

for LOVE or MONEY by CORLEY

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NEA SERVICE, INC.

CHAPTER 35

THERE were 20 first-class passengers on the Miranda. The government official who had canceled the steamer occupied by Mona and Lottie was represented by another official quartered in the second best stateroom. He was an attractive young chap who said modestly that he was "in the line."

A nice old couple taking a belated honeymoon walked about the deck hand in hand. A younger couple, not so amiable or interesting, permitted the entire ship's company to know that they were going south on an important mission, collecting tropical fish for a museum.

The consul's nephew was returning to one of the French islands after what (so a steward confided) had been a fruitless search of New York for an earlier passenger with whom he had fallen in love.

Two middle-aged women, seeking a home where the exchange would make their meager income adequate, were among the passengers. An enthusiastic auto salesman was en route to introduce a newly patented lock throughout the islands, a mission scoffed at privately by the ship's officers. The natives, said the officers, would never arouse themselves to the labor of adjusting a spare tire, much less the task of stealing one from another car.

And then there was the ship's doctor, to be found at almost any hour of the day or evening at Lottie's side. "Dr. Allen isn't the regular ship's doctor," Lottie told Mona the second day out. "This line doesn't use them. They distribute vacation trips to eight boys just out of hospitals. This keeps the ship doctoring business on its toes. The doctors are likely to have a touch of senility themselves and have sympathy for the rest of us."

Dr. Allen, it seemed, had much sympathy for Lottie. They strolled the deck, sat for hours over cooling drinks, leaned at the rail in joyous interchange of flippancies. Mona, not quite escaping the difficulties of the voyage, lay back in her deck chair, pale and smiling at them.

Two days out, Cape Hatteras. The Miranda pitched and rolled and pitched again. The galleys of banjo and lilted songs from the second cabin quivered.

"We haven't dropped them off, have we?" Lottie inquired of the physician, pointing at where the quiet of the tomb reigned. At that moment a bell announcing meal time in the second cabin rang briskly. There was an answering shout. Eating was far from the program of the day.

"All sick!" the doctor observed sympathetically. "But by Saturday they'll be out."

Lottie watched the second cabin quarters riding and falling with every pitching of the boat. It was like the swaying of a sea-saw.

"How do they stand it?" she murmured sympathetically. "It's certainly terrible to be poor!"

"You are one of the few wealthy women I've ever heard say that," Dr. Allen observed.

"So you think I'm wealthy, do you?" Lottie thought. Alone she did not say anything.

"If I could get her to marry me," the doctor was musing, "I'd be on an easy street. It takes years to build up a practice."

But he did not persuade Lottie to marry him and on the fourth day out she shifted her attention for the time to the salesman who told her that she really should buy a new car.

Friday the air was warmer and the ship's officers appeared in white. Sunday it was still warmer. The clouds were fleecy and low hung. The turquoise sky seemed almost within reach if one could only stand tiptoe on the topmast. The waters, on which golden seaweed floated, had turned to deep indigo.

Men passengers appeared self-consciously in white linens and sports shoes. One islander wore a pith helmet as he strolled the deck in the middle of the day.

And then on Monday morning an emerald net in silver sands, floating on the supphire sea.

"I don't wonder the boys adore the tropics," Mona breathed.

The Miranda docked at St. Thomas

and the two girls went ashore to buy a stock of French perfume and fruit. The doctor drove them to the beach past Lindbergh's Bay where the aviator had made a "happy landing," where they swam in the sapphire water and sat on the silver beach while a live boy scrambled up the trees for coconuts.

Then they were off again just after luncheon. At St. Croix they did not dock but anchored far out in the harbor. Native police swarmed aboard, urging under among the native boatmen who appeared to row the passengers ashore.

"Imagine coming all this way to row ashore in a boat named 'Broadway,'" said Lottie in disgust. She and Mona hired "The Sea Gull" and were invited to tea by a passenger who had taken the boat at St. Thomas. They returned to the ship after dark. The boatmen sang—and charged double fare in lieu of sufficient applause. There was a slight breeze. The boat swayed up and down, its lantern rolling. The quartermaster helped them aboard. A little later dinner, now quaintly tinged with tropic offerings, was served.

St. John, St. John. Heat and more heat. Native women appeared displaying baskets of guavas for sale. Native boys put on diving exhibitions. Mona's plan was to proceed to Trinidad and at Port of Spain to inquire for airplane accommodations to the mine. This, she remembered, was the method utilized by Steve and Barry. Bud, too, had made the trip via Trinidad.

Guadaloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia. And then came a bombshell. They were seated on deck after dinner, listening to the singing of the second cabin passengers. The steward was serving ices, cold drinks and sandwiches. The radio operator appeared with a message for Lottie which she read by the flickering light of a match held by the picnic.

"What do you think?" she exclaimed delightedly. "It's from Sallie! She says a cable and a letter have arrived from Steve!"

"Tell her to send the letter by air mail to Port of Spain and relay the cable," the doctor suggested.

"It may be something we should know," Mona added. "Steve hasn't written much before, has he, Lottie?"

"He hasn't written at all! Maybe the cable is for my birthday."

She wired to Sallie to open and relay the cable and the answer came the next afternoon. It read:

MISS LOTTIE CARR
S. S. MIRANDA AT SEA
STEVE SAYS THEY HAVE LEFT MINE TEMPORARILY. VACATIONING AT ISLAND. SALLIE.

In reply Lottie sent a second message, reading:

MISS SALLIE JOYCE
— WEST 55TH STREET
NEW YORK CITY
WHICH ISLAND — STATEN, WARD'S OR CONEY? LOTTIE

Sallie's answer was extravagantly flippant:

MISS LOTTIE CARR
S. S. MIRANDA AT SEA
WHICH ISLAND? THY BLACK-VELLIS. HOW SHOULD I KNOW WHICH ISLAND? SALLIE.

"We can wire Bud," Mona suggested. She recalled that the boys had a holiday island in the Caribbean. There were literally hundreds of islands, scattered about. How could they find the right one?

They radioed to Bud and received the answer just off Barbados: MRS. JOHN B. TOWNSEND S. S. MIRANDA AT SEA HOLIDAY ISLAND.

But the captain had never heard of Holiday Island, though he had been making the cruise for 20 years. Nor had the first mate heard of it. Aspinwall apparently had not heard of it for it was not mentioned in his manual.

"I imagine," said the engineer "that it's a new name." He was distressed at his inability to help the ladies. "I'll tell you," he said, brightening. "There's a man in Port of Spain who can tell you everything there is to know. I'll get in touch with him."

Port of Spain would be reached in the morning. Until then there was nothing for the girls to do but wait with as much patience as they could manage. Mona and Lottie both tried to conceal their restlessness. But they had not left Barbados and something was to occur there which changed their attitude, if not their plans.

(To Be Continued)

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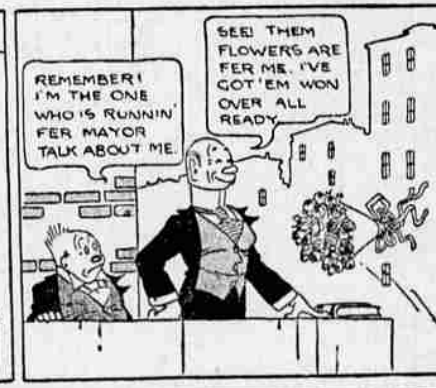
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