

SERIAL STORY

MURDER IN FERRY COMMAND

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RESCUE AND REUNION

CHAPTER XIV

A FAINT hope, or perhaps only a sorrowful curiosity, prompted Clyde Dawson to telephone the port commander who had told him of Carole Fiske's disappearance aboard the torpedoed steamer Fort Glengarry.

"Captain," he said, "I recall that the girl I'm hunting was given accommodation in a cabin with an officer's wife. Can you tell me where I could find this rescued woman?"

"She was brought to the St. John's General Hospital," the naval officer replied. "Let me call the hospital and find out if she is able to see you. I'll ring you back."

With permission of the head doctor, the commander arranged a short interview with the surviving woman passenger. Dawson found her waiting for him in the sun porch. Pausing only to congratulate her on being saved, he asked if she knew Carole Fiske.

"Yes, she shared the cabin with me . . . in fact," the woman's voice lowered to a whisper, "I wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for Carole Fiske. When the torpedo hit I was asleep in my bunk . . . the horrible crash woke me, and the next moment the ship listed heavily to starboard. It was terrible . . . the lighting system was destroyed and the portholes were sealed for blackout, so we were in utter darkness. I heard people screaming, then I must have fainted . . . I have a bad heart anyway."

"They told me later that Carole dragged me from the cabin through the passageway and onto the deck. When I came to, a sailor was helping her lift me into a lifeboat. Just then the ship listed worse than ever. They barely shoved the lifeboat clear when the ship keeled over. Carole—the woman's voice broke—"Carole didn't have time to climb in. She was probably too exhausted. If I had only kept my senses . . . if I hadn't been ill, she might . . ."

The woman covered her face with her hands. Dawson, without a word, rose to his feet and walked slowly from the ward. For the second time within an hour he walked unseeing through the wintry streets of St. John's, heedless of direction, of traffic and of passers-by. Clyde Dawson had seen death so often, had barely escaped it himself with only the fatalistic second thought that it was part of his job. But Carole Fiske . . . part, keen-witted, smartly dressed . . . her moments of quiet concern about Darwin Lemoy . . . Carole Fiske, out there in the blizzard-blown Atlantic graveyard in the dark of night . . . And all because he had played the cagey, cocksure investigator too long. A word from him and she would have still been here.

Dawson's aimless steps had led him back to the Newfoundland Hotel. Wearily he mounted the circular stairway to the main lobby. As he passed the desk the clerk halted him.

"Naval headquarters has been calling you, Mr. Dawson—it's most urgent, they say. I'll have you connected by phone."

The captain came on the line immediately.

"I've been trying to find you, Dawson . . . damn good news, my boy! An American flying boat spotted three people on a raft, made a landing in a heavy sea and brought them back to the American naval base . . ."

"The girl?" Dawson's voice was tense.

"She's one of the three and her condition is reported satisfactory, although she is suffering from exposure. I figured you'd want to rush down there, so I had them hold a corvette that was about to sail for Halifax. Hurry to the Dockyard Pier . . ."

CAROLE FISKE looked surprisingly well when Dawson entered the women's section of the Naval Hospital. Her eyes widened as he walked quickly to her bedside and clasped her hand.

"If ever I prayed in my life," he said with emotion, "I'll pray tonight to thank God for this miracle."

She started to speak but Dawson made a motion for her to remain silent.

"There is little possibility of your ever forgiving me for misjudging you, but we investigators often do that until . . ."

but this was a harder blow than she could possibly have expected. "There is only one thing more," Dawson said. "No matter how hard it is, please try to wipe this sorry business from your mind. Don't try to probe for the full story. It is now a war secret and besides, you know the most important thing of all—that Darwin redeemed himself nobly and loved you as he should . . ."

Carole Fiske looked at Dawson strangely.

"You are so different now. There is a kindness about your way of bringing this awful news that has taken away a lot of its sting. I always felt guilty about the night in Chicago when you were almost shot . . . they overheard my phone call to you on the extension and forced me to go with them."

Dawson nodded. "I had surmised as much. Now—he held out his hand—"will you please forgive me for all my boorishness?"

With a sad smile, she took his hand.

Dawson turned to go, but she called him back. Carole had raised herself in the bed, leaning on one elbow. Her beautiful black hair, still showing signs of salt water, fell to her shoulders.

"But, Clyde—there was something of alarm in her voice—"what shall I do now? Will they let me go back . . . should I see . . ."

She suddenly seemed a lonely and badly frightened girl. Dawson answered quietly.

"Would you prefer if I waited for you to get well—and take you back home, Carole?"

The girl's brow cleared and gratitude showed in her eyes.

"I would be most thankful. This . . . all this . . . has left me feeling as if I were in a strange,

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