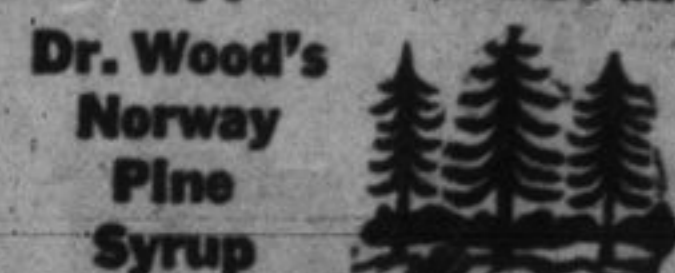


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"THE GIRL IN THE SECOND CABIN"

By E. J. RATH

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Spencer Trumbull, in order to be near his girl in the Adirondacks instead of taking a health trip, 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 Keeler, a male nurse, who is a stranger to both, and thus fulfill the orders of Trumbull's father's physician. Trask starts aboard the Gulf Stream in a wheel chair, and no sooner is he pushed on deck by Keeler than he beholds a girl at the rail—the "goddess," he dubs her. She is Miss Kent, a society girl with a mania for nursing, who takes at once to the interesting invalid despite her dragon of an aunt, Miss Grimm. Meanwhile, Keeler makes himself a hero to Sidney Sands, a girl in the second cabin, concealing his identity. Trask breaks bounds and meets Sidney, who fascinates him.

"She weighs about an ounce—when she dances," thought Trask. "But when it comes to a little argument like this, she weighs something over a ton. I'm for her." Her examination at the hands of the captain evidently completed, Sidney hitched back in her chair and swung her feet. The goddess and she looked at each other. There was mutual speculation in the eyes of both.

It was Lucille who abandoned the silent duel. She glanced toward her aunt, and there was the faintest suggestion of a curl at the corners of her finely chiseled lips. As for Sidney, she neither smiled, frowned nor indicated the least emotion of any kind. She looked like a completely contented woman.

Captain Blodgett riveted a stern glance upon the figures of Trask's nurse.

"What's your name?" he demanded, suddenly. "Keeler, sir." "You're in charge of this man?" "Yes, sir." "What's his name?" "Mr. Trumbull."

"Ever hear him called Trask?" "No," lied Keeler promptly. "I mean, 'No, sir,'" he added. "Ever see him walk?" "No, sir."

"You're lying," announced Captain Blodgett bluntly. Keeler bit his lip, but made no reply. Trask could feel his great hands gripping the back of the chair so that it vibrated. Keeler was human. He might be a liar, but it did not please him to be called one.

"How about the night he was out of his chair for more than an hour?" "Well, sir, I don't believe he was out of it."

Trask half turned to look up at his nurse. His amazement was plain. So was that of the captain. "What do you mean by that?" roared the latter. "You were the one who reported him missing!" "I know it, sir. But I've been thinking the matter over since, and I believe now that I made a mistake. There was so much excitement, sir."

Captain Blodgett lurched back in his chair and gasped. "You expected us to believe that?" "I hope you'll believe it, sir."

Trask wondered if there was hidden irony in the monotonously pitched voice of his nurse. He hoped to be believed! There was a considerable pause, during which the captain played with his watch chain. Aunt Merselabel broke the silence.

"Well, if something isn't done about this matter, I shall leave the ship," she announced. Trask hoped she would; and he would not have been deeply concerned if she chose the easiest way of doing it.

The Sentence. Captain Blodgett cleared his throat, sat erect and leveled a thick forefinger at the invalid. "I am the captain of this ship," he began, in his heavy voice. "My word is law aboard this vessel. I can put you in irons, if I choose. In any event, I believe I shall put you under arrest. I don't know what your game is, but I don't like it."

"I don't like people on my ship who travel under two or three names, and I don't like 'em when they can't walk one minute, and when they do a hop, skip and a jump in the next. You're a suspicious character, sir."

Trask listened with a smile. "I'm going to put you where you won't annoy any more passengers, and I'm going to put a guard over you, sir," continued the captain. "I'm not going to have you jumping around, either in the first or the second cabin. I believe you're a dangerous man, Mr. Trask, or Mr. Trumbull, or whatever you are."

gentleman's family; but I see it's no use now." Trask's eyes were slowly widening. "You see," continued Keeler, dropping his voice to a low tone, "Mr. Trumbull here comes of very excellent people. He had a nervous breakdown some time ago and it affected his mind."

"What?" exclaimed Trask. "Keeler, you're a liar!" Keeler looked at the captain apologetically. "You see how it is, sir. It affects him in different ways. Now, one of his notions is that he can't walk. Of course he doesn't have that notion regular; just at times. But when he does have it, it affects him so that he really can't walk. He's as good as a real cripple, sir. When he doesn't have it, why, his legs are all right and he can walk."

Trask listened as though he were in a dream. "Now, captain," continued Keeler evenly, "it would probably do Mr. Trumbull a permanent injury if you were to lock him up, sir. It would have a very bad effect on him. I couldn't be responsible for what would happen to him. But he's quite harmless, sir. If you'll just leave him with me, sir, I'll guarantee he'll make no trouble at all for anybody. Just let him keep his stateroom, sir, and I'll promise to take first class care of him."

Keeler pleaded with eyes and gestures, as well as voice. "I believe you're telling the truth at last," commented Captain Blodgett.

"Yes, sir," said Keeler, proudly. "Captain, he hasn't uttered one true word!" exclaimed Trask fervently. "That will do, sir," ordered Captain Blodgett, with a wave of his hand. "I'm satisfied with the way things stand now. I believe what this man Keeler says. Now, here's what's going to happen: "Keeler, you may take this man back to his stateroom."

"Thank you, captain." "I shall expect you to be responsible for him."

"I certainly will, sir." "And to-morrow, when we put in at Key West, both of you get off this ship."

"What?" The dismayed exclamation was from Trask, who almost leaped from his chair. "I don't propose to carry any high-jumping lunatics on my passenger list," announced Captain Blodgett with finality. "The pair of you get off at Key West to-morrow. That's all!"

"I've a good mind to slam you one, Keeler!" he exclaimed. "The Tennessee Torando threw up his guard instinctively, tucked his jaw down against his chest and crouched. Then, with a sigh, he dropped his hands.

"All right, sir," he said meekly. "I'll take it from you. Shoot it, sir."

He presented his jaw at a favorable angle and waited patiently and resignedly. Trask made a gesture of despair and turned away.

"Confound you, Keeler! I wish to Heaven I could paste you right on the point—but I can't. You deserve it. You've made things worse than ever."

"But I've kept you out of the lock-up, Mr. Trask."

"And kicked me off the ship! But I won't go! They'll never put me ashore at Key West."

"But wouldn't it be about the best way, after all, sir?"

"No, it wouldn't! In the first place, I've paid to go to Galveston—and I'm going, if I have to hang on to the rudder. In the second place, is Miss Sands getting off at Key West?"

Keeler swallowed hard. "It's as bad as that, sir, is it?" "Yes, it's as bad as that!" cried she belligerently, then added—"If she ever speaks to me again."

Keeler sighed and shook his head mournfully. "I was hoping, sir, that you and Miss Kent might—"

"Oh, shut up! Fat chance I'd have with Miss Kent, anyhow, after the way the beans have been spilled this afternoon. It all comes of your trying to think, Keeler. You're old enough to know that you can't. And I order you peremptorily never to try to do any thinking for me again."

Keeler was humbled to the point of dejection. (To Be Continued.)

you get off at Key West to-morrow. That's all!" "He arose from his seat, signaling that the session was over. Sidney Sands slipped from her chair and made a formal little bow to the captain. Then she crossed the office, without even a glance at Trask, and went out. Lucille, Aunt Merselabel and Mrs. Kent followed, in silent procession. The goddess ventured a timid, half reproachful glance at the patient, who was still in a daze. Aunt Merselabel wore an expression of sweet victory. "Wheel him out!" ordered the captain. Keeler swung the chair around and wheeled him out. Trask was too staggered by the verdict of Captain Blodgett to utter a word until he had been trundled into his stateroom and the door closed behind him. Then, the spell of inertia broken, he leaped from the wheel chair, and turned upon Keeler, his eyes blazing with anger. "Now you've done it!" he cried. "You big bonehead!" Keeler backed away a step and his jaw dropped loosely. "A fine mess you've got me into!" yelled Trask, thoroughly excited. "I get put off the ship tomorrow!" "I did the only thing I could think of, sir," pleaded Keeler. "What business had you to think? Who told you to think? When the blazes did you ever get the notion you could think for me?" "But I couldn't see you sent to the lock-up, Mr. Trask, wherever that is aboard ship. I was only trying to save you that, sir."

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