

The Wheel o' Fortune

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was Tagg's brief comment. "They had the air of expecting somebody. Did you think that? What do you say if we wait in the shadow a few minutes?"

"Better mind our own business," said Tagg, but he did not protest further, and the two halted in the gloom of a huge warehouse. There was nothing visible along the straight vista of the road, but, after a few seconds' silence, they heard the clatter and rumble of a vehicle crossing a distant drawbridge.

"Some skipper comin' to his ship," muttered Tagg. "It can't be ours. By George, if those chaps tackled him they would be sorry for themselves."

"Captain Stump is a good man in a row, I take it?" "Good isn't the word. He's a terror. I've seen him get six of his men out of a San Francisco crimp's house, and I s'pose you've bin to sea with-out knowing wot that means."

"Ah!" said Royson admiringly. He had found safety many times during the past two days by some such brief comment. Thus did he steer clear of conversational rocks. The carriage drew nearer, and became dimly visible—it was one of the tiny voiturettes peculiar to French towns. Suddenly the listeners heard a shout. The horse's feet ceased their regular beat on the roadway. Royson began to run, but Tagg vociferated: "Wait for me, you long knifit! If you turn up alone they'll knife you before you can say 'Jack Robinson.'"

Dick had no intention of saying "Jack Robinson," but he moderated his pace, and helped Tagg over the ground by grasping his arm. They soon saw that two men had pulled the driver off the box, and were holding him down—indeed, tying him hand and foot. Royson prevented the success of this operation by a running kick and an upper cut which placed two Marseillais out of action. Then he essayed to plunge into a fearsome struggle that was going on inside the carriage. Frantic oaths in German and Italian lent peculiar significance to a flourishing of naked knives. But that which stirred the blood in his veins was his recognition of Baron von Kerber's high-pitched voice, alternately cursing and pleading for life to assailants who evidently meant to show scant mercy. One man, who, out of the tail of his eye, had witnessed Dick's discomfiture of the coachman's captors, drew a revolver, a weapon not meant for show, as its six loaded chambers proved when Dick picked it up subsequently.

Royson had no love for unnecessary risk. Stooping quickly, he grasped the hub of the off front wheel, and, just varying the trick which saved Miss Fenshawe in Buckingham Palace Road, threw the small vehicle over on its side. No doubt the patient animal in the shafts wondered what was happening, but the five struggling men in the interior were even more surprised when they were placed into the road. Royson sprang into the midst to them, found von Kerber and said: "You're all right now, Baron. We can whip the heads off these rascals." The sound of his English tongue seemed to take all the fight out of the remaining warriors. Tagg had closed valiantly with one, and the others made off. Von Kerber rose to his feet, so Royson went to Tagg's assistance. He heard the Baron shriek, in a falsetto of rage: "You may have recovered the papyrus, Alferi, but it is of no value to you. Name of an Italian dog! I have outwitted you even now!"

While kneeling to pinion the foot-pads' arms behind his back, thus rescuing Tagg from a professor of the savate, Dick tried to guess von Kerber's motive in hurling such an extraordinary taunt after one of his runaway adversaries, and in French, too, whereas the other had an Italian name, and, in all likelihood, spoke only Italian. Was this Alferi the man who "hated" von Kerber—who "brought a very serious charge" against him? But Royson was given no time for consecutive thoughts. The Baron, breathing heavily, and seemingly in pain, came to him and said, in the low tone of one who does not wish to be overheard: "Let your prisoner go, Mr. King. I am all right, and everlastingly obliged to you, but I do not wish to be detained in Marseilles while the slow French law gets to work. So let him go. He is nothing—a mere hireling. And we sail to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV. Von Kerber Explains. "You've left your trademark on this chap," broke in Tagg. He was leaning over a prostrate body, and the cab-driver was bewailing the plight of his voiturette. Royson righted the carriage; then he lifted the man to a sitting position, and listened to his stertorous breathing. The blow had been delivered on the facial angle known to boxers as

the "point," while its scientific sequel is the "knock-out."

"He is all right," was the cool verdict. He will wake up soon and feel rather sick. The general effect will be excellent in future he will have a wholesome respect for British sailors."

He laid the almost insensible form on the road again, pocketed the revolver, which he found close at hand, and gave an ear to von Kerber's settlement with the cocher. The latter was now volubly indignant in the assessment of damages to his vehicle, hoping to obtain a louis as compensation. When he was given a hundred francs his gratitude became almost incoherent.

The Baron cut him short, stipulating sternly that he must forget what had happened. Then he turned to Royson.

"If you think we can leave the fellow on the ground with safety, I want to reach the yacht," he said.

"Are you wounded?" inquired Dick. "Slightly. Those scoundrels did not dare to strike home. They knew my papers would identify them."

"But they robbed you?" "No, not of anything valuable. Why do you ask?"

"Because you sang out to one of them, an Italian, I should judge—"

"Ah, you heard that? You are indeed, quick in an emergency. Can we go on, yes?"

"Certainly. I will just lift our dazed friend into the victoria, and tell the cocher to give him a glass of cognac at the first cafe he comes to."

This was done. Five minutes later the first and second officers of the Aphrodite assisted their employer up the yacht's gangway. Leaving Tagg to explain to Stump what had happened, Royson took von Kerber to his cabin, and helped to remove his outer clothing. A superficial wound on the neck, and a somewhat deeper cut on the forearm, were the only injuries; the contents of a medicine chest, applied under von Kerber's directions, soon stanchied the flow of blood.

"I do not wish anything to be said about this affair," began the Baron, when Royson would have left him.

"Tagg must have given the captain full details already," said Dick.

"But did he hear that name, Alferi?"

"I think not."

"And he would not understand about the er—document?"

"The papyrus," suggested Royson.

"Yes."

"No. I don't suppose he would understand the word in English, where as you spoke French."

"Ah, yes, of course. Well, that is between you and me. Will you ask Captain Stump and Mr. Tagg to join us in a bottle of wine? I would put matters in my own way, yes?"

The Baron, after a slight hesitancy, made his wishes clear. Mr. Fenshawe and his party would arrive at Marseilles by the train de luxe next morning, and preparations must be made for instant departure as soon as they came on board. They would be alarmed needlessly if told of the fray on the quay, so it was advisable that nothing should be said about it.

"You see, purred the Baron affably, refilling the glasses which Stump and Tagg had emptied at a gulp, "ladies, especially young ones, are apt to be nervous."

"Have we wimmen aboard this trip?" growled Stump in a deep rumble of disapproval.

"Ladies, yes. Two, and a maid." Stump bore round on the chief.

"Wot did I tell ye, Tagg?" he demanded fiercely. "Didn't I say that them fixins aint meant no good?"

"You did, aint Tagg, with equal asperity."

Von Kerber caught the laughter in Dick's eyes, and checked the angry protest ready to bubble forth.

"The two ladies," he said, speaking with an emphasis which strove to cloak his annoyance at Stump's off-handed manner, "are Miss Fenshawe, granddaughter of the gentleman who owns this yacht, and her companion, Mrs. Haxton. Without their presence this trip would not have been undertaken, and that fact had better be recognized at the outset. But now, gentlemen, I have come on ahead to have a quiet talk with you. Captain Stump knows our destination, but none of you is aware of the object of our voyage. I propose to take you fully into my confidence in that respect. By this time you've become more or less acquainted with the crew, and you think any of the men are untrustable, we must get rid of them at once."

He paused, and looked at Stump. That broad-beamed navigator emptied his glass again and gazed into it fixedly, apparently wondering why champagne was so volatile a thing. Tagg followed the skipper's example, but fixed his eyes on the bottle, perhaps in calculation. Royson, deeming it wise to hold his tongue, contented himself with closing the medicine chest, and thus making it possible for von Kerber to sit down.

The latter was obviously ill at ease. Although he was the master of these three men, he was their inferior in individual strength of character. But he was a polished man of the world, and he promptly extricated himself from a difficult position, though Royson, at least, detected the effort he was compelled to make.

"I see you are thinking that one bottle does not go far among us, Mr. Tagg," he exclaimed, with a pleasantly patronizing air. "Kindly tell the steward to bring another, Mr. King. And some cigars. Then we can discuss matters at our ease. And will you make sure that we are not overheard? What I have to say is meant for the ship's officers alone at this moment, though, when the time comes for action, every man on board must be with us absolutely."

Dick summoned the steward, and ascertained that the watch were quietly chatting and smoking forward, whereas the Baron's stateroom was situated aft. The delay enabled von Kerber to collect his thoughts. When he resumed the promised disclosure, his voice was under control, and he spoke with less constraint.

"It is probable that you gentlemen are not familiar with the history of Egypt," he said, "but you may take it from me that the facts I now lay before you are accurate. At one time, about the beginning of the Christian era, the Romans were all-powerful in the Nile delta. They pushed their stations a long way south, almost to the borders of Abyssinia, but it is important to remember that they followed the lines of the river, not the sea. In the year 24 B. C., the Roman Governor, hearing of the great wealth of a people called the Sabaeans, whose country lay in Arabia, in the hinterland of Mocha and Aden, sent an expedition there under the command of Aelius Gallus. This legion is historically reported to have met with reverses. That is true, in the sense that its galleys were beset by a terrible storm on the return voyage. Though the Red Sea is usually a fair-weather lake, you can have a stiff blow there at times, I believe Captain Stump?"

Thus appealed to, Stump had to open his mouth.

"I've known it blow like sin," he said. "Isn't that so, Tagg?"

"Wuss nor sin, cap'n. Ordinary manslaughter isn't in it with a nor-easter gale on a dark night off these islands north o' Perim."

"Exactly," agreed the Baron eagerly. "That is where the Roman triremes were caught. They were driven ashore in a little bay in what is now Italian territory. Their vessels were wrecked, but they saved the loot they had taken from the Sabaeans. The nature and value of the loss can hardly be estimated in these days, but you can draw your own conclusions when you learn that the city of Saba is more familiar to us under its Biblical name, Sheba. It was thence that the famous queen came who visited Solomon. Nearly a thousand years later, when the Roman legion sacked it with fire and sword, it was at the height of its glory."

Von Kerber, fairly launched in a recital glib on his lips, regained the dominance of manner which the attitude of his subordinates had momentarily imperiled. Increased composure brought with it a certain hauteur, and he paused again—perhaps to gratify the actor's instinct in him rather than observe the effect of his words. But the break was unfortunate. Tagg removed the cigar he was half chewing, and said oracularly:

"The Queen o' Sheba! I once knew a shop o' that name. D'ye remember her, cap'n?"

"Shall I ever forgit 'er?" grunted Stump. "I wish them Romans had looted her. W'en I was goin' down the Hooghly, she was comin' up, in tow. Her rope snapped at the wrong moment, an' she ran me on top of the James an' Mary shoal. Remember 'er, damn 'er!"

The Austrian winced at this check to his story. These stolid mariners had no imagination. He wished to enthrone them, to fire them with the vision of countless wealth, but they had side-tracked ideality for some stupid reminiscence of a collision. In a word, they did him good, and he reached the point of his narration all the more speedily.

"As I was saying," he broke in rapidly, "the expedition met with disaster by sea. It was equally unfortunate on land. The commander built a small encampment, and sent for assistance the only seaworthy vessel left to him. He waited six months, but no help came. Then he determined to march inland—to strike a bold course for the Nile—but he was soon compelled to entrench himself against the attacks of hostile tribes. The probability is that the Sabaeans had interested in the western shores of the Red Sea as well as in Arabia. Indeed, the Abyssinians hold the belief to this day that their kings are descended from a son of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon. However that may be, Aelius Gallus buried his treasure, threw aside all useless impediments, and like the daring soldier he was, decided in favor of attack. He fought his way for twenty marches, but was finally overthrown, with all his men, by a Nubian clan. The Romans were slain without mercy. Their conquerors knew nothing of the gold and jewels hidden in the desert three velours board, gathered from Persia and India by generations of traders, has lain there nearly two thousand years."

This time he was sure he had riveted the attention of his hearers. They would have been dull, indeed, if their wits were not stirred by the possibilities underlying that last sentence. Royson, of course, jumped to conclusions which the others were slow to each. But Stump was not backward in summing up the facts in his own way.

"Am I right in supposin' that you know where this stuff is hid, Mr. von Kerber?" he asked, his small eyes twinkling under the strain of continuous thought.

"Yes."

"Are you positive?"

"Yes."

"Does anybody else know?"

Royson felt that the Baron did not expect this question, but the answer came promptly.

"Mr. Fenshawe knows, and the two ladies who accompany him have a species of general knowledge."

"If I took c'rect bearin's, accordin' to your yarn the cargo is planted some distance from the coast?"

"About forty miles."

"An', while some of us goes after it, the yacht will stand off an' on, waitin' orders, an' mebbe runnin' to Perim or Aden for letters."

"You have grasped the situation exactly, Captain Stump."

The skipper shifted his cigar from one corner of his mouth to another.

"Sink me," he growled, "I thought couldn't be gun-runnin' when there was wimmin mixed up in it. Didn't say so, Tagg?"

"You did," agreed Tagg again.

"Gun-runnin'!" repeated von Kerber. "You mean carryin' contraband arms, yes? What put that into your head?"

"I've not bin, cap'n of a ship nigh on fifteen years without learnin' the importance of knowin' wot she's loaded with," said Stump. "Big or little, in package or in bulk, I go through her manifest, an' check it, too."

The Baron laughed softly. He was pale, probably as the result of his words, but he was inflexible in his resolve to arrive at an understanding with his lieutenants before the remaining passengers put in an appearance.

"Ganz gut, herr captain!" he cried. "You must have seen our supply of firearms and cartridges, yes?"

"Twenty rifles, twenty-five revolvers, an' enough ammunition to fight a small war." Stump ticked off each item slowly and looked at Tagg as though he expected him to cry "Tally!"

"Ah! That is well put, yes? If we are called on to fight a small war, as you say, have we got the right sort of men on board? I had to trust to chance. It was the only way. I could not talk plainly in England, you see."

"I don't know much about 'em," said Stump. "I can answer for myself an' Tagg, an' from wot I hear, Mr. King has a heart of the right size. As for the others, I'll run the rule over 'em between here an' Port Said."

I have any doubts about one or two. We can ship 'em home on a P. an' O. But, from the cut of their jibs, most of 'em are deserters from the Royal Navy, an' the remainder are army reserve men. That sort of crowd is pretty tough, eh, Tagg?"

"Tough!" echoed Tagg. "If they're 'lowed to eat three solid meals every day like the Lord Mayor's banquets they've put out o'sight since they kem aboard, there'll be no holdin' 'em."

"Oh, yes, there will. I'll hold 'em," said Stump.

"And you approve of my reticence thus far?" asked the Baron.

"Of your wot, mister?"

"I mean that it was wise not to tell them the object of the voyage."

"Take my advise an' tell 'em nothin'." Wait till they're fixin' in the Red Sea, an' I've worked some of the grease out of 'em. By that time, wot between prickly heat an' high livin', they'll be ready to kill any Gord's quantity of Italians."

"Italians!" snapped von Kerber irritably. "Why do you speak of Italians?"

"It's your fairy-tale, mister, not mine. You said that wot's in name, the Roman who went through the Shebeens, had planted his takin's in Italian territory."

"Ah!" the Austrian gasped a little, and his palor increased. "That is of no consequence—the place—the desert—we shall meet with no interference."

Then Royson spoke. Hitherto, he had taken no share in the conversation, but he saw that von Kerber was unable to withstand any further strain. The man was bearing up gallantly, yet he had reached the limit of endurance, and the trouble, whatever it was, seemed to be wearing his very soul.

"Neither Captain Stump nor Mr. Tagg knows that you are wounded, sir," said Dick. "Perhaps it would be advisable to defer our talk until the morning."

Von Kerber shaded his face with his hands.

"I cannot add much to what I have already said," he answered. "I think you understand me. I want silence—and good service. Give me these and shall repay you tenfold."

They went on deck. Stump dug Royson in the ribs.

"It would ha' done me a treat to see you upper cut that Frog," he whispered, his mouth widening with a grin. "I'm good at a straight punch myself, but I'm too short for a swing. Lord love a duck, I wish I'd bin there."

So the burly skipper of the Aph-

rodite paid slight heed to the wonders half revealed by von Kerber's story. He had been stirred but for a moment when the project was laid bare. Already his mind was rejecting it. The only matter that concerned him was to bring his ship to her destination in a seaman-like manner, and let who would perplex their brains with fantasy. Indeed, he was beginning to regard the Baron as a harmless lunatic, whom Providence had entrusted with the spending of a rich man's money for the special benefit of the seafaring community.

"A straight punch!" he repeated, gazing with a species of solemn joy at the men leaning against the rails forward. "They're a hard-bitten lot from what I've seen of 'em, an' they'll have to have it before they're at sea with me very long. Won't they Tagg?"

"They will," said Tagg, eyeing the unconscious watch with equal fixity.

Dick went to his cabin firm in the belief that he would lie awake half the night. But his brain soon refused to bother itself with problems which time might solve in a manner not yet conceivable, and he slept soundly until he was roused at an early hour. Day dawned brightly and clear. A pleasant northwesterly breeze swept the smoke haze from off the town and kissed the blue waters of the land-locked harbor into white-crested waves. He took the morning watch, from four o'clock until eight, and all he had to do was to make sure that the men tried to whiten decks already spotless, and cleaned brass which shone in the sun the instant that lunary peeped over the shoulder of Notre Dame de la Garde. Although the Aphrodite lay inside the mole, her bridge and promenade deck were high enough to permit him to see the rocky islet crowned by the Chateau d'I. He knew that the hero of Dumas' masterpiece had burrowed a tunnel out of that grim prison, to swim ashore an outcast, a man with a price on his head, yet bearing with him the precious paper whose secret should make him the fabulously rich Count of Monte Christo. It was only a soul-stirring romance, a dim legend transformed into vivid life by the genius of the inspired quadroom. But its extraordinary appositeness to the Aphrodite's quest suddenly occurred to the young Englishman watching the sunlit isle. He was startled at the thought, especially when he contrasted his present condition with his depressed awakening in Briton five days earlier. Then he laughed, and a sailor, busily engaged in polishing the glass front of the wheel-house, followed the direction of his gaze and half interpreted his day-dream.

"It's a bit of a change from the West India Dock Road, ain't it, sir?" he asked.

Royson agreed with him, and the two conversed a while, but when the man led the chat round to the probable destination of the yacht, the second mate's thoughts fell from romance to reality.

"You will be told soon enough where we're bound for," he answered sharply.

"I'm sorry, sir, if I've said anything I shouldn't," said the other.

"But the chaps forrard made out that there's a bit of a mystery in it, an' I argued they was talkin' nonsense."

"You are quite right. The owner and a party of ladies will be on board to-day, and then you will find out our destination."

"Ladies, you say, sir? That settles it. This is no Riff pirates job, then?"

Royson turned on his heel. So others, as well as Captain Stump, had drawn conclusions from those boxes of arms and ammunition? If Baron Franz von Kerber deemed it necessary to provide a warlike equipment, how could he permit an elderly gentleman like Mr. Fenshawe, and a charming girl like Irene, to say nothing of others yet unknown to Royson, to share in the risk of a venture demanding such safeguards? That was a puzzle, but it disturbed Dick not a whit. Somehow, the mention of the desert and its secret hoard had stirred him strangely. It seemed to touch unknown springs in his being. He felt the call of the far-flung solitude, and his heart was glad that fortune had bound up his lot with that of the winsome woman who smiled on him so graciously when they parted in Hyde Park.

Then a steward announced breakfast, and the mirage vanished. Captain Stump's greeting showed that his slumbers had not been disturbed by golden visions.

"Mornin'," he said. "I've just bin tellin' Tagg." Seeing that his second officer was not enlightened by this remark he went on:

"You'll want his help if I'm not alongside. Bless your 'eart, you can depend on Tagg. He'll never give you away. He thinks the world of you already."

The reminder was useful, though not in the sense intended by Stump. It brought Royson back to earth. He felt that he must justify himself if he would win his way among these rough sea-dogs. Hence, when a railway omnibus lumbered along the quay, and pulled up in front of the yacht's gangway, he remembered that he was Mr. King, probationary second mate on a small vessel, and not Richard Royson, heir to a baronetcy and rightful successor to an estate with a rent-roll of five thousand a year.

Mr. Fenshawe, exceedingly glad for one of his age, helped two ladies to alight. The first was Irene. Her admiring glance at the Aphrodite, no less than an exclamation of delighted in-

terest, revealed that she, too, like everyone else, was a stranger to the ship. She was followed by a pretty woman, whose clothes and furs were of a fashion which told even a mere man that she was a person of consequence. This was Mrs. Haxton, and her first action which caused Dick to dialike her, because she deliberately turned her back on the smart yacht, and gave heed only to the safe lowering of certain trunks from the roof of the omnibus. He heard the manner of her speech to a neatly dressed maid and its languid insolence did not help to dissipate that unfavorable impression.

Miss Fenshawe ran along the gangway. Royson had stationed a sailor at the shoreward end, while he held the rail to steady it on deck.

"Good morning, Mr. King," she cried. "Has not Baron von Kerber arrived?"

"Yes," he said. "He came aboard late last night."

"Then why is he not here to meet us?"

"I believe he is fatigued after his long journey, Miss Fenshawe."

"Fatigued! Fiddlesticks! Look at my granddaddy. Is he fatigued? And we have travelled over the same route. But I will deal with the lie-abed Baron when I see him. What a nice boat the Aphrodite is. I am in love with her already. And this is Captain Stump? Good mornin', captain. I have heard about you. Baron von Kerber says you will bite my head off if I come on the bridge. Is that true?"

"Shows how little Mr. von Kerber really knows about me, ma'am," said Stump gallantly, beaming on her over the rail of the small upper deck.

By this time, Mrs. Haxton had satisfied herself that the Aphrodite's crew might be trusted to bring her boxes on board without smashing them, and she gathered her skirts carefully to keep them clear of the quay. She raised a lorgnon, mounted on a tortoise-shell and silver handle, and examined the yacht with measured glance. She honored the stalwart second officer with a prolonged stare.

"Is that the captain?" she said to Mr. Fenshawe, who was waiting to escort her on board.

"No. That is Mr. King, the young man Irene told you about."

"Oh, indeed! Rather an Apollo Belvidere, don't you think?"

"He seems to be a nice young fellow, quite well-mannered and that sort of thing. And it imposes somewhat of a strain on the imagination to picture him in the scant attire popular at Delphi."

Mr. Fenshawe was not without a dry humor, but Mrs. Haxton was pleased to be amused.

"What a light-hearted creature you are!" she cried. I envy you your high spirits. Personally, I feel utterly downcast at the prospect of a sea voyage. It always blows a mistral, or some other horrid thing, when I cross the Mediterranean. Are you sure that little bridge won't move the instant I step on it? I have quite an aversion to such jim-crack appliances."

"Mrs. Haxton's timidity did not prevent her from noting the arrival of a telegraph messenger on a bicycle. He was reading the name of the yacht when she said:

"Come here, boy. Have you a telegram for me?"

She used excellent French, and the messenger gave the small blue envelope he was carrying. The lady dropped her eyeglasses, and scanned the address quickly before she read it aloud.

"Richard Royson, British Yacht Aphrodite, Marseilles," she announced, after a pause.

"Who is Richard Royson?" she went on, looking from Mr. Fenshawe to the nearest officer of the ship, who happened to be Royson himself.

The incident was so unexpected that Dick reddened and hesitated. Yet he saw no reason why he should not proclaim himself.

"That message is meant for me, madam," he said.

"For you? But Mr. Fenshawe has just said that your name is King?"

"Baron von Kerber bestowed that name on me, but he acted under a misrepresentation. My name is Royson."

"How odd! How exceedingly odd!" Mrs. Haxton seemed to forget her fear of the gangway. Advancing with sure and easy tread she gave Dick the telegram and he was conscious, during one unhappy minute, that Irene, and Captain Stump, and Mr. Fenshawe, each in varying degree, shared Mrs. Haxton's opinion as to the exceeding oddity of the fact that any one should be masquerading on board the Aphrodite under an assumed name.

CHAPTER V. Miss Fenshawe Seeks An Ally.

Royson was not in the least non-plussed by this recurrence of a dilemma for which he was not responsible. Von Kerber, of course, could have extricated him with a word, but von Kerber for reasons of his own, remained invisible. So Dick threw his head back in a characteristic way which people soon learnt to associate with a stubborn resolve to see a crisis through to the end. He ignored Mrs. Haxton, and spoke to the captain.

"I am glad the question of my right name has been raised," he said.

"When Baron von Kerber comes on deck I shall ask him to settle the matter once and for all."

"Just so," said Stump, "I would if I was you."

"The really important thing is the whereabouts of our cabins," interrupted Mrs. Haxton's clear drawl. "Take the ladies aft.—Mr. Royson, an' let 'em choose their quarters," directed Stump curtly.

Dick would have obeyed in silence had not Miss Fenshawe thought fit to help him. She had found Mrs. Haxton's airs somewhat tiresome during the long journey from London, and she saw no reason why that lady should be so ready to bring a hornet's nest about Royson's ears.

"We are not in such a desperate hurry to bestow our belongings that you cannot read your telegram," she said to Dick. Then she favored Stump with a frank smile. "I know you mean to start almost immediately, captain, and it is possible that Mr. Royson may wish to send an answer before we leave Marseilles. You won't be angry if he waits one moment before he shows us to our staterooms?"

"Not at all, miss," said the skipper, "he's at your service. I can do without him—easy."

Stump was angry with Dick, and did not hesitate to show it. A blunt man, of plain speech, he resented anything in the nature of double dealing. Royson's remarkable proficiency in most matters bearing on the navigation of a ship had amazed him first instance, and this juggling with names led him into suspect some deep-laid villainy with which the midnight attack on von Kerber was not wholly unconnected.

But the person most taken aback by Irene's self-assertion was Mrs. Haxton. A firm attitude on the girl's part came as an unpleasant novelty. An imperious light leaped to her eyes, but she checked the words which might have changed a trivial incident into a sharp tussle for supremacy.

"I am sorry," she said quietly. "Telegrams are important things, sometimes. And the messenger is waiting, too."

Thus, under the fire of many eyes, Royson tore open the petit blue, and read its typewritten contents. The words were brief, but sufficiently bewildering:

"Better return to England forthwith. I undertake full responsibility for advice, and guarantee you against loss. Forbes."

"Forbes," undoubtedly, was his uncle's solicitor. But how was it possible that he