

MYSTERY OF THE MEDORA

Daring Captain Thwarts Designs of His Piratical Crew

By STEPHEN RUDOLPHE

The rusty little freight steamer Medora bobbed tubbily in a rising sea. On every quarter stretched the Caribbean, its calm blue face changing to ugly gray green as ominous dark clouds raced up from the horizon. It did not need a land lubber's glance at the falling barometer to inform the solitary passenger that a gale was brewing.

I was the solitary passenger. My firm had sent me to Trinidad island to install some new machinery at one of the big sugar estates, and the steamer on which I had sailed from New York had paused at a Cuban port of call. I had gone ashore and been left behind. Through the courtesy of business friends and part owners in the Medora it was learned that the little freighter was about to clear for Port of Spain, and despite the protests of the peppery little captain I sailed as a passenger in the wake of my own steamer.

Plainly I was an unwelcome guest. The captain ignored me. The two mates scowled upon me and whispered darkly together. The crew of four villainous looking blacks grinned savagely when I appeared on deck. The Scotch engineer patronized me and smoked my cigars.

Because of their hostile attitude toward me I came to the conclusion that there was some mystery about this voyage of the Medora, and I lily sought for some clue to its solution. It so happened that I had not to search far. The solution was to be thrust upon me in the most unwelcome and unsuspected manner.

Now the Medora, in light ballast, proceeded to toss giddily on her southward way, and I watched the rise and fall of her bow with anxious eyes. Landsman as I was, I sensed the coming storm and I dreaded it.

my presence, although he never glanced at me.

When the captain had disappeared the first mate slouched past. "Good afternoon, Blake," I said cheerfully.

"Noon," he returned morosely. "Looks like a hurricane."

"Nothing doing," he said contrarily. He stopped short, bent a hand over his eyes and squinted ahead. Bells were ringing below in the engine room, and the horizon line was changing.

"We're putting back," I rejoiced. "Putting back, eh? I'll see about that!" muttered the mate, and he cantered forward in the wake of the captain.

Far to the northeast I could see the hazy blue coast of Cuba lifting above



THE SECOND MATE SPRANG INTO THE BOAT "COME ON LADS," HE YELLED.

the horizon, but every now and then it was blotted out by the mountainous waves.

The gale arrived without further warning.

With a whistling shriek of rage the wind dipped down and sent the little steamer careening over the sea. Great curling waves slapped the heavy sides of the Medora, and snuffing gusts of foam came on the decks. I was with the two mates greenish stare and a cold sweat on my forehead.

I tore open the door of the cabin, and the wind whistled through the brass board steps to the cabin floor where I stood, ready to and fro with every slant of the ship.

The throbs of the engines was stifled, and I heard the rush of running feet on deck and the muffled cries of men. There was a smothering dampness of escaping steam.

If they were abandoning the Medora I was caught like a rat in a trap. The next time I coasted to the foot of the stairs I caught the lower one and climbed up. I fairly tumbled through the door and gained the deck.

Captain and crew were in a struggling group around a solitary boat swinging at the port davits. Far astern the remaining three boats foated bottom upward. All around us was the dark fury of the storm, and straight ahead loomed the large bulk of a palm covered island. Between us and a safe harbor there ran a hungry, snarling, white toothed reef with one narrow opening.

I took in the scene at a glance—land, sea, sky and the deck of the steamer, where two opposing forces met, on one side the ugly mates and mutinous black crew and ranged against them the fiery little captain and the hulking engineer, Sandy McAlpin.

"If the old tub's going down give us the money," threatened Blake, flourishing an iron bar.

"Have your choice—stay here and sink with the money or take the boat and cast off!" screamed Captain Sayles.

The mutineers hesitated. The wheel was lashed, and the gale was driving the Medora straight toward the ugly reef. Perhaps they were thinking that if the Medora broke on the reef they would still have a chance at whatever treasure they had in view. Of it I had no inkling.

A large wave came hurtling along, and the second mate sprang into the boat. "Come on, lads," he yelled. "We'll come back and get the money when the sea goes down."

With one accord his mates followed him into the boat and lowered away. The chains swung free again as the boat rode on the crest of a wave and disappeared in the tumult of water.

"Aha!" yelled Captain Sayles, slanting a cold blue eye in my direction. "Why didn't you go along too? Don't you know we're sinking?"

"I'll take a chance with you," I said gruffly, and I knew it was a long chance, because I couldn't swim a stroke.

Without further parley Captain Sayles leaped up the ladder to the wheelhouse and grasped the wheel. The Medora was headed toward the opening in the reef. It struck me then that, no matter where the Medora was wrecked, the mutineers might reach her unless she sank to the bottom. There her mysterious treasure would be lost to all.

Sandy came running from below. "All ready," he sang out. "I'll stand by with a line!"

"Raffy!" roared the captain. "Aye, come, lubber!" said Sandy to me, and I went

Another five minutes and the Medora shot through the opening in the reef into water churned into froth by the gale. Through smoky spume lifted by her bow I caught a glimpse of land edged with a mangrove swamp. Just then Sandy rushed me over the side on to the teetering raft. As we broke away from the steamer I saw the captain's weather beaten face at the rail and a lump rose in my throat.

"Can't he come with us?" I protested angrily.

"Stow that," growled Sandy, bending to the single oar. "The captain 'll be knowin' what he's about." I watched the Medora as we drew away from her. Little by little she was settling in the water. The waves washed her main deck, splashed the cabin windows, and then, as if tired of playing with its victim, the sea sent a heavy swell into the harbor and pushed the tired little steamer down under the waves.

The captain leaped wide as the vessel swirled down, a wet line whistled toward him from Sandy's hand, he caught it deftly, and I helped Sandy pull the plucky little fellow aboard. I held my pocket flask to his blue lips, and he growled thanks.

When I turned my head the Medora had vanished and the raft to which we clung was spinning about in the whirlpool of her suction. All at once wind and waves sent up heaving shoreward among the mangroves. Abandoning the raft, we foundered through the swamp among the tangled roots and circled to the left, where we found a crescent of snowy beach washed with creaming combers. It was good to be upon land once more.

We flung ourselves down on the sand, and the captain pulled from a waterproof box tobacco, matches and a pipe. Sandy and I produced our own pipes, and soon we were comforted in clouds of smoke that whipped to and fro in the wind.

"Do you know where we are, captain?" I asked presently.

"Palm Island," he said shortly. Sandy laughed. "Captain's knowin' it well enough, lubber. It's back here he lives." He pointed a thumb toward the jungle clad hill behind us.

"Then this is a familiar harbor?" I questioned, for I was puzzled at the loss of the Medora within this comparatively safe harbor. Sayles could have beached the vessel, but of course he could not help her sinking. Undoubtedly he was trying to teach her when she foundered. Probably she leaked like a sieve. Still the careless unconcern—nay, relief—with which captain and engineer viewed the loss of the steamer excited my curiosity. "You must know this harbor like a book," I insisted.

Before the captain could reply a heavy step crunched on the sand and a tall, cant framed woman, her arms loaded with driftwood, stared at us with hard round eyes. Under her steady gaze I fancied the captain shrank to smaller proportions. I would

hardly have been surprised had she vanished altogether, absorbed in the angry fire of her glance.

"Hello, Elsie," he said weakly enough.

"Well, Charlie Sayles," she broke forth at last, "what are you doing here, laying off like a lord or a high duke? I thought you'd cleared for Port of Spain."

"We're wrecked, Mrs. Sayles," put in Sandy politely.

"Wrecked, is it?" Her eyes searched our faces in growing incredulity. "Aye, Elsie," said the captain sadly.

"Where's the Medora?" she demanded, dropping the wood with a crash.

Captain Sayles pointed the stem of his pipe toward the harbor. "She lies down under there."

"I'd be proud to say it, Charlie Sayles! Wrecked in your own port—a pretty pair of sailormen ye be! What have you to say, Sandy McAlpin?" She whirled upon the Scotchman.

"She went down," replied Sandy. "And the crew?"

"They mutinied, and the pirates escaped with the one boat left. They're hangin' around like sharks noo, waitin' for—" He shot a glance at me and stopped.

"And the bags of gold money ye was trusted to take to Trinidad to pay off the sugar hands?" persisted the woman.

"Went down with the Medora." "Fools!" muttered the woman bitterly as she turned seaward. She stood looking out over the gray water, and



I saw her bare eyes were dripping tears. Suddenly she brushed a hand across her wet lids. Then she gazed intently at the spot where the Medora had gone down. The waves were surging above her tomb, and I too, saw something black for a moment. Then it disappeared in the foamy wash.

"The Medora's smokestack!" I exclaimed.

Elsie turned to her husband. "Charlie, she's sitting on the mud bank."

"Aye," he returned calmly.

"We aimed to set her right there," added Sandy proudly. "After that pirate crew mutinied and tried to get away with the money in the hurricane I drew the fires, and the captain here opened the sea cocks, and—he chuckled—"the Medora dipped her bow and went down below. There she sits like the lady she is on her mud bank, taking care of the money till we can get the wreckers here and pump her out and bring her up safe and sound."

"Twas the captain's idea, and he'll be gettin' something out of it all," he added diplomatically.

Mrs. Sayles dropped her gaunt frame on the sand beside her little husband and hugged him in a crushing embrace. "There's no man like him, Sandy!" she triumphed.

"Ye canna beat him," assented Sandy.

"Belay there, woman!" roared the embarrassed captain.

I moved to the water's edge and reviewed the events of the day. The half submerged smokestack showed plainly now I had never heard of such an unseamanlike proceeding, but it had required courage.

Although highly scandalized at the remarkable maneuver executed by the captain and engineer of the Medora to preserve her golden freight, I could not help laughing until from very exhaustion I sank upon the sand.

Suddenly the captain's voice rasped on my ear.

"Crying, lubber?" he asked dryly. I turned and wrung his horny little hand. "Captain, you're a wonder—a living wonder!"

"Humph!" snorted the captain, but away back in his hard little blue eye I caught an answering twinkle.

Getting Even.

James, four years old, had been naughty to the point of evoking a whipping from his long suffering mother, and all day long a desire for revenge rankled in his little bosom.

At length bedtime came, and, kneeling before her, he implored a blessing for each member of the family individually, she alone being conspicuous by her absence. Then, rising from his devout posture, the little suppliant fixed a keenly triumphant look upon her face, saying as he turned to climb into bed:

"I guess you noticed you wasn't in it?" Harper's Magazine

The Wonderful Self-Heating Flatiron



\$3.50 You Have 4 Months to Pay it.

We Have Started Our Special Sale of I-Want-U Comfort Gas Irons. This Iron Fills Every Requirement.

It heats itself to any temperature and stays hot as long as you want to use it.



The Heat Is Supplied By a Tiny Gas Flame Inside The Iron---Takes Only One-Third of a Cents worth of Gas to run Iron 1 Hour We insure the I-Want-U with a money back guarantee.

The price of time-saver is \$3.50, including stand, six feet of flexible tubing and connection. You need pay no money down, but divide the amount into three installments of 90 cents and one of 80 cents to be paid with your next four gas bills. Just try I-Want-U Comfort, Iron.

Watch for the Gas Man--He will demonstrate the iron in your OWN HOME



Western United Gas and Electric Company