

PROMENADE DECK

by Ishbel Ross

FOURTH INSTALLMENT

SYNOPSIS—A luxurious five-month cruise around the world aboard the "Marenia" brings together a group of passengers for adventures, romantic, entertaining—and tragic—like in "Grand Hotel" these passengers offer a study in human actions and reactions which unconsciously bare their souls—These characters are aboard the ship: Macduff, dour Scotchman, single, of middle age; Miss Mudge, school teacher, spending the savings of 20 years; Angela, faithful wife of Lovat, gigolo; Dick Charlton, first officer; Clare, a person of experience; Joan, a dissipated flapper; Jenny, run-away wife, and Peter; Captain Baring, master of the ship—and his soul. NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY—

The Red Sea stretched like a velvet carpet under a sky dotted with stars. "Venus!" said Jenny, looking upwards. "I always know it because of its translucence, and it seems so much closer to the earth than the others. I used to watch it over the river at Little Oaks, and now I'm seeing it near Aden with you!"

She clung to the rail, her figure enveloped in a dim blue haze. She listened to the swish of the boat thru the water, and watched its trail of foam. The funnels rose like black towers, pouring a stream of smoke into the night. It was hot in a smooth and milky way. She threw off her wrap and clutched at her throat. Peter slid his hand along the rail and caught her fingers.

"Strange, isn't it?" Jenny whispered.

"Why strange?"

"I feel as if we're all alone in the night and very far from everyone—rather afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

She shuddered and pressed close to his side. There were moments when one was alone in all the universe, when there was no aid, no communion anywhere, but how could one convey this sense of isolation, even to the man one loved? She sank to a deck chair and lay looking up at the stars. For an hour they seemed to be racing thru foam under a canopy that reached to infinity.

"What a fine sense of exhilaration one gets on the top deck," said Peter, turning from the rail to look at the silent Jenny. "But I wish we were having a roaring storm; this is so tame. I like the fury of the sea. You've never been in a real storm have you, Jenny?"

"No, never. I wonder if I should mind."

"I think you wouldn't like it, for you're not attuned to wildness. Your mind and your body are passive."

He bent over her till her hair drifted across his mouth with a sharp fragrance. Her face was part of the night. For a moment he thought her a perfect stranger—so shadowy and remote! What did she dream of all the time? Why could he never reach the core of Jenny's thoughts? Why did she shut him out? He looked down the dim corridors of the future and wondered if he had made a mistake in taking her from her husband and home. Half of the time he was forced to comfort and assure her, and she paid for a moment of rapture with hours of futile regret.

She turned to him suddenly, her voice edged with pain. "You're thinking of the future, aren't you, Peter?"

"I was thinking of you."

"I know—the two of us together. How do you think it will be—afterwards, when all this is over?"

"This won't come to a sudden stop, Jenny. Our happiness will continue."

"It's peaceful here tonight, but I'm afraid of what time will do to us, Peter."

"Rubbish! You're carrying your troubles self too far from home."

Clare and Johnny went pacing by. Peter turned his head to watch the sweep of the figure in violet chiffon. Her shoulders swayed as she moved; she held her chin like a bird in flight. He was now abstracted, puffing at his cigarette. Jenny's voice was crossing his thoughts.

"I'm hypnotized by the sea, Peter. It's like a song in my heart, rhythmic and never-ending. Look at the queer glow on the horizon."

"You never know what you are going to encounter in that region. I've seen the Red Sea churned like a mass of foaming lava, and again as calm as a pane of glass. But it's

not a patch on the China sea, which is always an ugly sight."

They went down to their stateroom, and Jenny emerged slowly from her taffeta.

"You make me think of a white peony," said Peter, as her ruffled frock fell to her feet. "So pale, so dreamy, so fragile, as if each petal would drop off with a breath." He kissed her neck and behind her ears; he ran his fingers down to her slender wrists. "And your skin is as soft as a peony petal, and your eyes are as blue as the sea at noon-day, and I love you very much!"

He caught her in his arms and Jenny's head drooped against his chest with fluttering eagerness. He kissed her throat and the blue lids of her eyes and then her mouth. The color stirred slowly in her creamy cheeks and her lips grew scarlet and full.

"Peter, I adore you," she whispered, dragging herself from a deep abyss to meet his love with her own pale ardor.

"But, my dear, you're so very far away." Peter's lips were against her mouth. "It's like calling a ghost back to my embrace. I feel, when I possess you, that you're perched on a distant mountain looking on. Darling, wake up. Love me as I love you!"

Jenny heard his words in a dream. Why did he bother to talk? It was true what he was saying—she was remote, alone on a mountain-top. She could see the bluish line of his half-closed eyes, and his hair damp on his brow. Why did she feel so soothed instead of the stinging pain of love? She was drifting now on calm waters. It seemed as if she were back in the dhoby on the Nile, and she felt that she must be swooning. "Jenny! Jenny darling. Where are you? Oh, my love!" Peter was calling to her from a long distance, pain in his voice. She could hear the swish of the water, outside the porthole. The light of the moon lay wan on the floor of their stateroom. Jenny's eyelids lifted. She was back from the distant places and was holding Peter in her arms. How she adored him! He was breathing gently and dropping off to sleep. She stroked his face like a mother with a child. "Jenny darling!" he murmured thru sleepy lids. She lay in a trance, hour after hour, her eyes fixed on the pencil of moonlight that pierced the porthole.

Five days later the Marenia steamed into the wide, flat harbor of Bombay. The Apollo Bunder, gateway to India, rose magnificent against a fleckless stretch of blue. A heat haze shimmered over the waters, and small craft sped like white-winged birds to their destinations. Angela stood on the top deck and watched the city taking shape at the water's edge. Far to the left she could see a fringe of green—Malabar Hill, overhanging Bombay.

The ship heaved and turned to a peaceful anchorage. A tender came puffing importantly to her side. When the boat ceased throbbing at last, Angela's ears continued to drum, a faint echo that would not leave her.

The chief officer came strolling up to her side.

"Good morning, Mrs. Wyant."

"Good morning, Mr. Chalton."

"Well, it's India at last. I must confess I like it as little as any country I know."

"I like it, nevertheless."

"You should see it in a typhoon, with the water breaking against the Bunder."

"Perhaps we shall."

"Not a chance at this time of year. Well, I've got to be going about my business."

Dick swung off, and Angela went down to the lower deck to get on the tender. Her fellow passengers were tired and sulky today. There had been a dance the night before.

She stepped ashore, and the first of the fakirs crossed her path, with his snake and mongoose already in action. It amused her to watch him tho she saw at once that it was the old game. The snake was not killed, but was popped surreptitiously into the sack for further use.

Angela sauntered under her parasol, alive to the drama around her. When she had had enough, she took a car and drove to the Towers of Silence. There, from the Hanging Gardens, she could see the roofs of Bombay, flat and white, stretching along the ocean front. The Marenia was a dot in the distance.

Angela thought of Lovat. What could she get him that would interest him at all? Something for his own adornment would please him most, altho it was difficult to pick up suitable gifts for a smart young man-about-town. She sighed and noticed that Peter had walked into the lounge with Clare. He looked more bronzed than ever in his white rajah suit. She was radiant in cream-colored silk, a few shades lighter than her tanned skin. There was no sign of Jenny. They found a quiet corner under the palms and ordered drinks. Peter leaned over the table and talked hard to Clare, whose lashes fluttered as she listened to what he said. He was so absorbed that he had no eyes for anyone else in the lounge.

Johnny walked into the lounge and glanced in the direction of Peter and Clare. He seemed aggrieved, and Angela, watching him, felt a little sympathetic as he stood uncertainly at the door. At last he came over to her table and drowned his pique in one cocktail after another. A flush crept up on his face as he kept his gaze on Clare, who was chatting in the most intimate way with Peter.

"Where's the lovely Mrs. Rumford today?" he inquired, like one who must torment himself.

"I haven't seen her at all." Angela told him. "I was the only one of our lot to come ashore on the tender."

"Perhaps she overslept—like me."

"Oh, cheer up, Johnny! Things are not so bad," Angela remarked, staring at his clouded face. Her

attention wandered around the room. There was Macduff, staring into space, and high-hating the world with the aid of a stiff drink. And here came Jenny, straying into the room with her usual lost air. Her expression in a mirror as her glance rested on Peter and Clare, was tinged with a flush of surprise, and she looked like a bird that had been winged. She moved straight over to the table, dragging a long white scarf behind her.

"Peter, I overslept. I'm sorry you didn't waken me."

He sprang to his feet. "You looked so exhausted, Jenny, so I just let you sleep. You didn't mind my coming on without you, did you? I was going back to get you for luncheon."

"Not a scrap, Peter. Good morning, Mrs. Langford."

"Hello, Mrs. Rumford! What a gorgeous shade of green you're wearing! It's just like turf, and suggests a lawn in this dusty part of the world."

Clare's voice was flattering, but Jenny shrank from the personal note. She regarded her as an absolute stranger.

"Well, I'm lunching with Johnny," said Clare, lightly. "I must be getting along." Then, turning to Peter, "You win."

"We'll have to discuss it again," he said, freezing his voice; but Jenny was inattentive.

Clare strolled over to the other table. "I'm famished for lunch," she announced. "I want some curry, Johnny. We're entering the area of starvation now."

"Sorry, I'm lunching here with others."

He was staring at her with a tragic air. Secretly Clare hoped that he wouldn't cut his throat or jump into the ocean. Stupid infant, she'd teach him a lesson. She leaned over and purred: "All right, Johnny, it doesn't matter a bit. I want to go back to the boat in any event and look up Mr. Charlton. So long. Hope you enjoy your curry."

"Damn!" muttered Johnny and let her go.

All afternoon the Marenia lay peacefully at anchor, with most of her passengers ashore. They were shopping and seeing the sights.

Joan had slept all day, and wakened just in time to have her cocktails before dinner. She was going to remain behind because she knew that Dick would not be leaving the boat.

Three hours later she was coming out of the bar when she saw him making for his stateroom. She knew that she was not supposed to go near his quarters; that nothing would offend him more. It was hard to forget the sizzling words he had tossed at her for breaking in on him the night she had been so drunk that she had tried to rip off her frock in the bar-room.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

And They Get the Business

General R. E. Wood, president of Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, announced that the company will spend \$9,600,000 for newspaper advertising in 1936. The advertising campaign, which will include 851 newspapers in 44 states, is a result of the company's experiments with almost every type of medium since the opening of its retail stores eleven years ago, according to G. W. Cunningham, advertising manager.

Surrogate Court News

Belmont, Mar. 5.—The will of Dr. Luther G. Probasco, prominent resident and physician of Whitesville, Allegany county, has been admitted to probate in surrogate court. It names his widow, Mae, executrix and leaves her all of the personal property estate, exceeding \$10,000 and real estate, not exceeding \$3,000, except what was left him from his mother's estate. That was ordered divided into five parts, one of which was left Mrs. Probasco and two parts each to a son, George W. and a daughter, Retta G., both of Whitesville. Dr. Probasco died Dec. 24th.

Joanna M. Curtis, Fillmore, widow qualified as executrix of the will of Jesse W. Curtis, Fillmore, who died February 21. The will gives all of the \$6,000 personalty and \$3,000 realty estate involved to the widow.

The First Trust Company, Wells-ville, is executor of the will of Norman C. Dexter, Bolivar, who died Dec. 23. Both real and personal property was listed as exceeding \$500 each. A \$50 marker was ordered erected at his grave and the balance will go to Bertha D. Erway, Bolivar.

Julia Edwards, Belmont, daughter, qualified as executrix of the \$1,000 personalty and \$2,000 realty estate covered by the will of Nancy M. Clayton, town of Amity, who died Feb. 2nd. All was left to the daughter.

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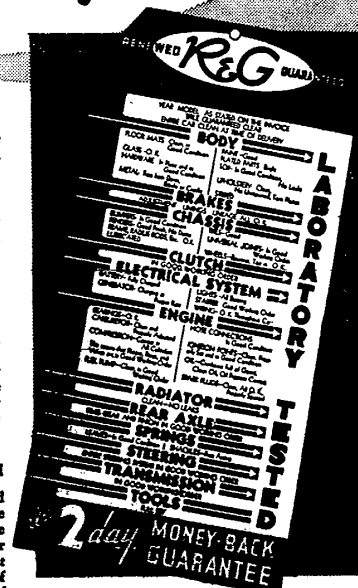
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