexion like a pickled walnut he would have seen that I'd gone red.

"'He probably does,' Peter went on. 'I suppose he's got a big reputation in Europe, hasn't he? I seem to remember reading something about him.'

"I told him all I'd learned about Stan-son, and I'd read everything I could lay my hands on since Wally told me his suspicions—how Stanson was the biggest and cleverest organiser of robberies that Europe had known in years; how, according to general belief, he never entered the bank himself but drew out the plans for every robbery; how he had gone from big to bigger things, and had become such a danger that the Bank of England adopted new methods for guarding their bullion. And as I spoke I was looking at him, and I could see behind his eyes that I was giving him a whole lot of pleasure.

"'Famous, is he?' he said. 'I didn't know people talked about him like that. He has a European reputation, eh?'

"He was most affable for the rest of the day.

"There was no doubt whatever that this man Stanson, whether he was Peter Murray or not, had a brain like a general's. Some of his coups were daring enough to take your breath away. The Monte Carlo business had been the talk of England for two months—they cleaned out the Casino reserve and escaped by motor-boat from the terrace.

"He came back to the subject that night, when I was helping him dress for dinner.

"'Stanson must be a pretty big man, Felix,' he said, 'when you compare him with these poor four-flushing card-players, a fellow like you must realise how big a man he is.'

"'The only drawback I can see is that he has to live under a false name,' I said. 'If I were Stanson I should want every-body to know who I was.'

"He frowned at this.

"'Well, there may be a reason, apart from the very good reason that no man wants to be pinched.'

"He chuckled, and then I saw him frown again, and I knew he was thinking of his wife. He was always with her; he would have sat and watched her while she slept in the afternoon if she had allowed him.

"The ship's doctor used to call and see her twice a day, but Peter never encouraged him to go very deeply into the case. I had the feeling that he didn't want to know how ill she was. He was quite satisfied if the doctor gave her a tonic. Nevertheless, he made up to the doctor and was very friendly with him. From what I heard when I was clearing away the tea one afternoon, Mrs. Peter Murray might be returning alone to the States, and her husband had planned that she should return on our packet.

"We ran into another bit of bad weather off the south of Ireland, and had a choppy passage up the Channel. This time the Murrays landed at Southampton, and the first person I saw on the quay was Dr. Lansen. He came aboard with a privilege ticket, and I was in the suite when he arrived. You didn't have to be very clever to see from his face that he was shocked at the appearance of Mrs. Murray.

"I carried their hand baggage ashore, and got the biggest tip I have ever had in my life.

"I can tell you, for the next voyage or so I didn't miss a newspaper. When I got back to London I went through the files and read every column, but there was no news of a big bank robbery, and I got a bit disappointed. I suppose, if you live long enough in the crook atmosphere, you get sort of crook-minded yourself, though, personally speaking, I have never committed a wrong action in my life, and there's no passenger who's ever travelled with me who can say that he lost five cents when I was in charge of his belongings.

"Round about June I was in Southampton, the weather being fine and my sister-in-law having brought her children there for a holiday. I don't like staying at Southampton, because I usually run across the one man I never want to meet. That's Mr. Fraser, who has a lodging in Southampton, and is always waiting for a ship that never comes. Ordinary people who want to touch you for money you can usually freeze off, but Fraser was a man I could never deny. He used to be chief officer of the old Riverine when I was officers' steward, and he'd shown me lots of kindnesses at a time when kindnesses count. And he being an officer and I a steward, our relationships were, so to speak, fixed for everlasting. He was dismissed from three ships for drunkenness, and eventually got a job on a ferry-boat, and lost that through colliding with a pier when he was on the verge of delirium tremens. Yet I'd never had the heart to avoid him when I saw him, in his down-at-heel shoes and his shabby coat, cross the road to meet me.

"I didn't mind the money: it was listening to his grievances that used to worry me. He hated our line worse than he hated poison. He reckoned that his ruin started when one of the company directors found him dead drunk in the passengers' saloon.

"It was difficult to listen to him and take his point of view. There's only one side to any question, and that's the side you're on, and naturally, I was on the side of sober officers. Even clever people cannot take impartial views. The best way of keeping the scales level is to put nothing in them, and I know a lot of people in this world who get the reputation of being well-balanced because they haven't any view one way or another. I prefer a passenger who thinks the food on the ship is bad to one who doesn't notice that it's good. There's a lot to be said for seeing the best in everything, and something for seeing the worst; but it's the chap who sees nothing in anything that gets my goat.

"I had kept away from the places where I was likely to meet Fraser, but on the third day, as I was going into the station to take my nephews and nieces to Southsea for a trip, I ran into him and got the shock of my life. He was as sober as a judge, and dressed as smart as a New York drummer at a convention. He held out his hand to me—he had the biggest, puffiest, reddest hands of any man I've known— and shook mine heartily.

"'How are you, Felix, my boy? I owe you a little money....'

"He put his hand in his pocket, pulled out a couple of fivers and pushed them on to me.

"'Have you come into a fortune, Mr. Fraser?' I asked.

"He roared with laughter.

"'No, no, my boy, but I've got a very good job.'

"For the first time in his life he didn't stop to tell me what he thought of the line, its officers and directors, but, waving his hand, strode off.

"When I got back to Southampton I made a few inquiries, but nobody could tell me anything except that he'd moved from the room he had occupied in one of the worst of the Southampton slums, and was staying at the South Western Hotel. Nobody knew what work he was doing or where the money came from, but certainly that didn't worry me. I was so glad to see the back of him, and to know that I had the freedom of Southampton once more, that I forgot all about Fraser until a month later, just before the first of the boat trains ran into the shed at Southampton, I saw him walk up the gangway with a brand new valise in his hand.

"He gave me a very cheerful greeting, and I carried his traps to his stateroom, though, as it happened, I was not his steward. As a matter of fact, I had spent all the morning putting the finishing touches to Mrs. Murray's suite. I had had a letter from Peter, asking me to look after his lady during the voyage, and telling me that she was travelling alone, so I scrounged a few extra flowers to decorate the sitting-room, and did what I could to make her state-room a home from home.

"I was on the gangway to receive them when they arrived—Peter, his wife and Dr. Lansen, and I brought them a bottle of champagne to the sitting-room. Peter Murray was nervous and irritable, snapped at me once or twice, but apologised immediately. It was clear there was some sort of strain between the three, and although the doctor and Ernestine Murray did most of the talking, they hardly said a thing worth saying.

"Peter went out with some jewels which he had to deposit in the purser's office, and I, being a bit curious, came back just as quickly as I could. I was fixing a cabin trunk in Mrs. Murray's bedroom when I heard her say:

"'You will come, won't you?'

"'Why, of course I will, my dear,' said the doctor in a low voice. 'I hope it will not be necessary and that the treatment will...'

"I couldn't hear for a bit, then I heard her say in a very low voice :

"'Peter mustn't be told—you do under-stand that, don't you, Doctor?'

"I didn't hear what he replied, because Peter Murray came in at that moment.

"After the siren went to signal passengers ashore, Murray took me aside and gave me five hundred dollars.

"'I want you to send two radio messages a day, telling me just how Mrs. Murray is. And, Felix, I don't want you to say she's any better than you know her to be. At the same time...'

"'I understand, sir,' I said.

"As a matter of fact, there was very little to tell during that voyage, because the lady was very bright and cheerful, though I could see she was missing Peter. I don't think my radios meant very much, because she seemed to be writing messages herself all the way across, and the wireless man told me that if they had lovesick wives on board like Mrs. Murray they'd have to double the staff.

"I saw her through the Customs at New York, though she had one or two shore friends to meet her. On the home trip we picked up Wally.

"'I've got to get back to work, Felix,' he said, the first time I had a chance of a chat with him. 'Doctors cost money, and I've missed one of the best seasons they've ever had on the Western Ocean—the O'Hara gang took twenty thousand dollars out of young Vanderveld. By the way, I saw an old friend of yours in Philadelphia, and she looked a pretty sick woman, too.'

"'Mrs. Murray?' I asked.

"He nodded.

"'They've got a swell place. I drove round and took a look at it. Certainly the real estate business is flourishing.'

"He must have seen Mrs. Murray the day she arrived in Philadelphia, and I told him that I'd brought her out from England.

"'Came alone, eh?' Wally was in-terested. 'Funny that love-bird let her go back to America alone.'

"He pinched his thick lip and stared at me like a blooming owl.

"'I heard a whisper in New York, Felix, about this fellow Stanson. It wasn't so much a whisper as a breath-in-the-ear. They say that Stanson's after a coup that will stagger humanity. Seeing Mrs. Murray in Phily, I naturally wondered, not dreaming that Peter would be in England—well, well, well! I don't think I'll stay long in Europe.'

"We dumped him at Cherbourg with a long-faced rubber merchant from Detroit. I don't know how much longer it was than it ought to have been, but I know he'd played a lot of picquet with Wally.

"The funny thing was that, looking after Mrs. Murray, I hadn't noticed the coming or going of Fraser, so when I met him in Southampton High Street I was naturally a bit surprised.

"'I came back by the next boat,' he said.

"He was still well-dressed, and had a diamond ring on his little finger. I think he must have had it specially built, for his little finger was like a small-sized banana.

"'I just had a look round New York, did a little business and came back. I shall be going out with you again some time this year.'

"I sort of lost interest in Fraser. I didn't see him the next time I was in Southampton, nor the next, but on the second autumn trip he must have come aboard very early, for I didn't know he was on the ship till one of the stewards told me. I was watching the arrival of the agricultural students. Our steerage space is very limited, and the whole of it had been booked up for a month for the accommodation of a party of students who were going out to Canada by way of New York. Although they were called students, the chief steward told me they were mostly farmers and farm helpers, who were being sent out to study Canadian and American methods, and as they filed up the gangway I couldn't help thinking that they'd be a more cheerful party if they'd brought their womenfolk. There wasn't a woman student amongst

'em, but, according to one of the steerage stewards, they were a nice, well-spoken lot of people, who didn't want to give trouble to anybody.

"Mr. Peter Murray was a passenger, and I had his suite all dolled up by the time he arrived. He wasn't as cheerful as you might expect a man to be who was going back to his wife, but, on the other hand, he was not at all glum.

"'The doctor sent his regards to you, Felix,' he said.

"'I was wondering whether the doctor would be a passenger,' said I, 'and I was quite disappointed not to see his name on the list.'

"Peter smiled and shook his head.

"'No, the doctor's getting lazy,' he said. 'I don't think he'll ever come to America again.'

"The last of the visitors had left the ship, and the signal was being given to take down the gangway, when I came on deck, in time to see a man running across the quay. He was followed by a porter carrying two bags. There was a few seconds' hurried conversation with the officer at the foot of the gangway, and then he dashed up and disappeared, but not before I had recognised him. I was down on the lower deck immediately.

"'Good morning, Dr. Lansen!' I said. 'This is an unexpected pleasure.'

"I think he was glad to see a familiar face.

"'I haven't got a ticket.'

"I took him to the purser. Fortunately, there was a vacant state-room, a passenger having missed the boat train. I took the doctor to Mr. Murray's state- room, and Peter Murray stared at him as though he were seeing a ghost.

"'For the love of Heaven, what are you doing here?' And then, quickly, 'Is anything wrong?'

"'Nothing at all,' said Lansen. 'I had a cable calling me to New York on rather an important matter. I drove down by car. I didn't dream I should catch the boat, but thank God I have!'

"He didn't stay long, and I thought I noticed that same sort of tension between the two that I had seen before. Lansen didn't come out of his cabin that night, and when I went to ask him to come to dinner with Murray said he had a head-ache.

"My old friend Wally was aboard, and as soon as I had finished with Mr. Murray I looked in at his state-room.

Looks like being a pleasant voyage, Felix,' he said cheerfully. 'I was lamping the passengers as they came aboard, and a good forty per cent, look suckers. I hope you've got none in your state-rooms?'

"I don't know whether I've explained before, but it's always been a standing arrangement with me that if I looked after one of the card Barons he never played cards with any of my other passengers. Not that it made any difference—there was always a gang or two aboard that I wasn't looking after.

"Although the Majoric invariably carried a full complement of card- sharps, we'd been very lucky in other respects. There had never been a big steal on the ship, and never what you would call a first-class scandal.

"The first night out, after dinner, it was the practice of the stewards to report to the purser any person they might have recognised, or that they knew in some other way to be a crook, and I weighed in as usual, reported Wally and a man named Yolaski, who I knew was a diamond smuggler. The purser scratched his nose and looked up at me.

"'Nobody else, Felix?'

"'No, sir.'

"'You might keep your ears open this voyage. We're carrying about seven million dollars in currency, and there's more jewellery in my safe than I've ever had before.'

"All the years I've been at sea I'd never heard a purser make a statement like that, and naturally I was taken aback. And then he asked me:

"'Do you know Fraser?'

"'Mr. Fraser, sir? Yes.'

"'What's his job? Why is he travelling?'

"I told him all I knew—which wasn't much.

"'Look him up,' said the purser, 'not to-night but pretty soon.'

"I didn't have to have much of an excuse, but on the Sunday evening just before dinner I strolled down to D deck, and, tapping at the door, walked

into his state-room. He had one of the biggest of the single-berth cabins on the boat, and when I walked in he was standing with his back to me, leaning over the table on which he had spread a large chart. He turned as he heard the door click, and I never saw such a look of alarm in a man's face as I saw in his. For a long time he stared, and then:

"'Hullo, Felix! What the devil do you want?'

"As he asked the question he folded up the chart hastily.

"'I thought I'd look in to see if there was anything I could do for you, Mr. Fraser,' I said.

"'Oh, did you?' He was breathing very quickly, as a man would if he were a bit frightened. 'No, there's nothing you can do for me, Felix. I was just looking over the Western Ocean chart. Like old times, eh? Not that I ever want to go to sea again. It's a dog's life, Felix—up on the bridge in all kinds of weather, no home life...

"He had his eyes fixed on me all the time, as though he were trying to read what was in my mind.

"'Come in and have a drink.'

"He put the chart under the settee, and, opening his bag, took out a bottle of whisky. 'I never drink on duty, sir,' I began, but he interrupted me hastily.

"'Neither do I, Felix. If anybody asks you whether you've seen me drinking, you say, "No." I take a little nip now and again.'

"'Who's likely to ask me that, Mr. Fraser?'

"He shrugged his shoulders.

"'Anybody might. You know how yarns get about. I was ruined by that kind of gossip. I carry a little whisky to give to my friends, if they happen to call, but personally I don't drink at all.'

"I knew he was lying, but I also knew that he couldn't be drinking as he used.

"I must say that at the first glance at that chart I saw nothing unusual; but it was beginning to grow on me that some-thing was wrong. I couldn't understand why he had been in such a hurry to hide it, why he was so anxious that I shouldn't tell people he was drinking.

"I saw the purser late that night and told him what I'd seen, and I told him that as the chart was bundled up and pushed under the settee I'd heard the rattle of metal.

"'He must have been using compasses. I wonder what he was working out,' said the purser. 'Where is he now?'

"'Just gone up on deck.'

"The purser got out of his chair.

"'I'll go up and talk with him,' he said. 'I know him slightly. You can follow me up. When you see I've got him hooked, go down and have a look at that chart and tell me what it's all about.'

"I carried out instructions, and followed the purser till I saw him talking to Fraser, then I slipped down to D deck and into the old chief officer's room. The chart had been put away somewhere, but I found it in the drawer of the little writing-table. It was, as Fraser had said, a chart of the Western Ocean, and the only marking was a round pencil spot about 600 miles south of our usual track. I put away the map and reported to the purser, and when I got back to my pantry found that Murray's bell was ringing.

"He was sitting up in bed, smoking a cigarette. He hadn't seen Lansen for more than ten minutes that day, to my know-ledge; for some reason they avoided one another. It was a bit puzzling, remembering that they were very good friends. I put it down to the fact that they might have had a quarrel before Murray left, but there was nothing in their conversation to suggest that they'd had any differences at all.

"'What is the weather report, Felix?' asked Peter when I came in.

"I told him there was an anti-cyclone over the whole of the ocean, and that it was going to be a very fine trip.

"'There is no radio for you, sir,' I said, thinking that was why he had rung for me.

"'I don't expect any,' he said, which was rather extraordinary. 'Mrs. Murray doesn't know I'm on the Majoric,' he went on. 'She thinks I have gone to the Continent. I want this to be a little surprise for her.' Then: 'What's the matter with the doctor? Is he ill or something?'

"'Not that I know, sir.'

"'Has he asked for me at all—you needn't tell him that I made this inquiry, Felix.'

"And then, quite unexpectedly, he put a question that took my breath away.

"'Are you a rich man?'

"'Me, sir? Good Lord, no!'

"He smiled quietly.

"'I've heard that stewards save money and buy real estate. I suppose the only rich men are fellows like Stanson.'

"It was the first time I had heard the name for a month. He switched the conversation back to my finances.

"'I'll tell you how you can get rich, Felix—do as you're told.'

"I didn't quite get that, and said so, but he did not explain. He asked me a lot about the ship, how many crew we carried, what sort of a man was the purser and the captain; did I know anything about the ship's officers. I think a lot of his questions were unnecessary, for once, when I made a slip about the accommodation, he corrected me. It was a queer, lop-sided sort of conversation about nothing in particular, and I've often wondered just what he was going to tell me and why he changed his mind.

"The Monday morning was bright and cold, with a cloudless sky, and the fog we had expected to meet was not dense and not more than forty or fifty miles thick. Though the weather was chilly, the decks were crowded with passengers, and any-body who had any doubt as to whether there was money aboard would have given up wondering when they held a shilling sweepstake on the run of the boat and the pool amounted to £2,000.

"The doctor and Peter Murray were a lot together that day; they paced up and down the deck, and dined in Peter's suite. Peter talked about his wife, but the conversation sort of hung fire, and I think they were both relieved when the doctor got up and went to his cabin.

"Now all that happened on the Tuesday I didn't see, being only one man and not being able to be in twenty places at once. But I'm going to tell the story as I heard it from a dozen different people—stewards, and especially the captain's stewards—as well as what I saw with my own eyes.

"It had been a fine day, with hardly a ripple on the water, and that night there was a fancy dress dance in the social saloon. In the well of the fore-

deck, where the steerage were accommodated, the agricultural people had a concert, with songs and recitations, but it was a bit chilly for open-air entertainments, and that closed down at half-past nine.

"I didn't see Fraser on deck that day, and his steward, who was a chum of mine, told me that he had been sleeping and hadn't been out of bed except for his meals. Round about midnight, just before I turned in, I went up on to the boat-deck for a smoke, and saw Fraser walking up and down in a heavy overcoat, the collar of which he had turned up. He didn't see me between the boats, but I both saw and heard him, for he breathed heavily and he walked heavily.

"At four o'clock in the morning, just after the watch was changed, two men walked into the wireless house. The opera-tor was putting through a batch of letter wires, and he had finished one when he heard the door open. The two men who came in had the tops of black silk stockings pulled over their faces; he could only see their eyes, and each man carried two automatics.

"'Don't touch that key, Sparks,' said the first of the men. 'Back up against the wall.'

"As the operator put up his hands and backed the second man leaned over and sent the 'finish' signal before he turned the switch that cut off communication. At this very moment, as far as could be made out, four men came up on to the bridge and held up the officers and quartermaster. They were hustled from the bridge and their places were taken by a masked man with big, trembling hands. He breathed heavily, they tell me, and I wouldn't give two guesses as to who he was.

"Everything was timed to the second. The new quartermaster took the place of the old one and turned the ship sharply to port. It wasn't done very cleverly, because the ship heeled over, and the engineer of the watch thought we were avoiding an iceberg and rang through to the chief engineer.

"The Majoric is an oil-burner, and the stoking crew a small one. The three gunmen who suddenly appeared were able to do very much as they wanted.

"I don't know what happened in the officers' quarters, but the deck hands and the watch on deck were called aft by one of the leaders of the gang and told just what would happen to them if they made any fuss.

"At four o'clock the chief steward woke me up and took me to the purser's office. Behind the curtains was the cabin where the purser slept, and in there, as he explained to us, were two gunmen.

"'The ship's in the hands of this crowd,' said the purser, who was as white as death, 'and they seem to be dealing with the situation intelligently. The passengers are not to know.'

"There were half a dozen stewards there, the senior man from each deck, and we had orders to pass the word to the other stewards.

"'They say that the only people to be locked up are the steerage passengers, and they've got a guard there.'

"Apparently the crowd had made a very systematic search of the ship—the arms store had been cleared. All the officers and the chief and second engineers were prisoners in their quarters, but when the sun rose there was no sign of force, except for the two machine-guns which were mounted on the bridge, and which, naturally, the passengers could not see. To make matters absolutely certain, a big board, which must have been painted months in advance, was shown on each gangway leading to the boat-deck, prohibiting passengers from going up, and a quartermaster was stationed at the foot of every gangway to prevent the boat-deck being used.

"The purser was practically in control of the ship, as far as he could be in control of anything. The leader of the gang gave all his instructions through Mr. Dinnett— which was the purser's name—and no secret was made of their plans. The ship was to steer to a point six hundred miles due south, and at this place a cargo boat would be waiting; the bullion and the con-tents of the purser's safe would be transferred. The wireless apparatus would be destroyed, and the Majoric would then lie for forty-eight hours before she steamed to the nearest port.

"'They say they'll leave two or three people on board to see that those instructions are carried out, and I've no doubt they will.'

"None of the passengers who went on deck that morning could have guessed what had happened in the night. It was too cold for the boat deck to be popular, and people hardly recognised the prohibition, whilst the stewards and the deck hands were too scared to speak. I can tell you that, as far as I was concerned, I was not at all anxious to be knocked off by somebody for opening my mouth. When I took Mr. Murray his breakfast I said not a word.

"Murray and the doctor dined together that night. I could see that the doctor was a little troubled about something. As I was serving the coffee he asked me:

"'Are there any icebergs about, Felix?'

"'No, doctor, I've not heard of any.'

"'Then, why have we changed our course?' he asked. 'We're steaming south. The sun set directly to starboard.'

"I wished then I hadn't been so emphatic about the icebergs.

"'Probably we're steering out of bad weather,' said Murray; but that didn't satisfy the doctor.

"He was up on deck at daybreak, watching the sun rise. I took him some coffee.

"'Is there any kind of trouble on this ship?' he asked.

"'Not that I know of,' I said.

"'We are still steaming south. I wonder whether I can see the captain?'

"'What has the captain done that he should be wakened up at this hour of the morning?' said Murray's voice behind us.

He was dressed, and smoking a cigarette through a long ebony holder.

"'Do you see?' The doctor pointed to the horizon.

"'Sunrise—very beautiful,' said Peter coolly.

"'There's something wrong, Murray. My God! I'm terrified!'

"I saw Peter's eyes narrow as he looked at the doctor.

"'Terrified? What about?' he asked sharply.

"'About—things. I must be in Philadelphia by Saturday. Even that may be too late.'

"I saw Murray's face go white.

"'You must be in Philadelphia on Saturday morning?' he repeated. Neither of them seemed to notice me. 'Why?'

"The doctor didn't answer for a minute, and then he said:

"'I have an engagement.'

"'You said it was in New York, doctor. Why do you want to be in Philadelphia on Saturday?'

"Dr. Lansen shook his head.

"'There is a reason.'

"'Is it anything to do with Ernestine?' He was white to the lips now.

"Lansen nodded.

"'Yes, she cabled me—that's why I'm on my way out. The trouble is as I suspected, and I could not trust anybody else to operate.'

"'Operate?' Murray looked at him almost foolishly, but Lansen did not meet his eyes. 'Is she in danger, doctor?'

"After a time the answer came.

"'Yes, but she didn't want you to know. I got the cable just after you left last Saturday morning. It was from Van Zyl, the surgeon. He wouldn't tackle the operation himself; he knows I've done it a dozen times, and besides, she asked him to cable me.'

"Murray was clutching on to a stanchion as though he could not trust himself to move.

"'This isn't a lie, is it?' he asked huskily. 'You haven't heard... this isn't a ruse.... God! You wouldn't do a thing like that, Doctor?'

"Dr. Lansen looked at him wonderingly.

"'I don't know what you're talking about, my dear fellow. I wish I'd told you all this before.'

"'I wish to God you had!' said Peter, and, turning suddenly, he darted through a companionway and disappeared.

"I went down after him. His cabin door was locked, but I thought I heard him speaking—there is telephonic communication between all the state-rooms on the Majoric.

"As I came along the corridor the ship heeled over—she was changing her course. Five minutes later I heard the telegraph bell ring, and then, after a few seconds, the thud of the screw ceased. There were very few passengers about at that hour, and the staff had the ship to them-selves.

"The first intimation I had that there was a change of plan was when I saw the old captain come running down the companionway and dash into the purser's office. According to what the captain's steward told me, the officer's

cabin, which had been locked all the previous day and night, had been suddenly unlocked, and the second officer, who was the first to come on to the deck, found the bridge deserted. The two machine-guns that had been there had been thrown overboard. He whistled for the quartermaster of the watch; one of the deck hands went aft to the men's quarters and brought a couple of quartermasters to the bridge. There wasn't a sign of any of the black masked men. They were gone from the engine-room, gone from the wire-less room, had disappeared as though they had jumped into the sea.

"Only the steerage quarters were locked and bolted, and the agricultural students seemed to be the only people that had any kind of grievance. When the ship was under proper command I went down to Mr. Fraser's cabin. He was dead asleep, as he was entitled to be, for he had been on the bridge for over twenty-four hours, if my suspicions were correct.

"The wireless was working between the captain and the company all that day and night. Cipher and code messages that broke the heart of the operator went spinning to and fro, and twelve hours out of New York the stewards were called together at two o'clock in the morning and the purser said a few words.

"'If anybody has had a bad dream on this ship about something that's happened the best thing he can do is to wake up,' he said. 'We've broken a propeller, and that's why we'll be in New York about forty-eight hours late. If there's any sort of a story published in the New York papers, it will be denied by the company, and there's no man on this ship will sail again under the house-flag. Is that clear? We've had no trouble and no casualties.'

"He was right up to that minute. Just outside of New York I took a radio message down to Mr. Murray. He read it twice, then folded it very calmly and handed it back to me.

"'Take that to the doctor,' he said.

"When I was in the corridor I took a peek at the message:

"REGRET MRS. MURRAY DIED THREE THIS MORNING.—VAN ZYL.

"The doctor's lips were trembling as he read the message. He put down the radio and without a word walked quickly out of the cabin towards Peter Murray's state-room. We found some difficulty in opening the door, because, when Peter shot himself, he fell against it.

III. — THE BUOY THAT DID NOT LIGHT

"WHAT'S that word that they use to describe an airplane that can come down on the sea or the land? (It was the steward inquiring). Amphibian! That's it. It was the name our old captain gave 'em. In the days when I was steward on board the old Majestic—you remember how she killed a stoker every voyage—there used to be a crowd that worked its way across twice a year—the only crowd I ever knew that mixed it.

"Amphibians are rare. A man either works ships or he works towns. If a ship's gang works a town at all, it is with people they've got to know on board ship. Some-body said that a ship is like a prison, with a chance of being drowned. It is certainly a bit too restricted for people who want to sell gold bricks, or have had a lot of money left to them to distribute to the poor, providing they can find the right kind of man to give it away. The point I want to make is this : that the ship crowd and the land crowd very seldom work together, and if the land people do travel by sea, they've got to behave themselves, and not go butting in to any little game that happens to be in progress in the smoke-room. The ship crowd naturally do not go to the captain or the purser and complain that there is an unauthorised gang on board eating into their profits. The case is settled out of court; and when you've real bad men travelling.... Well, I've seen some curious things.

"There was a fellow, quite unknown to me except from hearsay, called Hoyle. He was a land man in a big way. Banks and bullion trains and post cars were his specialty, but there was hardly a piece of work he couldn't do if there was money to it.

"If he'd kept to land work, where by all accounts he was an artist, he'd have been lucky. You can't properly work both. I've had that from some of the biggest men that ever travelled the sea. What my old skippers called 'The Barons of the Nimble Pack' work in a perfectly straightforward manner. All they need is a pair of hands, a pack of cards, a glib tongue and a nut. Sometimes they use more packs than one, but there is no fanciful apparatus, no plots and plannings, guns, masks or nitro-glycerine. It's a profession like doctoring or lawyering— peaceful and, in a manner of speaking, inoffensive. When a land crowd comes barging into the smoke-room they're treated civilly so long as they're travelling for pleasure. Otherwise. ... Well, it's natural. If you're poaching a stream you don't want people throwing half-bricks into it. There's only one sensible way of being unlawful when you're poaching, and that is to poach.

"I've seen a bit of amphibian work and I'm telling you I don't want to see any more. In the year 19— we went out of Southampton with a full passenger

list, the date being the 21st of December, and we carried to all appearance as nice a passenger list as you could wish to meet. Mostly Americans going home, though there was a fair sprinkling of British. We had a couple of genteel gangs on board—fellows who never played high or tried for big stakes, but managed to make a reasonable living. Tad Hesty of Pittsburg ran one, and a London fellow named Lew Isaacs managed the other. I think he was a Jew. A very nice, sensible fellow was Lew, polite and gentlemanly, and I've never heard a com-plaint against him, though I've travelled a score of voyages with him.

"'Felix,' he said to me one day, 'moderation in all things is my motto. Nobody was ever ruined by taking small profits. A man who loses a hundred dollars or twenty pounds doesn't squeal. Touch him for a thousand, and the pilot boat comes out looking like an excursion steamer, it's that full of bulls. A hundred dollars is speech-less, Felix. It may give a tiny squeak, but it apologises immediately afterwards. A thousand dollars has a steam siren, and ten thousand dollars makes a noise like a bomb in a powder plant.'

"He and his two friends used to share the same cabin. One was always dressed quiet and respectable, and never went into the smoke-room at all. He used to sit up on the deck, reading a book and getting acquainted with the serious-minded people from the Middle West, or the North of England mill-owners who think they're sporty because they own a couple of grey-hounds that get into the second round of the Waterloo Cup.

"Lew was on very good terms with the Pittsburg crowd, and I've seen them drinking together and exchanging views about the slackness of trade and the income tax and things of that kind, without any ill word passing between them.

"A ship isn't out of port twenty-four hours before a steward knows the history of everybody on board; and the smoke-room steward told me that there was nobody else on board but the Pittsburg crowd and this man Lewis and his friends. In fact, it looked so much like being such a quiet voyage, that only the little cards warning passengers not to play with strangers were put up in the smoke-room. If the Flack gang had been travelling, we'd have put up the usual warning with four-inch type.

"I had eight state-rooms to look after. No. 181 to 188, F Deck. A Chicago man had one, a Mr. Mellish, who was a buyer at a St. Louis store, was another, a young English officer—Captain Fairburn—attached to the British Embassy had another and the remainder were booked by Colonel Roger Markson for his party. There was the colonel, a tall, solemn-looking man, his wife, who was younger than him, and always seemed to be crying in her

cabin, his son, a slick young fellow, generally dressed to kill, and there was Miss Colport.

"Personally, I don't take much notice of a passenger's personal appearance. I judge 'em by their hair-brushes. There's woodens, generally missionaries or fellows like reporters, whose passage is paid by somebody else; there's ivory backs (the captain's was ivory) and silver backs and horn backs, with now and again a gold back. Gold backs are usually on their honeymoon. I can't remember whether this Miss Colport was an ivory or a silver. Maybe she was silver, for she was Markson's secretary and he'd got her in London, where she was stranded and anxious to get home. Not that she had any friends in New York. By all accounts she came from the west and went to London to take up a position as stenographer to an uncle, who first went broke in the rubber slump and then died.

"I knew she was a good-looker long before I saw the trouble she was making with the British Embassy. This captain used to be up hours before breakfast waiting for her on deck. Whether they knew or did not know one another before they came on board, I can't say. I should think not. On board ship you get an introduction from the after combing, as they say. The colonel and his son had breakfast in bed for the first day, for the Beramic is a cow of a ship, and she'd roll in a saucerful of milk.

"Anyway, somebody must have given them the word that their young lady secretary was getting acquainted with the British Army, for the second morning out young Markson (Julius by name) told me to call him at seven. And about five minutes after he'd climbed to the upper deck Miss came down, looking very pink in the face and not a bit pleased.

"Julius was mad about the girl. Used to follow her about like a tame cat or a wild tiger, whichever way you look at it. What first got me thinking was a bit of a conversation I heard between him and his father one afternoon when I was polishing the brasses in the alleyway,

"'I've got a few words to say to you, Julius,' said the colonel. He had a growling, complaining voice at the best of times, but now it was like a file on granite. 'If you get any pleasure out of making up to that girl, you're entitled to get it, so long as you're not too serious. I'll do all the serious stuff in that quarter.'

"'She'll skip to Denver as soon as she lands,' said Julius sulkily. And something in his voice told me that they were not father and son. I don't know what it was, but I jumped to that conclusion and I was right.

"I heard the colonel laugh, and it was the sort of laugh that has a bark to it.

"'Have I paid her passage to New York to have her skip anywhere?' he asked. 'She's going to be very useful. Min's getting past her work. Colport is the woman I've been looking for....'

"That's all I heard, but I knew that 'Min' was Mrs. Roger Markson, because I'd heard him call her that lots of times. I had a good look at her after that. She was a woman just over 30, who used to make up a lot. I began to understand why her eyes were always red and why she was so scared looking when the colonel spoke to her. I knew, of course, that she was too young to be the mother of Julius. At first I thought that she was the Colonel's second wife. Now I guessed that none of the three was related. It's a wicked world.

"The next day was Christmas Eve, and some queer things happened. It was in the morning that the deck steward met me and asked me to take Mrs. Markson's wrap to her.

"I took it up and found them leaning against the rail opposite the smoke-room door. Julius was there, scowling at the captain and Miss Colport, who were sitting together, talking.

"Just as I was putting on the lady's wrap, Lew Isaacs came out of the smoke-room. I was standing behind the lady, looking over her shoulder, and I caught one glimpse of his face. His expression didn't exactly change as he looked at her. I don't know how I'd describe it.... I think it must have been his eyes that lit, but he took no further notice and strolled down the deck with his hands in his pockets and his cap on the side of his head.

"'Good God!' said the colonel. 'I didn't know he was on board.'

"As I fixed the wrap I could feel Mrs. Markson tremble.

"'He works this line,' she said. 'I told you in London....'

"'That will do, steward,' said the colonel, and I had to go away at a moment when, as you might say, the story was getting interesting.

"It was a heavy day for me, and heavier than I expected, owing to Santa Claus.

"We always do our best to amuse passengers, and on this Christmas Eve a grand fancy-dress ball was arranged, which seemed to be passing off without anything unusual happening. Lew Isaacs spent the evening in the smoke-room playing bridge for a dollar a hundred, and the Pittsburg crowd had got hold of a man in the movie picture business, and was listening

admiringly to all he was telling them about the way he won four thousand dollars from another fellow. This movie picture man was one of those kind of people you meet on board a ship, who are often sober.

"Well, the fancy-dress ball came off, and about eleven o'clock, when people were getting noisy, at what I call the streamer and confetti stage, a Santa Claus with a big sack on his back and a bundle of presents in his hand, went along all the alleyways, into every cabin he found open, and left a little cellular doll—celluloid, is it? You can buy them for a penny. A little doll without any clothes on except a bit of ribbon, with 'A Merry Christmas' printed on it. I saw him ; lots of other stewards saw him; the purser saw him and wanted him to have a drink, but no, he said he had a lot to do, and he was right.

"Of course there was trouble in the morning. Nobody who has lost a pearl stick pin or a pair of earrings or a gold watch and chain or a cigarette case, is going to be satisfied with a two-cent doll in exchange. That old Santa Claus had cleared out every cabin of its valuables, and there were very few people on board who enjoyed their Christmas dinner. The fortunate thing, from the stewards' point of view, was that everybody had seen this jolly old gentleman with white whiskers, and one or two had slapped him on the back. They were all anxious now to slap him almost any place, so long as they could lay hands on him. Every steward on board, all the ships' officers, and some of the engineering officers, spent Christmas Day making a thorough and systematic search of all the cabins. Naturally, the first people to be suspected were the stoke-hold staff. I say 'naturally' because it is a popular idea among ships' officers that, if anything is pinched, it is a stoker that did it. Then the third-class saloons were searched, bags and boxes were opened; then finally—and it was the first place they should have looked—they had a tour of inspection of the first-class accommodation.

"One of the first persons they sent for was Mr. Lew Isaacs (who is a Hebrew, I'm pretty certain).

"'Now, Isaacs,' said the first purser, 'you know what happened on the ship last night. I want you to help me. You needn't tell me that you and friends were playing cards in the smoke-room, and that all your crowd was there, because I know that. Who else is on board?'

"If I never move from this carpet, Mr. Cole,' said Lew very earnestly, 'I have no more idea who did this job than an unborn child. I am not saying,' he went on, 'that if there was a gentleman on board engaged in that kind of business, I should give you his name, because my motto is "live and let live," But it so happens that there isn't anybody that I know. When I heard about

this you could have knocked me down with a feather,' he said. 'Naturally, it's not to my interest to make people suspicious and tighten up their wads, and I consider that, from my own point of view, the voyage has been spoilt, and every particle of enjoyment has been taken out of it.'

"'That's all very well,' said the purser, looking at him hard (I heard all this from Lacey, who does for the purser), 'but there's been a complaint made, and your name has been mentioned by Colonel Markson. He says he knows that you are a card man and a dangerous character.'

"Lew shook his head.

"'I don't know the colonel,' he said, 'except by sight. He's probably mistaken. It's easy to make mistakes. The first time I saw him I mistook him for a fellow named Hoyle that's wanted in London for the London and City Bank affair—they got away with twelve thousand pounds. Tell him that, will you, and apologise to him for my mind harbouring such libellous thoughts.'

"On Christmas evening I saw the colonel talking to young Captain Fairburn at the door of .Captain Fairburn's state-room. They were very friendly and they were both laughing.

"'I'm afraid I shall have to give you a cheque if I lose any more,' said the captain.

"That was all. When he'd gone down to dinner I went into his cabin. He had been playing cards. How they got to be friendly I don't know. You can never keep track of things like that. You see a man and a girl pass without noticing one another the first day out. By the time the Irish coast is out of sight they are meeting on deck at daybreak and getting in the way of the watch that has to scrub down. Before they get to Sandy Hook they are receiving congratulations by wireless from their friends and relatives.

"Young Captain Fairburn came in after dinner to get some cigarettes.

"'Excuse me, Captain,' I said, 'but I shouldn't play cards in your state-room if I were you.'

"'Why not, steward?' he asked, surprised. 'Is it against the rules of the ship?'

"'No, sir,' says I, 'but it's dangerous.'

"'Stuff!' said he. 'I was only playing with Colonel Markson—you're not suggesting that he is a thief, are you?'

"'No, sir,' I says. When people start asking me if I suggest that somebody is a thief, I resign.

"That is why stewards can't help passengers. Passengers know it all. They're men of the world, by gum!

"As soon as I had finished my eight state-rooms, I had to join one of the search parties that were hunting through the ship for the lost property. Our purser was still certain that matter must occupy space, and we searched space from the crow's-nest to the bunkers. I didn't see or hear anything of what happened in the smoke-room, and I never knew till the next morning that the Colonel and Julius had played cut-throat poker with young Fairburn in full view of the smoke-room, and that the Captain had lost a lot more than he could afford. In fact, the cheque he gave was for four figures. The deck steward told me that when they came out on the promenade, he heard the colonel say to Julius: 'That settles our young friend's matrimonial plans—if he had any.'

"At this moment I was on the boat deck having my second pipe. I was naturally lying doggo—in other words, in-visible—not wishing to be seen by any of the ship's officers or the master at arms, and the night being cold, I was wedged between the second officer's cabin and the wireless house. From where I sat I had a limited view, and if the couple hadn't stopped right opposite to where I was, I'd have missed everything. But I always have been lucky that way. All that I could hear at first was a woman crying, and somehow I guessed it was 'Mrs. Markson.' Perhaps it was because she was the only woman I had seen crying since the voyage started.

"But when I heard the man's voice, why, I nearly jumped. It was Lew Isaacs.

"'Oh, Lew, I've treated you badly. I don't deserve anything....'

"I saw him put his arm round her shoulder, and I knew by the way her sobs were stifled that she was crying on to his chest.

"'I bear no ill will, Minnie,' he said. 'I've always said that if you liked Hoyle better than me, you were entitled to marry him, old girl.'

"There was a long silence, and then she said :

"'I'm not married, Lew.'

"He said nothing for a minute, and when he did speak, he seemed to have turned the subject.

"'He told the purser that I was in that Father Christmas job. That's the kind of swine Hoyle is. Where's the stuff, Min....? You needn't tell me. It is in the calcium canister of one of these life-buoys. Had it ready planted and painted and substituted it one dark night, eh? It's an old trick of Hoyle's.'

"My hair almost stood up. Round all the promenade decks are life-buoys hooked to the rail. Attached are cans containing a chemical to light up the moment it touches water. The lid of the canister is jerked off automatically as the life-buoy is thrown. It was the simplest idea in the world. Hoyle had a duplicate life-buoy in his cabin baggage. One dark night—probably the first night out—he'd carry it up to the boat deck and put it in the place of another that he'd throw overboard after cutting the cord that opened the calcium tin. He wouldn't have a chance of doing it on the promenade, but the boat deck was dark and was easily reached.

"They were talking in low tones and I could only catch an occasional word. Then, just as they were turning to go, I heard her whisper:

"'There he is!'

"It was the colonel. I caught a whiff of his cigar before I saw him.

"'Hullo! That's Lew Isaacs, isn't it? Meeting old friends, eh, Min?'

"'Hoyle, I've got a word or two to say to you. The first is business. You've been breaking into our game to-night with that young officer. Tad is pretty mad about it.'

"'Got a franchise to work the Western Ocean, Lew? What do I have to do—get a written permission before I work a ship?'

"'That's one thing,' said Lew. 'Here's another, and that is business too. You told the purser that I was in your Santa Claus game.'

"'He knew all about you,' said the colonel, and I saw the red end of his cigar gleaming and fading. 'It did you no harm, and testified to my respectability—that's right, eh, Lew? Anything more?'

"Lew struck a match to light his cigarette, and I saw his face. Saw the woman's too—just for a fraction of a second.

"'You've got a young girl in your outfit—secretary or something. What's the great idea?'

"The colonel laughed softly.

"'Min's been talking, eh? Jealous. Well, Lew, it's like this: Men grow old and it doesn't matter. Looks are not my asset. They are in the case of Min. There's no sense in seeing these things sentimentally. When a card man loses his fingers he's finished, isn't he? When Min loses her looks.... Well, be sensible. I can't work with a plain woman. She's got to hook first time, Lew. Isn't that common sense? It's tough on Min, but I'm going to play fair. She's got a big roll coming to her"

"'What about the girl? She's a decent woman and a countrywoman of mine,' said Lew.

"Hoyle laughed again.

"'I didn't know that a Jew had a country, but we won't argue. She's a mighty nice girl, and when she's a little wiser than she is at present.... Anyway, we're not going to quarrel.'

"I saw the dark figure of Lew. He was leaning back with both his elbows on the rail.

"'I never quarrel with a man who keeps his gun in his hand all the time,' he said, and I think that one struck home, for the colonel moved kind of startled.

"'Besides,' said Lew, 'I'm not actually in this. Off you go, Min, I want a chat about this Father Christmas notion.'

"He took the arm of the colonel, and they went forward, and I followed Mrs. Markson down the deck. The first person I went to see was the chief purser. I don't want to say anything against the chief pursers of the 'Starcuna' Line, but all I can say is that if there's one with the brain of a Napoleon, I've never sailed with him. Our chief purser at the time was a man who thought in about fifty phrases, one of which I've told you. 'Do nothing precipitate' was another. 'Dereliction of duty' was also a great favourite. I don't know what it means and I'll bet he didn't either.

"'It's an extraordinary story,' he said, 'and I'll report the matter to the captain first thing in the morning. We must do nothing precipitate. But what were you doing on the boat deck, Jenks, smoking?

That was a derelict ion of duty, surely! However, we'll wait until the morning. I was certain the missing property would be found. Matter must occupy space.'

"I was so agitated and put out> that I went out to the promenade deck and helped the steward on duty stack up the chairs and collect the rugs and the library books. It was getting late, and I spotted Miss Col-port and the captain very close together and looking over the rail. I suppose the sea was vaster than ever that night, for if they weren't holding hands then I'm inexperienced. I can tell hand-holders a mile off.

"Farther along the deck was Mrs. Markson and Julius. They were talking together, too, but not so friendly.

"It was late, and some of the bulkhead lights were out. I saw the second officer coming along the deck in his heavy over-coat and sea boots, and at that minute something flashed past the rail.

"I heard the shriek, and then the second officer yelled:

"'Man overboard!'

"He sprang to the rail, lifted up a buoy, and flung it as the Beramic heeled over to port and the engines rang astern.

"'The calcium light's not burning,' shouted the second, and, racing along the deck, he flung over a second buoy. It hardly touched the water before it burst into a green flame.

"'That works all right—what in hell was wrong with the other?' asked the second officer.

"The Beramic was moving in a slow circle, and the watch had the fore lifeboat into the water in double quick time. The deck was crowded now. The passengers had flocked out of the saloon and the smoke-room, and were crowding up the companionway in their dressing-gowns. I think it was the 'man boat' signal on the siren that roused 'em. The boat pulled round and reached the second buoy, but the first they never found, nor the man either.

"'What is it, steward?'

"I looked round and saw Mr. Lew Isaacs. He was in his pyjamas and dressing-gown.

"A man overboard, sir,' I said , 'and they threw him a buoy that had no calcium tank. I think it was Colonel Markson.'

"'How extraordinary!' said Mr. Lew Isaacs.

"The captain had an inquiry next morning, and I told all that I'd heard. Mr. Isaacs said he had never been on the boat deck, and so did Mrs. Markson. All the life-buoys were examined, but none were found that had jewellery in the canister.

"After the inquiry was over the captain had a talk with me.

"'Two against one, Jenks,' he said. 'This had better be an accident or a suicide, or anything you like. We don't want this yarn of yours to get into the newspaper, do you understand?'

"'Yes, sir,' I said.

"'And don't smoke on the boat deck, steward. If you want to smoke, come and have a pipe with me on the bridge.'

"A very sarcastic person was the skipper of the Beramic.

"I don't think Captain Fair burn was as poor as Markson thought—even though his cheque was never presented.

"The reason why I think this is because, when he came back to the Beramic about six months later, he had the honeymoon suite, and Mrs. Fairburn (Miss Colport, that was) had the dandiest set of gold back brushes I've ever seen."

IV. — THE LEFT PASS

"THERE was a lady artist named Louie Something. I've been several trips with her," (the steward speaking), "though I haven't seen much of her this past six years. I guess she's married—she was rich enough.

"She was one of these new kind of artists. She'd put bits of different coloured paint on to a canvas, and whatever you thought it looked like, it was.

"'Yes, Felix,' she said to me once when I was admiring a bit of her work, 'that is a picture of Flamborough Head. I've never seen Flamborough Head. I just obey the Hidden Urge in me and give visible expression to the Inner Vision of Things.'

"One of our stewards told me after that she'd been painting a picture of a lifeboat on the boat deck, and maybe it was that after all. She's married now, I suppose— she had whips of money.

"But what I remember about her was that she didn't paint for a living or because she wanted to get into the National Gallery.

"'I love Art for its own sake, Felix,' she said to me lots of times. 'I just love to go on painting because it is in my soul.'

"Often and often I've carried her paint-box and a chair on to the boat deck and stood by watching the colours being squeezed out of tubes, just like tooth-paste, and seen 'em mixed up and laid on to a white cardboard, a bit of green here and a bit of yellow there, till the whole card was covered. And whichever way you took the picture, it was something. You could find a sort of resemblance to any-thing that happened to be in your mind. There is a whole lot in this business of art for art's sake, but it can be carried too far.

"There's a lot of fun in sailing out of port without a destination, but you're liable to drift back to the place you started from without having been to any place that matters. It gives you a fine feeling of in-dependence, but it also sours you up to pass a packet that's doing twenty knots in a straight line from port to port. Half the fun in life is working out your position from day to day and seeing the red crosses on the chart get nearer and nearer to Sandy Hook.

"When I was steward on the old Numanic there was a man named Stoney Barton who travelled with us regularly. He was one of the cleverest card-sharps that ever sailed the Western Ocean. He was one of those solitary workers who didn't have to travel a circus. His method was to sit in at any

game of bridge and make his killing without assistance. It was a good graft, especially at bridge, because often his partner would be a highly respectable banker or business man who had no idea that Stoney got his grand slams out of stacked cards. Naturally the partner won too, and that made it easier to collect.

"This graft, if you're clever enough to work it, is the safest and surest of all. The funny thing about bridge parties is that they always want a fourth, and the richer the players, the more anxious they are to pick on somebody who doesn't look as if he could afford to lose.

"Stoney's method was to sit in a corner of the smoke-room with a book on bridge problems and a deck of cards, and work out the teasers in the book. And as every guy who plays bridge thinks he knows it all, he was usually surrounded by people who told him where he was wrong and how they'd have done it.

"He could practically choose his own party, though they didn't know this.

"He made a good income without a chance of getting into trouble. Once he was invited down to a millionaire's camp in the Adirondacks, and often he got dinner-party invitations in New York and London. That was the beauty of his system—he not only won money for himself, but for his partners—and they were his friends for life.

"There was a detective in New York named Dicker, who hated Stoney worse than poison. It appears that Stoney was very sweet on Dicker's daughter, who was a high-school girl and quite a lady, for Dicker had made more money than any detective had ever made honestly. They say... but why repeat scandal?

"Elsie Dicker made a couple of trips to Europe, once to finish her education and once to make sure, and on the second of these trips she met Stoney, a fine up-standing fellow, good-looking and about ten years older than she.

"Stoney gave up business for that trip and danced around that young lady as though she were a queen of Babylon and he a Christian slave. He was, in fact, a Reformed Wesleyan on his mother's side. That was how I first came to find out that he was a card-sharp. I heard him crooning hymns in his cabin one morning and peeked in, thinking he was ill, and saw him arranging a deck of cards for his evening stance.

"They made a hit with one another, and it was arranged that Stoney should call at the house and meet pa. It wasn't necessary; pa was there waiting on

the pier, and when Elsie said, 'Daddy, I want you to know Mr. Barton,' the old man put his lamps over Stoney and froze him.

"'I know Mr. Barton,' he said, 'and if you want to know him any better you come along to headquarters and I'll show you the register.'

"It seems that Stoney had been inside once and in trouble often.

"After that there was war between Dicker and Stoney. The young people must have met often without the old man knowing, and certainly there was generally a fat letter waiting for Stoney whenever he came back from Europe—I've delivered half a dozen to him in his cabin.

"I believe Stoney had an interview with Sergeant Dicker and said he'd give up ocean-going and settle down in a respectable business if the old boy would let up on him. But Dicker wouldn't hear of it. He tried to 'frame' Stoney twice—Once on a charge of carrying concealed weapons, and once on a worse charge, but Stoney had some sort of pull and got clear each time.

"Elsie believed in him. When her father told her he was a card-sharp she just smiled.

"'He's got business interests in Europe.' she said. 'That is why he travels so much.'

"When the old man started raving about what Stoney had confessed to him, she went up to her room and locked the door.

"One day when we were in port, old man Dicker came down to the ship and saw me—I happened to know him well, because I'd done a little business with him. No. I'm not going to tell you what it was. Ships' stewards have their own little side-lines, and it's not for me to put you as wise as I am.

"'Felix,' he said, 'you know this so-and-so feller Stoney Barton. He's the biggest crook that ever caught a sucker. Give me an angle to this bird and you won't lose by it.'

"Naturally, I knew nothing, and he got very sore with me.

"'Mr. Dicker,' I said, 'if I started squealing about all that I know, where should I be—and, for the matter of that, where should we all be? If a detective came here from the Jewellers' Association and said, " Felix, how many private parcels have you delivered to a certain man in

New York in the past two years? " what would you think of me if I split?'

"He didn't ask me any further questions about Stoney.

"'That's all right by me, Felix,' he said, 'but I'll tell you something: this man is breaking my daughter's heart and ruining her life and spoiling everything I've planned for her—there's a stockbroker from the Middle West who's crazy about her, and he's got a house and everything. I'm going to get Stoney if it takes all the rest of my life to get him. It will be a hobby with me.'

"About six months after this I heard in a roundabout way that old Dicker had left the police. He'd made a fortune in Wall Street—gambling in motor shares or steel or something. Anyway, I saw him driving down Fifth Avenue one afternoon, and from the fact that he was driving in a Rolls-Royce and wearing a shabby suit of clothes I knew he must be terribly rich.

"Then a curious thing happened. Stoney had an old aunt who lived in California, and this old dame, all unknown to him, had been speculating in real estate for years. When she died, round about this time, Stoney found he was worth about a million and a half dollars. Being a crook, he was naturally suspicious, and the lawyer who brought the good news had a narrow escape of being thrown into the street.

"'I thought he was a con man,' Stoney told me, 'or some nut trying to buy my left pass.'"

"Now Stoney had a marvellous trick which no member of any other gang could imitate. The boys called it the 'left pass'—it was a way of changing one pack for another right under the nose of the players. In 1920, Micky Sullivan, one of the smartest men at the game, took two trips across the Western Ocean, not to play, but to watch Stoney operate.

"'It beats me, Felix,' he told me. 'I've watched that guy from every angle and I'm just as wise as ever I was.'

"To my knowledge Micky offered him five thousand dollars for the trick, but Stoney wouldn't sell. Every gang came after him to find out how it was done, but all Stoney would say was:

"'It's so simple that I'd be robbing you if I took your money.'

"The first thing that happened after he'd got his fortune was that the boys came after him to learn all about the 'left pass'.

"'I'm sorry,' he told Micky, 'but it's not for sale.'

"For a few months he loafed around the United States trying to get a kick out of spending honest money. But there was nothing to it. He got boreder

and boreder. Then one day he came aboard the Majoric—the new ship of the line. I hadn't seen him for the best part of a year, and didn't know about the real estate aunt till he told me all about his troubles.

"'I've got to go on, Felix,' he said. 'This millionaire life is killing me. There are no interests for a man of my activity and judgment. I've got to get away to sea to recover my soul, and to see what kind of suckers have grown up since I took my vacation.'

"There was a gentleman and his daughter. in Suite A. I knew they were coming, because a lot of flowers had arrived in the morning for the young lady. He gave me a rather cold how-are-you.

"'I suppose the ship is full of cheap card-sharps?' he said in a very loud tone of voice, which I knew was intended for his daughter. 'It's disgraceful these lines aren't properly policed. There ought to be a couple of detectives on every ship that pulls out of New York. In my opinion, steward, the steamship company is re-sponsible, for isn't it acting as aiders and abettors of these gamblers?'

"The girl wasn't a bit upset. I saw her smile.

"'Oh, daddy, leave the card-sharpers alone.'

"'There's one I won't leave alone till I've got him behind bars!' shouted Mr. Dicker, his face going red. 'I'm on the side of the law, steward. I don't believe in all this toleration bunk. I—h'm"

"He finished rather abruptly because I had caught his eye. I felt he was tempting Providence.

"I was pretty busy until we had passed Fire Island, and then I had a few minutes to talk to Stoney. He was sitting in his cabin, reading a new book on bridge. He read them all—he liked a good laugh.

"'Anybody on board, Felix?' he asked.

"'There's a millionaire travelling in Suite A with his daughter,' I said. 'His name's Dicker.'

"He was lolling on the sofa when I told him this, but that brought him up quicker than a jab with a pin.

"'Not Dick Dicker?' he asked, and, when I nodded, he whistled. 'Does he know I'm aboard?' he asked.

"I couldn't tell him that, but I guessed that old man Dicker wouldn't have been so violent if he hadn't seen the passenger list.

"Stoney was very quiet and thoughtful after that, and I wondered what was going to happen. The deck steward's a friend of mine, and I passed the word to him to keep his eyes open, but he had nothing to report that night. Stoney made no attempt .to speak to the girl, and he passed Dicker as though he didn't recognise him.

"If the old man had been wise he would have kept very quiet all that voyage, but he hated Stoney so much that he couldn't lose an opportunity, and when, the next night, Stoney walked into the smoke-room, he saw people nodding towards him and, putting their heads together, and he guessed that Dicker had done a lot of broadcasting; and what he guessed was confirmed when somebody took down a notice from the wall warning passengers not to play cards with strangers, and carelessly dropped it on the table before Stoney as he passed.

"Soon after that Stoney got up and went down to his cabin.

"The old man had made a lot of friends in the couple of days he had been at sea, and he was sitting with a few of them when Stoney walked out.

"'I've cooked him,' he said. 'Now let me warn you young men not to play cards with that fellow!'

"He had had a couple of drinks, according to the bar-room steward, and was a bit talkative, and he was naturally more so because the people who were with him were three young English college men who were going home after visiting the States.

"'You boys are English,' he went on, 'and you don't understand the depths of depravity to which an American crook can sink. That man would steal the feathers out of an angel's tail.'

"He must have told them that he'd been connected with the Central Office, because one of the young men asked him a question about Stoney's previous convictions, and old man Dicker told all he knew —and more.

"'If he ever asks you to play cards with him, send for the purser—or send for me,' he said.

"The very next day Stoney did sort of suggest that they should make up a four, but the three young Englishmen said they weren't playing that afternoon.

"'It's going to be a dud trip for me, Felix,' he said. 'I'd get Lafferson in to play euchre with me, but I don't want to call attention to him.'

"Lafferson was a pretty slick con man and a friend of Stoney's. He was travelling to Europe with a grip full of hope, after three blank voyages. The poor fellow was telling me that unless he found a sucker this trip he'd be obliged to go back to the book-peddling business.

"I knew that Stoney was very fond of

Lafferson, but, now that the old man had branded him, he couldn't even speak to the man or buy him a drink without putting him in wrong.

"Old Dicker was very jubilant. He went straight to his daughter and told her.

"'I said I'd kill him dead, and I have killed him dead,' he said. 'That fellow will never put his nose on the Majoric again. I've told the purser, I've told the chief steward, and it's more than their jobs are worth to let him operate on this passage.'

"She took it very well, partly, I think, because she'd had a long talk with Stoney on the boat deck. I happened to know this because I was watching out for the old man so that they shouldn't be caught.

"The three young Englishmen wouldn't play bridge with Stoney, but they played bridge with Mr. Dicker that afternoon. He was a good player—he told them he was before he started; and as they were three well-connected young gentlemen, one of them being the brother of the Duke of Wye, they played for pretty high stakes, and old man Dicker went down to dinner with a thousand dollars in his pocket.

"'You don't have to be a swindler to win at cards, Elsie,' he said. 'All you have to do is to know the game. Card playing's an instinct....'

"You know the sort of stuff that fifth-rate bridge players tell the world after they've won.

"One of the nice young Englishmen had a private sitting-room, and they played there that night. I saw the old man going back to his cabin about two in the morning, and he looked kind of dazed. He didn't wake his daughter up to tell her how much he'd won, because he hadn't.

"He played with the three young English-men after breakfast—and that's a bad sign—and he played with 'em right up to the luncheon bugle, and his face got longer and longer, for, if there was one thing that old man Dicker loved more than money, it has never been discovered.

"In the afternoon he played again, and round about tea-time he went in search of Stoney. I know that because he asked me where Stoney could be found, and I said he was down watching the people in the swimming-bath, and while the old man

was gone to look for him I nipped up on to the boat deck and told the young lady that she hadn't better be seen with Stoney.

"Afterwards I was able to direct Mr. Dicker, and he climbed up on to the boat deck. There was Stoney, smoking a mild cigar and reading the market reports.

"'You can go, Felix,' said Dicker, and I went—but not far. 'I want a word with you, Stoney,' said Mr. Dicker after I was supposed to be out of earshot.

"'If it's a nice word I'll listen to you,' said Stoney. 'But if it's a naughty word I'll send for the master at arms and have you put in irons.'

"'Don't be fresh with me!' snarled the old man.

"He jerked a chair up and sat down.

"'I've been playing cards,' he said.

"'So I noticed,' said Stoney. 'You've probably observed that I haven't.'

"Dicker took no notice of this.

"'With three young Englishmen,' he said.

"Stoney nodded, and sort of smiled out at the sea.

"'Do you know 'em?'

"Stoney shrugged his shoulders.

"'I've met 'em occasionally,' he said, and I heard the old man groan.

"'Are they....?'

"Stoney chuckled.

"'It's the only clever English gang I have met,' he said. 'They don't usually work this route—they've been operating on the Pacific for two or three years.'

"Dicker stared at him.

"'My God!' he said, in a hollow voice. 'They've got nine thousand dollars of mine.'

"Stoney didn't laugh—he was too well-bred.

"'Cheques?' he asked.

"'Real money,' said old Mr. Dicker, his voice trembling.

"There was a long silence.

"'That's very unfortunate,' said Stoney. 'To tell you the truth, I wondered if you'd fall for them. The brother of the Duke of Wye is the gang leader—there isn't any duke of that name, and nobody but a fat-headed New York cop would have been deceived.'

"I guess the old man swallowed some-thing at this, but he didn't speak.

"'You've got to be brave, Mr. Dicker,' Stoney went on, 'and bear your loss like a gentleman.'

"'I'll have them all arrested,' the old man burst out. 'The minute I get to port I'll go and see the Chief of Police'

"Stoney shook his head.

"'No, you won't,' he said. 'In the first place you'd make yourself the laughing-stock of New York; in the second place, you couldn't bring a charge against them. I'm an expert in these matters.'

"Neither of them spoke for a long time, and I had the idea that the old man was trying to say something. So had Stoney, but he didn't give him any encouragement. At last Dicker cleared his voice.

"'Listen, son,' he said, in a tone that was almost friendly, 'couldn't you see these birds and talk to 'em? '

"Stoney shook his head again.

"'Couldn't you play with 'em?' asked the old man desperately.

"I saw Stoney lift his eyebrows.

"'They wouldn't play with me, even if they didn't know me. You've set 'em against me.'

"'But that left pass of yours'

"'It's past,' said Stoney. 'No, Mr. Dicker, not even to oblige you. My name's mud on this ship, and you're the good parson who christened me.'

"The old man wriggled round in his chair, and I had to stand on my bad toe to stop myself laughing. Presently old Dicker leaned over.

"'How long does it take to learn that pass of yours, Stoney?' he asked in a wheedling voice.

"Stoney looked round at him. I think he must have seen me too, but he didn't take any notice. Anyway, he always liked an audience.

"'Once a policeman, always a crook,' he said. 'What do I get for passing on the secret of my ancient and dishonourable profession?'

"The old man jumped up.

"'If you think I'm going to let you run after Elsie"

"'I'm asking for nothing like that,' said Stoney. 'All I want is half that you make on the voyage over and above your nine thousand.'

"The old man shuffled at this.

"'I don't want anything but my money back' he began.

"'Is it a bet? You go on playing till the end of the voyage, and I take half of what you make,' said Stoney.

"I couldn't hear what followed, but I do know that Dicker went down to Stoney's cabin with him, and that they locked the door and were in there for about three hours.

"That night the three young Englishmen and Dicker played till ten o'clock, and the thing that happened in the four games they played is nobody's business. The gangsters had to play because it was a public séance, with all sorts of people looking on.

"I went up to the smoke-room on an excuse, and I must say that the old man was a good pupil. The sharpest pair of eyes in the world couldn't have seen that left pass.

"Stoney wasn't there; he wasn't there the next night, but from the old man's face, and the way he strutted down the deck, and from the way those three young English gentlemen behaved, I could see that Dicker had made his killing.

"The night before we reached Plymouth one of the Englishmen didn't turn up to dinner. After dinner a fourth man took his place. They weren't playing for high stakes, and there was no reason to play at all, but he'd got so expert with the left pass that he used to sit up half the night in his cabin doing it for his own amusement, and every time he met Stoney he used to tell him that he hadn't quite got his own money back, but Stoney knew that was a lie. The old man just hated paying commission.

"On the night before reaching port everybody sits up later than usual, and it was two o'clock before Mr. Dicker reached his cabin and walked into the sitting- room. He had hardly closed the door before there came a tap, and the fourth man who had been playing that night walked in after and closed the door behind him.

"'Hullo!' said Dicker, very surprised. 'What do you want?'

"The stranger looked at him kind of pityingly (I got all this back through Stoney).

"'I'm afraid I'm on a very unpleasant mission, Mr. Dicker,' he said. 'My name is Chief Inspector Barclay from Scotland Yard.'

"The old man went pale.

"'I've been watching you play for some days,' said this fellow, 'and although I haven't been able to detect anything, I am satisfied that you have in your possession a number of packs of cards which you are substituting for those which have been dealt.'

"Old Dicker pretended to be very angry, but his voice was shivering.

"'Very good,' said the man. 'Then you have the alternative of coming along with me to the captain and being searched in his presence, or letting me do the thing quietly here without any fuss.'

"'It was a joke,' said old Dicker. 'I'm a rich man, Mr. What's-your-name. I was just playing a little joke with those three crooks'

"'Are you going to be searched here or do I take you to the captain?'

"The old man had been a cop too long to expect that his tale would go, and he stood by like somebody dumb whilst this fellow searched him and took out the ten packs of cards that he had substituted during the evening.

"About five minutes later the bell rang and I went into the sitting-room and was told to fetch Stoney. I don't know what happened in the room, but I'm a

pretty good guesser. The detective went off at Plymouth with two thousand dollars, and Elsie Dicker hadn't been in London two days before she had the grandest engagement ring that could be bought for real money.

"They came back together with me on their honeymoon trip, but old Dicker was staying behind. He went on to Paris one day and he saw the chief inspector from Scotland Yard—somebody pointed him out at the Brand Hotel.

"'That's Lafferson, the con man, Mr. Dicker. You want to be careful of him. He's a great friend of Stoney Barton's.'

"He needn't have gone to Paris to find that out. I could have told him. But, then, nobody asked me.

V. — THE GHOST OF JOHN HOLLING

"THERE are things about the sea that never alter. I had a writing gentleman in one of my suites last voyage who said the same thing, and when writing people say anything original, it's worth jotting down. Not that it often happens.

"'Felix,' he said, 'the sea has got a mystery that can never be solved—a magic that has never been and never will be something-or-other to the tests of science.'

"(I'm sure it was 'tests of science,' though the other word has slipped over-board).

"Magic—that's the word. Something we don't understand, like the mirror in the bridal suite of the Canothic. Two men cut their throats before that mirror. One of 'em died right off, and one lived long enough to tell the steward who found him that he'd seen a shadowy sort of face looking over his shoulder and heard a voice telling him that death was only another word for sleep.

"That last fellow was Holling—the coolest cabin thief that ever travelled the Western Ocean. And what Holling did to us when he was alive was nothing to what he's done since, according to certain stories I've heard.

"Spooky told me that when the mirror was taken out of the ship and put in the stores at Liverpool, first the storekeeper and then a clerk in his office were found dead in the store-room. After that it was carried out to sea and dropped into fifty fathoms of water. But that didn't get rid of Holling's ghost.

"The principal authority on Holling was the steward who worked with me. Spooky Simms his name was, and Spooky was so called because he believed in ghosts. There wasn't anything in the supernatural line that he didn't keep tag on, and when he wasn't making tables rap he was casting horror-scopes—is that the way you pronounce it?

"'I certainly believe in Holling's ghost,' said Spooky, on this voyage I'm talking about now, 'and if he's not on this packet at this minute, I'm no clairvoyager. We passed right over the spot where he died at three-seven this morning, and I woke up with the creeps. He's come aboard—he always does when we go near the place he committed suicide.'

"There was no doubt that. Spooky believed this, and he was a man with only one delusion: that he'd die in the poor-house and his children would sell

matches on the street. That accounts for the fact that he hoarded every cent he made.

"Personally, I don't believe in spooks or anything, but I do admit that there is one magical thing about the sea—the way it affects men and women. Take any girl and any man, perfect strangers and not wanting to be anything else, put them on the same ship and give them a chance of talking to one another, and before you know where you are, his wastepaper basket is full of poetry that he's torn up because he can't find a rhyme for 'love,' and her waste-paper basket's top-high with bits of letters she's written to the man she was going to marry, explaining that they are unsuitable for one another, and that now she sees in a great white light the path that love has opened for her.

"I know, because I've read 'em. And the man hasn't got to be handsome or the girl a doll for this to happen.

"There was a gang working the Mesopotamia, when I served in her a few years ago, that was no better and no worse than any other crowd that travels for business. They used to call this crowd 'Charley's.' Charley Pole being the captain. He was a nice young fellow, with fair, curly hair, and he spoke London English, wore London clothes and had a London eyeglass in his left eye.

"Charley had to work very carefully, and he was handicapped, just as all the other gangs were handicapped, by the Pure Ocean Movement, which our company started. Known card-sharps were stopped at the quayside by the company police and sent back home again—to America if they were American, to England if they were English. About thirty of our stewards were suspended, and almost every bar steward in the line, and it looked as if the Western Ocean was going to be a dull place. Some of the crowds worked the French ships, and nearly starved to death, for though the French are, by all accounts, a romantic race, they're very practical when it comes to money.

"So the boys began to drift back to the English and American lines, but they had to watch out, and it was as much as a steward's place was worth to tip them off. Charley was luckier than most people, for he hadn't got the name that others had got, and though the company officials looked down their noses every time he carried his grip ashore at Southampton, they let him through.

"Now the Barons of the Pack (as our old skipper used to call them) are plain business men. They go travelling to earn a living, and have the same responsibilities as other people. They've got wives and families and girls at

the high school and boys at college, and when they're not cutting up human lamb, they're discussing the high cost of living and the speculation in theatre seats, and how something ought to be done about it.

"But on one point they're inhuman: they have no shipboard friendships that can't pay dividends. Women—young, old, beautiful, or just women—mean nothing in their lives. So far as they are concerned, women passengers are in the same category as table decorations—they look nice, but they mean nothing. Naturally they meet them. A sucker is a sucker because he wants to look important. That's the why of it. A mean man who doesn't care a darn how mean he looks, never really gets into the sucker class.

"But the others, the fellows that are dying to overhear somebody say, 'Ain't he grand?' are ready to flash anything from bank notes to a wife to push home the impression that they're grander than you thought they were at first. But beyond a 'Glad to meet you, Mrs. So-and-so.' the big men of the big crowds never bother with women. That was why I was surprised when I saw Charley walking the boat deck with Miss Lydia Penn for two nights in succession. I wasn't surprised at her, because I've given up being surprised at women.

"She had suite 107 on C deck, and Spooky Simms and I were her room stewards—we shared that series—so that I knew as much about her as anybody. She was a gold and tortoise-shell lady, and had more junk on her dressing-table than any-body I've known. Silver and glass and framed photographs, and manicure sets, and all her things were in silk, embroidered with rosebuds and blue birds. A lady.

"From what she told me she was travelling for a big woman's outfitters in Chicago. She had to go backward and forward to London and Paris to see new designs, and by the way she travelled it looked as if no expenses were spared.

"As a looker Miss Lydia Penn was in the de luxe class. I've never been a good hand at describing women, and have got in bad at home often and often owing to my not being able to say what women are wearing, and how they looked—especially film stars that we've brought home. But this Miss Penn was easy. She had golden hair, just dull enough to be genuine, and a complexion like a baby's. Her eyebrows were dark and so were her eyelashes— black and long.

"I admire pretty girls. I don't mean that I fall in love with them. Stewards don't fall in love, they get married between trips and better acquainted when the ship's in dry dock. But if I was a young man with plenty of money and

enough education to pass across the line of talk she'd require, I shouldn't have gone further than Miss Penn.

"But she wasn't everybody's woman— being a little too clever to suit the average young business man.

"The day before we made Nantucket Lightship, Spooky Simms came to me just as I was going off watch.

"'Remember me telling you about Holling?' he said.

"As a matter of fact, I'd forgotten all about the matter.

"'He's on board—saw him last night as plain as you—if it's possible, plainer. He was leaning up against No. 7 boat, looking white and ill. Plain! Why, I can see him now. There will be trouble!'

"And he was right. Mr. Alex. McLeod of Los Angeles took his bag from the purser's safe that night to save himself trouble first thing in the morning. He locked the bag in a big trunk and locked the door of his cabin, and wanted to give the key to Spooky, who was his steward. But Spooky was dead scared.

"'No, sir, you'd better keep it. And if you'll allow me to say so, sir. I shouldn't leave any valuables lying about to-night if I was you.'

"This he said in my hearing.

"When Mr. McLeod went to his bag the next morning, three thousand dollars and a gold watch and chain were gone.

"'Holling,' said Spooky, and you couldn't budge him. He was one of those thin, bald men that never change their opinions.

"The Central Office people investigated the case, but that's where it ended.

"It wasn't much of a coincidence that Miss Penn and Charley were on the ship when it turned round. Charley was on business, and so was she. I saw them together lots of times, and once he came down with her and stood outside her cabin whilst she dug up some photographs of the South Sea Islands.

"Charley's side-partner was a fellow named Cohen, a little fellow with the biggest hands I've ever seen. They say he could palm a whole pack and light a cigarette with the hand they palmed in without the sharpest pair of eyes spotting it.

"One morning I took Cohen in his coffee and fruit, and I thought he was sleeping, but just as I was going away he turned round.

"'Felix,' he said, 'who is that dame in the private suite?' (She travelled that way).

"I told him as much as I thought necessary.

"'She's got Charley going down for the third time,' he said, worried, 'and he's side-stepping business. We're eight hundred dollars bad this trip unless somebody comes and pushes it into my hand—and that only happens in dreams.'

"'Well, it's your funeral, Mr. Cohen,' I said.

"'And I'll be buried at sea,' he groaned.

"Cohen must have talked straight to Charley, because that same night the smoke-room waiter told me that Charley had caught an English Member of Parliament for a thousand dollars over a two- handed game that this bird was trying to teach him.

"We got to Cherbourg that trip early in the morning, and I had to go down to lock up the lady's baggage, because she was bound for Paris. She was kneeling on the sofa looking out of the porthole at Cherbourg, which is about the same thing as saying that she was looking at nothing, for Cherbourg is just a place where the sea stops and land begins.

"'Oh, steward,' she said, turning round, 'do you know if Mr. Pole is going ashore? He wasn't certain last night.'

"'No, Miss,' I said, 'not unless he's going ashore in his pyjamas. The tender is coming alongside, and when I went into his cabin just now he was asleep.'

"She looked very thoughtful at this.

"'Thank you,' she said, and that was all.

"She went off in the tender and left me the usual souvenir. She was the only woman I've met that tipped honest.

"There was some delay after the tender left, and I wondered why, till I heard that a certain English marquis who was travelling with us discovered that his wife's jewel-case had been lifted in the night, and about twenty thousand pounds' worth of pearls had been taken.

"'It is very unpleasant for everybody when a thing like that happens, because the first person to be suspected is the bed-room steward. After that, suspicion goes over to the deck hands, and works its way round to the passengers.

"The chief steward sent for all the room-men, and he talked straight.

"'What's all this talk of Holling's ghost?' he said, extremely unpleasant. 'I want to tell you that the place where Holling's gone, money—especially paper money— would be no sort of use at all, so we can rule spirits out entirely. Now, Spooky, let's hear what you saw.'

"'I saw a man go down the alleyway toward Lord Crethborough's suite,' he said, 'and I turned back and followed him. When I got into the alleyway there was nobody there. I tried the door of his cabin and it was locked. So I knocked, and his lordship opened the door and asked me what I wanted. This was at two o'clock this morning—and his lordship will bear out my words.'

"'What made you think it was a ghost?' asked the chief steward.

"'Because I saw his face—it was Holling.'

"The chief steward thought for a long time.

"'There's one thing you can bet on— he's gone ashore at Cherbourg. That town was certainly made for ghosts. Go to your stations and give the police all the in-formation you can when they arrive.'

"On the trip out, Miss Penn was not in the passenger list, and the only person who was really glad was Cohen. When he wasn't working, I used to see Charley moping about the alleyway where her cabin had been, looking sort of miserable, and I guessed that she'd made a hit. We had no robberies, either; in fact, what with the weather being calm and the passengers generous, it was one of the best out-and-back trips I've had.

"We were in dock for a fortnight re-placing a propeller, and just before we sailed I had a look at the chief steward's list, and found I'd got Miss Penn again, and to tell you the truth, I wasn't sorry, although she was really Spooky's passenger.

"I don't think I've ever seen a man who looked happier than Charley Pole when she came on board. He sort of fussed round her like a pet dog, and for the rest of the voyage he went out of business. Cohen felt it terribly.

"'I've never seen anything more unprofessional in my life, Felix,' he said bitterly to me one day. 'I'm going to quit at the end of this trip and take up scientific farming.'

"He was playing patience in his room— the kind of patience that gentlemen of Mr. Cohen's profession play when they want to get the cards in a certain order.

"'What poor old Holling said about Charley is right—a college education is always liable to break through the skin.

"'Did you know Holling?' I asked.

"'Did I know him? I was the second man in the cabin after Spooky found him. In fact, I helped Spooky get together his belongings to send to his widow.' He sighed heavily. 'Holling did some foolish things in his time, but he never fell in love except with his wife.'

"'Have you heard about his ghost?' I asked.

"Cohen smiled.

"'Let us be intelligent,' he said. 'Though I admit that the way Charley goes on is enough to make any self-respecting card-man turn in his watery tomb.'

"Two days out of New York we struck a real rip-snorting south-wester, the last weather in the world you'd expect Holling to choose for a visit. At about four o'clock in the morning, Spooky, who slept in the next bunk to me, woke up with a yell and tumbled out on to the deck.

"'He's aboard!' he gasped.

"There were thirty stewards in our quarters, and the things they said to Spooky about Holling and him and everything were shocking to hear.

"'He's come on board,' said Spooky, very solemn.

"He sat on the edge of his bunk, his bald head shining in the bulkhead light, his hands trembling.

"'You fellows don't think as I think,' he said. 'You haven't got my spiritual eyesight. You laugh at me when I tell you that I shall end my days in the poorhouse and my children will be selling matches, and you laugh at me when I tell you that Holling's come aboard—but I know. I absolutely know!'

"When we got to New York the ship was held up for two hours in the Hudson, whilst the police were at work, for a lady passenger's diamond sunburst had disappeared between seven o'clock in the evening and five o'clock in the morning, and it was not discovered.

"Miss Penn was a passenger on the home trip, and this time Charley wasn't as attentive. He didn't work either, and Cohen, who was giving him his last chance, threw in his hand and spent his days counting the bits of gulf weed we passed.

"As I've said before, there's one place on a ship for getting information, and that's the boat deck after dark. Not that I ever spy on passengers—I'd scorn the action. But when a man's having a smoke between the boats, information naturally comes to him.

"It was the night we sighted England, and the Start Light was winking and blinking on the port bow, and I was up there having a few short pulls at a pipe, when I heard Charley's voice. It wasn't a pleasant kind of night—it was cold and drizzling, and they had the deck to them-selves, he and Miss Penn. He put down a Mackintosh coat on one of the chairs and covered her with a rug he was carrying. I couldn't see that, but I guessed what was happening.

"'You're landing at Cherbourg?' said Charley.

"'Yes,' said Miss Penn's voice, and then : 'What has been the matter with you all this voyage? '

"He didn't answer at once. I could smell the scent of his Havana. He was thinking things over before he spoke.

"'You generally get off a boat pretty quick, don't you?' he asked, in his drawling voice.

"'Why, yes,' she said. 'I'm naturally in a hurry to get ashore. Why do you say that?'

"'I hope Holling's ghost isn't walking this trip,' he said.

"I heard her gasp.

"'What do you mean?' she asked.

"And then he said in a low voice:

"'I hope there'll be no sunbursts missing to-morrow. If there are, there's a tug full of police meeting us twenty miles out of Cherbourg. I heard it

coming through on the wireless to-night—I can read Morse— and you'll have to be pretty quick to jump the boat this time.'

"It was such a long while before she answered that I wondered what had happened, and then I heard her say:

"'I think we'll go down, shall we?' And then the creak of her chair as she got up.

"It was six o'clock the next morning, and I was taking round the early coffee, when I heard the squeal. There was a Russian count, or prince, or something, travelling on C deck, and he was one of the clever people who never put their valuables in the purser's safe. Under his pillow he had a packet of loose diamonds that he'd been trying to sell in New York. I believe that he couldn't comply with some Customs' regulations, and had to bring them back. At any rate, the pocket-book that held them was found empty in the alleyway, and the diamonds were gone. I had to go to the purser's office for some-thing and I saw him writing out a radio, and I knew that this time nothing was being left to chance, and that the ship would be searched from the keel upwards.

"'They can search it from the keel downwards,' said Spooky, very gloomily, when I told him. 'You don't believe in Holling, Felix, but I do. Those diamonds have left the ship.'

"And then, what I expected happened. The ship's police took charge of the fire-men's and stewards' quarters; nobody was allowed in or out, and we were ordered to get ready to make a complete search of passengers' baggage. The tug came up to us about nine o'clock, and it was crowded, not with French police, but with Scotland Yard men who had been waiting at Cherbourg for something like this to happen.

"The police interviewed the Russian and got all they could get out of him, which was very little, and then the passengers were called to the main saloon and the purser said a few words to them. He apologised for giving them the trouble, but pointed out that it was in their interests as much as in the interests of the company that the thief should be discovered.

"'We shan't keep you long, ladies and gentlemen,' he said. 'There is an adequate force of detectives on board to make the search a rapid one, but I want every trunk and every bag opened.'

"The ship slowed down to half-speed, and then began the biggest and most thorough search I've ever seen in all my experience of seagoing. Naturally, some of the passengers kicked, but the majority of them behaved sensibly

and helped the police all they knew how. And the end of it was, as a lot of people had foreseen, that nothing that looked like a loose diamond was brought to light.

"There was only one person who was really upset by the search, and that was Charley. He was as pale as death, and could hardly keep still for a second. I watched him, and I watched Miss Penn, who was the coolest person on board. He kept as close to the girl as he could, his eyes never leaving her, and when the search of the baggage was finished and the passengers were brought to the saloon again, he was close behind her. This time the purser was accompanied by a dozen men from headquarters, and it was the chief of police who addressed the crowd.

"'I want, first of all, to search all the ladies' handbags, and then I wish the passengers to file out—the ladies to the left, the gentlemen to the right, for a personal search.'

"There was a growl or two at this, but most of the people took it as a joke. The ladies were lined up and a detective went along, opened each handbag, examined it quickly and passed on to the next. When they got to Miss Penn, I saw friend Charley leave the men's side, and, crossing the saloon, stand behind the detective as he took the girl's bag in his hand and opened it. I was close enough, anyway, to see the officer's changed expression.

"'Hullo, what's this?' he said, and took out a paper package.

"He put it on the table and unrolled it. First there was a lot of cotton wool, and then row upon row of sparkling stones. You could have heard a pin drop.

"'How do you account for having these in your possession, madam?' asked the detective.

"Before she could reply, Charley spoke.

"'I put them there,' he said. 'I took them last night, and placed them in Miss Penn's handbag, in the hope that the bag would not be searched.'

"I never saw anybody more surprised than Miss Penn.

"'You're mad,' she said. 'Of course you did nothing of the sort.'

"She looked round the saloon. The stewards were standing in a line to cover the doors, and after a while she saw Spooky.

"'Simms,' she called.

"Spooky came forward. As he came, Miss Penn spoke in a low voice to the detective, and showed him something in her hand.

"' Simms, do you remember that I sent you down to my cabin for my bag? '

"'No, Miss,' he said, 'you never asked me for a bag.' " She nodded.

"'I didn't think you'd remember.' And then: 'That is your man, Inspector.'

"Before Spooky could turn the police had him, and then Miss Penn spoke.

"'I am a detective in the employment of the company, engaged in marking down card-sharpers, but more especially on the Holling -case. I charge this man with the wilful murder of John Holling on the high seas, and with a number of thefts, particulars of which you have,' she said.

"Yes, it was Spooky who killed Holling—Spooky, half mad with the lunatic idea that he'd die in the poorhouse, who had robbed and robbed and robbed, and when he was detected by Holling, who woke up and found Spooky going through his pocket-book, had slashed him with a razor, and invented the story of the face in the mirror. Whether he killed the other man I don't know—it is very likely. One murder more or less wouldn't worry Spooky, when he thought of his children selling matches on the streets. Was he mad? I should say he was. He had no children.

"I never saw Miss Penn again until she came out on her honeymoon trip. There was a new gang working on the ship—a crowd that had been pushed off the China route, and weren't very well acquainted with the regulars that worked the Western Ocean. One of them tried to get Miss Penn's husband into a little game.

"'No, thank you,' said Charley. 'I never play cards in these days.'"

VI. — THE LITTLE BARONESS

"WHEN you're twenty-one" (the steward speaking) "there doesn't seem a lot left to learn. Young Searlby was like that. The first time he travelled west with me—he was settling up his grandfather's estate in New York—he was a fresh- faced kid, straight out of college, and he knew every-thing from navigation to farming. I used to stand for hours holding up the door-post in my slack time, listening to him, for I'm always willing to learn, though he told me very little that I didn't know, except that I was meeting for the first time a man who couldn't be caught. This was on the Hedric soon after the War.

"'How absurd,' he said (those were his very words) 'to post those notices all over the ship: " Passengers are warned that there are card-sharps on board." No intelligent man would play with strangers.'

"I pointed out to him that by the time you start playing cards with 'em, they ain't strangers. They know all about you, and you know all about them and their fruit farms in New Brunswick and their stomach troubles and what their only daughter wore at her wedding and how they hate playing cards on Sunday because their dear old mothers wouldn't like it. What an ocean-going passenger has got to learn is : that a voyage from Southampton to New York takes about 140 hours, and that you can trim a sucker in two. That leaves 138 hours to tell the tale and prepare the patient for the operation.

"Mr. Arthur Searlby had a lot of money —he and his sister split six million dollars when their grandfather died, and from what I heard, they weren't begging their bread before that happy event. He was so rich that he could afford to be mean in the matter of tips, and he'd have got away with two dollars and thank-you-steward if I hadn't looked so hard at the bills that his conscience went into reverse.

"Arthur had a friend who always travelled with him—Mr. Lester Bookham. He was a fellow of twenty-eight and dressed like a tailor's ad.—you know the kind: you see a pair of creased trousers, and lo! it is a man! He wasn't rich—I got an idea that young Searlby paid his transportation—but these two young fellers were closer than brothers.

"Naturally the little gangs that worked the Hedric did their best to lure Arthur to his doom. They sent forth their touts, male and lady, they got confidential and asked him his opinion on the state of Germany, but they could never get him to sit in to a quiet game of poker. He played cards—but only with Mr. Lester Bookham. Picquet was the game, for cent points, and

they played so evenly that there wasn't five dollars in it one way or the other by the time they settled up at the end of a trip.

"One day young Joe Stibbington, one of the smartest sharps that ever travelled the Western Ocean, took me into his cabin—he had a state-room on F deck that I was looking after at the time.

"'Felix,' he said, 'who is this bird Bookham?'

"I told him I didn't know.

"'He's catching that kid,' he said, and I laughed.

"'They only play cent points,' I said, 'and they break even every trip.'

"Joe shook his head.

"'It's a come-on,' he said. 'I know the signs and symptoms. If a bird was being fattened up for a real thanksgiving, it is Searlby. Why not persuade him to sit in with me—it won't cost him more than a thousand dollars and a sore feeling, but it will save him money in the long run.'

"There was a lot about Joe that I liked. His father used to be in the cloak business in Milwaukee, and went broke over a partner who spent five years' profits on a theatrical show he was running for a lady friend. He drew on the profits before they were made, and that bust the cloak business, killed Joe's father, and brought the kid back from one of the big universities to fend for himself. Nobody knows why people go crook. Joe never told me and I never asked.

"He was a good-looking young fellow and a lonely worker. He had no touts or partners, never looked for a game but always got it.

"'Bookham's a bad egg,' he said. 'I was watching him last night in the smoking room. Lew Warner tried to get him into a game after Searlby had gone to bed. He'd had a couple of drinks and couldn't resist . the temptation to show that he knew as much about a fake shuffle as Lew. He did it like a master, too.'

"After this, I used to watch the game they played in Searlby's state-room a little more closely, but I saw nothing that was suspicious. About three months after this, Searlby came aboard at New York—alone. He had his old state- room, but it was easy to see that things had not gone well with him. He drank a lot and drank lonely, which is a bad sign.

"The second day out he got talkative. I expected him to say something about Bookham, but it was a long time before he even mentioned his name. What started him oft was a remark of mine about the number of lady passengers we were carrying. It was in the afternoon, and he had had cocktails, champagne and old port, and was filling in time with whiskies and sodas.

"'Women mean nothing to me, Felix,' he said bitterly. 'They've no intelligence, no sense of honour—they're mercenary. A woman's heart is like a block of granite.'

"I guessed the reason for the booze, but guessed wrong. His trouble was his sister.

"'She's humiliated me, Felix. She's made me look a fool and a cad—my own sister!'

"'That's pretty bad,' I said, and told him about a sister of mine who'd sold all my chickens while I was on a voyage and never paid me for them to this day, but he wasn't very much interested.

"'If I cabled her once, I cabled her forty times,' he said savagely, 'and all that I got was my steamship ticket and a beggarly sum for expenses!'

"I was amazed, because I knew he was a pretty well-off man.

"'Did you go broke, sir?' I asked him.

"'Of course I didn't go broke!' he snapped. 'I've got' He mentioned a sum that made my head reel. 'But I've exhausted my American credit. You won't understand what that means. I had certain obligations to meet—they're not met even now. I asked her to wire me two hundred thousand dollars and she refused. My own money! At least, mine and hers. She could easily have raised it, but instead I get this!'

"He pulled a heap of papers out of his inside pocket, sorted them over, and after a while found a telegram, which he handed to me. It ran:

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE 300,000 DOLLARS YOU HAD TO YOUR CREDIT AT THE CITY BANK?

"'Did you have that, sir?' I said, in amazement.

"'Yes, I had three hundred thousand, but I had—certain obligations to meet.'

"He was whisky-serious, a little stuffy. He said that he had been selling property, part of his grandfather's estate in the Middle West, and that the three hundred thousand had accumulated in the New York bank.

"'It's half hers, I admit, but she has no right to humiliate me....'

"And then I remembered Joe Stibbington's words.

"'What was the obligation, sir?' I asked.

"'It was money I owed—a debt I incurred,' he said very stiffly. 'You're a man of the world, Felix, and I'm a man of the world, and you understand there are certain debts that a man of honour must pay. I still owe nearly a hundred thousand dollars'

"'Cards?' I asked, and he blinked at me and scowled.

"'That's beside the point,' he said, and I knew I'd hit the mark, and I knew, too, why Mr. Bookham was not returning with him.

"I put his baggage ashore at Southampton and I haven't seen him since. Bookham came back on the Megantic and went out to the States again on the Coronia— a friend of mine, a steward I met in Southampton, told me all about him.

"It appears Mr. Lester Bookham was a gentleman. He was a college friend of young Searlby's and a member of the same club. I didn't bother my head about Searlby any more—if I mourned over limp suckers I'd live in crape.

"It was about six months after this that I met Miss Stelevant.

"It seems to me that young women have changed for the worse. There was a time when you knew where you were with 'em an' where to find 'em. Mostly under a rug in a chair by day and leaning over the rail listening to the tale by night, and saying how wonderful the moon looked on the sea and what a pity the ship couldn't go on for ever. That was before cocktails in the smoking-room got fashionable, before cigarettes came in—and shingles. Funny thing is—I don't know whether you've noticed it—that a woman is never called advanced till she begins to act and dress like a man, and a

man's never called a fool till he starts behaving like a woman. I thought that out one night when I was having a quiet pipe on the boat deck.

"I wouldn't call this here Miss Stelevant advanced nor anything like it. For one thing, she wasn't shingled and never smoked. She was the sort of girl you'd think twice of 'damning' before, and yet she was not what you might term old- fashioned. Personally speaking, I'm not keen on old-fashioned people. The majority of the old fashions were a bit insanitary. I mean that she wasn't prim and proper— butter would melt as easily in her mouth as in anybody else's, but the impression (if I may use the word) she gave you was that her mind was all dusted and polished and had clean windows with white curtains.

"Elsie Stelevant—that was her name on the passenger list—and she had what we called the semi-bridal suite on E deck. This was on the Monconia.

"It was the ninth of May that we came out of Southampton waters with our nose pointing for Cherbourg; and to me it looked like being one of the runs you read about. The weather was good, the sea like a pond, and all the reports relayed back from the Atlantic were kiss-your-fingers-to-the-lady. The passenger list was a heavy one and I had four millionaires to look after, and not one that hadn't travelled with me before. It was what I would call a 300-dollar trip for me, not reckoning Miss Stelevant, who might be a revelation in the tipping line, but at the same time might very well be cold pudden.

"One of the most beautiful girls I ever looked after on a voyage handed me twenty-five cents after I'd seen her baggage through the Customs. I've never worried about beauty since.

"You couldn't help noticing Miss Stelevant, though. She had real golden hair— the sort you see on babies' heads just before the gold begins to go brown. And marvellous eyes. I used to wonder whether she was a natural mesmerist. She never looked at me but I didn't feel a sort of turnover inside me. And I'm forty-three— and married.

"Before we pulled away from the French coast I'd called on my millionaires and put them wise to the gangsters that were on board—Ben Hicks, Mordley Hemmings, Long Joe Pippison, the two Flemmington brothers and Joe Stibbington. A lot of stewards think it's unprofessional for a cabin steward to warn passengers about the 'barons.' I've argued it out this way : If a passenger asks, a passenger should be told—and my four gentlemen always asked.

"I didn't warn Miss Stelevant, naturally, because no professional card-sharp goes after a woman, however rich she may be. In all my experience on the Western Ocean I've only known one woman to be 'caught' by the Barons of the Nimble Pack, as my old captain used to call 'em, and she was fat. And a fat woman who wears diamonds to breakfast simply asks for trouble.

"I was doing her cabin the first morning out when, to my surprise, she turned to me and asked:

"'Steward, are there any card-sharps on board?'

"I had to laugh.

"'Why, yes, miss, there's the usual crowd.'

"She looked at me very thoughtfully for a long time, and then: "'Who is the cleverest?'

"I had never had this question put to me before, and I'd given him away before I realised what I was doing.

"'Well, miss,' I said, 'I think Joe Stibbington's the best of the lot.' And as I'd told her this, I thought she might as well know all about him.

"'Do you think you could bring him to my state-room this afternoon?' she asked.

"I could only stare at her.

"'Bring him here, Miss? You mean you want to see him?'

"She smiled.

"'I want to play cards with him.'

"That put me in a very awkward position. Of course, a passenger is entitled to have anybody she likes in her saloon. We don't keep a ship's chaperone. But the real awkwardness was how I was going to tell Joe that I'd got him in wrong. I tried my best to persuade the young lady that it wasn't the thing to do, and I'd made up my mind to pretend I'd forgotten what she'd asked me, but she put that little idea on the blink.

"'Don't say this engagement slipped your mind, Felix,' she said. 'I shall be ready at three o'clock.'

"So I had to go down to F deck to Joe's cabin. I thought the best thing to do was to tell the truth. He didn't call me a sap or swear at me as I expectec; in fact, he seemed too interested to worry much about my squealing on him.

"'I don't play cards with women—you ought to know that, Felix,' he said—' not for money, anyway. Who is she?'

"I shook my head.

"'I've never seen her before this voyage, but she's class. She's got one of the best private suites on this ship. I hated telling her you were on the crook, Joe'

"'Am I blushing?' he asked, a bit sourly, I thought. 'Don't let that worry you, Felix. If you hadn't told her some-body else would—and I'm not sensitive.'

" Out of curiosity I peeped into the suite that afternoon about four o'clock, and there they were sitting at a table, this lovely girl and Joe, and he had a pack of cards in his hand and was shuffling slowly.

"'Bring some tea,' said Miss Stelevant very sweetly. 'Do you drink tea, Mr. Stibbington? '

"Joe lied and said he did, though I know it's poison to him.

"The first chance I got, which was just before dinner, I asked him what was the grand idea.

"'The lady's bored and wants to play cards, that's all,' he said very shortly, and the next time I asked him he told me to mind my own business.

"I couldn't make it out, because, when-ever I went into the private saloon, all I saw was a pack of cards, either in her hand or his—I never saw a hand dealt all the voyage, though I had very few opportunities for looking.

"We got to New York on the Wednesday, and the thing that struck me was that Joe must have had a thin voyage, for he spent all his time with Miss Stelevant, and the smoke-room steward told me that he hadn't seen him pick up easy money once. Just before he went ashore I asked Joe if he'd made a killing, and he turned on me in a white fury.

"'Do I play with women?' he snarled. He added a few remarks about my personal appearance, which is neither here nor there.

"The mystery of Miss Stelevant was one that I couldn't make head or tail of. When the ship 'turned round' I found that she had booked her passage

home, in the same suite, and, looking down the list, I found Joe Stibbington's name.

"All the way back to England they sat together playing cards in her private saloon, and Joe simply gave up business. On the way out it was the same. She was a passenger, so was Joe. But on the second trip homeward Joe sailed alone, leaving the young lady, in New York. I've never known him to be so quiet and unbusiness-like. One of the Flemmington brothers asked me if I knew what was the matter with him.

"'The ship's full of two-handed suckers and he hasn't so much as thrown a line!' he said.

"Now, you've got to remember that a card-sharp's expenses work out roughly at 400 dollars a week. That is when four are working a ship. For the solitary artist who has a cabin to himself, it's as much as 600 dollars. Yet, when he ought to have been earning his living, you'd find Joe walking up and down the boat deck, his hands in his pockets, a sort of half scowl on his face. He seemed to have lost interest in his work. I've noticed card-sharps get that way just before they quit for good. But when I asked Joe if he was thinking of buying a farm and settling down, I got vitriol. Not that Joe was a hard swearer—as a rule he was a nice-speaking fellow without a cuss- word to his name, but he was certainly difficult to get on with that trip.

"We reached New York in a thunder-storm and I was looking forward to the return voyage. My month's leave was due, and I'd taken a house in Southsea to give my children an opportunity of meeting their father and recognising him when they saw him again. In the passenger list I found Miss Stelevant's name against her old suite, and, of course, Joe had his one-berth state-room on F deck, but what did interest me was to see that Mr. Lester Bookham had engaged one of the best suites on the ship.

"They came aboard together, Lester and the young lady, and I have never seen her so gay and full of smiles. It appeared they had got acquainted in New York. I was on the boat deck for something, and the first man I saw was Joe. He was leaning over the rails, looking down at the gang-way, and it was then that I saw Mr. Bookham and Miss Stelevant. Joe was scowling horribly.

"He looked round and saw me.

"'Are you in charge of Miss Stelevant's state-room?' he asked. 'If you are, you'd better go down and get her trunks.'

"'It's funny Bookham coming aboard, isn't it' I began.

"'Don't discuss the passengers, Felix. Go down and look after Miss Stelevant.'

"He was quite unpleasant.

"She gave me one of her turnover smiles, and really I was glad to have her back. She was a good woman and never tipped me less than fifty dollars a trip.

"From the moment we got away from New York Harbour it was clear to me that Bookham and the young lady were thicker than glue. They spent all their time together in the morning, and on the first afternoon he went down to have tea in her saloon. She neither saw Joe nor mentioned his name—as a matter of fact, Joe spent most of his time in his state-room or on the boat deck.

"The second day out, I was ordered to take tea to the little saloon, and found the young lady and Lester Bookham playing cards. The sea was smooth, the day was sunny, the sort of day you'd expect to see her walking about the deck in white. But there she was, with a cigarette, a big stack of chips at her elbow, and she was dealing the cards when I put down the tray.

"'Of course we'll play for money—don't be absurd,' she was saying. ' I refuse to allow you to treat me like a maiden aunt.'

"'But, my dear Elsie' he began.

"She gave a quick glance at me, which I saw, and he stopped himself.

"Picquet was the game, and when I went into the saloon to clear away the tea, the pile of chips was like an ammunition dump. Mr. Bookham was a little bit peevish.

"Have you ever noticed that card players get that way, even though they're playing against the people they like best in the world? They just hate to lose. I suppose it's human.

"I've never known the cards to go like that,' he grumbled, and she laughed in his face, and I guess that made him more irritable, because I was there, and men especially go hot under the collar when they are made to look foolish before servants.

"They played again after dinner, and early in the morning, when I was in the purser's office, I saw Bookham come in, get his small grip from the safe and take out three thick pads of bills. There is a kind of man who never travels without a lot of money, and I have an idea that he was taking home his pile

in solid cash. He put back the bag, got a new receipt and went out of the office. The assistant purser winked at me.

"'The boys are catching that nut,' he said. 'Who is it—the Flemmingtons?

"I told him I didn't know, but that I'd find out.

"They played that morning. I was dusting her room, which was next door to the saloon, and heard them.

"'Really, your luck is diabolical, Elsie!' he said.

"'Isn't it awful?' said Miss Stelevant. 'I'll tell you what we'll do. I simply cannot leave this ship with your winnings. We'll play ten-dollar points.'

"Now ten-dollar points at piquet are pretty high. It is quite easy in five games to lose ten thousand dollars. But he jumped at the offer.

"The door between the room and the saloon was open, but there was a heavy curtain, and as I peeped through I saw him open and shuffle a new pack.

"There are only thirty-two cards in a piquet deck, and that makes them easy to palm, and I was pretty certain that the cards he pushed towards her to cut were not the new pack he had opened.

"'I want a lemon squash,' she said. 'Ring the bell for Felix.'

"He turned, walked across to the wall of the cabin and pressed the bell. I hardly saw her hand move, and I've got a pretty quick eye, but before he turned round the pack was changed, and she had just cut.

"'I'll tell you what we'll do,' he said. 'If you like a real bit of sport, let's make this partie for a hundred dollars a point.'

"'That's gambling,' she laughed, 'but we'll do it.'

"You have to remember that after every hand at piquet the cards are shuffled, and well shuffled, and that, however cleverly you fake a pack, you've got to fake a new one for the next deal, and as there are thirty deals in every partie you require thirty distinct packs of cards. How it was done I don't pretend to know. Miss Stelevant's back was towards me, and I couldn't look very long, because they'd rung for me. Just before lunch, I saw Bookham come on to the deck, and he was looking as sick as an apprentice on his first voyage.

"That afternoon he went to the purser's office again....

"The day before we reached the Channel there was a ball scheduled—one of those all night affairs that are so pleasant for the passenger and so rotten for the steward. The chief steward gave me a deck job— to serve the people who were sitting out. A hot night, a calm sea and a beautiful moon made that ball the best we ever had. I have never seen the social hall more crowded—even the people who spend their time in bed from port to port dragged themselves out to watch the dancing.

"I saw Joe several times during the evening—in fact, I served him with a drink round about midnight.

"'Smoke-room empty, Mr. Stibbington?' I asked.

"'I haven't been in the smoke-room this voyage,' he said, and that was true.

"'It's a funny thing,' I said, 'Miss Stelevant hasn't got a word for you this trip.'

"'Why in hell should she?' he asked, going red. 'See here, Felix, I'd rather you didn't discuss Miss Stelevant with me, or with anybody else. The trouble with you is, you've got a beautiful voice and you like to hear it. I wonder you don't stay home and join a choir.'

"He made similar remarks, but I didn't take them too seriously, knowing that something had happened to Joe and he wasn't quite normal.

"The crowd began to thin at daybreak. It was a little too chilly for the deck parties, and my opposite number and I cleared away our tables, and I went up to the boat deck for a pipe. My favourite cubby-hole is just abaft No. 2 lifeboat on the port side. You can squeeze in between the boat and the rail, and neither the officers on the bridge nor the passengers can see you; and many a little bit of gossip and scandal have I heard from that listening post. I didn't see Miss Stelevant, but she used a peculiar kind of perfume, and I caught a whiff of it as she passed along the deck. Then I heard:

"'Well? '

"It was Joe Stibbington, and I peeped round. He was standing there with a half- frown on his good-looking mug, his hands in his pockets, and she was facing him. She hadn't even a wrap over her beautiful dance dress.

"'Did the fatted calf bleat very loudly?' asked Joe.

"'A little,' she said coolly, and then sighed. 'I'm glad it's over. I feel a beast.'

"'Why should you?' he asked.

"'I suppose a thing like that wouldn't worry you? '

"He shook his head.

"'No. That wouldn't worry me at all.'

"She looked up at him.

"'What does?' she asked quickly, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"'I don't know... things,' he said. (I wrote down the conversation from memory afterwards). 'You a little, and me a lot.'

' There was a long pause after this, and then he said:

"'I suppose I shall never see you again? '

"'Why not?' she asked, ever 90 quickly. 'You have my address.'

"He laughed.

"'You really don't expect an ocean-going card-sharp to call upon you, do you? I made you a little baroness, and I have been well paid for it.'

"'A baroness?' she said in surprise, and he told her about the old skipper and the name he gave to the card-sharps. 'Oh, I see!' She seemed a little disappointed, as though she expected something more exciting. 'I'm very grateful to you.'

"He took her hand and held it for a little while, and then suddenly she was in his arms. For a few seconds she did not attempt to free herself, and then suddenly she pushed him back.

"'Mr. Stibbington,' she gasped, 'how— how dare you!'

"His face was as white as death.

"'I'm sorry,' he said—or I think he said, for his voice was so low that it was hardly hearable—' I've been a brute. I'm sorry. Won't you forgive me? '

"She didn't answer for a long time, and then:

"'I think I'll go down now. Good-bye.'

"He did not take the hand she offered. She hesitated a little more, and then turned and went past me so unexpectedly that I had just time to hide my nose before she was gone. Joe stood where she had left him, his head on his

chest, his hands thrust into his pockets. Then he walked to the side of the ship, took something from his pocket and threw it into the sea. As it fell it broke, and I saw the surface of the water littered with playing cards. He threw another bundle and another—six packs in all—and then, turning, walked forward through the narrow alleyway between the three little deckhouses, the centre of which was the wireless store room.

"I thought I'd get below, when I saw out of the tail of my eye Miss Stelevant coming back. She was walking very slowly, and I couldn't see her face, until she came abreast of me. She was sort of out of breath, and the hand she put up to steady herself was trembling. She looked left and right and then backward, as though she was avoiding somebody. I thought she was searching for Joe, and that she had some fear in her heart as to what had happened to him. Maybe there was something in that, but she was keeping out of somebody's way as well.

"Just then came the slow creak of Joe's shoes, and she looked round in a panic. For a moment I was scared to death, I thought she was coming to hide behind my lifeboat, but she didn't. Reaching up, she caught the roof of the deckhouse and pulled herself up to the top just as Joe came in sight. I couldn't understand what it was all about until:

"'Hullo!' I heard Joe say, and then another voice said :

"'You're the man I've been looking for.'

"It was Mr. Lester Bookham, and his voice was shaking with anger. Miss Stelevant must have seen him coining and that was why she hid—from both of 'em.

"'Looking for me?' said Joe coolly. 'Why should you look for me? '

"'I've been having a talk with my steward... he tells me you have made several trips with Miss Stelevant.'

"He could hardly control his voice, he was so furious.

"'I've had the honour of travelling in the same ship—yes,' said Joe Stibbington.

"'And it is common talk you've been in her saloon teaching her little card tricks? '

"I looked round. I could just see the girl's head and eyes showing above the top of the deckhouse.

"'She's trimmed me for two hundred thousand dollars, and I want that money back or one or both of you go to gaol!'

"'You don't mean that?' drawled Joe. 'So a little bird told you that I'd been instructing the young lady in the art of cheating cheaters, eh? Well, they told you the truth, Mr. Lester Bookham.'

"Lester was fairly dancing with rage.

"'So that is why she tried to get acquainted with me in New York, is it? And I thought I couldn't be caught. Now listen, Stibbington. I know you: you're a card-sharp. I've enough influence in England to have you arrested the moment the ship touches port, and I'll do it unless you and your confederate—'

"'Forget that confederate stuff, will you?' Joe's voice was deadly quiet. 'Miss Stelevant asked me to teach her a few tricks and paid me a thousand dollars a trip.'

"'You're a liar!' screamed Bookham. 'throwing your 're a pair of crooks, and she's—'

"I didn't exactly hear the word he used, but I did hear the smack of a fist and heard Bookham go to the deck with a thump. I thought it was time to interfere, but there was someone before me. Miss Stelevant, her beautiful dress torn and grimy with dust, had slipped down from the top of the deckhouse and was standing between the two men, and I thought it was a moment when I might 'accidentally' come on the scene—besides which, I didn't want to miss anything.

"There was Lester Bookham, with a big red patch on his jaw, glaring like a maniac at the girl, and there was Joe, white as death, behind her.

"'Before you go any further,' she said, and I've never seen a woman cooler in those circumstances, 'I think you ought to know that Stelevant is only one of my names. The other is Searlby. Arthur Searlby was my confiding brother, with whom you played in New York and whom you robbed. If you wish to recover the money I have taken from you, you'll have to do it through the courts. You have been a card-sharp all your life....'

"She went on to tell him other things that were news to me—things she'd discovered with the help of a detective agency, and suddenly, without a word, Bookham turned on his heel and walked away. She looked from me to Joe, and then I had a wonderful inspiration.

"'Hullo, Mr. Stibbington' (I gave him 'mister' for it) 'I noticed you were throwing your packs of cards into the sea. Giving up playing?'

"At first he scowled at me, and then he nodded. She looked at him.

"'Are you?' she asked in a low voice. "'Yes, I'm finding a new occupation,' he said.

"I saw her wonderful eyes come round to me, and they were very expressive. This time they said, 'Get out!' So I got out."

VII. — SOLO AND THE LADY

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"I'm naturally fond of children" (the steward speaking) " except when they're singletons. Only sons aren't so bad, except when they've got a mother who is strong enough to remind the old man that he was a boy once. That's a fatal thing to say to a father who's after a scalp, because whilst he's trying to think if he ever was a boy, the kid gets away without connecting his hide with pa's waist supporter. But only girls are worst. Man and boy, I've been following the sea for—I don't know how many years and I've got thoroughly acquainted with men, women, children and only children. I've known all the big statesmen and near statesmen in Europe and America and I've met every card baron from Lew Angus to Clink Smith. I've known missionaries and murderers— I had Stellman in one of my cabins when he was arrested on the high seas for killing Hannah Bontey—and I've looked after practically every big woman star from Hollywood. And they're easy people to get on with—if you only remember the names of their new husbands.

"But only daughters! Mon Jew!—to use a foreign expression.

"The president of the Nation Line had one child—a daughter—and the only ship in the line that wasn't named after a nation was the Winifred Wilford which was named after her. But only for a year or so, when it was changed to the Flemish, Miss Wilford not liking the way the news-papers talked about the Winifred Wilford being scraped and the Winifred Wilford have a new refrigerating plant put into her. She said that it was vulgar and so Sir Ernest, her father, changed the name. I heard this from his valet, who used to be a bedroom steward on the Italian.

"I never saw the young lady, though it seemed that I couldn't very well miss seeing her, for every other voyage we got word that she was sailing with us next trip to visit her aunt in Chicago. The times the bridal suite went westward empty was because she'd changed her mind at the last minute.

It used to be the joke of the ship. The old hands always asked when they came aboard if Winifred was sailing and the poor chap who had charge of the suite reckoned that she cost him the price of a row of houses through the best state- room in the Flemish going so often to New York without a passenger.

"I heard a whole lot about her from the valet. She used to go to Rome for a change and to Como for a rest. Then she'd have the Ascot house open and staffed and wouldn't be there a week before she'd skip over to Le Touquet for the golf or go down to Aix for the cure. She'd go to Paris because she was

bored and to Switzerland because she had nerves, and Sir Ernest said it was natural that a high-spirited young girl wanted to get about a bit and thought she was the most wonderful thing that ever condescended to look like a human being.

"She was an only daughter, as I've said before.

"Card crooks are the easiest people to look after, and most stewards I know would sooner have a four-berth cabinload of unlawfulness than the grandest ambassador that ever travelled in a bridal suite. I never blame card-sharps any more than I blame weasles and stoats. They're born to keep tag of the rabbits. If there wasn't any rabbits there would be no stoats. That's my idea of nature.

"Speaking generally, gangs are not so dangerous as the fellows who work lone-some. The lone man has got to be smart enough to do without partners and touts and stool pigeons. It's the ideal way of working, because it reduces expenses and there is nobody to cut the loot with. That is the attraction which has split many a gang; but the fellows who can work single-handed are few and far between and even Solo Smith, one of the cleverest, found it hard to make a living after he dropped his partner.

"There are a whole lot of games for two players and Solo knew them all, and his graft was good, because the people who play two-handed games are generally folks with money. Figure that out and think of your friends who play picquet and bezique and such-like games and you will see that I am right. What is more, a man who plays that kind of game reckons himself an expert. There are generally two or three experts in every passenger list and Solo managed to find one of them. There were voyages, of course, when he never made his fare, but on the whole Solo did very well and so long as he got a living he didn't mind, because he was sure and certain that one day he would get acquainted with the beautiful daughter of a Pittsburg millionaire and be honest ever after. He was the best-looking man I have ever met at the game. Fair, with curly yellow hair, fine-looking eyes and Roman nose. He was one of the few that got introduced to ladies, and surely the girls used to be crazy about him—I think that was one of the reasons he dropped Lila. He was the athletic sort you see in motor-car ads., sitting negligent at the wheel of a shiny car with a beautiful girl stroking the nose of a Russian bloodhound down-stage.

"One big film star tried to get him to play opposite her. Solo did the next best thing. He played opposite her husband and took a year's salary out of him in one sitting. The game was picquet and the husband was an expert.

"There was nothing novel about his method. He never wanted to play cards. It was always the sucker who said, 'Ah, gwan! What are you scared about—think I'm a card-sharp? '

"The easiest way to get money out of a sucker's pocket is to give him the free use of his hands. Al Lipski, who knew him very well, told me a lot about Solo.

"'He's not the same man as he was when he had Lila Bowman as his partner. Lila had brains, if you want to know anything— she gave him all the education he's got. And then he double-crossed her in the only way a man can double-cross a woman —he said he would and he didn't.'

"'What?'

"'Marry her,' said Al. 'Solo's got a pipe that one day he'll meet a million-dollar girl that'll fall for him. He always was a big thinker. Felix, have you ever noticed Solo going ashore in New York?'

" I thought for a little while.

"'No. I've taken his bag ashore, but I don't remember seeing him go.'

"Al Lipski gave a sort of laugh.

"I'll bet you haven't. He never goes ashore until all the passengers are off—he takes few risks, does Solo.'

"We had this talk on board the Flemish. She was a nice ship, slow but sure. The cabin accommodation was good, the table was the best in the line, and if she took ten days to crawl from the Mersey to the Hudson it was a safe crawl. Our skipper in those days was Captain Grishway, one of the old school. That is to say he thought steam ought never to have been invented and that the sea had gone to the dogs since ships stopped carrying fore-to'-gallant sails. He hated crooks worse than poison, being a God-fearing man, but at the same time he didn't think passengers had any right to be on a ship. But he was a good seaman and never, as the saying goes, scratched a plate. I think he must have been Royal Navy before he came into the Western Ocean trade, for he was certainly full of navy ways. It was 'hands muster aft,' 'quartermaster stand by for going out of harbour' and he had a bo'sun's mate to pipe him over the side just the same as if he was Captain of a blooming flagship.

"I was his steward for ten trips, and captain's steward is six of the seven sea-going jobs no man ever wants to hold down.

"But the skipper was a good fellow, apart from his navy ways, and when I got used to standing at attention and running instead of walking, and shaving before breakfast and other little fads, I got quite fond of him. He was a big fellow with a clean-shaven upper lip and a chin beard. And he was death to the card-men. The first voyage he made in the Flemish he had special notices printed and put in the smoke-room.

Don't play cards with

any man unless you know

his mother.

"He followed this up by sending the master-at-arms to arrest Lew Grovener, one of the quickest men in the game. Lew's cabin was searched and about twenty packs of cards were found, and he was handed over to the New York police. On the eastward trip, he pinched young Harry Toler for running a chemmy bank in his private suite. For three voyages he kept the master-at-arms busy. We were lying alongside the pier at Liverpool one Satur-day morning, waiting for the boat-trains, when I saw Sir Ernest Wilford's car come on to the jetty and I guessed there was going to be trouble.

"Sir Ernest was the President of the Nation Line and he was what every American thinks every Englishman is. He was a thin man with a long yellow moustache and he wore an eyeglass and a long-tailed coat and a top hat—winter and summer. When I saw his white spats come on to the bridge I knew that he hadn't driven over from his country house in Cheshire to wish Captain Grishway God-speed and a safe return. Ship owners don't do that sort of thing.

"I was in Grishway's cabin and the door leading to the office was ajar.

"'Good-morning, Sir Ernest,' I heard the captain say.

"'Good-morning, Captain. I called in at the smoke-room as I came along the promenade deck and I observed—ah—that —ah—you have a notice posted—ah:

"'If you must play cards, use your own pack.

If poker is your favourite game, there's onse

in the fireplace—play with that.'

"'Yes, sir,' said the captain. "' And I read in the newspapers that you prosecuted three men at the Liverpool court for playing cards? '

"'They were sharpers, sir,' said the captain gruffly. 'They caught a young man from New Orleans—skinned him!'

"'Yes, yes,' said Sir Ernest. 'Very unpleasant—very unpleasant indeed, but you're getting the ship a bad name, Captain. People will soon think that the Flemish is the only ship these fellows travel by and they will give us a wide berth. It is quite sufficient to put the ordinary notice in the smoke-room, warning passengers not to play cards with strangers. There our responsibility ends. It is obviously outside our province to—ah—provide nursemaids for improvident and foolish young men.'

"There was a bit of silence after this and then the captain said:

"Do I understand that I am not to interfere with these thieves—that I am to allow them all the rope they want, Sir Ernest?'

"'Well—ah—yes. So long as they be-have, they must be treated as though they were ordinary passengers. This is an instruction. If there is a complaint from a passenger, you may act. Otherwise...'

"'Very good, sir,' said our old man in his happiest voice. 'It is not my business to clean up the Western Ocean.'

"'Exactly!' said Sir Ernest. 'Oh, by-the-way, I am thinking of sending my daughter with you next trip.'

"'We'll try to make her comfortable,' said our old man. He always said that.

"Now Captain Grishway was not the sort of man who would take a kick like this and forget all about it. He was hurt, and when a man like Grishway gets hurt he doesn't pass it on. I don't know how this kind of news spreads, but it was common talk in the stewards' quarters that the lid was off, and on the trip home we carried the grandest agglomeration of talent and science that has ever been brought together in one hull.

"Solo Smith had managed to stick to the ship all the time it was pure and he was on board, and one night when I was smoking one of his cigars on the boat deck, he told me that he thought that the captain was right and the owner wrong.

"'It has been paradise in the packet for the last six trips,' he said, ' especially to a refined player like myself. With Al Lipski and Tricky Taylor, and Boss Sullivan and all that kind of trash on board, there's no graft left for a man of my class. Sullivan and Doc Entwhistle want me to take a corner in their game, but, Felix, I've got a repugnancio to being No. 3 in any outfit. I'm a

chief or nothing. My, God!' he said, 'to think that a college man should come so low that he's got to take his share of a five-way cut!'

"However, it wasn't such a bad trip for him. He picked up a Boston hardware man who'd had a European education and played bezique and a game called Bush-man's Poker with him, and by the thoughtful way this Boston man was looking when we came to the landing-stage, I guess Solo had packed a parcel.

"I had to go down to London to see a married sister of mine who'd had her first baby. I never dreamt I'd meet any of the boys; but one night when I was up west I ran into Solo Smith. He was staying at the Palace-Carlton and was on his way to a theatre when I saw him. There's nothing gives a man away quicker than evening dress, and Solo wore his as though he wasn't conscious that he had it on.

"'Why, Felix!' he said. 'What are you doing in town? Come and have a quick one!'

"He took me into a quiet bar off Piccadilly and he was in what I would call his college mood, for he was very bitter about an uncle of his who had died, leaving nothing much—except a few mortgages and a lot of enemies.

"'That man made a solid hundred thousand a year and had a business worth two millions! And he played every cent away on the races. Can you beat that, Felix, for selfishness? He didn't think about his relations—me, I mean. He didn't worry about what would become of me. He just threw his money into the sea. Men like that ought to be... well, he's dead, anyway.'

"He told me that he was giving up ocean-going. He'd saved enough money to build an apartment-house in Los Angeles, and he was going into the real estate business, marry and settle down.

"'I know a girl who's crazy about me,' he said. 'She's a lady and refined like me. I shouldn't be surprised if I didn't marry her when I get back home. Though I don't know.... I'm not like one of those cheap gangsters who can't sign their own names. There's some class to me and I ought to do better for myself than Lila.'

"Solo generally took a favourable view of himself. That was his one weakness.

"'Who's Lila?' I asked him.

"'She's a girl I know,' said Solo. 'She got ideas about me and we quarrelled. Not that I take notice of threats. I'm not afraid of any man or woman in the world, Felix. I'm that way. Nothing ever scared me. Al thinks I'm frightened of Lila, but what women say to me means nothing.'

"We drank up and went out on to Piccadilly. The roadway was pretty crowded because it was theatre time and we stood for a time waiting for the traffic cop to hold up the lines to let us get through.

"I didn't see the girl come up—she must have been following us and the first notion I had that anybody was around who knew Solo was when I heard somebody say:

"'My! Look who's here!'

"Solo turned like as if he had been shot. His face was the colour of putty, and I could almost hear him shiver.

"'Why—Lila,' he stammered, and if ever a man's voice said, 'I'm frightened,' it was Solo Smith's.

"This girl might have stepped out of a picture—she was that pretty—and I began to wonder what more a man wanted.

"'Hello, Solo. My, you're all dolled up! Going to a party? '

"He blinked at her as though he had come out of the dark into a strong light.

"'Thought you were in—in New York,' he said.

"'Sure you did.' She looked at him with a kind of smile. 'You're one big thinker! Thought over that idea of ours?'

"Solo pulled himself together.

"'Why, yes,' he said, 'I was thinking— in fact, I was talking....'

"'Talking, yes,' she said, 'thinking, no! Going back home soon? Saw your name in the Flemish list, you'll be going back on that packet, I guess?'

"Solo shook his head.

"'No, Lila. I'm staying over for a, month. Come and see me one day, Lila. I'm at the Palace-Carlton.'

"She nodded and walked away.

"'Maybe I will,' she said, but I didn't like the way she said it. Neither did Solo.

"When I looked at him his face was wet, but he laughed.

"'That's a real girl,' he said. 'My, that woman's mad at me! I'm glad you didn't say I was going back on the Flemish. Not that I'm scared of Lila. All that stuff about shooting me up is fool talk.'

"'Why don't you marry her—if that's what she wants?' I asked him.

"He didn't answer till we were crossing Piccadilly Circus.

"'I might do better,' he said then.

"I thought that he might do worse.

"He seemed to have changed his mind about going to the theatre, and when I asked him if he'd like to come with me to the pictures, he said 'no, it was dark at the pictures.' He thought he'd go back to his hotel and asked me to walk with him. All the way he kept glancing over his shoulder, as if he expected to see some-body following him.

"'I'm not scared of Lila,' he told me when we said good-night, 'I like her. I don't mind marrying her, but I'm not going to be frightened into it. Do you see what I mean, Felix? If she'd cut out her letter-writing and that stuff about what she'll say to the judge when she comes up in court. That's bunk, and I simply pass it. There's no woman in the world can scare Solo Smith.'

"When I got back to the ship next morning I found the chief steward just about all in. I'd seen him that way before when he'd had a wire saying that Miss Winifred Wilford was sailing with us.

"'She's coming this trip,' he said, and his hair was standing on end. ' Rush along to Jackson and give him a hand with the bridal suite—oh, no, you're captain's steward. I'm in such a state of mind that I don't know whether I'm on my head or my teeth!'

"'She won't come, sir,' I said.

"'Won't she? She's on the boat train— left Euston half an hour ago in the director's private car! And if she's anything like she was when she sailed to Madeira on the Riff there's going to be trouble!'

"I didn't know until then that when she took the Madeira trip she ran the ship, had three of the officers suspended from duty, the purser and the chief

steward fired and got the fourth officer, who was a sad-looking fellow with a secret sorrow, promoted to second on a cargo boat. I guess that his secret sorrow was that he didn't know much about navigation. In six months he piled up his ship on the Irish coast and lost his ticket.

"I went and took a look at the bridal suite. It was full of flowers and the writing table was piled up with telegrams from loving friends.

"Captain Grishway didn't worry; he wasn't even down by the gangway when she arrived, but he sent the fourth officer.

"'She's partial to fourth officers,' I heard him say to the chief.

"Having time to spare I dodged down to the gangway to look her over. A crowd of passengers came on board before she appeared and I was mightily interested in one who came up the first saloon gangway but had a second-class ticket. I showed her the way aft, but she didn't recognise me, or if she did she never made any sign. I wondered if Solo knew and guessed that he didn't. When the big rush of passengers was nearly through, Miss Wilford came up the gangway. I'm not good at describing dresses : she wore a sort of fluffy mauve with a fur coat. Pretty, with big dark eyes and a rather thinnish mouth and a beautiful complexion. That's how I'd describe her.

"The purser was there and the chief steward.

"'Where is the captain?' she asked.

"'He is on the bridge, Miss Wilford,' said the chief. 'We are casting off in a minute.'

"'Go and tell him to come to my cabin at once, please,' she said. 'He ought to be here—papa's captains always receive me. I shall wire to my papa right away and tell him.'

"The chief went straight up to the old man and gave him the message.

"The captain sort of played with his beard.

"'Take stations for going out of harbour,' he said, very brief. 'Report to me when the mails are aboard. Send the pilot to the bridge.'

"I don't know who told Miss Wilford. Maybe she forgot all about the skipper and nobody told her at all. She was still alive when the ship turned into the Irish Sea.

She had three maids and a lady secretary. Two of the maids were put into a first-class cabin and the other slept in the suite. Winifred had 'em on the move from the moment she came on board, but on the whole they had a better time than the secretary, who was a plain woman of thirty, but looked older.

"The same afternoon that we left port Miss Winifred strolled on to the bridge and rang the starboard engines astern. Captain was in the chart house, but at the first sound of the bell he leapt out on to the bridge.

"'What's wrong here?' he roared, and then he saw the girl.

"'I wanted to see how this thing worked,' she said as cool as ice. 'Are you the captain? '

"The captain's face was the colour of blood.

"'Get off this bridge,' he said.

"She stared at him.

"'I'm Miss Wilford'

"'I don't care if you're the Queen of Sheba—get off this bridge. Full ahead that starboard engine, Mr. Holdon, and don't allow passengers to meddle with the telegraph—what in blazes do you think you're here for?'

"Winifred went red and white. She couldn't speak, but when she could:

"'Take me back to Liverpool at once!' she screamed. 'You horrible man! My papa will have you discharged. How dare you talk to me! If you're a gentleman,' she said to the chief officer, 'you'll knock him down this very minute.'

"The poor chief could see his job going, but he was a good seaman.

"'Sorry, Miss,' he said, 'but you're not allowed on the bridge unless you have the captain's invitation.' And when she had stamped down the companion ladder, he turned to the skipper. 'There goes forty pounds a month!' he said.

"The skipper said nothing.

"By all the laws of the sea he had done what was right. There wasn't a board, whether they were Trinity Masters or a Court of Enquiry that wouldn't have said that he was right. But right or wrong, he had lost his ship and he knew it. The wireless got working as soon as night fell and the

first message that came to the captain was from Sir Ernest. I saw it on the skipper's desk. Did I lower myself to read it? I did.

"'Cannot understand your extraordinary conduct. Return from New York by first available steamer. Hand over your command to Captain Gillingham of Ethiopia. Chief officer returns with you.— Wilford.'

"The old man just O.K.d the radio. I suppose he showed it to the chief, for the chief was mighty glum. He had a wife and three children. The skipper had two boys at the university. And Miss Winifred Wilford hadn't any children at all, only two little dogs like pen-wipers and a pet alligator which she kept at her home in Mentone.

"Her bedroom steward came to see me and asked me if I'd lend him a hand; appears Miss didn't like the blue carpet in her bedroom and wanted a rose-pink.

"'That woman,' he said, 'is the world's worst passenger. She treats everybody like a dog and she's given me half an hour to find a lady on the ship that plays pikky— now what in heat is pikky?'

"'Bill,' I said, 'you've got it wrong; it's picquet—rhyming with ' hick ate' you want. The only person on board that plays is Solo and he's a gentleman and wouldn't play against a lady.'

"'She's no lady,' said Bill very vicious, 'and I'm going to lumber her on to Solo.'

"'It's no good,' I said. 'Solo couldn't waste the time on her. He's paid four hundred and fifty dollars for his passage, and it stands to reason that he can't put pleasure before business.'

"I was a bit surprised later on when the captain sent for me.

"'I hear that Miss Wilford is playing cards in her private parlour with that man Smith. Is he straight? '

"Stewards never tell—except to ship's officers. I told him all I knew.

"'Humph,' he said. 'Wait whilst I write a radio—you can take it to the wireless house and tell the operator that if he can't get to England he must send by relay.'

"He was a long time writing the message, scratching out and beginning again a dozen times before he gave me a clean copy.

"'**YOUR DAUGHTER INSISTS UPON PLAYING CARDS WITH NOTORIOUS SHARP. ADVISE ME WHAT I AM TO DO**.'

"At midnight I was talking to the radio man when the answer came through:

"'**MY DAUGHTER IS COMPETENT MANAGE OWN AFFAIRS**.'

"Just that and nothing more. I didn't see the radio till after the captain had it, because these wireless operators wouldn't tell you if Europe was burning, if the news came on a private message. I'm not blaming them—at the same time I'm not praising 'em. Amongst friends there ought to be give and take and I've told 'Lightning' more scandal than ten stewards on the ship.

"I saw the old man log the message in his private diary and I wouldn't have seen the radio at all only he made a copy for the chief.

"On the third day out the purser, thinking to get one in, stopped my lady as she was coming up the grand companion.

"'Excuse me, Miss,' he said, taking off his cap, as though he was speaking to royalty, 'but I understand that you've been playing cards with Mr. Smith.'

"She looked at him as though he was a hat she didn't like.

"'Well?' she says.

"'Well, Miss, this man Smith is a card-sharp....'

"He got as far as that, when she walked past him. He was fired that night by radio. You wouldn't believe it possible? It happened. This is a true story and there are a dozen men at the docks in New York who'll tell you it is true, and a hundred men on the line. A man will do a lot for his wife and a lot more for a lady who ought to be his wife, but when you want to see a real dam' fool, you've got to meet a rich man who idolises his only daughter.

"Now there was one man on board that ship who could get into the heart of the matter without upsetting the Queen of the

Seas. And that man was a man of discretion and, if I may say so, experience. It's not for me to throw violets at myself, but—anyway I went along and saw Solo.

"Now a card-man is the most reasonable fellow in the world to deal with. You can make him do most anything except give you your money back. So far as we are concerned, they've got to be good, for one thirty-dollars-a-month steward can spoil a game worth thousands.

"'I know what you've come to see me about, Felix,' he said when I went into his cabin. 'Miss Wilford and me are good friends. She admires me—I admire her. She's the woman of my dream and I'm the kind she's always thought about. She says she adores strong silent men.'

"I fell up against the wall, but before I could say anything he went on :

"'You think I've been playing for money, Felix, but I haven't. We've been playing for almonds—the winner gets the kernels and the loser gets the shells. I've got enough shells in my cabin to start a war. I can't throw 'em away—they're sacred to me, Felix....'

"' Steady, Solo,' I said. 'What's all this stuff about admiring. Does she happen to know? '

"'She knows my past—I told her,' said Solo. 'She feels I haven't had my chance. If my uncle had died when he ought to have died, I'd have owned my own steam yacht and home on Long Island, and everything. She sees that. We're going to get married the day we make New York.'

"And it wasn't a joke. I nipped up and told the captain and he thought Solo had been stringing me along. But he wasn't taking any chances. He went down and saw Miss Wilford.

"'That is entirely my own affair,' she said. 'Will you please leave my cabin.'

"'I don't like your father and I don't like you,' said the old man, 'but before I let you marry a professional thief I'll put you both in irons!'

"He sent about a hundred dollars' worth of radio to Sir Ernest and got a $1.50 snub.

"'**YOURS INCOMPREHENSIBLE. DO NOT COMMUNICATE FURTHER**.'

"It appears that the president thought our old man had invented all this stuff to make it appear that he was looking after his daughter, so that he could get his job back.

"I thought the matter over and that night, when the smoke-room was empty, and Al Lipski was taking his evening walk on the promenade I went up to him and told him everything.

"'Solo's dream has come true,' he said, 'and if you think you can get him to back out you're crazy. I know him. He's nearly through with business—since he left Lila he has hardly made enough money to pay expenses.'

"'He may have left Lila, but she hasn't left him,' I said. 'She's on this ship.'

"He whistled.

"'Does Solo know? He doesn't? Well, I'd tell him if I was a friend of his.'

"It wasn't until the next afternoon that the grand idea came to me. We had run into fine weather and the decks were crowded. Even the people who usually go to bed as soon as they get on board and don't get up until we stop to land emigrants at Ellis Island, had managed to crawl up to take a look at the gulf weed. I saw Miss Wilford and Solo sitting in a snug corner of the boat deck as I took the captain's afternoon tea to the bridge. Solo was talking, and by the earnest look on his face, I guessed he was talking about himself.

"The captain's cabin is behind the chart-house and I found him lying on his bed with a book in his hand. He wasn't reading. I've got an idea that he wasn't sleeping any too well, for Captain Grishway was a conscientious man.

"I put the tray on the table and then:

"'I beg your pardon, sir,' I said. 'I'd like to pass a few remarks about Solo Smith if I may.'

"He scowled up at me.

"'The more offensive they are, the better I shall like them, steward,' he said. And I gave him my views.

"He listened without saying a word, sipping his tea and looking down at the deck.

"'Bring this Lila woman here,' he said, and I went down to the second-class deck and found her in her cabin.

"I think this time she recognised me.

"I didn't hear what she said to the captain or the captain said to her, because he shut both doors. It was nearly half an hour before the bell rang and I went in. Lila was sitting on the sofa and the old man was at his desk with a thick book in front of him, turning over the leaves as if he was looking for something.

"'Go down and ask Mr. Smith to be kind enough to step up to my office,' he said, 'and listen, steward, you can stay with him whilst he's here. And give my compliments to the chief officer and ask him to come along.'

"I gave the message to the chief and went to look for Solo. He wasn't on the boat deck, nor yet in Miss Wilford's suite. I found him drinking a cocktail by himself in the smoke-room. 'Me?' he said. 'What does he want, Felix? There's no trouble, is there? He can't put me in irons—if he does I'll get a million dollars out of the company.'

"He was as nervous as a cat.

"I got him quiet and told him that the captain hadn't any idea of pinching him, and after a while he came with me, though I could see that he was in a blue funk.

"When I opened the captain's door and he saw Lila sitting there on the sofa I thought he would faint.

"'Shut the door, steward. You know this lady, Smith? '

"Solo nodded.

"He had another attack of the blinks he'd had in Piccadilly.

"'This is the lady you promised to marry,' said the captain. 'I've seen your letters, and it seems to me that you're pretty well bound to carry out your promise.'

"'Anyway, you're not marrying anybody else,' said Lila, but the captain told her not to interrupt.

"'Sure, I'm marrying you, Lila,' said Solo. 'When we get back to New York'

"'There's no time like the present,' said the old man, taking up a book. ' By the laws of England I can marry anybody on the high seas.'

"Poor Solo looked one way and the other and then he must have seen Lila open her bag to take out a handkerchief. And if he saw that, he saw the grip of the little black automatic she carried around. I saw it and the captain saw it, so I guess Solo saw it, too.

"He was as pale as death. I've never known and don't know now what pull Lila had, or what Solo had done to keep this girl on his trail, but it must have been something pretty fierce to make him go under without a fight.

"'I'm agreeable,' said Solo, and in ten minutes Lila and he were man and wife, and I signed the log as witness, so did the chief officer.

"'I've got a word to say to you, Captain,' said Solo when it was all over. 'I guess Lila knows about Miss Wilford?'

"'I certainly do,' said Lila. 'I've been wise to that picquet game. She had the secretary chaperone her—that's why you're alive, Solo.'

"For a second he seemed to be swallowing something, for his face was screwed up as if he was in pain.

"'We're through with that,' he said, 'but I've been playing for almonds and I guess that doesn't pay expenses. She's been pestering me to play for real money— said she wanted me to win and she's got a fifty-thousand dollar credit at a New York bank.'

"'Well?' said the captain.

"'Well,' said Solo, 'there are two clear days before we get into port and I'd like to get a little of that fifty thousand.'

"Our old man didn't kick him out of the office as I expected. He just looked hard at Solo and smiled. I'd never seen him smile before.

"'If you play cards for money with Miss Wilford, I shan't interfere,' he said. 'I have orders to that effect.'

"Miss Wilford didn't come home with us. She returned to England on a Cunard boat. The valet told me afterwards that the first thing she did when she found Solo had skipped with her fifty thousand was to send a long cable to her father and that same night the captain was reinstated and the chief officer and the purser and the four stewards she had fired on the west-ward trip.

"Even the fathers of only daughters have moments when they're sane."

VIII. — THE BARONS OF THE NIMBLE PACK

"IN the old days" (this is the steward talking) "there were seven gangs working the North Atlantic. They favoured the Red Funnels and the Blue Star mainly, but now and then they worked across in an American boat. But the Red Funnels and the Blue Star were the principal beats of the 'Barons of the Nimble Pack'—that is what the old captain of the Mauronic used to call them. Of course there were, and still are, odd men who work New York—Genoa, and there have been parties on the Canadian packets. But there is not much picking in dago ships and Canada is dangerous. Why, an ordinary common or garden magistrate in Canada can send a man down for ten years and give him the whip! That makes the Canadian trip so unpopular.

"When I first went to sea there were about five bunches—Harry Burke's gang, Dutch Frank's, Sandy Havers', Boy Swindon's and Jerry Macbean's—that's five, isn't it? And all the time there was Boston Smith. He was a gang by himself, and never had a partner. He laid for the rich and the silly—business men who thought they knew it all. You've met the kind. Know everything about their own business, but are not quite sure whether Tunis is the name of a German town or whether it is a new kind of chewing gum.

"Boston worked into tables of five that needed another player to liven up the game.

"'Six is a nice number for a poker game. Won't you play, Mr. Smith?'

"'Why, surely—I was going to bed, but I don't mind playing for an hour.'

"Nobody ever caught him out. Once, when there was a little disagreement about his holding four aces against four pat kings, he insisted upon being searched and examined generally. They did it too, and apologised.

"'Very well, gentlemen,' says he. 'Now, if you don't mind, we will resume. I bear no malice, and I can imagine nothing more exasperating and liable to tear one's judgment to tatters, than to be beaten on four kings. Steward, some new cards.'

"And the very first hand he dealt, he gave fours to every player at the table, and a low straight flush to himself. It cost that crowd some money, and he certainly livened up the game. He may have been working with the barman—your hair would go up if I told you the number of ocean-going barmen who stand in with card-sharpers. But if he was, the barman was certainly an artist.

"The other crowds tried to get Boston into their game, but he allowed that they were too dishonest. It's a fact. Told them plain and straight one morning in the smoke-room of the Mauronic.

"It was Jerry Macbean's lot he was talking to—the toughest collection of wolves that ever travelled saloon. They would take a man's last cent, and then go back to his cabin to get the gold filling from his teeth. You never saw them playing in the smoke-room. They always got their sucker down in some quiet place—in a cabin as likely as not.

"Jerry looked ugly, but he said nothing. Boston Smith stood seventy-two inches in his stockings and was a pretty bad man when he was roused. I never saw him that way, but I've heard.

"Two voyages after this row, we shipped Boston Smith and the Macbean crowd in New York. We had a big passenger list, for it was early summer, and there were a lot of tony people on board. Colonel Vanbyn and Mrs. Cornebilt, and a regular regiment of monied folk. I was bedroom steward of 228 to 232 on C deck, and it so happened that Boston Smith was, so to speak, in my charge.

"I suppose you wonder why we didn't warn the passengers that there were card- sharpers on board? Well, we did. We kept a notice posted permanently in the smoking-room: 'Passengers are cautioned et cetera.' You've seen it. A steward doesn't tell anything till the right—what's the word? That's it—psychological moment and somehow that never seems to come.

"Boston was always very decent to stewards. He tipped well, and he gave very little trouble, except that he was particular as to the way his clothes were brushed. I can say that I have handled every suit he wore, and I've never found a card or a false pocket or any of those contraptions that card-men are supposed to have concealed about them. He was a gentleman to deal with—always polite and never asking questions or getting into familiar conversations. I must say that I like a gentleman to be a gentleman, and keep his place. It's there for him to keep, the same as it is for a servant.

"The first three days of the voyage, Boston Smith did nothing but loaf in his chair up on the boat deck and read novels that he'd borrowed from the ship's library. He used to read books by a writer called Meredith and by another called James. I could never make head or tail of them. I think that books which can't be under-stood by everybody are badly written. But that is neither here nor there.

"On the fourth day I saw him go up the companionway in company with a fellow named Carter Moriaty. His father was Moriaty, the New York banker—

or it may have been Philadelphia. Anyway, he was dead. Carter M. they used to call him—a fat fellow of thirty who'd never done a day's work in his life, but knew it all.

"'Carter M.,' says I to myself, 'your doom is sealed.'

"I had a chat with his steward next day and the steward said that Carter had told his valet that he'd lost twenty thou-sand dollars.

"'He's lucky,' says I.

"But he wasn't lucky. He lost over thirty thousand the next night. I didn't trouble to inquire after that—and I hadn't time, either, for that day Mrs. Frederick Colcott, who travelled in the royal suite, lost her diamond spray. It was a steal—there was no doubt about it. The jewel case had been broken open in the night by somebody who had managed to get into the cabin, and the spray was gone.

"It was my luck that the theft occurred in my section of C deck. I was her steward, and I was on duty late that night, long after she went to bed—sick. There was a bit of a cross-sea running and the Mauronic would roll if there was a ripple on the water.

"So it was me for the captain. Where was I at 12—what was I doing at 11—did I see any strangers on C deck? You know the sort of questions they ask you. There was never a second officer that ever went to sea that didn't believe he ought to have been a lawyer, and the second did all the cross-examination.

"Well, the ship was searched from end to end. There were two firemen who had a bad record, and they were put under arrest because the master-at-arms found a lady's shawl and a pair of field glasses that they had smouched when they were cleaning decks. Stuff left behind by passengers, and overlooked by the deck steward. But there was no diamond spray. We didn't touch Cherbourg in those days but went straight into the Mersey—at that time Southampton wasn't a port for us. Only the South African and the River Plate boats went there. As soon as we got into the Mersey the police came aboard and the first thing they did was to come down to Boston's cabin. I can see him now, sitting on a settee, a good- looking fellow with brown, clean-shaven face, and I can recall the look of astonishment he showed when the bulls came in.

"'Why, gentlemen!' he said as he took the cigar out of his mouth and stood up. He was all ready for shore and there was a glove on one hand. 'This is a surprise. What can I do for you?'

"'We want to search your baggage,' said the first detective.

"'Go right ahead,' said Boston, and sat down again watching them with a sort of amused look in his eye as he pulled at his cigar.

"They took his trunk first and right on the top of the tray, under some hand-kerchiefs, was the diamond spray. Boston Smith just stared.

"'Gee whiz!' he said, 'now how did that get there?'

"One of the splits laughed.

"'You'll be able to explain,' he said, and looked at his pal.

"'I certainly should like to,' said Boston, and threw away his cigar. 'You'll want me to go a little walk, I guess,' he said. 'This thing has been planted, and the man who planted it was the man who sent you straight to this cabin.'

"The detective said nothing, but jerked his head, and Boston followed. I don't know what would have happened if they had waited until the passengers were ashore before they landed him. They usually do this when they are taking a prisoner off. But these police seemed to be anxious to get him away from the ship, and they hustled him down the gangway. I saw it all, because I followed them on deck to find out what was to be done with Boston's luggage. It was an open gangway and I saw Boston walking in front of the detective—the other having stayed behind, I suppose, to see the captain and the woman who had lost the spray.

"On the landing stage, at the foot of the gangway, was Jerry Macbean. It was the first time I'd seen him since he came on board. I heard from his steward he'd had a lean voyage.

"Boston didn't turn his head, but was walking on.

"'How's the trade in diamond sprays?' shouts Jerry.

"I didn't see Boston turn. I heard the shot and saw Jerry double up and fall over on his face, and then I heard Boston say:

"'Fine!'

"That's all he said, and then the women began squealing and all kinds of policemen leapt at Boston. But he didn't make any struggle; he dropped his gun after he'd fired and there was no need to act rough with him. Not that they did—much.

"It was two voyages after that they sentenced Boston Smith for 'unlawful wounding.' Jerry was still walking about on crutches—and lucky to be alive. Ten years' penal servitude was the sentence. I went down to the Assize Court and saw the close of the trial, it being the day before we sailed.

"Boston just bowed to the judge and stepped down. He might have had a life sentence, only his lawyer got at Jerry's character and gave him a shocking time in the box. Still, ten years takes a lot of passing.

"I often used to think of Boston, and I've talked about him a whole lot to other crowds. He was a gentleman. One of the first things he did when he got control of his money was to send aboard to me a five-pound note—my tip.

"What a contrast to some so-called respectable people!

"After that, and for about seven years, Jerry Macbean's lot only travelled with me three voyages. They were working the boats all right, but I just happened to miss them. One of the times they were with me was on the Caloric, the company's new boat, when she was torpedoed. That was during the war. The third time was last year, on the Sindic. Jerry walked with a limp and he'd got a new lot of partners. He usually travelled four people. One of these never played cards at all. He used to sit on deck and make acquaintances with people, tell them how dangerous it was to play cards with sharpers, and then he'd introduce them to the gang.

"Willie Hoffner only travelled three. He was a little thin-faced man, who got the confidence of his victims by describing his bad state of health and the arrangements he'd made to be cremated.

"Both Willie and Jerry were on board the Sindic when she warped out of Southampton Dock. I heard that this couldn't be avoided, and that Willie's gang had arranged to pool with Jerry any makings that came his way.

"It looked like being a pretty lively voyage. Every berth was taken, we had a lot of good people on board, though it didn't seem that I was going to get much out of it. That's the luck of my job. Some voyages you may have a couple of millionaires to look after, the next voyage you may strike half a dozen missionaries coming home from China, who think that they've done well when they show you their curios and the scars on their heads that the Chinese did before they were converted.

"One of my passengers rather reminded me of a missionary. He was a tallish man with black hair and a black spider-web beard. You may have seen the kind I mean—you can trace every hair from end to skin. He wore a single

eyeglass with a black tortoiseshell rim—the only American I'd ever seen wearing one, and he told me that he had been living in Switzerland during the war. He had made a lot of money (that news cheered me up) and was going to settle down in Cleveland where he belonged. You know how these conversations start. A sort of 'good-morning—here's your coffee, sir—it's a fine morning,' and then you get on to what happened on the last voyage and the people who were aboard.

"Anyway, that's what he told me. He didn't speak-much. He used to play chess against himself, sometimes in his cabin, sometimes on deck. I mentioned once about Boston Smith. He happened to ask me what was the usual tip nowadays, and I thought it was a good opportunity to get in a little propaganda work.

"'Boston Smith?' says he, very thoughtful. 'I know that name. What sort of a person was he in appearance?'

"'Taller than you, sir, with a sort of golden-brownish hair.'

"'Clean shaven?'

"'Yes, sir,' I said.

"'Then I have met him,' said he, 'in Switzerland—how curious that he should be a card-sharper!'

"I didn't see how he could have met Boston, considering that Boston had only served about seven out of his ten years, and I said so.

"'You forget, steward,' he said, 'that it is the practice in England to remit a certain period—three months in every year, I think—for good conduct. Strangely enough,' said he, 'I have just been reading a book on the subject. Tell me some more about this man, I am interested.'

"Well, I told him all that I knew—which wasn't much. I suppose I ought to have mentioned that Jerry Macbean and Willie Hoffner were on board, and would be round him like bees round treacle, if they got to know that he was travelling in bulk. However, I didn't. But like a fool, I told the stewardess in my section all about his having a lot of money. And, of course, she told the deck steward and I know for certain that he is a 'nose' for every gang that travels.

"The next two cabins to Mr. Danton (that was my rich passenger's name, though we used to call him 'Whiskers' between ourselves) were occupied by a brother and a sister. They had a fine name—Tester-Stanhope—but they

hadn't much more. I gathered that they were going out to a fruit farm which an uncle had bought for them—their parents having just died. And the uncle had given the boy and the girl a thousand pounds to start there, and paid their passage out. That was why they were travelling in good class cabins. The stewardess told me a bit and the boy told me a bit more. He was one of these cock-sure lads that get my goat. He always knew the position of the ship, and he could tell you what time we'd go alongside, and he knew where the icebergs would be seen, and where we should strike fog—and heaven knows what. It was no good telling him anything. It was like writing in-formation on the fly-leaf of the Encyclopaedia.

"'It's a nice morning, sir, but I think we'll have a little rain.'

"'Rain with the wind due east?— rubbish,' says he.

"What was the good of telling him it was sou'-west?

"Or else you'd say, by way of making conversation :

"'There'll be a dance to-night in the saloon.'

"'I know,' he'd say. 'The purser told me yesterday.'

"His sister was as different as you can imagine—a shy girl, very grateful for any-thing you did for her, and always anxious to hear anything interesting. I'm not cracking up myself, but there are few people who know more about the North Atlantic than myself—bearing in mind that I am only a steward, and not a ship's officer.

"And she was as pretty as a picture. Soft and sweet, with a timid helpless way, that made you want to be running round after her all the time. For some reason these two and Mr. Danton chummed up together. They used to sit together on deck. I don't know why young Stanhope and Danton hit it off so well, unless it was that Danton was a good listener. On the Sindic C deck is level with the promenade deck, so that I saw a whole lot of what was happening.

"For the first three or four days they hung together, Danton teaching the girl (whose name was Eileen) the game of chess, and young Ralph Tester-Stanhope giving him advice. And then the kid wandered off and these two used to be alone. Personally, if I was a young girl I shouldn't have taken a lot of interest in a middle-aged man with black whiskers, but I could see that she had begun to lean on him. Not actually—she wasn't that kind of leaner. I fancy she was scared stiff at the prospect of being dependent on

young Ralph, and just had to lean on somebody. I heard her and her brother one morning, talking in her cabin.

"'But, Ralph,' she was saying, 'we won't be able to afford a motor car for years.'

"'You can buy 'em cheap in America,' says he, 'and I expect to make at least a thousand the first year. I've taken an horticultural course, Eileen—don't forget that. Anyhow, we can afford to have a real good time in New York for a week or two.'

"'But, Ralph!' (I could hear her gasp). 'Uncle said we must go straight through to British Columbia. It is terribly expensive living in New York—Mr. Danton told me so. And we shall want every penny.'

"'Oh, rats,' says Ralph. (I'd have gladly paid a pound for the privilege of giving him a clip across his ear). 'Uncle is old-fashioned....

"He came out just about then, and I couldn't go into her cabin because she was crying.

"That same day Jerry Macbean sent along his 'Shepherd.' He was the tout who never played cards, but gathered in the golden baa lambs. He was a man named Michell, a very quiet, middle-aged man who wore glasses and was supposed to be a tobacco broker from Kentucky or some-where south.

"I knew that there was a ship in sight as soon as I squinted him coming forward. That's the way he started his conversation if he couldn't find another.

"'Have you seen the ship,' he says. (They were all sitting right under the alley-way porthole where I was standing). 'It is a big Cunarder—she is on the starboard side.'

"So they all walked round to see the Imperator go by. They call her the Berengaria now, and she's a wonderful ship to see.

"Of course that started the conversation, and then Jerry came strolling carelessly by and it was a case of 'Meet my friend, Mr. Macbean—an old Scottish family.'

"Jerry was angling for Danton—I could hear that, but Mr. Danton said he seldom played bridge or poker.

"'And then I play such a modest game that it isn't worth the trouble,' he says.

"'Oh, say,' says Jerry, pained, 'we only play ten cents a hundred.' But he didn't get Danton. Instead, he found Ralph. Ralph knew all about bridge. When he came back before the lunch bugle went, he had won eighty-five dollars.

"'Danger!' he says when Miss Eileen talked about playing cards with strangers. 'You can't sharp at bridge, and besides, they are friends of that big tobacco man.'

"Can't sharp at bridge! I could have laughed. It's got poker lashed to the mast from the sharper's point of view. They needn't stack the cards. They've only to signal what top cards they're holding to over-call their hands, if they are partnering the victim, or to revoke, and it's picking up money with all the chance of winning honestly thrown in.

"Two nights off Sandy Hook they pulled Mr. Ralph into poker. He knew all about poker. They got him between tea and dinner, and the first I knew about it was when Miss Eileen's bell rang and I went in to find Mr. Ralph lying on the bed sobbing his heart out.

"'Will you please fetch Mr. Danton, steward,' she says, and she was terrified. I guessed what it was all about when I saw the revolver on the floor. He couldn't even commit suicide without going to her and telling her how well he could do it.

"I picked it up and shoved it in my pocket. If there's one thing we don't want on board of a ship, it's a suicide of that kind.

"I found Mr. Danton; he was dressing for dinner, and he came as he was.

"I'm not a listener, and curiosity was never a vice of mine. But, in a manner of speaking, I could not help hearing, especially as I was rubbing up the paint-work in the alleyway. Well, I could have rubbed it up in the morning but I felt like doing it just then.

"'He's lost every farthing we have,' says Miss Eileen in a low voice.

'"Lost it—how?'

"'He has been playing cards with Mr. Macbean,' she says. She was very quiet and very steady. There was nothing weak or timid about her then. Mr. Danton didn't say a word for a long time, and when he did, he was talking to young Ralph.

"'See here, my young friend, you're not going to mend matters by blubbing. I'll go see that—what's his name? Macbean? Perhaps I can persuade him to give you some of the money back.'

"That sort of thing roused Ralph and he started talking about debts of honour, and how no gentleman could ask another gentleman for money he had lost at cards.

"'I forbid you to see Mr. Macbean,' he says. 'I lost my money fairly. They couldn't have cheated me without my knowing—I'm not a fool.'

"And so on and so forth.

"Danton and the girl went out on deck and I saw them leaning over the rail together, so close, and her arm slipped through his, that I guessed she wasn't likely to starve in New York City.

"In our mess we had had rabbit-pie for dinner—at least, every member of the mess but me. I never did care for rabbit even when it was fresh, and these rabbits were out of the freezer. I mention the rabbits because they gave me an opportunity of seeing Act II. so to speak. The chief steward sent for me whilst the passengers were at dinner.

"'Finished your work?' he said,

"'Yes, sir,' said I.

"'Then go forward to the smoking-room and report to the barman. Billing and his mate are down with ptomaine poisoning—did you notice anything funny about that rabbit pie?'

"It appears that the whole mess was down with this ptomaine poisoning—you spell it with a 'P'—and as I'd had a promise from the chief of the first vacancy in the smoking-room, I got the duty for that night.

"It was about 9 o'clock when the people began to drift back from dinner, and almost the first man in was 'Whiskers,' looking very distinguished, as the French say, in his black eyeglass and broad black ribbon.

"Jerry came in later and I saw the two having a long conversation. When I went up to them to take Jerry his coffee and cointre eau, he was laughing.

"'I'm very sorry, Mr. Danton,' he said, 'but I don't know what I can do. I wouldn't have played with the poor fish if I thought he couldn't afford to lose.'

"He looked at Whiskers with a twinkle in his eye.

"'The best thing you can do,' he said, 'is to get into a little game and win back all that he lost—my luck's turned for the worse.'

"'I haven't played poker for years,' said Mr. Danton, 'and although I can better afford to lose than Mr. Stanhope, I don't care to play.'

"Well, Jerry kidded him along and I could see Danton was weakening. He kept on polishing his eyeglass nervously, and what with Jerry's kidding and the fact that quite a lot of people had gathered round and were listening, he seemed to get more and more rattled until at last they had him.

"The gang gathered round and they let in an outsider just to make the six and give the game a genuine appearance. Of course, Danton won at first. Couldn't do wrong. The way they let him take money showed that they were out for a killing.

"Then he lost. He bet up to two thousand dollars—they had dealt him a pat-full hand and on the show-down was beaten by small fours. That made him look down his nose and count the bills that were left.

"He won a little jack-pot after that, but when they handed him the cards to deal I saw by the signs that the real killing had commenced. I've seen plenty of cabin play. I've known the gangs for years and watched 'em at practice. It was ten years before my eye was educated up to seeing a pack changed in full view of the audience. Quick? That's not the word. One of the gang picks up the pack from the table and hands it across. You may never take your eye from it, but between the moment the cards are picked up and the moment they reach the dealer the old pack has been pocketed and a new pack beautifully stacked has been put in its place. The only thing I saw happen was Jerry lift the cards and frown as if he'd forgotten something. The next instant they were in Danton's hand— but it wasn't the same pack!

"Danton seemed nervous.

"'Is it my deal?' he asked.

"'Your deal, sir,' says Jerry, 'and this time I'm going to bet. If I've only got a pair of fours I'll bet. The game wants livening up.'

"I looked over Danton's hand, but I didn't see anything except the ten of diamonds. But he drew no cards. No more did Jerry.

"And then the fun started. The first man to call made it a thousand dollars—it's funny how they always bet in dollars on the outward voyage and in pounds on the homeward trip.

"The next man raised him five hundred. Jerry put it up to two thousand. The next man made it twenty-five hundred. It was three thousand when it came to Danton.

"'I'll see that,' says he.

"But the man on his left raised it five hundred. It was four thousand when it came to Danton again, one man having chucked in his cards (he was the mug they'd brought in to make the sixth).

"'I'll see that,' says Danton.

"But they weren't letting him see any-thing, and it was six thousand when it came to Danton's turn to speak. He was more nervous than ever.

"'Six thousand is a lot,' he said doubt-fully, 'but I've got a real good hand and I don't like to go away.'

"He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a roll of bills and counted them.

"'I'm playing with strangers,' says Danton, 'and, without wishing to cast any reflections, I'd like to be sure that I am not betting against words.'

"Jerry planked down a wad of money. He must have had a very successful voyage home. And, of course, the other members of the gang did the same. There was a bigger crowd round the table than I've seen since Monty Benson, the millionaire, played Isaac Hardfelt picquet for a hundred a point—and that's going back a few voyages.

"'Do you make a limit?' asked Danton.

"'No limit—raise by thousands if you like. Double stake when it gets to ten thousand.'

"'Well, I'll see six thousand,' said Danton with a sigh.

"'Seven,' said the next man.

"'Eight,' said Jerry.

"'Nine.'

"'Ten.'

"It came to Danton again.

"'Twenty,' says he.

"The next man went away, and I think Jerry either funked or else, and this was more likely, he thought that twenty thousand dollars was about Danton's bank roll.

"'I'll see that twenty thousand,' he said. 'I've got a straight flush, king- high.'

"Danton put down his cards. Ace, King, Queen, Knave and ten of diamonds—unbeatable.

"I never saw any man look as Jerry looked. If the ship had suddenly straddled an iceberg he couldn't have been more dazed.

"'A straight flush—ace-high?' says he. He couldn't believe his eyes.

"'That's so,' said Danton, and began to gather up the money.

"Then Jerry laughed.

"Let's face all the cards on the table,' he says. 'I have an idea that I drew away the ten of diamonds when I drew.'

"As he didn't draw cards at all, I thought Danton would mention the fact. But they faced the cards and they were all there. Not one too many, not a single card duplicated.

"'Let's deal again,' said Jerry, breathing through his nose.

"'I don't think I'll play any more,' said Mr. Danton, and stuffed the money into his pocket. 'I will give you your revenge to-morrow, gentlemen.'

"But the next day he was not well enough to do anything but walk with Miss Eileen and her brother. Jerry trailed him all over the ship and was outside the smoking-room biting his nails and waiting for Danton when he came up from dinner.

"I didn't see that night's play, partly because the regular smoking-room steward was back on duty, and partly because it was the night before we got into New York—we passed Fire Island at one o'clock in the morning, though I wasn't aware of the fact.

"From what I heard later Mr. Danton won about ten thousand.

"But, as I say, I'm not quite sure about what happened that night. At one o'clock every steward was paraded, and the purser and head steward and second officer were trying to discover who was the man who had gone into Colonel John Widdicombe's suite whilst he was promenading the deck with a little English widow that he was crazy about, and pinched a pearl necklace that he was taking back to his wife. The pearls had gone, and the colonel's presentation watch and a gold cigar case.

"That sort of thing often happens just before a ship arrives in port. The thieves wait until the last moment, because it gives very little time to make a thorough search. Luckily, it wasn't in my section. It appeared that the colonel had drawn the pearls from the purser over night, so that he needn't bother him in the morning. That's what he said. My own idea is that he wanted to show 'em off to the widow.

"We had the same old search with the same old result. At Ellis Island the next morning half a dozen men from the Central Office came aboard, but they found nothing.

"I carried Mr. Danton's grip and Miss Eileen's portmanteau to the Customs, when we got alongside, and Jerry Macbean and one of his crowd followed me.

"There was a detective on duty at the end of the gangway, and Mr. Danton, who was the first of our party, stopped and said something to the detective. He only spoke for a few seconds, not long enough to hold us up.

"I reached the end of the gangway and put down the baggage I was carrying in order to get a better purchase of them, and at that minute Jerry put his foot ashore on his native land.

"'Hello, Jerry,' says the detective, 'got anything worth seeing in that grip of yours?'

"'Say, how long have you been a Customs officer, Reilly?' said Jerry.

"'Just been appointed Collector,' says Reilly, and took the grip out of Jerry's hand. The pearl necklace, the gold cigar case and the presentation watch fell out when he opened it.

"I didn't wait to see the rumpus, I wanted to tell Mr. Danton. He had found a Customs officer and I didn't have a chance of speaking to him until the examination of his baggage was through, and then I had to carry his bag to the 'S' block, where the Stanhopes had just finished displaying their lingerie.

"'Good-bye, Felix,' he said, and stuffed a hundred-dollar bill into my hand, but I was so astonished at his calling me by my Christian name, that I didn't see its value until after he had gone. Only the old passengers who knew me called me by that name.

"'I'm travelling to British Columbia,' he said. 'Mr. Stanhope and I are going into partnership.' He looked at the girl and she turned her eyes away. I pretty well guessed where the partnership would be.

"'I've left a pair of shoes in the cabin,' he said, dropping his voice. 'You can have them, Felix, and there's a bottle of hair-dye in the locker—you might find it useful.'

"I looked at him hard. He was smiling—that gentle smile of Boston Smith's.

"I've often wondered how long it took him to get his hair golden brown again. And how he explained it to the young lady.

"I will say this of Boston Smith, that he was thorough. He must have spent six months in cultivating those whiskers of his, and another three months before he found the right voyage to put it over Jerry.

"Twelve years Jerry got—they had been waiting for a chance at Jerry. So had Boston. Jerry swore he was innocent and that the jewellery had been planted in his bag. I think he was right.

THE END