

In Valhalla and Out

by George Ethelbert Walsh

WNU Service

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(Continued from first page.)

"All right," he said finally. Stay on this deck, and when the half hour's up go down the gang-plank you came up."

"Sure! You didn't think I was going to jump overboard and swim, did you?"

The skipper frowned and eyed

him with disapproval. Dick flirted cut a cigarette, and added: "Any objections to smoking, cap? I'm dead for a few whiffs."

"No, not if you stay outside," was the surly retort.

When he walked away, Dick moved a camp stool near the railing and contentedly puffed away at his cigarette. He was apparently interested only in the scene on the dock, and never once turned his head sideways or backward. He felt that eyes were watching him, but he wasn't sure.

He was conscious once of a cat-like footstep coming around the forward cabin, and halting near him, but he continued to snore peacefully. Twenty minutes, and he was still in the same position. Out of the corners of his half-closed eyes, he saw Captain Brent go down the gangplank and walk aft where the men were finishing their job of coaling the yacht.

Once out of sight a remarkable change came over Dick. He sat slowly upright, and gazed swiftly and keenly around the deck. He was alone on it. Not a person was in sight.

Without further delay he picked up his package and darted for the

main saloon cabin. Once in it he closed the door softly and stared around. The place was vacant. He gave vent to a chuckle of relief.

The cabin was not much changed from the days when his father owned it. The furnishings had been re-upholstered, and the woodwork done over, and a few pictures distributed around; but in the main it was exactly as he had known it. It was home to him, and a great desire to shout and proclaim the fact made him lighthearted for a moment.

But a label of voices on the deck warned him that any moment Captain Brent might return, and find him gone. He crossed the richly carpeted floor in a few strides and came to a halt in front of a paneled wall. He gave one swift glance up and around it, and then dropped down on his knees.

His hands shook a little as he fumbled at the base with nervous fingers. His breath came and went in little sharp, tremulous waves. He knew that the critical moment had arrived that would decide the success or failure of his scheme. Like a bank burglar opening a safe, with a fear of the police beating on his brain, he played his hands up and down skillfully and with precision, hunting for something that time had dimmed in his memory.

Suddenly a low exultant cry escaped his lips. His fingers had touched the thing he had been searching for. It was a tiny crack



They Only Half Filled the Box.

between the molding and baseboard. It was hardly wide enough to admit the blade of a pocket knife.

With one finger pressing on it for fear of losing it, Dick got his knife out of his pocket and opened the smallest blade. Inserting the point of this in the crack he pressed it hard against something that gave forth a soft tinkling, metallic sound.

The effect of his manipulations would have startled Captain Brent had he appeared then, but to Dick it was no more than he expected. The narrow panel before him slid slowly to one side, revealing an opening in the wall about the size of a small stateroom.

The secret compartment in the wall had been designed by the architects of the yacht to satisfy a whimsical fancy of Dick's father. It had been used as a storage place for special papers and securities that the elder Van Ness often carried away with him on long cruises. It was never designed for human occupancy, and when Dick glanced in it he felt a chill of doubt.

The dust of years had accumulated over the door, showing that it had not been used by the present owner of the yacht. Dick had guessed right that the secret of it had not been passed on with the sale of the craft, and no one, in refitting the interior, had stumbled upon the spring that opened the panel.

It was just about wide enough and long enough for a man to stretch himself and move about without bumping his elbows or scarring his shins. It was high enough for the tallest man, with an open register above through which the air of the cabin escaped. The presence of this register of iron grillwork, instead of exciting suspicion, allayed the curiosity of anyone inquisitive enough to want to thump the walls to see if there was a hollow space behind.

Approaching footsteps on the deck brought Dick out of his reverie of indolence. With a shudder he wiped away the worst of the dust and stepped inside. He hesitated again before closing the panel. Then Captain Brent's booming voice aroused him.

"Where's that young fellow with the package?" he called angrily.

Dick touched the spring and watched the panel slide noiselessly in position. At the same moment the cabin door opened with a bang, and Brent stamped inside.

"Search the yacht!" he commanded. "If you find him bring him to me. I'll teach him to snoop around. No, not in here! He's not in the cabin. Search below decks!"

Nevertheless, he made a careful examination of every possible hiding place in the cabin. Dick, holding his breath, heard him

tramping around, opening and closing doors and lockers, and even thumping the soft cushions. Once he stopped in front of the register, and remained quiet for so long that Dick feared he had discovered some clue.

The spring had been a little rusty, and possibly it had not closed completely. The presence of a little dirt or rust near the crack might excite Brent's suspicion. Dick drew a sigh of relief when the man finally moved away, and after another tour of the cabin walked outside on deck.

"It's an even chance, cap; that I'll go with you on this little trip," he mused, grinning to himself. "Anyway, you'll have a hard time finding me."

A little light entered the compartment through the register, and as the air from the cabin escaped through this the suction created kept his narrow quarters fairly well ventilated.

"I won't smother," he reasoned, looking up. "Plenty of air." He glanced at his package and smiled again. "Grub and drinks enough for a week."

Unconsciously, he drew forth a cigarette and started to light it, but checked himself. "Smoking forbidden," he said in a rueful voice. That's hard luck! Then in a relieved voice he added, "At night when everybody's asleep, I can light up. The ventilator will carry away the smoke and odor."

After that he tried to make himself as comfortable as possible in his narrow quarters. It was some satisfaction to know that he would be far more comfortable than in the cool bunkers, where he had first thought of hiding.

"As a stowaway I'm pretty well off," he decided. "Nothing to do but eat, drink and sleep, with a quiet smoke at night." He opened his box and distributed its contents around in the corners, counting the number of sandwiches and bottles of drink. Making a mental calculation he concluded that, with careful rationing, he would not suffer for a week. Then, making a pillow of his coat and box, he lay down and tried to kill time with sleep.

The noises outside did not alarm him. Coal was still pouring into the bunkers, and the tramping of many feet, accompanied by loud orders and oaths, convinced him that the search was still going on. Now that he felt secure this did not concern him, and listening dreamily to the confusion of sounds he dropped off into restful slumber.

He woke with a start finally. Unable at first to collect his senses, he sat upright and stared around him. Over his head a stream of electric light entered through the register. Outside voices sounded so clear and distinct that it gave him a shock at first. The jar and vibration of the yacht told him they were under way. A querulous voice was saying:

"Blake's a fool, Allice. I don't think this trip will do me any good. I could rest at home—don't need a change at all—never did like salt water—sure to be seasick."

"Where's Doctor Alster?"

"He'll have to give me something to make me sleep. I'm wide awake's an owl. What's that infernal racket about?"

"I don't know, uncle. I'll find out. Please don't excite yourself. You know the doctor says the change will do you good."

Dick recognized the voice of Alice Cutler.

"It won't!" came the explosive contradiction. "It will make me worse! Go on deck, and send Blake to me—no, send Doctor Alster! I've got to have some relief from this pain. Tell him to hurry!"

There were soft footsteps across the carpeted floor, and a moment later the cabin door opened and closed. Dick could hear loud, stentorian breathing of one in great pain.

(To be continued.)

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