

A BIT OF WAX

By WILLARD BLAKEMAN

I had gone out to India to serve as an accountant in a banking house; but, becoming homesick, I decided to return to America. A few days before I sailed the head of the firm called me into his private office and told me that a client of the house desired that I carry for him to Boston a valuable sapphire. He would pay me handsomely for its delivery in that city.

I needed the money and accepted the commission. I called for it the day I sailed, wearing a coat with a pocket in the lining, in which the sapphire was sewed by an Indian woman who was called in for the purpose, though she did not see the contents of the pocket or know that there was a pocket there.

My route was by Aden, the Suez canal, the Mediterranean and over the Atlantic to New York, quite a long journey and all in the same vessel. I made the acquaintance of an American lady, Mrs. Gillette, whose maid was a young Indian woman. The lady told me that shortly before she sailed the woman—Susan she was called, because her Indian name was hard to pronounce—hearing that she was intending to sail for America, came and begged her to take her with her as her maid, with no compensation except paying for her passage. The lady, who was subject to senile dementia and wished some one to wait on her, consented. Mrs. Gillette was ill in rough weather, but well on a smooth sea. Susan took very good care of her.

Since I had told no one that I carried a valuable gem and no one except myself and the man through whom it came to me knew where it was I felt very little fear of losing it. I simply wore the coat in which it was sewed by day and used it for a pillow by night, so that it was always either on my back or under my head. But one thing occurred during the voyage to cause me to suspect the possibility of any one being on my track. One day when about to enter my stateroom I noticed something white not as big as a pea on the floor directly under the lock. I have no idea what induced me to pick it up, but I did so and, crushing it between my thumb and forefinger, found it to be wax. Could any one have been taking an impression of the lock on my stateroom door? I dismissed the suggestion at once as farfetched.

We had left Gibraltar and were nearing the Azores when one morning I awoke with a head swimming sensation. I smelled a peculiar odor in the room. I put up my hand to grasp my coat, for I felt that my head was without support, and was horrified to find the coat was not there. I arose and looked about the room for it as best I could, but it was not in the room. I tried the door and found it locked. The key I had concealed under my mattress. It was where I had placed it.

The remembrance of the bit of wax I had found came back to me as the only clue to this robbery. If an impression had been made for a key the key must have been made aboard the ship. It could not have been filed without the filing being heard. Doubtless it had been made in the ship's workshop. I went below and asked the man in charge of the metal working shop if he had been called to make a key. He said that he had not, but, after some thought, said that one of the stewards had been in the shop filing something. He remembered the steward, and we found him.

I reported the matter to the captain, who called the steward before him and obtained a confession that he had been tipped by a lady's maid to do some filing on a key. When called upon to identify the lady's maid he pointed out Mrs. Gillette's Indian girl, Susan.

Before Susan got wind of the matter a stewardess took her in charge and another went through her effects. My coat was found among them, but the sapphire was missing. We were obliged to tie a rope around Susan, threatening to put her overboard, before she broke down and told us where she had concealed it.

No blame whatever was attached to Mrs. Gillette. She had not the slightest conception that her maid was not only a thief, but had entered her service knowing that she was about to leave for America on the same steamer as I and believing that I carried the sapphire.

This is the explanation of how Susan acquired this information. She had been chambermaid in the hotel where the owner of the sapphire stayed and had suddenly entered the room and had seen him handling it. She had watched him and had seen him go to the bankers. There she had succeeded in making the acquaintance of the woman who had done the sewing on my coat. This was enough. A brother of hers had got from the passenger list of the steamer on which I was to sail the names of several ladies. Susan had gone to each of these ladies, proposing to go with her as maid, and had been successful with Mrs. Gillette.

Susan was kept in limbo to the end of the voyage, when I went ashore. I learned afterward that she was taken back to India, being made to do menial work on the return voyage. What became of her after reaching India I do not know.

The incident convinced me that the natives of Asia are very shrewd.

A Diabolical Plot

By MARGARET C. DEVEREAUX

A lady and a gentleman stood on the deck of an ocean liner about to depart for the Mediterranean.

"Upon my word," said the latter, "if there isn't my old chum Dick Thurston coming aboard loaded down with hand baggage. I haven't seen him in four years. He's going across, sure. I wish I were going."

"Introduce him. He'll serve to lighten the annual during the voyage."

"I'll do it on one condition."

"What condition?"

"That you go for him. I'll let him think you're my wife instead of my cousin, and you must keep up the deception. He's always prating about honor in not making love to a friend's wife and all that sort of thing, while I claim that if a woman can get a man in love with her she can turn him over to Satan, body and soul. Do you agree?"

Miss Katherine Maryweather in her heart snapped at the idea, but she occupied the few minutes to spare in declaring that she would do no such abominable thing. Thurston was brought up and introduced to her. Frank Waters having given him the impression that he had been married since they had met and he wished him to take charge of his wife for the voyage.

"Remember," said Dick, giving his cousin a parting kiss, much to the envy of Thurston.

"I'll remember nothing," was the reply.

Miss Maryweather was an unconscionable flirt, and this request of her cousin especially appealed to her. She had brought many a man to her feet, as Waters well knew, but she had not experienced the zest attending making a man a traitor to an intimate friend. As to deliberately stating to Thurston that she was Waters' wife, she repelled such a sin with horror; she would merely suffer him to suppose she was.

The voyage consumed twelve days, during which the weather was delightful, the sea smooth, and all were on deck every day and moonlight nights from start to finish. Before the vessel reached the Azores Thurston's conscience was troubling him dreadfully. At Gibraltar he made a weak effort to leave the ship and do the rest of the journey by land. The night before reaching Naples he seriously contemplated jumping overboard. He had not offended, indeed, against his old friend, but he had been criminal in word and thought up to his chin. Miss Maryweather had bewitched him.

Once ashore, he righted himself and fled to Rome, where he had intended to remain a month. But, fearing that the supposed Mrs. Waters would be coming up that way, he lit out for Florence. Indeed, he never stopped till he reached Lucerne.

Frank Waters had made arrangements to join his cousin at a summer resort on Lake Thun, and they met there in July.

"Well?" said Frank inquiringly.

"Well what?"

"Did you break down Thurston's self respect?"

"Certainly not. Mr. Thurston is a very honorable man."

"Since you don't seem disposed to tell me what happened I'll ask Dick."

"He'll tell you nothing."

"Won't he? Do you mean that he will lie about it?"

"He needn't lie. He can simply refuse to talk."

"I won't ask him. I'll charge him with all sorts of dishonorable things, and he won't deny them."

"Such as—"

"I'll say, 'Dick, you've been making love to my wife!'"

"What else?"

"In a moment of weakness you proposed to her to leave me and take up with you."

"If you accuse him of such a thing I'll never speak to you again."

"I won't do it if you assure me he didn't."

"You had no business to introduce him to me, letting him suppose I was your wife."

"Why didn't you disabuse him?"

"Why didn't I? Why, because—"

He looked at her with an amused smile, then continued:

"Dick Thurston is a mighty good friend of mine. When I saw him going aboard the ship in which you sailed I knew you would expect an introduction; that you would flirt him all the way over and send him off with the rest of them on reaching Italy. What I did I did for his protection."

"How for his protection?"

"In the first place, if he believed you to be my wife it might help him to resist you. In the second, if you succeeded you would be so tangled up in your deceptions that you could be managed. I'm going to confess the matter to him—my past and yours."

"You'll do no such thing!"

"What shall I say to him? He is at Lucerne, and I'm going to run down there tomorrow to see him."

"What shall you do? Why, let him discover that I'm not your wife without saying anything about your detestable plot."

"Or yours?"

"This thrust was received in silence."

"If I do as you say will you treat him honorably in future?"

"Yes, I will!"

The former Miss Maryweather is now Mrs. Thurston.

The Story of "Mrs. Rescue"

By M. QUAD
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We were between the Azores and Madeira, bound for a port in the West Indies, in the American ship Ben Joyce when a curious thing happened one morning about an hour before daylight. I was digging my eyes and fighting away sleep when a curious sound from over the bows caught my ear. As I listened to the noise the only thing I could compare it to was the noses of sharks bumping up against a small boat. It would have been ridiculous to call to the mate and give him any such wild explanation, but I finally called his attention to the curious noises and left the cause to his own perception.

"There's a raft or a boat out there," he said after a moment, "and the noise may be made by ours. I'll burn a port fire."

The port fire lighted up the sea for a hundred feet around, and the first thing we saw was a ship's boat within forty feet of us on the port bow. In the bottom of the boat were two human figures, and one of them was a woman, and all around the boat the sea was alive with sharks. As soon as we caught sight of the boat the mate ran to call the captain. By the time the captain arrived the boat had drifted right down against us, and one of the crew lowered himself into her and made fast the painter. Then I got down to assist him, and we passed up the bodies—the man first. We might just as well have dropped him into the sea, for he had been dead for twenty-four hours at least. He was recognized by all as a sailor. As we picked up the woman, having not a doubt that she was dead also, she moved and uttered a groan. We had her on board after a couple of minutes, and the small boat, which was a captain's gig, new and without a name, was later hoisted up.

The woman awoke to find herself aboard of a strange ship, with strange men around her. She was a handsome, well formed woman, English in looks and speech and about thirty years of age. Her apparel was fine and costly, but she wore no jewelry and had neither a purse nor a cardcase. When asked how she came to be at sea in the gig, what her name was, if she had visited Madeira or the Azores, if she lived in England, she could tell nothing. She began a new life when she opened her eyes in the cabin of the Joyce. After three or four days both cabin and fo'castle came to the same conclusion, which was this: The sailor must have been rowing the woman off to a ship or from a ship to shore at some of the islands.

That's the way we figured it out, and it looked reasonable enough, and, of course, the right thing to do was to leave the woman at Trinidad and report the case as widely as possible. Queerly enough, she fought and baffled this plan. Our captain was a good looking man, and feeling that she owed him her life and doubtless being rather romantic by nature, what did she do but fall in love with him! That is only half the story. He fell head over heels in love with her. The position was most embarrassing for him, however. All of us agreed that the woman was or had been a wife, though she had no finger ring to prove it. I think he saw things as an honorable man should, and yet he could not help loving her. When we reached Trinidad he notified the English consul, placed the woman in the household of a friend and then sailed for the port of New York.

The story of our picking up the living and the dead was published far and wide. The publication of that story all over the world did not solve the mystery. No husband came forward; no relatives wrote.

When three years had elapsed and still no news had come the two were married. The woman had not recovered one single point of memory. She was a stranger to herself. She had no country, no relatives, no name except by chance. After marriage the captain left the sea and went into the ship chandlery business in Brooklyn. One evening two years after the wedding the captain of an English tramp steamer just in called to ask for some information. He complained of not being well, and, one thing leading to another, he finally related a tale of woe. Several years before, while his ship was at the Azores, his wife, who had been sent ashore in the morning, attempted to return about midnight, just as a squall was coming up. The boat upset, and the occupants were lost. They found neither the boat nor the bodies, but there was no doubt of the calamity. The loss of the wife so affected the husband that he was ill of brain fever for months, and he had never read a line of her rescue in mid-ocean. There was the husband at last, and Captain Clark realized that he had fought before him. They were alone in the office, and perhaps he thought of killing the man who had come to break up his happy home. It was only a step to the edge of the slip, and perhaps he thought of suicide as the best way out. The climax was a curious one, but in keeping. The strange captain, who had given his name as Burke, was coming at Captain Clark in a puzzled way and wondering why he should be so affected by the story when a yacht anchor swinging from a beam above his head parted its fastenings and fell upon him and crushed him to the floor, and, though he did not die

he never spoke again.



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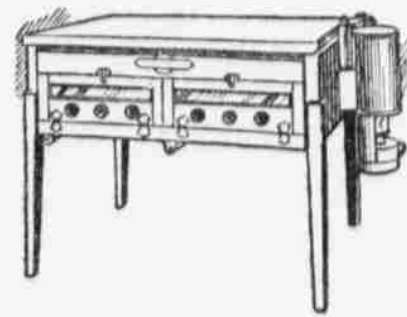
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