

*Learn How to Stop an
Ocean Liner In One
Uneasy Lesson*



By WESTON
MARTYR

Little Man—What Next?

NOTWITHSTANDING the non-sense trumpeted about her by the publicity, the S. S. *Palatia* was undoubtedly an impressive job of work. She weighed fifty thousand tons, steamed thirty knots, housed as many people as a good-sized town; she was stuffed as full of machinery as a watch and it all ran as regularly and efficiently as a watch.

This should make it clear that the ship was one of man's major achievements and it therefore seems unnecessary to stress the trivial facts that she was commanded by a Knight Bachelor and contained a palm court with a chromium plated bar one hundred feet long, etc., etc., etc., etc. (see advertisements).

Rose Simmons sat in one of the palm

court's brocaded chairs, with a trace of disillusionment and faint distaste showing in her eyes. These emotions were by no means induced by the blatant splendor of her surroundings, for all the luxury and splendor of it delighted her. No, Rose's eyes were fixed upon her husband.

Albert Simmons caught his wife's look and understood its implications perfectly. Albert, in truth, did not shine in that elegant and palmy environment, and he knew it. He had no use for that kind of environment and he did not care if he shone in it or not. But he did care, greatly, whether or not he shone in Rose's eyes. Her look hurt him, made him think.

Albert was one of those meek-looking, sandy, raw-boned little men who blush

when a woman looks at them, and who seldom have occasion to blush twice on that account. In other words, Albert was the type no woman looks at twice. He was also the type no man monkeys with once, if he be wise and understands that appearances are deceptive—especially the appearance of meekness in a pair of very cold, very pale eyes.

It is easy to explain why Albert had married Rose. She was the blond, Junoesque sort of girl who attracts small virile men as cream does cats; and Albert worshipped Rose and thirsted to make her his from the moment he set eyes on her.

It is not so easy to explain why Rose had married Albert, which she did to the fully expressed surprise of all her relations and of that swift little set of near-successful theater people she ran around with in London. Rose had been the belle of the little East Anglian town of her origin. She could have had her pick of any of the men there. But she had preferred a career. She had done chorus bits, understudied an ingénue rôle which she never had the chance to play, and done a small part in one of the touring companies of a year-old London success. She could have had her pick, also, of several dozen men she had met during those two tyro years. Or she could have gone on with the small career which was beginning to show promise. But—she had married Albert.

When her most insistent suitor—the assistant stage manager of the touring company, who was a bright young lad with a jutting jaw and a good deal of promise—had implored her to tell him, “Why, oh why, Rose? To throw yourself away on that—” she had not been able to answer him, herself.

“That little runt of an outsider,” he had gone on fiercely, in response to her vexing silence, “whom nobody knows, and the Lord alone can guess where he comes from, and he must be twice your age and if it were anyone but you, Rose, I’d say it’s his damned money that’s done it. . . . Oh, Rose—Rose.”

But the young man was quite wrong. It

was not Albert’s money that had done it. It was Albert. He wanted Rose badly, and whenever he had wanted anything badly before, he made adequate arrangements to get it. So he made adequate arrangements to get Rose.

One of his arrangements was this honeymoon trip on the *Palatia*. He knew he would hate it; but he also knew that, to Rose a round-the-world cruise in the world’s most luxurious cruising liner would prove a captivating prospect.

SO ALFRED captured Rose. But do not despise her. Rose was a nice girl, and she would never have married Alfred simply because he could afford to provide her with such things as luxury cruises. No. There was something about Alfred—some quality which her other young men entirely lacked—which made Rose like Alfred, in spite of the little man’s meek and unornamental appearance.

Everything is relative, particularly appearances. Alfred, in his office or foundry or machine shop, looked boss of the job. Alfred, bombing a trench in Flanders, looked so much like certain death that brave men had cowered at the sight and held their hands up in terror and supplication. Alfred, surrounded by the polished, gay and ultra-fashionable crowd in the *Palatia*’s palm court, looked insignificant and inferior. And Rose felt ashamed of him and looked it. And Alfred noticed that look.

It was Alfred’s habit to think a lot before he said anything, so he did not say anything. But Rose said, “Alfred, I don’t think you go to a very good tailor. Just look at the cut of Mr. Russell’s dress clothes. How smartly his coat comes in at the waist; and the graceful drape of his trousers. Surely you could afford to go to as good a tailor as Mr. Russell. Your coat—well, I must say it, Alfred. It’s awful. And the way you let your trousers get baggy at the knees . . .”

Alfred gazed at Mr. Russell, weighed him up and found him wanting. “Very pretty; but not my line,” he said. “He’s no good.”

"No good!" cried Rose. "Why, Alfred, that's Ronny Russell, the great tennis player. They say he's going on the films."

"Suit him better," observed Alfred. "Softer job."

Rose said, "I believe you're jealous, Alfred. I was thrilled when he came and spoke to us in the smoking room, and I could have cried when he went off because you were so curt with him. And now we're talking about it, Alfred, I do wish you could be more easy and polite. I think most of these people are very nice, and I know they're ready to make friends with me—us; but, somehow, you seem to put them off. That nice Professor James, for instance, who sits at our table. He's a most interesting and distinguished man and I was getting on so well with him at lunch. And then you grunted, most rudely I thought, at something he was saying, and he gave you such a look it made me blush. And I saw you blush, too. And then he practically turned his back on us, and he's cut me dead since. Why must you be so rude, Alfred?"

"Sorry," Alfred mumbled. "The idiot said men were slaves of their machines. But I make machines. I drive 'em. So I had to grunt."

"Well, why just grunt?" cried Rose. "It sounds so—so ineffective. You ought to speak up for yourself and assert yourself, Alfred. The way you behave, you make these people despise you. If you knew about machinery and disagreed with the professor's views, why didn't you discuss it with him like an intelligent and civilized human being? That's the worst of you, Alfred: you never say anything. You won't talk; not even to me, hardly. Why, you've never told me till now that your business is making machinery!"

"Didn't think you'd be interested," Alfred murmured. "If you'd like to hear—Gosh! Who's this?"

ALFRED rose and his face turned red as he observed Mrs. Wedderburn bearing down upon them. Mrs. Wedderburn nodded to Alfred and smiled sweetly

at Rose. "I wonder if you'd care to play a rubber of bridge?" said she.

Rose said, "How nice. We'd be delighted."

Alfred mumbled, "Sorry. Don't play. Think I'll have a look round on deck."

As Alfred ambled away, Mrs. Wedderburn smiled again at Rose and said "Good. As a matter of fact we only need one to make up our four, and no doubt your husband will be much happier—" She waved Alfred out of her mind and, with the same gesture, introduced Rose to her party. Rose spent a happy evening and lost twenty-five dollars. Alfred spent an interesting evening and acquired knowledge, poking unobtrusively about those parts of the ship which bore such legends as, *Crew only* and *Passengers not allowed on this deck*.

He returned to his cabin after midnight and found Rose half asleep in her bunk. Rose said, "Oh, Alfred. Where have you been? I was getting quite anxious about you. What *have* you got on *your* hands?"

Alfred said, "Rust. I've been thinking about what you said, Rose. I mean about me not talking or telling you anything. Well, I'll talk. About the things I know. Don't think they'll interest you. I've been looking at this ship. She's a big box of tricks. Very big. Very tricky. She's solid with machines and pipes and wires, from deck to keel and from bow to stern. The men who run her know their work. It's just as well. This ship's no job for a crew of girl-babies."

Rose smiled at Alfred. "How very interesting, dear," she said.

"Yes," said Alfred. "It can be. You know what an anchor is? Well, this ship's got two working anchors. They weigh about eight tons each and they're shackled to a hundred and twenty fathoms of heavy stud-link cable. And the inboard end of each cable is fastened to the ship's bottom framing. If you were to let go an anchor, now, and didn't check it with the windlass brake, it would run its chain right out, because the water's over a thousand fathoms deep here and the ship's steaming full

speed, anyway. And, if the chain didn't carry away, which I don't think it would, its weight and momentum would tear out the frame it's fastened to, and the frame would tear out the skin plating it's fastened to, and all of this ship forward of her fore bulkhead would fill up with water."

"Oh, Alfred," said Rose. "It sounds very dangerous. Could it happen? Would the ship sink?"

"Not by accident," Alfred answered. "And she'd only sink a few inches by the head, if the fore bulkhead's sound. Don't let it frighten you. Before you can let one of this ship's anchors go, you've got to open the cable compressor and ease off the windlass brake. The compressor's fastened to the deck, between the anchor and the windlass and the cable passes through it. You open the compressor by raising a lever. And at sea in this ship the lever's lashed down, just in case of accidents. To release the brake on the windlass, all you've got to do is to turn a handle. And they don't keep a man on look-out on this ship's fo'c's'le head. They do that job from the crow's nest up the foremast."

Rose lay back on her pillows and gave a little sigh. "Sure I'm not boring you?" Alfred asked.

"It is rather technical," Rose answered, firmly stifling a yawn. "But it's frightfully interesting, dear. Just fancy if an anchor did slip. I'd no idea you knew so much about these queer things, Alfred."

"Nothing queer about 'em," said Alfred. "Just common engineering practice. What is a bit queer, though, if you come to think of it, is the way this ship's steered. Nobody steers her. There's no hand at her wheel. It's all done by machines. A gyroscope controls the steering gear on the bridge and that controls the steering engine which turns the ship's rudder. And it's rummy to see that engine, working away right aft, under the poop, all by itself, without anyone attending to it. I've just been looking at it. The engine's geared to the rudder head and its gear wheels turn the rudder and stop and turn it back again just enough to keep the ship straight on her course. It

looks rummy, and I expect it'd make that professor chap at our table talk a lot of rot, if he saw that machine, working itself, and steering the ship straighter than a man can. But I could make a machine like that myself—and break it, too, if I thought it was making a slave of me. Rats!"

ALFRED looked at his dirty hands and turned to the washbasin. Rose smiled to herself at the little man's pathetic efforts to make interesting conversation. Then she shut her eyes and pretended to be asleep, in case Alfred decided to go on boring her with any more of his dull and technical details.

"The main switch-board in this ship," went on Alfred, "is just inside the door of the engine-room casing on E deck. It's a poor place for it. If some fool passenger were to start fiddling with it, he could get hurt, besides putting all the lighting in the ship out of action."

Rose gave a little snore. But she miscalculated. It was such a little one that Alfred did not hear it.

"I saw that chap Russell just now, up on the boat deck," he continued. "He had a girl with him, and they were sitting on the canvas cover on the outboard side of one of the lifeboats. That's a good place, all right, if you don't want anyone to see you; but if the ship gave an extra bit of a roll, you'd be apt to slide off there and drop overboard. And the ship's propellers project well out from her side, so anything that falls overboard and doesn't float gets drawn in by the propeller suction and minced up small. If you lowered a rope overboard with a weight on it, you'd see what I mean. There's a couple of mooring wires, two inches in diameter, wound on drums on the after end of the fo'c's'le, and if anyone—"

Rose gave a weary yawn that put a full stop to Alfred's discourse. "I'm sorry, dear," she said. "But it's so late. And I'm so tired. Don't you think it's time we went to sleep?"

Alfred switched off the light. . . .

At breakfast next morning, Rose was

humiliated to observe that the professor had secured a seat at another table. In the smoking room before lunch, Mr. Russell delighted Rose by offering her a cocktail. But when he saw Alfred approaching, Mr. Russell said, "Oh, Lord! I forgot. I've got a date with the—er—purser. D'you mind? We'll have our drink together some other time."

After dinner, Mrs. Wedderburn so pointedly omitted Alfred from her invitation to play bridge, that Rose would have refused had not Alfred insisted. "Suits me nicely," said he. "You play. I'll take a look round on deck." He promptly vanished.

A LITTLE before midnight all the lights in the *Palatia* went out. And stayed out.

"Bother," said Mrs. Wedderburn. "I was just going to trump your king."

Professor James made a pronouncement. "Something has gone wrong with the dynamo," he said.

Mr. Russell flicked on his cigarette lighter and held it over his head. "Let there be light," said he. And there was laughter.

A voice from the crow's-nest wailed into the night, "Masthead and side lights gone out, sir."

The officer on watch answered from the bridge, "All right!" he shouted. "Quartermaster! Get the oil lamps. Binnacle first, then the navigation lights. Don't forget the stern light. Slap it about, now." He shone a torch on the steering compass and found the ship was four points off her course and still swinging. "Gosh!" he said. "Power's

off, too. Watch on deck! You there, bo's'n? Rush the hands to the after wheelhouse and put her into hand steering-gear. Boy! Call the captain."

The sound of men running in the dark is a first-class panic-breeder. The bo's'n led his men aft by the quickest route, via the promenade deck, past the open doors of the smoking room. The noise of their trampling feet died out and was followed by dead silence. Then Rose heard the professor say sharply, "Something's up!"

The ship began to tremble throughout all her great bulk and from forward came a rumble and a roar. The *Palatia* shuddered. She seemed to trip over something and stumble. She gave a jerk and a hicough and her engines suddenly stopped. Then everything grew very still and silent.

Mrs. Wedderburn was the first to break silence. She cried out, "Oh, oh! Turn on the light. The light! The light! *Please* turn on the light." And suddenly Mrs. Wedderburn was screaming. Then it seemed to Rose that a lot of people were screaming. A panting man ran into her and nearly knocked her down. She clutched him and he pushed her violently away, shouting, "Here! I don't like this. Let me out. Let me out." And, in spite of a high, falsetto note in it that she had never heard before, Rose recognized the voice of Mr. Russell.

Rose got knocked down in the scramble to get through the smoking-room doors. Being a woman of sense and not wishing to be trampled on, she crawled under a table.

Two minutes later, Alfred found her

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there. He held a torch to her face and, "I say, Rose," he said, "You aren't hurt, are you?"

He lifted her up and sat her on the table, and Rose realized for the first time that her small husband was a strong man.

"Oh, Alfred!" she cried, "What's happened? Is the ship sinking? What shall we do?"

Alfred said, "Sinking, my foot! Everything's all right. Nothing's happened that need worry you, anyway. If I'd known *you* were going to get scared— Here! Come down to our cabin, and you make yourself easy, and I'll tell you exactly what's happened. It's all *right*."

WHEN Alfred got Rose to their cabin, he said, "There now. We'd be fine if only I'd remembered we'd need a candle. And a drop of brandy would set you up nicely; but I don't suppose I could get hold of any now, with everyone rushing round like a lot of silly sheep. So you'd better turn in and listen to me while I make your mind easy. What's happened is this. Somebody took a steel hatch-batten off a bunker hatch on E deck and dropped it on the main switchboard by the door in the engine-room casing I was telling you about last night. He dropped the thing on the two terminals where it would do the most good and fused the whole box of tricks. That's why the lights are out. Then the chap went aft and put a steel belaying pin in the gears of the steering engine, and the engine tried to chew the pin up and bust itself. That engine won't steer this ship again till they get it ashore to a machine shop, if then."

Alfred felt Rose give a start, and Rose heard Alfred chuckle.

"When all hands came running aft," went on Alfred, "to see what was up with the steering gear, the chap slipped forward to the fo'c's'le head and let go both anchors with a run. The cables ran right out to the bitter ends and, judging by the tilt on this cabin floor, they've snatched out

a bit of the ship's shell plating and let some of the North Atlantic into her fore-peak. Then the main engines brought up with a round turn, because someone led the ends of two 2-inch mooring wires overboard and let 'em run off their drums until the propellers fouled 'em."

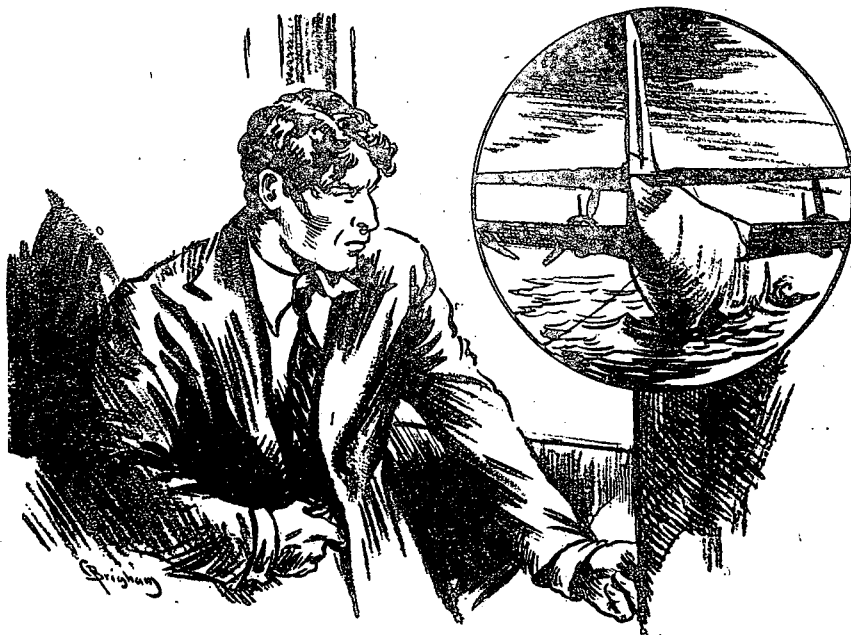
Rose caught her breath sharply and stared into the dark at the dim shape of her husband.

Alfred stood up. "So you see, Rose," he added, "There's nothing for you to worry about. This ship's as safe as houses, only she can't steam and she can't steer. Somebody's put her out of business, pro tem. But, as soon as they get the wireless working, we'll have every ship within range offering us a tow into port. This puts the lid on our round-the-world cruise, of course; and I hope you don't mind, but I, personally, was beginning to feel I'd had all the cruising I needed."

Alfred heard Rose gasp in the dark. He felt the clutch of her hands on his shoulders and he heard her cry, "Alfred! Is *that* what you did it for?"

"No," Alfred answered. "That's just a —er—useful by-product. The reason this ship's out of action is . . . Well, Rose, you were beginning to think that your old man, compared to a chap like that Russell, was a bit of a rabbit. And I couldn't have that, Rose! And presently I shall have to go to the captain and tell him how simple it is to disable his precious ship—and how very terrible it would be if someone really dangerous had done all those things—" He smiled. "But I'm not a dangerous man, Rose. I'm a very simple, ordinary sort of fellow, really."

There was silence in the Simmons cabin for quite a little while. It was dark in there, and Rose was looking at a light that dazzled her. But when Rose could see clearly, something happened to Alfred that had never happened to him in all his life before. A woman threw her arms around him and kissed him passionately on the mouth.



Loot Below

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

THE giant *European Cruiser*, built by the Trans-Caribbean Airways as the first unit of a passenger fleet to fly the Atlantic, is given a test run from Miami to Buenos Aires. She carries forty prominent passengers and a crew of ten. On the way from Buenos Aires to Trinidad four men passengers, acting in well-drilled unison, take over the airship. With casual brutality they murder Captain MacFarland and all of his crew but three—Williams, a pilot; Toby Bronson, purser; and Segurdo, Latin steward.

The members of this fantastic band of air pirates are all ex-employees of Trans-Caribbean. Their ringleader, "the Chief," has remained ashore and has succeeded in extorting two million dollars from Jarratt, president of Trans-Caribbean, by telling him that he will never see the *Cruiser* again unless he pays. The Chief has met Garland, manager of the Miami terminal and a pilot, Hewett, on the Tamiami Trail. Taking the two suitcases of ransom money from them, the Chief drives off into the Everglades and boards his own seaplane, anchored in a bayou. As his radioman contacts the pirate

crew aboard the *Cruiser*, the Chief tells his pilot that it has taken him a year of planning and a hundred thousand dollars in cash to consummate his scheme of piracy. Then the seaplane heads out into the Atlantic, following the *Cruiser*, for a rendezvous on the open sea. Voss, leader of the four who have taken possession of the *European Cruiser*, in an effort to get Bronson to open the safe, burns the purser's foot with a cigar lighter. Bronson faints and is carried to the cabin of Ann Hall, heiress passenger.

AS MYSTERIES within the mystery we have this same Ann Hall and a Mr. Crouch, another passenger. They are playing some deep game. And so are Rosita Alvarez and Commander Halsey of the United States Navy. He is attaché of the embassy in a certain South American country and carries documents of vital importance. Rosita, a sultry beauty, seems to be a lady-of-fortune whose charms are fatal—not to say mercenary. Pilot Williams is pretty fond of her, just as Toby Bronson is beginning to find himself falling for Ann Hall. Ann binds Toby's horribly burned foot and the purser has just regained consciousness when Roope, pale-eyed gunman of the pirates, enters the cabin. His idea seems to be homicide, with Bronson as the victim and then a dash of love-making with Ann in the receiving role. But Segurdo, faithful steward, enters the cabin behind Roope. Noiselessly he pulls a knife. He and Roope die together, one from

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