

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ADVENTURE OF DRAWING-ROOM "A"

#### I

LANIER, in his drawing-room, rang for the porter, and scribbled a note in pencil while awaiting the negro's advent :

"DEAR MISS DIRCK,—I am not hounding you; I am not blackmailing you; I'm not afraid you'll forget to divide with me; I'm not planning to double-cross you; and I'm not attempting to make love to you. And that's that.

"But what you've done to-night requires an interview with me before you go to sleep. I have Drawing-room 'A' on this train. Please come to it.

"JOHN LANIER."

He directed it to Section 12.

The porter arrived; Lanier showed him a ten-dollar bill, which evoked a lively African grin. Lanier said in a low voice :

"The young lady in Section 12? Ask her to send me an answer to this note, by you."

The porter remained absent five or six minutes, then reappeared, mysterious, important.

"The young lady wishes me to convey to you, suh, her ansuh in respect to your communication of this evenin', suh. I am requested to say to you that she will be pleased to considah a social interview with you in a few moments, suh."

Within those "few moments" there came a light

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knock on his door; he opened; Maddaleen stood in the corridor, wearing her mantle trimmed with silver fox over her black evening gown.

"Please come in," he said politely. His berth had not yet been made up; seats and sofa were available. They sat down *vis-à-vis* by the window.

The girl's beautiful face was still flushed from excitement. She said:

"I'm sorry I spoke to you as I did. It was vulgar to swear at you. I am ashamed."

"It's all right. You must be rather nervous."

"I am."

"I don't blame you, Heaven knows. I'm nervous, too."

There ensued a brief silence. Then Lanier said carelessly:

"I'm going to exchange accommodations with you. You must take this drawing-room, and I'll occupy your section."

"No, thank you——"

But he already had rung for the porter once more; and, when the negro came, he told him to take his luggage to Section 12 and bring the luggage from that section to Drawing-room "A."

"I didn't wish you to do that," said the girl under her breath.

"I understand," he said good humouredly, "that you don't care to be under obligations to a man of my sort. But I really don't mind a lower berth, and you really do need conveniences, comfort, and a good night's rest."

"Why should *I* concern *you*, Mr. Lanier?" she returned coldly.

"That you should feel perfectly fit to-morrow concerns our common safety."

"Has what I have done to-night compromised your security, too?"

"Probably."

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"Then you told me an untruth!"

His smile was mildly ironical. "You'd have done what you did all the same, Miss Dirck."

"Yes, but differently——"

"Well, it's done, anyway. You surely have stirred up the hornets."

"Do you really think they'll try to do to me what you said?"

"It has been their—*our*—custom," he replied gravely, "to search for, and try to murder, any member who has violated the neutrality of the Forty Club."

The girl's coolness and self-control preoccupied him. Her gaze met his; not a nerve twitched or a muscle quivered.

"Has that ever before occurred?"

"Twice since I have been a member."

"Did they discover the——"

"In both cases."

"And——"

"Yes; in both cases," he said gently. "And that is why I'm concerned about you——"

"You need not be——"

"Why not? Your safety may mean a million to me. I want you to *live*."

"Of course—on that score," she said hurriedly.

He laughed. "Certainly not on sentimental grounds. Your attitude towards such a man as I am is only too painfully plain."

She gave him a flushed and troubled look; remained silent for a while, then, with some difficulty:

"I'm not a crook, Mr. Lanier. And that is the reason for my attitude. Probably you believe I am a criminal. I've behaved like one."

Her lifted eyes were interrogative. He answered them:

"You are a finished actress, Miss Dirck. I don't know what else you may be. I merely surmise."

"Do you think I am acting *now*, Mr. Lanier?"

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"Instinct tells me that you are not; reason warns me that you are," he said lightly. "If you weren't a genius you couldn't have done what you did to-night, and we wouldn't be sitting here. You're the cleverest woman I ever knew. I actually am not sure at this moment whether you are straight or crooked. And I'm not a fool. I've told you that the members of the Forty Club are dangerous because they don't *look* like criminals. It's easy enough to see what sort of girl you *seem* to be. I know nobody who would not be disarmed instantly at sight of you—who would not be perfectly certain of you the moment you spoke. But I have seen you pick a man's pocket. And I have seen a gun in your handbag. And I've seen you act. I should like to know how on earth did you ever put it over so quickly?"

She told him the story calmly.

Lanier's face had become expressionless as he listened. She said, in ending:

"What I have told you is true. My motives for behaving like a crook I shall not explain to you. Think what you please about me, Mr. Lanier. It really doesn't matter to either of us."

"Yes, it does—because it puts us on common ground if I regard you as a crooked little girl," he replied smilingly.

"If your conclusion were a fact it would put us on common ground. But, whatever you choose to believe, I'm quite frank with you, Mr. Lanier; I'm not a criminal; I have never done anything dishonest; I am not interested in dishonest people; I *couldn't* be."

"Are you very sure I am dishonest?"

"Are you not?"

He laughed; and the girl took his mirth for his reply.

"I'm sorry," she said with a shrug. "You are well born, Mr. Lanier."

"Sorry I'm a crook?"

"Sorry anybody is—particularly a man of your breeding."

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He waited, his head averted, until the glint of amusement was entirely quenched in his eyes; then :

"Suppose I reform. Would it help me with you?"

She turned her head to look at him. His handsome face seemed serious, almost wistful.

"Is that a pleasantry?" she asked suspiciously.

"No; really, what would be your attitude towards me if I dropped this sort of thing and lived a straight life?"

She felt oddly uncomfortable, hesitated, shook her head.

"I can't answer."

"Would the stain remain—in your estimation of me?" he persisted.

"Really, Mr. Lanier, I don't know. I've had no experience with men of your description. There is a natural revulsion——"

"You couldn't ever forget, could you?" he insisted; and his pursuit irritated her.

"There is no interest of that sort—no question of friendship involved——"

"*Could* there be?"

The girl was becoming more and more impatient.

"There's no friendship between us *now*, anyway," she retorted nervously. "I am emphatically not interested in you, Mr. Lanier. Of course, I should be—interested—to believe that you even consider the possibility of giving up the—the sort of life——"

"Really would it please you?" he asked, so boyishly that the girl blushed.

"It ought to interest any decent woman," she said, "if a man attempts to regain his self-respect——"

The porter appeared with Maddaleen's luggage, saying that Section 12 was now made up. He removed Lanier's effects, and that young man rose to make his adieu.

"About leopard's spots and Ethiopians we can continue some other time," he remarked cheerfully,

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"but what I ought to know to-night is your destination."

"Why?"

"I'd rather you arrived *alive*."

The shock passed clear through her. "Do you suppose—*they* are on this train?"

"That's the trouble; I don't know. I'm not going to undress to-night. I'm going to watch your door. *Keep it locked*, too. Now, where are you going?"

"I am going to Cape Charles," she said with a slight shiver.

"Then you expect to take the boat from there?"

"Yes—for Norfolk."

"And then?"

She looked up out of eyes that were slowly becoming less hostile.

"Why do you ask, Mr. Lanier? Do you really mean it kindly?"

"I ask because I don't intend to leave you for a single moment until you are safe."

"What do you mean by safe?"

"I told you. It's important to me that you wake up alive every morning for a while. I've a million at stake, perhaps."

"Of course. That is all that interests you."

"That is all the interest you permit me, isn't it?"

"Oh! What do you intend to do? Follow me?"

"Keep a lively and sophisticated eye on you." He added smilingly: "Set a thief to watch thieves, you know. I ought to make the best of watch-dogs. Of course," he added blandly, "after we divide fifty-fifty I won't bother you with my attentions."

"Naturally," she said with faint contempt. And, oddly enough, it hurt her to realize the base and selfish motives of this man. She said, with heightened colour: "Well, if you think it advisable to remain in my vicinity for a while, I'll tell you where I'm going: I'm going by train from Norfolk to a little cross-road hamlet called Stede's

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Landing. From there I shall journey in a launch to an island called Place-of-Swans. There are really five islands close together. I live on one of them. It is my only real home. And there are real men there," she added, looking insolently at him, "who care for me and know how to take care of me, and are not paid crooks."

"I appreciate," he said, grinning, "your girlish confidence in my being as rotten as I seem to be. Maybe I'm even rottener. Maybe I haven't a single decent instinct. You never can tell."

The girl reddened. After a moment she said: "Thank you, Mr. Lanier, for giving up your drawing-room—whatever your motive—and for offering protection—whatever your reason."

"Purely mercenary," he assured her with a malicious laugh, and he went off towards Section 12.

When he buttoned the curtains he opened a suit-case, selected fresh underwear, and changed his evening clothes for tweeds and knickerbockers.

Then he extended himself flat on his bunk, took a pistol in either hand, and fixed his eyes on the locked door of Drawing-room "A," where a ceiling light burned.

"That is the cleverest, the most dangerous and most crooked woman in the United States," he reflected; "or else she is the straightest, pluckiest *and* cleverest. But—I'm taking no chances."

His mind was open. His opinion so far was divided fifty-fifty. But if any of the Forty had tracked that girl to this train, and had boarded it, certainly he was going to see that they did her no harm.

Lying on his back, his two pistols placed upon the blankets on either side of him, he rang for his porter and requested a telegraph blank.

When the pad was brought he sat up cross-legged on the bunk, covered both pistols with the sheets, and fished out a fountain-pen.

"Stick around," he said to the porter. "I want this

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sent from Cape Charles." And he wrote a night letter to one Donald Mayne :

"The two men and women indicted in the Orizava Oil matter are Eugene Renton, Harry Senix and Helen Wyvern. Welper, the brains, has not been named. The action of the Government has been premature. Departments do not co-ordinate. Those named will vanish.

"For your personal and confidential information other matters more important than Orizava Oil are linked with that corporation. These matters include the recent sale of Tiger Island to the Du Bloon Syndicate; the negotiations with the Mexican, Guatemalan and Costa Rican Governments and with the Government of Panama for concessions in Chiapas, at Ixlu, in the Perlas Islands, and at Old Panama. The two or three millions cleaned up in Orizava Oil are nothing compared to plans for a two hundred million clean-up financed by Orizava profits.

"I am keeping in touch, always mindful of your interests and mine. Welper knows quite well that we must have *ours* in anything pulled off, but he doesn't dream *how much* we must have.

"I may wire for you at any moment. Until I do, don't let anybody at the Forty Club put anything over on you in Central America. And don't worry about me.

"J. L."

Lanier leaned forward in his bunk and touched the porter who was waiting in the aisle.

"I want you to send this from Cape Charles," he said. "And I want you to secure for me two cabins *de luxe* on a private corridor on the Norfolk boat. Can you do it?"

"I'm sorry, suh——"

"Could you for a fifty-dollar tip?"

"Yaas, suh——"

"Do it. Get the bridal suite for us and I'll give you a hundred dollars."



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### 2

The sleeping car was dark and silent; the porter had retired for a nap in the smoking compartment; a dim light burned in the centre of the ceiling, but both ends of the long car were dark.

A little after two o'clock Lanier swung himself noiselessly to the edge of his couch, sat listening for a moment; then, pocketing both pistols but holding them grasped in both hands, he rose and walked swiftly towards the corridor that led past Drawing-room "A" to the vestibule.

There was a man there busy with the locked and curtained window of Drawing-room "A." A tiny ray of electric light streamed out of his scarf-pin and revealed two abnormally small hands roaming over sill and pane.

"Barney," said Lanier calmly.

The soft fingers, instantly still, remained motionless on the pane. Slowly Mr. Welper turned his head in the darkness, and the thin star ray from his scarf-pin fell upon Lanier's breast.

"What do you think you're putting over?" inquired Lanier in a low voice full of cold contempt.

Welper's voice was as cautious and as calm.

"I'm after what's mine, John."

"Walk out into the vestibule."

After a fraction of a second's hesitation Welper turned with a mousy movement and moved silently towards the vestibule, followed by the younger man.

Through the glass sides starlight made the two men visible to each other.

"Now," said Lanier, "what are you trying to do to my girl, Barney?"

"Do you know what she's done to me, John?"

"What?"

"She's frisked my room at the Forty Club."

"Who says so?"

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"She does, for one," retorted Welper in a colourless voice.

"You mean my girl cleaned you up?"

"She was after a private paper, and she got it."

"What did you ever do to her, Barney?" asked Lanier, and there was a hint of a smile in his voice.

"I never did anything to your girl. But I know now where I first saw her. And she followed me. She put one over on you, too, John, or——"

"Or what?" said the younger man quietly.

"Or she's a gay cat."

"Whose?"

"Somebody's, of course——"

"Whose?"

"Well," said Welper huskily, "whose gay cat would she be?"

"Get this, Barney," said Lanier in an even voice. "She's my girl, and she's nobody's gay cat. And that's that."

Welper moistened his lips. His sly, half-veiled eyes fell to the side pockets of Lanier's coat. He knew now that he was covered with two pistols. He had meant to scratch an imaginary itch under his left arm-pit, but decided otherwise, profoundly influenced by the shape of those two coat pockets.

"You're so impulsive, Barney," said Lanier persuasively. "If you don't alter the sleepy expression of your map I'll be likely to frisk you."

"John——"

"No; safety first, my friend. Get it out of your bean that I'm doubling on you. I could have killed you in the corridor. You've a gun and a 'can-opener' on you. Any jury would have thanked me. Is that right?"

"Yes, John, so far."

"All set, then, so far as it concerns me. And now I'll take you all the way, Barney. Do you want to go?"

"It's natural, isn't it, John?"

"Why, yes. But why didn't you wait to hear from

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me? I'll tell you why: you assumed my girl was a gay cat and I was framing you. All right, do you know what would happen to you if you had croaked my girl? Think of that the next time you jump to a conclusion. How on earth can you run the Forty Club if you become hysterical over a scrap of paper and try to start something with a sectional can-opener and a gun?"

Welper's sly eyes met Lanier's level gaze.

"You're twice my age, you've a hundred times my experience, Barney, but I don't fly off the handle over a scrap of paper. And now you listen to me; I took you just so far, I'll take you all the way. Here's the whole business: my girl told me you'd stolen a document that is her property. I warned her not to pull anything inside the Forty Club. Being a kid she didn't think I meant it. She played me for a boob, planted me at the Ritz, slid on a back trail to the club, palmed the master-key, and got her document. All right. Then she called me at the Ritz and spilled it. My hat, what a knock for me! I handed it to her good over the wire and I guess I scared her, for she started to beat it till it blew over. But she couldn't get away with *that*. I came after her, and I guess she realizes what's coming to her, because she's locked herself into that drawing-room and I'm sitting up to nab her."

The young man's face paled slightly, and grew intent and rigid; and he stepped close to Mr. Welper and looked him in the eyes.

"You keep out of this," he said. "I'll maintain discipline in my own family. I'll do the punishing. You'll get what's yours. But, look here, Barney, if ever again you meddle with what belongs to me, you can pick out your style of casket and your own favourite hymn."

After a pause Welper said: "Very well, John. When do I get my document?"

"When I take a stick to her, I suppose."

"You promise?"

"Certainly. She gives up or I beat her up. Do you

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think any skirt runs my business?" Lanier's smile became so unpleasant that Welper's ebbing suspicions ebbed faster.

"I don't understand yet," he said softly, "how your girl knew the value of that document. But she did. She got a glimpse of it; she took a taxi and followed me. She played you for a sucker, got into the Forty, frisked my room—all for that paper. Why?"

"That's past me, too," said Lanier. "But don't worry; she'll get what's coming to her, and you'll get what's coming to you, Barney. But, as far as my family is concerned, you're *out!* Don't ever again forget that. If things seem to go wrong you come to me."

"Yes, John."

In Welper's sly eyes the chill of murder had died out; only infinite insincerity remained as they shifted over Lanier's person and sought the door of the rear sleeper.

"You in *there?*" inquired Lanier.

"Yes, John."

"Alone?"

A second's hesitation, and the younger man said: "Who else?"

"Sam."

"Sam Potter?"

"Yes——"

"Who else?"

"No one."

"Anyone else to follow you?"

"P-possibly Geie and Harry——"

"Eugene Rerton and Harry Senix?"

"Well, I left word——"

"All right. That's your affair. You run the Forty Club," retorted Lanier.

"But, John——"

"Oh, go to bed, you old Dodo! What's the matter with you, starting the whole club out to 'get' my girl and me when you've only circumstantial evidence? Isn't it customary to give a guy a chance to explain himself

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before you turn your guns on him? You act like an old woman crossing traffic with signals set against her!"

"John," protested Welper with unction, "you wrong me——"

Lanier's right hand flashed out and ran over Welper like lightning.

"You've two guns, a knife, a squirt and a go-easy on you, not counting your sectional can-opener. What do you think you're doing, mobilizing like that? Go to bed. You sicken me."

"John——"

But Lanier turned on his heel, jerked open the car door, and left Welper with his loose mouth partly open.

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Lanier could have gone to bed and to sleep. He was certain of that.

As he lay back on his bunk he realized that in any other affair he would have undressed and slept without bothering to make assurance doubly sure by a night's vigil. But this girl's security had become a positive obsession already. Without effort—even with effort to dismiss it—the image of Maddaleen Dirck remained always before him, her unusual beauty emphasized by the black gown of mourning; her dark blue eyes, lovely and fearless; the enchantment of voice, of her smile.

"The deuce!" he murmured, parting the curtains in order to keep her door in view.

And it was thus that the hours wore away far into the dark morning until his porter came to arouse him and found him in the wash-room, already shaved and dressed in his knickerbockers.

"Speak to the lady in Drawing-room 'A,'" said the young man.

A few minutes before the train rolled slowly into the station at Cape Charles Maddaleen came from her room, dressed in a black wool travelling gown and hat.

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She nodded to Lanier with polite reserve.

"No," he said, "that won't do. Please act. We've been followed. Last night they tried to kill you."

She gave him a startled but incredulous look, saw the grave concern under his smile, felt the full shock of fear.

"Probably we're watched," he said calmly. "We'd better play our parts from now on. Do you understand?"

"Yes. What shall I do?"

"Behave as though we were in love but had quarrelled."

Her voice was not entirely clear and steady: "Shall—I—kiss you?"

"Yes; that's corroborative evidence. Put both hands on my shoulders."

Maddaleen placed her ungloved hands on Lanier's shoulders and stood so, blushing furiously.

"My part is to sulk," he whispered. "You locked me out last night. You're trying to square yourself."

"I understand."

One arm slipped around his reluctant shoulder; he turned, sullenly, but she drew his head against hers, laughing, and kissed his cheek-bone.

"Who followed me?" she whispered close to his face.

"Welper and Sam Potter."

"What did they do?"

"Welper tried to jemmy your window."

He felt her hands trembling on his shoulders.

But now the train was slowing to a stop; passengers emerged from sections and began to fill the aisle; porters appeared outside along the dim platform.

"Do everything I tell you. Don't hesitate," he whispered.

"I will."

Lanier drew her to the vestibule. "Call two porters," he said to his own porter. "Send that night letter; get those two state-rooms, or get the bridal suite if you can. Then come to the boat for your tip."

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Amid throngs of sleepy passengers descending from the cars to the dark platform, Lanier perceived two negroes making signals to him, and he nodded and charged them with the safety of Maddaleen's baggage and his own. And now on the dimly-lighted platform he drew the girl aside and backed her against an iron pillar, and stood so as to cover her with his own body, passing his left arm through hers. His right hand clutched a levelled pistol in the depths of his coat pocket.

"Now you've got to do exactly as I tell you," he said under his breath. "I don't propose to kick in because a strange girl develops a stubborn streak or a yellow one——"

"Look!" she interrupted in a nervous whisper. "There is Mr. Welper!"

"I see him. And that big, jolly-looking man with light eyes is Sam Potter. Try not to forget his face."

"They don't see us," she breathed.

"Oh, yes, they do."

He felt the girl beside him shudder.

"Maddaleen!" he whispered.

"Yes."

"You *are* game, aren't you?"

"I hope so. Yes."

"Very well. If they try anything I'm going to shoot through my coat pocket. If I do, don't move."

"I—won't," she faltered.

"I'll *have* to kill them both if they turn tricky. You'll be cleared. So will I, for that matter. I want you to look up at me and smile. Quick!"

She turned her head, smiled adorably, laid her vivid cheek against his shoulder.

"Don't be angry, dear," she murmured. "I'm sorry I locked you out."

"What you need is a beating up," he interrupted with cold brutality.

The act was on, and Welper's sly eyes watched them

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askance as he moved about busy with baggage and porters.

"Carry on," whispered Lanier. "If you really can act, show me *now!*" And, aloud: "I'm going to teach you that you can't lock me out. I'm going to hammer the stuffing out of you, girlie."

"If you lay a finger on me I'll never love you again," cried Maddaleen, jerking her arm free of his.

"You'll love me better if I give you what's coming to you," he growled, and took possession of her arm roughly.

"Jack dear, I'm sorry." She leaned closer to his shoulder with a sort of scared coquetry. "I'm sorry, Jack."

"You'll be sorrier when I get you alone in our state-room." He murmured under his breath: "Turn nasty and defy me. I've got to beat you up on the boat, but it won't hurt."

The girl took her cue, drew away from him with a defiant, sinister little laugh; and again he jerked her back to his side.

"You rotten bully!" she exclaimed with a venom that really startled him.

Welper, passing close behind them in the crowd, heard Lanier say in a guarded voice, thick with ferocity:

"Just you shut your mouth and give me what you stole from Barney Welper, you little slut, or I'll whale the hide off you when I get you on board."

Sam Potter, following two negroes carrying the luggage, caught up with Welper.

"Hey," he whispered jovially, "d'ye hear what John is handing that gay-cat of his?"

Welper nodded cautiously. "I guess John's all to the square," he muttered, "and I guess he can handle that fancy skirt of his. I fear I was hasty, Sam; but, lord! to be frisked for a probable two or three millions by that little bunch of lace underwear——"

"I hope he takes the skin off her," said Mr. Potter



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with a satisfied grin. His light-coloured eyes remained small and round and blank and utterly unwarmed by the mirth which stretched his big mouth.

They went aboard the brilliantly lighted boat; their luggage was stowed away in their double cabin; but they disregarded the call for breakfast and stood in the centre of the saloon, watching the passengers slowly moving through. Presently: "There they come, Barney," whispered Sam. "Turn your back and I'll look round your right ear at them."

"I see them in the mirror."

Maddalcen and Lanier passed amid the throng, piloted by laden porters.

"They've got the bridal suite," said Potter. "Some front they pull—what?"

"He means to marry her," remarked Welper, as they entered their own state-room.

"Oh, *that* bunk?" sneered Potter.

"No; it's level, I guess. They're tied tight and good, those two. You can tell: there's something in a girl's eyes—and in the fellow's. All the same, no guy can put out that line to me—with a gay-cat on the hook. . . . Still—I was hasty, I guess. M—m, yes; I guess John is going to slam the toilet-powder out of her. He'll make her eat her lip-stick—and like it. But if he hadn't been that kind of guy—I—m—m, I think that little lady would have been 'found' in Drawing-room 'A,' Sam, m—m, yes—discovered by a porter this morning with her pretty head out of joint—m—m; and with both ornamental eyes open and a sailor's knot in her silly neck. You going to bed, Sam?"

"Ho—ho!" roared Mr. Potter, selecting a cigar from his vest pocket. "I'm going to eat first. Come on to breakfast, Barney——"

"No, I lost sleep——"

"Aw, come on. And, say, the corridor runs aft right past that bridal suite. I'd like to hear him beat her up, Barney."

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"M—m, let us walk that way," suggested Welper. "I'll swallow a little sea-air and turn in——"

They strolled through the saloon towards the after saloon deck; and both paused by the door of the bridal suite.

Through the keyhole Mr. Potter's large cable-chain of gold and sapphires, which stretched across him and anchored watch and keys in his vest pockets, was visible to Lanier. He recognized the lavish jewellery as Mr. Potter's, straightened up, signalled to Maddaleen that the expected eavesdroppers had arrived, and that their act was on again.

"Come here," he said threateningly.

"Go to the devil," she retorted.

"Bring me that paper you swiped. Do you hear?"

"I hear you."

"Well, I'm waiting."

"I won't give you that paper—and you can curse your head off, Jack."

"You won't?"

"No!"

"You *won't*?"

Welper and Potter heard a scuffle; a slight scream instantly muffled, as though by a hand. The struggle became graphically audible; the listeners almost could see the two young people in the cabin swaying, reeling, clutching each other—see the infuriated, panting girl dragged away from the bunk where she sought refuge; see the very blows that fell from Lanier's limber walking-stick—fell actually upon the bed.

"I'll teach you to play crooked in the Forty Club when I tell you it isn't done there!" came Lanier's cool, malignant voice, followed by blows and choked whimpers from the struggling girl.

"Oh, Jack—oh, don't! *Don't!* You hurt! You're—you're killing me, Jack!"

"Give up then!"

"I won't!"

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"Give up, curse you!"

Potter was fairly squirming with pleasure as the noise of blows increased with the sobbing and crying.

"Oh, Jack! Oh, stop—stop——"

"Will you give me that paper?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, hand it over!"

There came an interval of suspense punctuated by strangling sobs. Then the girl's exhausted voice:

"There, Jack, darling——"

"All right," panted Lanier. "Now go to bed!"

Welper and Potter, listening with painful intensity, gazed triumphantly at each other.

"He's got your stuff for you," motioned Potter with his thick lips; "come on down to breakfast, Barney."

"That's what she needed," murmured Welper. "M—m, yes; whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. M—m . . . she'll be crazy about that young man after this. They all fall for the man who knows how to beat them up."

Potter rubbed his thick palms together exultingly. "Say, he tanned her good. He certainly tattooed that potential young gay-cat. When she looks at her fancy stripes she'll do a lot of thinking, Barney."

"M—m, yes. . . . I deplore violence," he added sanctimoniously, dropping his sly eyes; "it saddens me, Sam. . . . But *sanctio justa, jubens honesta*—m—yes; *ab honesto virum bonum nihil deterret*. . . . Ah, yes, yes, yes, indeed—*nihil, nihil, deterret*——"

"Aw hell," grinned Potter, "don't pull *that* stuff before breakfast."

In the bridal suite Maddaleen, dishevelled, flushed, palpitating, sat on the bed breathing fast and unevenly. Lanier leaned against the door, his features set in stern lines, listening to the departing eavesdroppers. After a

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little while he ventured to open the door and looked out. The corridor was empty.

"Now," he said, turning to the girl, "give me the paper you took from Welper."

Surprised and startled, she merely gazed at him.

"We'll have to give it back. But I'm going to make a copy of it for you."

Then she understood. She rose, went through the connecting bathroom to the bedroom beyond.

Lanier seated himself at the little desk, pulled towards him a sheet of the steamer's stationery, and took from his key-ring a gold pencil-case fitted with indelible lead.

In a few moments the girl came back. She had a paper in her hand. She hesitated, looking at the young man with eyes full of inquiry and indecision.

"I'm trying to throw a sop to that bloodhound," said Lanier. "I want to get him off your trail if I can—permanently. After all, isn't a copy of this paper sufficient for your purpose?"

"Yes——"

"Does it matter if Welper possesses the original as long as you have a copy?"

"N—no."

"Well, then——"

She still hesitated. He gave her a puzzled glance, then reddened.

"You don't wish *me* to see it. Is that it?"

"Yes," she admitted, "that is it."

"You're afraid of treachery," he said calmly.

She looked at him, lowered her eyes, nodded slightly, and stood slowly smoothing the paper between her fingers.

"I thought," he said, "that this document alone was not enough for Welper."

"I did say so."

"And you told me that you had another document which gave this one its only real value."

"Yes, I said so."

"Is that true?"

## *The Adventure of Drawing Room "A"*

"Yes."

"And," he asked with a smile, "isn't it true, also, that I've played square so far?"

"Yes."

"Well, then?" he inquired, amused.

"I—wondered——"

"What did you wonder?" he asked patiently.

"Whether you ever might think of robbing me."

"Of what?"

"Of both papers."

"Well," he said, laughing, "you'll have to take that chance. And you're quite right; honour among thieves is merely idle fiction. There is none; there never was any. So perhaps you had better copy that document for yourself."

"Yes . . . but the trouble is that I can't draw."

"*Draw?*"

"These are drawings. There are hieroglyphs. I can't copy them; I don't know how, I never could draw a stroke. Can *you?*"

His smile was boyishly mischievous. "Oh, yes," he said, "I can draw. What are we to do about it?"

In her painful dilemma she gave him a flushed and desperate look in which there was a hint of distressed appeal.

"I suppose," he said, "you consider my word of honour a paradox. But if it has any currency at all with you, take it in pledge of a square deal."

There was a silence.

Presently she came slowly to his side and laid the paper on the desk before him.

"Don't worry," he said; "I won't rob you: I'm not as rotten as that." And he looked down at the sheet of hieroglyphics with the pencilled translation under each symbol.

"That's nothing," he remarked, beginning his copy with a rapid accuracy that interested and surprised her.

She watched his nimble fingers and flying pencil. It

## The Mystery Lady

really was an absurdly simple task, except for those congenitally unable to draw.

In a few minutes he had completed the copy and had written under each pictograph and phonetic its proper equivalent in English.

"There," he said, handing the copy to her; "now I can return this to Welper and square your account with him. Does he know there is *another* paper besides this?"

"He couldn't know it."

Lanier sat motionless for a while, studying the original document with thoughtful eyes.

Finally: "What troubles you?" she ventured.

"Nothing. . . . I don't know. . . . I'm terribly sorry you stirred up such a man——"

"But if I return to him what I took——"

"I know"—he looked up at the girl and his features had become expressionless—"I told Welper," he said, "that I'd kill him if he ever again bothered you. But that wouldn't help you if——"

"If I were 'found' somewhere?" she said quietly.

He smiled. "Well, it wouldn't, would it?"

"Did you really say that to Mr. Welper?" she asked.

"Yes; it was part of our act, you know," he replied carelessly. He added, laughing: "Any guy will fight for his own skirt."

"You really didn't mean it, then," she said coolly.

"What do you think?"

"Why should you fight anybody on my account?"

"Fifty-fifty."

A rush of painful colour flooded her face.

"Certainly," she said, "I forgot. Any dog will defend his own bone."

"Why didn't you say *cur*. You meant it."

"Did I?" She turned on her heel and walked back to her own cabin, carrying his copy of the document.

A little while afterwards he knocked at her door; she opened it, meeting his amiable gaze with blue eyes darkly hostile.

## The Adventure of Drawing Room "A"

"Do you want to sleep?" he asked.

"Does that concern you?"

"It concerns both of us if you are as hungry as I am."

"Very well," she said, "we can go to breakfast if you wish."

As they went out, and as he locked the door, he asked her where the papers were.

"In my gown—both of them," she replied. "And my pistol is in my handbag."

"That's right," he said with his swift smile—a mischievous smile amiably ironical. "They'll probably get in and rummage while we're at breakfast. Is there anything among your effects that Welper ought not to see?"

"Nothing. But how can they get in——"

"Oh," he said, "you funny child!"

"Pick the lock?" she persisted.

"Dear lady, there are so many ways of opening doors."

"I suppose so," she said with faint disgust.

"Yes; *you* used one way."

She bit her lip and walked on beside him.

"I gave the document to Welper," he remarked.

"Oh! Did he say anything?"

"Yes; but what Welper *says* never indicates what he thinks. There's a man who seems to be unique. Because he seems to be *all* bad. I don't think I ever before knew anybody who is entirely bad."

"In your opinion," she said nervously, "have I any reason to be apprehensive for the future?"

"We'll talk it over after breakfast."

They entered the dining saloon; were seated at a table for two; gave their orders.

"Tell me now," said the girl in a low voice, "I wish to hear the truth."

"I want you to eat a good breakfast first——"

"I *shall!* . . . Tell me."

"Well," he said, "I'm going to keep an eye on you for a while."

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"Then you're really worried about your share in our enterprise?"

"I'm going where you go. I'm going to remain near you as long as my experience with Barney Welper——"

Lanier's voice stopped short. Maddaleen looked round at him, and saw that his narrowed eyes were fixed on the pantry door, which swung to and fro as tray-laden negro waiters came and went.

"Wait a minute," he said, rising. And he went swiftly towards the swinging leather door, where a head steward stood in brass-buttoned blue uniform.

"I hear," said Lanier to the steward, "that this new boat has a fine kitchen."

"Yes, sir," returned the official proudly; "it's worth seeing." And he reached out and opened the leather door, holding it wide. "After the rush is over, sir, if you would care to inspect it——"

"Thank you, steward." Lanier stood aside to let a waiter pass.

The waiter carried a heavy tray to the table where Maddaleen sat, and was beginning to dismantle it when Lanier returned.

The waiter was a quadron with sickly yellow skin and eyes set close together. As he brought the coffee-pots Lanier touched his elbow.

"Lance," he said softly.

Over the waiter's visage a dreadful sort of pallor came; he nearly dropped the two coffee-pots.

"Lance," said Lanier pleasantly, "take those coffee-pots and dump what's in them overboard."

The waiter couldn't utter a sound; he steadied his trembling legs by leaning one hand on the table.

"Then," continued Lanier calmly, "tell Mr. Welper that I advise him to keep out of the kitchen. Which pot is doped?"

The negro stared at the young man in loose-jawed terror.

"Which?" repeated Lanier.



## *The Adventure of Drawing Room "A"*

The negro touched Maddaleen's pot with shaky fingers.

"With what?"

"I—I dunno, sir——"

"Bring some fresh coffee. Leave that pot here! If you don't start, I'll start something *now!*"

Scarcely able to walk, almost blind with fear, the negro went away to fetch fresh coffee.

Lanier looked at Maddaleen. She was very pale.

"I'd better tell you," he said. "I caught a glimpse of Welper through that door. He was in the kitchen talking to this waiter. The waiter's real name is Lance Ferray. He's an ex-convict, and he's one of Welper's rats. I've heard that Welper has been known to use strychnine."

The girl's face was marble.

"Now," he said, "do you understand why I think it wise to keep an eye on you?"

Her blanched lips formed a soundless phrase. Then, "How horrible!" she said in a voice scarcely audible.

"Can you eat?"

"I—think not——"

"Try."

"It is too—awful."

He turned, smiled at her, rested a firm hand over hers, which were clasped convulsively in her lap.

"You're not to be afraid," he said. "Do you understand?"

She looked at him with pallid courage.

A new waiter appeared with fresh coffee.

"Where's our waiter?" asked Lanier sharply.

"He ain't well, suh. He done flop down in de pantry,, suh; an' de gin'ral he sent me to wait on you all."

Lanier tasted the coffee from both pots. The breakfast was spread before them.

"All set for the next scene," he said gaily to Maddaleen. "Come, don't fail me now. I haven't failed you so far."

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She said, "Very well, I'll eat," and tasted her coffee with a slight shudder.

"I wonder," said Lanier, "whether you've room for me in your own house."

"Yes."

"Maybe you don't want me there——"

"Yes, I do. I'm—frightened."

"I know you are. That isn't good for you, either. Suppose I—suppose I tell you something that ought to—well, reassure you. Shall I?"

She was silent for a while, then she turned her head.

"Haven't I guessed?"

"Have you?"

"I think so, Mr. Lanier."

He seemed in the slightest degree disconcerted. "What is it you think you've guessed?" he asked mockingly.

"I think you are to be trusted," she said.

"Well, now, is *that* what you guess about me?" he said in a bantering voice.

"More than that, Mr. Lanier."

"What?"

"Somehow or other I think you really are what you look like."

"I told you that is why men of my sort are dangerous——"

"I can't believe you are a criminal."

"Then your guess is that I'm an honest citizen?"

"You are, aren't you?"

"What! Hand in glove with Barney Welper and Sam Potter? And a member of the Forty Club——"

"I am a member, too. And I know you think me honest."

Her voice, her manner, her expression brought an odd look into his face.

"Once," he said, "I asked you what would be your attitude towards me if I chucked the crooked life and became honest. Have you made up your mind?"

## *The Adventure of Drawing Room "A"*

She continued with her breakfast for a while, and he waited.

At last she said, not looking at him :

"I've—wished I could—like you."

The simplicity of the avowal was its charm.

And yet the actress in her, and strange experiences with the world, left him a little cautious.

"I'll tell you this much," he said. "I meant to play square with you from the beginning. I mean to, always. Whatever my motive really is, I leave you to guess, because you are so good at guessing," he added lightly. "But I would like to have you know that my motive is not money."

She looked up with a trace of incredulity in her blue eyes.

"I don't want to share in anything except—your good will," he said.

"But—you helped me. It is a bargain——"

"The fifty-fifty? "

"Yes——"

"Do you really believe I'd take *money* from you? "

"Wouldn't you? "

"What does your intuition teach you is the right guess? "

She blushed. "I'm quite willing to share whatever I get. You've been—loyal——"

"Yes, but not for a price."

The girl's face cleared exquisitely.

"Why, then? "

"I suppose," he said lightly, "it's because I like you. If there are other reasons why I have aided you, desire for money is not among them. I wonder whether you will come up on deck with me and tell me a little about yourself."

"What do you wish to know, Mr. Lanier? "

"Are you really an actress? "

"Yes, I am. I have had three years' experience on the English stage."

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"Well, that clears things," he exclaimed happily as they rose from the table.

"How?" she inquired.

He laughed, offered his arm. They went to the saloon deck and walked towards the bow.

Standing there, her arm still clasping his and the wind blowing in their faces, she said :

"You might just as well tell me that you are as honest as I am. You are, aren't you?"

"Would you like to believe it?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I tell you I am honest."

"If you do I'll believe you."

They had turned to look at each other, and their faces had become serious.

"Are you?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "I'm all right."

A deep breath of relief was her only comment.

At that moment Mr. Welper came to the door of the saloon. Lanier freed himself from Maddaleen's arm and was beside Welper before he could retire.

"Barney," he said, "you're still inclined to take chances with me, aren't you? Do you want me to plug you *now* and settle matters?"

"Why, John!"

"Go and find Lance. He'll tell you what I mean if he's not too sick with fright. I've told you already that if you continue to bother my girl I'll bump you."

"John, you wrong me——"

"Remember," said Lanier pleasantly, "I'll kill you if you touch her. I'll kill anybody in the Forty Club who touches her. And that's the case as it stands."