

"THE GIRL IN THE SECOND CABIN"

By E. J. RATH

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Spencer Trumbull, son of a wealthy father, is ordered to take a sea voyage to Galveston for his health when he'd rather go to the Adirondacks because of the presence there of a certain girl. So he hires his old college and war-days chum, Billy Trask, to make the sea trip in his place and promises him one thousand dollars and expenses if he takes his place under the eye and care of a male nurse, who is a stranger to both, and thus fulfill the orders of Trumbull's father's physician, and by his impersonation ward off any displeasure which said stern father might see fit to visit on a delinquent and disobedient son. Trask starts aboard the steamship Gulf Stream in a wheel chair, and no sooner is pushed on deck by Keeler, his nurse, than he holds a girl at the rail—the "goddess," he dubs her.

"Trask almost did it, so casual was the request. His feet were on the floor and he was half risen from his seat on the edge of the berth, when he remembered. He dropped back quickly, just as Keeler turned his head. "How do you expect me to stand up?" demanded Trask. "That's so, sir, I forgot. It just slipped out." Keeler's face was impassive and his voice imperturbable as he crossed the room with the dressing gown. He never blinked as Trask bestowed a piercing glance. "Forgot? Yes, he did!" muttered Trask. "The old fox nearly had me then. He'll bear watching."

When Trask had been dressed for the day, Keeler brought him his breakfast, and when that was finished the nurse anticipated and silently yielded to a demand that he knew would be made by offering his patient a cigarette. "Dr. Van Norden'll be very proud of your temperature chart, sir," observed Keeler, as he made a notation on the record. "He's apt to write a special paper about it."

"As wonderful as that?" "Yes, sir; for a patient. You see, it's been exactly normal from the start." Trask looked upon his nurse and guardian in silent admiration. Keeler, his visage as solemn as that of an ancient owl, had perpetrated a joke!

"And now you'll go on deck, sir?" inquired Keeler evenly, as he put away the history-making chart. "Yes, before you spring another one like that. Some day I'm going to bust you on the bean, Keeler." Keeler permitted himself a shadowy and friendly little smile and trundled the chair out of the stateroom.

The enemy, in the person of Aunt Mehetabel, was encountered with appalling suddenness. She was marching the sunlit deck resolutely, her umbrella tucked under her arm at an eye-piercing angle. Trask verily believed she carried it as a weapon. "As she saw the chair and its occupant she altered her course and halted directly in front of it. To spare her shins, Keeler stopped. "Well, young man, are you satisfied?"

"The Dragon Again. "With the weather? Indeed, yes. It's a fine morning." "I'm not talking about weather. I'm talking about your conduct." "Well, I'm satisfied with that, too," said Trask modestly. "After last night? After keeping the ship in an uproar for an hour?" "But that was scarcely my fault," protested Trask. "I'm not so sure about that."

snapped Aunt Mehetabel. "I've advised my niece never to speak to you again." "I should be sorry, if she took your advice." "Don't worry. She won't." "Do you know what I think?" she demanded. "It was a habit of hers to hurl this presumptuous question into conversations without warning. Trask replied very truthfully that he had not the faintest inkling.

"I think we would all be much better off if you were actually in the place where you were supposed to have been," she said. "Meaning—?" "For answer, Aunt Mehetabel pointed a rigid finger in the direction of the ocean. Then, with a dragonlike snort, she stepped aside and resumed her walk. "Did you hear that charming wish, Keeler?" inquired Trask. "And she told me yesterday that she always tried to be kind to people."

"I'd hate to have her wish me an unkindness, sir," said Keeler thoughtfully, as the chair moved onward. "She's a funny woman, sir." It was a lazy morning and a lazy sea. Even the Gulf Stream seemed to be indolent and sluggish as she held her way southward, although she was doing her allotted sixteen knots. Trask soon lost interest in the deck games, which was irritating to see people use their legs.

"Miss Kent evidently had not yet made her appearance. He felt a momentary pang of remorse when he thought of the shock he had caused her; but as he recalled her parting words as she said "good-night," he thought that perhaps, after all, the event could hardly have been improved. Yet, although it was very pleasant to think of the goddess—an occupation to which any young man might easily devote his undivided attention—Trask soon became aware that another lady was subtly intruding herself upon his reflections—Sidney Sands. He wondered how she was getting along with her absent-minded father's barometers and whether she had yet succeeded in accumulating enough readings to keep him busy for the remainder of his years.

Flinding Out. He liked her frank craving for adventure, even if he did not wholly approve of her enthusiasm for the exploits of the marvelous Captain Ferriss. He wanted to see her dance again. More than that, less he wanted to dance with her. Well, why not? She had taken the trouble to speak of him to Keeler. That flattered him, of course. It probably signified nothing whatever, yet he was grateful for it. It impressed him as being a considerate act on her part. Possibly he had aroused something more than a casual interest. Beyond doubt he had given Keeler a black hour or so, and that pleased him immensely.

Not that he wished Keeler harm; he was growing rather fond of him. But he loved to see Keeler jolted to the foundations of his smug hypocrisy. Some day he felt that he was going to tear the mask from his curious companion, and he had a presentiment that the revelation would be astonishing. Poor Keeler! He was as lovelorn as a sentimental boy. Trask found it so amusing that the extraordinary aspect of the matter never occurred to him. Perhaps it was not so extraordinary, either. He could readily conceive that the labor of falling in love with Sidney Sands was not herculean.

It occurred to him that he would like to know to what extent his own reputation had been impaired by the amazing inventions of Keeler. The more he thought about it, the more curious he became. Keeler had said she simply turned her head away and made no comment. That might mean belief, disbelief, amusement, disappointment—anything. Well, there was no certain way to find out. He must see her again. And that involved another trip to the second cabin. Very good; he would make the trip. And he would do it in daylight, too!

"Captain Ferriss." Preliminary to everything was the necessity of getting rid of Keeler, who was sticking to his patient like a Siamese twin. Trask fell back upon the simplest device he could think of—that of getting himself put to bed for an afternoon nap. He feigned swift slumber and awaited developments. Twice Keeler softly approached the berth and beat over him. The second visit appeared to satisfy him, for with a nod of his head he tiptoed into the adjoining stateroom. Trask could hear him moving about cautiously for several minutes. Then, through nearly closed eyes, he glimpsed Keeler as that gentleman peeped through the doorway for another look at his patient. Keeler was arrayed again. Only by a great effort of will did Trask suppress a howl of laughter. The metamorphosis of his nurse, meant but one thing—another joust with Fortune for the favor of the lady of the second cabin. Once again Keeler had become the dancing dandy, irresistible in his own eyes, utterly ridiculous in those of Trask. Paddling as softly as a great cat, Keeler crossed his patient's stateroom and stood before the mirror, where he gave himself a final preening. Then, with a barely audible sigh of admiration for his image, he went to the door, opened it, stepped out on the deck and was gone.

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