



The Stowaway

By LOUIS TRACY

Author of the "Pillar of Light," "The Wings of the Morning" and "The Captain of the Kansas."

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The Stowaway is a typical Tracy story that grips the interest with the first chapter and holds it firmly until the last. A conspiracy against the safety of a ship, a beautiful girl in distress, a brave sailor who aids her and speedily learns to love her, a mysterious island which is the scene of a South American revolutionary plot—these are some of the characters and themes utilized by a master story teller in weaving a romance of life under the mystic Southern Cross.

CHAPTER I. THE ANDROMEDA.

"MARRY Mr. Bulmer! That horrid old man! Uncle, what are you saying?"

The girl sprang to her feet as if she were some timid creature of the wild aroused from sylvan broodings by knowledge of imminent danger. In her terror she upset three winglasses on the luncheon table. One, rose tinted and ornate, crashed to the floor, and the noise seemed to irritate the owner of Linden House more than his niece's shrill terror.

"No need to bust up our best set of 'ock glasses just because I happen to mention owd Dickey Bulmer," he growled.

"I'm sorry," she said and stooped to pick up the fragments scattered over the carpet.

"Leave that alone," came the sharp order. "It's 'igh time you an' me 'ad a straight talk, an' I can't do w' folk boucens' about like an infia rubber ball when I've got things to say to 'em."

He gulped down some of the wine, darted his tongue several times in and out between his teeth, smacked his lips, replaced his cigar in his mouth and leaned back in his chair until it creaked.

Iris Yorke, accustomed to this ritual, found herself even in her present trouble wondering how it was possible that David Verity could be her mother's brother. This coarse mannered man, brother to the sweet voiced, tender hearted gentleman whose gracious wraith was left undimmed in the girl's memory by the lapse of years—it would be unbelievable if it were not true! But he had shown kindness to her in his domineering way. Shocked almost at the disloyalty of her thoughts, Iris tried to close the rift that had opened so unexpectedly.

"It was stupid of me to take you seriously," she said. "You cannot really mean that Mr. Bulmer wishes to marry me?"

"I meant it right enough, my lass," he said.

"But, uncle, dear—"

"Stop a bit. Listen to me first an' say your say when I've finished. Like everybody else, you think I'm a rich man. David Verity, Esq., shipowner of Linden House an' Exchange buildings—it looks all right, don't it, like one of them furria apples with rosy peel an' a maggot inside? You're the first I've told about the maggot. Fact is, I'm broke. Shipwulin' is rotten nowadays unless you've lots of capital, I've lost mine. Unless I get help, an' a thumpin' big slice of it, my name figures in the Gazette. I want \$50,000, an' oo's goin' to give it to me? I put it to owd Dickey yesterday, an' 'e said you couldn't raise money in Liverpool today to build a ferryboat. But 'e said summat else. If you wed 'im 'e makes you a partner in the firm of Verity, Bulmer & Co. See? Wot's wrong with that? I've done everything for you up to date. Now it's your turn. Simple, isn't it? I'raps I ought to have explained things differently, but it didn't occur to me you'd bobble to bein' the wife of a millionaire, even if 'e is a doddrin' owd idiot to talk of marryin' ag'in."

"Oh, uncle!"

With a wall of despair the girl sank back and covered her face with her hands. Now that she believed the incredible she could utter no protest. The sacrifice demanded was too great.

Verity was angry, almost alarmed. Resistance, even of this passive sort, raised the savage in him. Hitherto Iris had been ready to obey his slightest whim.

"There's no use cryin' 'Oh, uncle, an' kickin' up a fuss," he snapped viciously. "Where would you 'ave bin, I'd like to know, if it wasn't for me? In the gutter—that's where your precious fool of a father left your mother an' you. You're the best dressed an' best lookin' an' best educated girl I bootle today—thanks to me. When your mother kem 'ere ten year ago an'

said her lit'rary gent of a 'usband was dead, neither of you 'ad 'ad a square meal for weeks—remember that, will you? It isn't my fault you've got to marry Bulmer. It's just a bit of infernal bad luck—the same for both of us, if it comes to that. An' why shouldn't you 'ave some of the soups after I've given you all the sweets?"

The girl staggered to her feet.

"I will do what you ask," she murmured, though there was a pitiful quivering at the corners of her mouth that bespoke an agony beyond the relief of tears. "But please don't say any more and never again allude to my dear father in that way or I may—I may forget what I owe you."

The door closed and he was alone. Taking a small notebook from his pocket, he jotted down an array of figures. He was so absorbed in their analysis that he did not see Iris walk listlessly across the lawn that spread its summer greenery in front of the dining room windows. And that was an ill thing for David. The sight of the girl at that instant meant a great deal to him.

"Yes; that's it," he was thinking. "I must wheedle Dickey into the bank tomorrow. A word from 'im an' they'll all grovel, blast 'em!"

The door opened.

"Captain Coke to see you, sir," said a servant.

"Send 'im in. Bring 'im in 'ere."

The memorandum book disappeared. Verity's hearty greeting was that of a man who had not a care in the world.

"Glad to see you, Jimmie, my boy. Sit yourself down. 'Ave a cigar an' a glass of port. I didn't expect you quite so soon, but you're just as welcome now as later."

Captain Coke placed his hat on top of a malacca cane and balanced both against the back of a chair.

"I'll take a smoke, but no wine, thankie, Mr. Verity," said he. "I kem along now cos I want to be aboard afore it's dark. We're moored in an awkward place."

"Poor owd Andromeda! Just 'er usual luck, eh, Jimmie?"

"Well, she ain't wot you might call one of fortune's fav'rits, but she's afloat, an' that's more'n you can say for a good many daisy cutters I've known."

Verity chuckled.

"Some ships are worth less afloat than ashore, an' she's one of 'em," he grinned. "You want a match. 'Ere you are!"

Coke puffed away in silence. There was an awkward pause. For once in his career Verity regretted his cultivated trick of covering up a significant phrase by quickly adding some comment on a totally different subject. But the sailor smoked on, stolidly heedless of a sudden lapse in the conversation, and the shipowner was com-

plained and David enjoyed a busy and successful day. He dined in town, came home at a late hour and merely grinned when a servant told him that Mr. Bulmer had called twice, but Miss Iris happened to be out on both occasions.

Nevertheless at breakfast on Tuesday he warned his niece not to keep her admirer dangling at arm's length.

"E's a queer owd codger," explained the philosopher. "Play up to 'im a bit, an' you'll be able to twist 'im around your little finger. I b'lieve 'e's goin' dotty, an' you can trust me to see that the marriage settlement is O. K."

"Will you be home to dinner?" was her response.

"No. Now that the firm is in smooth water again, I must show myself a bit. It's all thanks to you, lass, an' I'll not forget it, Goodby!"

Iris smiled, and Verity was vastly pleased.

"I am sure you will not forget," she said. "Goodby!"

"There's no understandin' wimmin'," mused David as his victoria swept through the gates of Linden House. "Sunday afternoon Dickey might ha' bin a dose of rat poison. Now she's ready to swallow 'im as if 'e was a chocolate drop."

Again he returned some few minutes after midnight. Again the servant announced Mr. Bulmer's visits, three of them, and again Miss Iris had been absent. In fact, she had not yet come home.

"Not 'ome!" cried David furiously. "W'y, it's gone 12. W'ere the—w'ere is she?"

No one knew. She had quitted the house soon after Verity himself and had not been seen since. Storm and rage as he might and did, David could not discover his niece's whereabouts. But enlightenment came on Thursday morning. A letter arrived by the first post. It was from Iris:

My Dear Uncle—Neither you nor Mr. Bulmer should have any objection to my passing the few remaining weeks of my liberty in the manner best pleasing to myself. On Sunday evening in your presence Mr. Bulmer urged me to fix an early date for our marriage. Tell him that I shall marry him when the Andromeda returns to England from South America. You will remember that you promised last year to take me to Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires this summer. I have been learning Spanish so as to help our sight-seeing. Unfortunately business prevents you from keeping that promise, but there is no reason why I should not go. I am on board the Andromeda and will probably be able to explain matters satisfactorily to Captain Coke. The vessel is due back at the end of September, I believe, so Mr. Bulmer will not have long to wait. It is more than likely that Captain Coke will not know I am aboard until Thursday, and I have arranged with a friend that this letter shall reach you about the same time. Please convey my apologies to Mr. Bulmer and accept my regret for any anxiety you may have felt owing to my unaccountable absence. Your affectionate niece, IRIS YORKE.

David narrowly escaped an apoplectic seizure. When he recovered his senses he looked ten years older. The instinct of self preservation alone saved him in his frenzy from blurtin' forth the tidings of the girl's flight. Incoherent with fear and passion, he contrived to give orders for his carriage and was driven to his office. Thence he dispatched telegrams to every signaling station at which by the remotest possibility the Andromeda might be intercepted, and the text of every message was, "Andromeda must return to Liverpool instantly."

But the wretched man realized that he was doomed. Fate had struck at him mercilessly.

I'd stuff you with 'em. I can grow 'em 'ere for next to nothin', but they cost a heap of money in furria ports, an' your crimson wave catcher doesn't earn money. She eats it."

"Even that's one better'n her skipper, 'oo doesn't do neether," commented Coke gloomily. "The Andromeda was a good ship in 'er day, but that day is gone. You ought to 'ave sold 'er to the Dutchmen five years ago, Mr. Verity. Times were better then, an' now you'd 'ave a fine steel ship instead of a box of scrap iron."

They were passing the rhododendrons, and Verity's quick eyes noted that a summer house beneath the shade of two venerable elms was unoccupied.

"Drop anchor in 'ere, Coke," said Verity. "It's cool an' breezy, an' we can 'ave a quiet confab without bein' bothered. Now, I really sent for you today to tell you I mean to better the supplies this trip. Yes, 'onest Injun; I'm goin' to bung in an extra 'undred tomorrow in the way of stores. Funny, isn't it?"

"Funny! It's a miracle!"

Though not altogether gratified by this wholehearted agreement with his own views, Verity was too anxious to keep his bearer on the present tack to resent any implied slur on his earlier efforts as a caterer.

"It's nothing to wot I'd do if I could afford it," he added graciously. "But wot chance as an iron ship built twenty years ago at a cost of £16 a ton agin a steel ship of today at £7 a ton, with twice the cargo space an' three feet less draft? W'y, no earthly. We're dished every way. We cost more to run, we can't jump 'arf the bars, we can't carry 'arf the stuff, we pay double insurance, an' we're axed to find interest on more'n double the capital. As you say, Jimmie, 'ot bloomin' 'chaunt 'ave we?'"

Coke smoked silently. He had said none of these things, but when the shipowner's glance suddenly dwelt on him he nodded.

"Premium gone up, then?" he inquired.

"She's on a twelvemonth rate. It runs out in September. If you're lucky an' 'ill up with nitrate soon you may be 'ome again. If not, I'll 'ave to whack up a special quotation. After that there'll be no insurance. The Andromeda goes for wot she'll fetch."

Another pause. Then Coke broached a new phase.

"Meanin' that I lose the £2,000 I put in 'er to get my berth?" he said quickly.

"An' wot about me? I lose eight times as much. Just think of it! Sixteen thousand pounds would give me a fair balance to go on w' I! These hard times, an' your two thou' would make the skipper's job in my new ship a certainty."

Coke's brick red face darkened. He breathed hard.

"Wot new ship?" he demanded.

"It's a secret, Jimmie, but I must stretch a point for a pal's sake. Dickey Bulmer's goin' to marry my niece, an' 'e 'as pledged himself to double the capital of the firm. Now I've let the cat out of the bag. I'm sorry, ole man—poo me out, I am—but w'en Dickey's name crops up on change you know as well as me 'ow many captain's tickets will be backed w' t' brass."

Neither man spoke, during so long a time that the break seemed to impose a test of endurance. In such a crisis he who has all at stake will yield rather than he who only stakes a part.

"S'pose we talk plainly as man to man?" said Coke thickly at last.

"I can't talk much plainer," said Verity.

"Yes, you can. Promise me the command of your next ship, an' the Andromeda goes on the rocks this side of Montevideo."

Verity jumped as though he had been stung by an infuriated wasp.

"Coke, I'm surprised at you," he grunted, not without a sharp glance around to make sure no other was near.

"No, you ain't not a bit surprised, on'y you don't like to 'ear it in cold English. That's wot you're drivin' at—the insurance. Wot are you afraid of? I take all the risk an' precious little of the money. Write me a letter—"

"Write! Me! Coke, you're loony."

"Not me. Wait till I'm through. Write a letter sayin' you're sorry the Andromeda must be laid up this fall, but promisin' me the next vacancy. 'Ow does that 'urt you?"

Verity's cigar had gone out. He re-lighted it with due deliberation. It could not be denied that his nerve at least was superb.

"I'm willin' to do anything in reason," he said slowly. "I don't see where I can lay 'ands on a better man than you, Jimmie, even if you do talk nonsense at times."

"I'll call at your office in the mornin' for the letter," said Coke, whose red face shone like the setting sun 'seen through a haze.

"Yes, yes, I'll 'ave it ready."

"An' you won't back out of them extra stores? I must sweeten the crew on this run."

"I'll supply the best of stuff, enough to last for the round trip, but don't make any mistake. You must be back afore Sept. 30. That's the date of the polley. By the way, 'oo's the new man you're shipped as second? Wats is the chief, I know, but 'oo is Mr. Philip Hooper?"

"Youngster fillin' in sea service to

get a ticket an' qualify for the Command."

"Thoroughly reliable sort of chap, eh?"

"The best. Just the right kind of second for the Andromeda's last cruise. Smart as a new pin. You could trust 'im on the bridge of a battleship. Now, Wats is a 'good man, but a tot of rum makes 'im fair duff."

"Ah," purred Verity, "you must keep a tight 'and on Wats. I like an appetizer meself w'en I'm off dooty, so to speak, but it's no joke to 'ave a boozier in charge of a fine ship an' valyible freight. Of course you're responsible as master, but you can't be on deck moralin' noon an' night. Choke Wats off the drink an' you'll 'ave no trouble. Well, come along. Let's lubricate."

The Andromeda sailed on the Tuesday afternoon's tide. She would drop the pilot off Holyhead, and if she followed the beaten track on her long run to the river Plate—as sailors will persist in miscalling that wondrous Rio de la Plata—she might be signaled from Madeira or the Cape Verde Islands. But shipmasters often prefer to set a course clear of the land till they pick up the coast of South America. If she were not spoken by some passing steamer there was every possibility that the sturdy old vessel would not be heard of again before reaching her destination.

But David Verity heard of her much sooner, and no thunderbolt that ever rent the heavens could have startled him more than the manner of that hearing.

Resolving to elch matters with regard to Iris and her elderly sister, he invited "Owd Dickey" to supper on Sunday evening. The girl entered the man's presence with a placid dignity that amazed her uncle. On the plea of a headache she retired at an early hour, leaving Bulmer to gloat over his prospective happiness and primed to the point of dementia.

He was quite willing to accompany Verity to the bank next morning. A pleasant spoken manager sighed his relief when the visitors were gone, and he was free to look at the item "bills discounted" on Verity's page in the ledger. More than that, a lawyer was instructed to draw up a partnership deed, and the representatives of various shipbuilding firms were asked to supply estimates for two new vessels.

Altogether Dickey was complaisant and David enjoyed a busy and successful day. He dined in town, came home at a late hour and merely grinned when a servant told him that Mr. Bulmer had called twice, but Miss Iris happened to be out on both occasions.

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Never was ship more eagerly sought than the Andromeda, yet never was ship more completely engulfed in the mysterious silence of the great sea. The days passed and the weeks, yet nothing was heard of her. She figured in the "overdue" list at Lloyd's, sharp eyed underwriters did "spec" in her, woebegone women began to haunt the Liverpool office for news of husbands and sons, the jowled Dickey wore Verity to a shadow of his former self by alternate pleadings and threats, but the Andromeda remained mute, and the fanciful letters from Iris became fewer and more fragmentary as David's imagination failed and his excuses grew thinner.

And the odd thing was that if David had only known it he could have saved himself all this heartburning and misery by looking through the dining room window on that Sunday afternoon when his prospects seemed to be so rosy. He never thought of that. He cursed every circumstance and person impartially and decently, but he omitted from the satanic litany the one girlish prank of tree climbing that led Iris to spring out of sight amid the sheltering arms of an elm when her uncle and Captain Coke deemed the summer house a suitable place for "a plain talk as man to man."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

CITY AND COUNTY BRIEFS

Allice Mayor went to Lostine, Friday, to visit friends a few days.

Mayor J. A. Burleigh returned Thursday from a business trip to Portland.

W. R. Kivette, the lumber buyer, is here helping to straighten out the planing mill muddle.

Mrs. J. P. Averill went to La Grande Friday to join Mr. Averill who is there on business.

C. J. Yager of Arko, five miles west of Flora, was in town Friday with a load of fine potatoes.

Mrs. Laura Sherod and baby of Wallowa, who had been visiting her aunt, Mrs. I. M. Young, returned home Friday.

A. C. Weaver will open a "Fair" store in his business room, recently vacated by Ashley. Miss Grace Wood will be head clerk.

Did you ever read a story by Louis Tracy? If you have, it is not necessary to tell you to be sure and read The Stowaway, starting in this issue. If you haven't then start with The Stowaway. For double-clinch interest it is ahead of anything you ever read.

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To the Citizens of Wallowa County. It is our purpose to handle any business entrusted to us in such a fair and liberal manner as to make the customer's relation with this bank satisfactory and profitable. Aside from our excellent facilities, this bank has the advantage of a large capital and substantial list of stockholders. It is also a State Depository. If you are not a customer we invite you to become one. Stockgrowers and Farmers National Bank Wallowa, Oregon



"THERE'S NO USE KICKIN' UP A FUSS."

peled to start afresh. He was far too shrewd to go straight back to the topic burked by his own error.

"It's stuffy in 'ere with the two of us smokin'. Let's stroll into the garden," he said.

Coke was agreeable.

"It's the on'y bit of green stuff you seem to be fond of, Mr. Verity," he went on. "You keep us crool short of vegetables."

David's little eyes twinkled. Here was another opening. It would not be his fault if it led again up a cul-de-sac. He threw wide the window, and they crossed the lawn.

"Vegetables," he cried. "Wah I could stock you from my place, an'

"I'm willin' to do anything in reason," he said slowly. "I don't see where I can lay 'ands on a better man than you, Jimmie, even if you do talk nonsense at times."

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