

PROMENADE DECK.

by Ishbel Ross

FIFTEENTH INSTALLMENT

The girl had passed from frenzy to a maudlin collapse. She was cowering as her protector dragged her firmly through the door. Down the companionway and along the corridors they staggered, the older man moving with intent and deliberate steps. At last they reached the cabin and the girl flopped on her bed. Miss Mudge bent down and drew off her slippers and stockings. She made her sit up and she pulled her flowered frock over her head. Blushingly she saw how little she wore, she gingerly drew the scrap of lace that seemed to be all of her under-clothing. How lovely she was! Miss Mudge went into her wardrobe and found a nightdress—of silk so soft that it could crush it in one hand. It was fragrant and sweet as acacia blossom.

"Comfy now?" she asked. Joan's reply was an incoherent gasp. Miss Mudge kissed her and tucked her up, dimly touched by her helpless state. Then she found her way to her own bed in the darkness, for she could not bear light just then. Her numbness slowly passing and she was coming out of a fog, aware at last that something terrible had happened to her in the captain's quarters. In a full blaze of consciousness she buried her face in her hands and sobbed. Miss Foster wild and drunk and beautiful, told the truth and stripped her to shreds, right down to the flannel foundation of her cotton nightgown and her crimped fringe.

Miss Mudge was seeing things as they were, and she felt alone and afraid, in a vast hall that stretched to infinity, a hall lined with shining mirrors that reflected her and over again the cheapness of all her belongings. A week ago she had felt so chic. And the kiss from Mr. Charlton—an act of pity!—had been cheap, too. Her life was drained of life. For hours she lay on her bed without mov-

The cocktail party went on, with the guests making feverish efforts to cover up the disappearance of Miss Mudge and Joan. Only Dick went out, after catching the eye of the captain. Angela took herself clear of the horrible scene that had gone through.

Captain Baring took out his violin and settled it tenderly under his chin. He played for them, softly, Grieg and Bach. Angela sat transfixed—not so much by the music as by the strange man who went lonely nights on the bridge and could wring such feeling from his violin. When he had finished, she was still remote, as if his playing was a form of self-intelligence that he did not care to share with others. He listened to their compliments absent-mindedly and left them without a word.

Miss Mudge left the Marenia at San Francisco. She was pale and wore her glasses. Her fringe was straight and she had given her Spanish shawl to her stewardess. One of her vanities had been laid aside for her mind worked clearly now, with everything out in the open. After her tips had been paid, she had eight dollars left and her return ticket to Ohonto. That was that! She had travelled forty thousand miles but had failed to see the world. She had spent her life's savings and would have to begin over again. Another twenty years with Agatha before it was time for them to retire on their pensions. Her dull life lay over her like a shade. Bravely she stepped down the gangplank, knowing that glamour was only an empty word. She was sure at least that there was only one place here in which she could move. Hereafter she would keep her thoughts clipped to her surroundings, and her thoughts close to the ground.

She had avoided Dick since the cocktail party. He had sent her a note, kind and detached, telling her that she must forget every word Miss Foster had said. It was

now among her souvenirs—a red balloon, a swizzle-stick, a cheap little Tanagra from Athens, a small carved god, her Jordan water, some gala favours, her autographed menus, a snapshot of him at Kandy. That was all. It was good-bye.

The people with whom she had chatted on deck and at table, exchanging addresses and promising lifelong friendship, had been too busy with their own affairs to notice her undistinguished departure. There were two exceptions. Mrs. Wynant had been cordial, inviting her to visit her home in England, and Miss Arundel had kissed her warmly, promising to send her some wedding cake. Miss Mudge fluttered along the pier. She had to get through the customs, but pain was fogging her vision, and the dragging weight deep in her inside, was getting worse each minute. For twenty years she had looked forward to her trip around the world. Now it was over, and she had nothing. She stumbled against a trunk and wiped the tears from her eyes.

It was too late for her to see that Dick was watching her as she wandered with uncertain steps among the packing-cases on the wharf. His glance was kind, but he was thinking that it was far, far better for Miss Mudge to be stepping back into her lustreless frame at Ohonto, Wisconsin. He had avoided Miss Mudge since the cocktail party, but only because she seemed to be keeping deliberately out of his way, and he had taken his cue from her. There was nothing he could say to her, nothing at all.

The orchestra was playing. Its languid notes came drifting up from the ballroom. Patty's hand stole through Johnny's arm. He squeezed it hard.

"Good kid!" he whispered, and kissed the tip of her ear.

Patty sighed. "I love the swish of the sea in my ears. Life will seem so quiet, Johnny, when we're on land again."

"Life is just opening up for Patty," said Angela, watching her affectionately.

"I hope there's something in Johnny, for Patty is a fine girl," Macduff declared.

"I think there is, Macduff. You're a little hard on the young."

"Intolerable puppies, all cheek and ignorance!"

Angela laughed. "I've got rather fond of those two. I shall always wonder about them. When you're thrown together on a trip like this, and share the sort of things that we have shared, you get more attached to people than you would in thirty years at home."

"I wonder what's happened to the Langford woman," said Macduff, irrelevantly.

"She's probably not with Rumford by now, but she did all the damage she could while she was on the boat. She comes from New York, doesn't she? You may run into her some time."

"Angela," Macduff bent over, "would you ever want to live in New York?"

"Never."

Dick Charlton took off his jacket and put on his dressing-gown, he lighted his pipe and sat down at his desk to read. A knock at the door. He opened it wide, and found Joan standing outside, the strap of her satin frock slipping down over her arm, and her wild green eyes ablaze with light. Dick grew pale but controlled himself. He couldn't forget what this devilish girl had done to Miss Mudge.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"I want to speak to you, Dick. I want to tell you I'm sorry. I swear I didn't mean to hurt her—or you. I swear I didn't."

"Joan, I hope never to see you again as long as I live," said Dick, in a voice that stung like a lash.

"Oh, oh, Dick, you can't mean it! You can't have forgotten our night together."

"I've forgotten everything except your unkindness."

The door moved in her face.

"No, no, Dick, don't do that!"

She was looking at the closed door. He had meant it, then. It was all over with Dick, who had seemed for a brief space to find her desirable. She knocked at the door again. There was no response. She would go to the bar.

An hour later Joan was on her way to the top deck again, with the vague idea of having a plunge to cool herself off. That idiot Macduff was standing at the top, staring down at her. Now would be as good an occasion as any to tell him what she thought of him. There were times when Joan burned to express her true opinion of some of her fellow passengers and here was a good chance.

"Looking for Mrs. Wynant?" she enquired, reeling up against him.

"That's funny." She laughed on a piercing note. Macduff regarded her with disgust.

"I don't like your looks," said Joan, "and I don't like the way you're staring at me now. Who do you think you are, anyway? You're scarcely human."

She prodded him in the ribs. Macduff did not move.

"But I like the way you can drink." She grew confidential. "Let's have a brandy together. Come to my room."

"No, thanks."

"All right, big boy. Joan's going to have a swim."

She made a gamin gesture and followed a twisting course to the pool. Macduff watched her, wondering if she weren't tipsy enough to drown. What an appalling girl! Even before she had reached the door she stooped down, caught her frock at the hem and began to pull it over her head. He could see her long, slim legs. The pool was dark, except for the green light in the far corner. Her dress came off and was flung to the floor; then she spread her arms for a dive. He caught a glimpse of her gleaming back in the second before she jumped. He waited for the splash, hoping that it would sober her up. It was his duty to see that she didn't drown.

But no splash came. Only a dull crash that sickened Macduff and hurried his footsteps through the door that Joan had entered. God in Heaven, the tank was drained! For a moment he shut his eyes, then leaped over the edge to look. The green light spread its sickly suffusion, and there, on the tiles, lay Joan. She was naked except for her beads, garters, stockings and sandals. One of her stockings was halfway down. Her arms were spread like wings. Her face he could not see. It was crushed on the tiles. Slowly he realized that the girl must be dead. Through a mist he saw her dress lying on the floor beside him, flame red, still warm from her body. There was no other trace of her, not a scrap of underwear. She had died as recklessly as she had lived.

The ship was heaving gently, rocking her white body. On every deck people were packing for landing. No one could know that he was standing here alone, guarding a lifeless form. He must do something about it. He must start the horrible chain of machinery moving. Two girls dead across his path! Jenny in the China Sea and the click of her heel on his wall, Joan with her brains dashed out before his eyes. He had sworn to avoid all human contact, yet fate had caught him twice in the orbit of death. Was it punishment for vowing that he would travel alone and apart? Were people not intended to avoid one another and the burden of mutual care? Had he been ducking life and had Angela touched his sensibilities at last? Was there something else that one must heed besides the inviolability of one's solitude and the warmth of a glass of whisky? Macduff's strong Highland sense of superstition was aroused. Sweat stood on his brow. Thoughts flowed through his mind in molten masses. The numbness of forty years was wearing off, and each nerve was a red-hot needle, coming to life and pricking his flesh. But the moments were flying.

(Concluded Next Week)

TODAY and TOMORROW

FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE

RUBBER itself

Back in 1911 I met a great German scientist, Dr. Duisberg, who showed me a set of tires he had made for the Kaiser's car, from artificial rubber of his own invention. I asked him how he did it.

"It's perfectly simple," he replied. "It's done by the polymerization of isoprene." Which left me right where I was at the start.

Since then thousands of others have tried to make rubber synthetically. Some have got better results than others, but nobody yet has produced a rubber substitute that answers all the purposes of natural rubber and costs no more.

An American company has produced something that works, but it is too expensive for ordinary use. The latest report from Germany is that a synthetic rubber superior to the natural article is being made from petroleum. That is doubted by practical rubber men.

Some day, however, somebody will turn the trick.

BUDDAH geography

The sect of Buddhists who live in Tibet regard their high priest, the "Dalai Lama" as their spiritual and temporal ruler. When he dies, they believe, his soul enters the body of a newborn babe, who at once becomes the Dalai Lama.

The last Dalai Lama died in December, 1933, and ever since then the Tibetans have been hunting for a child born at the instant of his death. They have not found one, and have about decided to accept the spiritual overlordship of another Lama, the "Panchan Lama," who has been an exile in China for twelve years.

That may result in putting China in a position to control the mysterious land on the Himalayan plateau, and so expand westward while Japan is slicing off Chinese territory in the North.

Little things often have great consequences. Nobody can guess what is going to happen in Asia, but the failure of the Tibetans to find a baby born just at the right time may change the geography of a nation.

LIAR honored

The town of Bodenwerden, in Germany, has bought the house in which Baron Munchausen, the world's most famous liar, used to

live. He was born there 216 years ago, and won fame for the "tall stories" which he used to tell about his adventures as a soldier and a hunter. One of his listeners wrote down some of the baron's yarns and sold them to a London book publisher, who printed them in 1785.

Since then the noble name of Hieronymus Karl Friederich, Frierherr von Munchausen, has been a synonym for "liar" throughout the English-speaking world.

Lately there has been a revival of interest in the type of obviously exaggerated or impossible tales such as Baron Munchausen told. But the technique is different. Baron Munchausen's stories are not thrilling enough for young people who read the "Tarzan" stories and delight in the adventures of "Buck Rogers."

LANGUAGE our own

It would be a monotonous world if everybody looked alike, thought alike, dressed alike and spoke alike. I have long felt that we were getting too completely standardized, and I am glad to hear the voice of Professor Hoffman of Boston University raised in defense of variety in speech and accent.

"If everybody talked with the precision of a radio announcer," Professor Hoffman said the other day, "our common speech would be lacking in charm, vitality and the human touch."

I hope none of the attempts of pedants and purists to make everybody speak alike will ever destroy the warm fluency of the accents of the South, or deprive New England of its short-vowelled, clipped staccato speech.

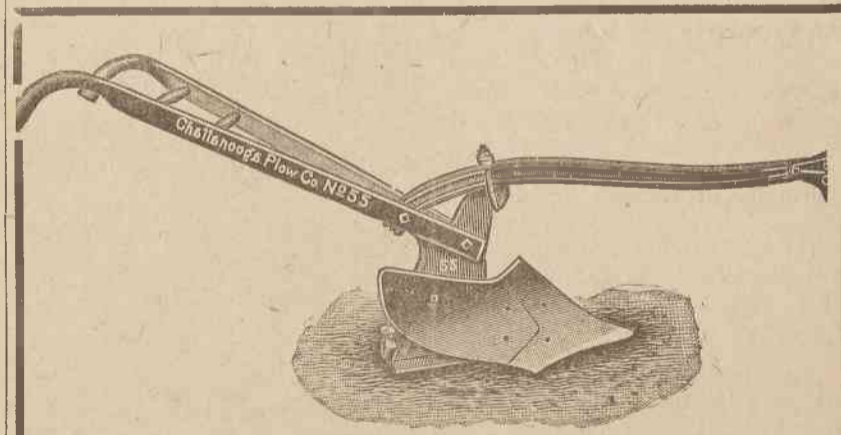
One of my fads for years has been to try to tell where a person was "raised" by listening to him or her speak. I am seldom more than a state or two out of the way.

TAXES dupes

Everybody pays taxes, but not everybody knows it. Nothing is more certain than that the tenant pays the landlord's taxes. If he didn't, the landlord would go broke.

Politicians make it a point to tell the average man that he doesn't pay taxes. They like to pose as "Robin Hoods," taking money from the rich to help the poor. The most absurd example of that which I have heard of comes from Annapolis, Maryland, where the public authorities have announced that any landlord who is charging what they regard as too high rents will have the assessment on his property raised, which will mean that he will have to pay more taxes—and get them where every landlord has to get his taxes, out of his tenants.

Some day, perhaps, everybody will realize that it is the ultimate consumer who pays all the taxes in the long run. When that day comes, the "man in the street" may be more watchful about the spending of tax money by public officials.



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