

Problem of the Interrupted Wireless

The Thinking Machine Enlisted in a Strange Marine Case

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Drawings by Thomas Fogarty

SEVEN bells sounded. The door of the wireless telegraph office on the main deck of the transatlantic liner Uranus was opened quietly, and a man thrust his head out. One quick glance to his right, along the narrow, carpeted passage, showed it to be deserted; another glance to his left showed a young woman approaching, with steps made uncertain by the rolling and pitching of the ship. In one hand she carried a slip of paper, folded once. The man paused only to see this much, then withdrew his head and closed the door abruptly.

The young woman paused opposite the wireless office, and thoughtfully combed over something on the slip of paper. Finally she leaned against the wall, erased a word with a pencil, wrote in another, then laid a hand on the knob of the door as if to enter. The door was locked. She hesitated for an instant, then rapped. There was a pause, and she rapped the second time.

"What is it?" came a man's voice from inside. "I wish to send a message," responded the young woman.

"Who is that?" came another query. "It's Miss Bellingdame," was the impatient response. "I desire to get a wireless to a friend on the Breslin which has just been sighted to the north." Again there was a pause. "It's impossible to send any message now," came the short, harsh answer at last. "It may not be possible to send it at all."

"Why?" demanded Miss Bellingdame. "It's a matter of the utmost importance. I must send it!" "Can't be done—it's out of the question," came the positive, quick spoken answer. "There has been an accident."

Miss Bellingdame was silent for a moment, as she seemed to ponder a note of deep concern, excitement even, in the voice.

"Well, can't it be sent after the accident has been repaired?" she asked at last.

There was no answer. "Is that Mr. Ingraham talking?" Miss Bellingdame demanded.

Still there was no answer. She remained there for a minute, perhaps, staring at the locked door, then turned and retraced her steps. A few minutes later she was reclining in a deck chair, gazing thoughtfully out over the treacherous, dimpling Atlantic with a troubled expression on her face.

At just about the moment she sat down the telephone buzz in the Captain's cabin sounded, and Captain Deihl impatiently laid aside a remarkably promising pinhole hand to answer it.

"Captain Deihl?" came a short, sharp query over the wire.

"Yes." "This is Mr. Tennell, sir. I'm in the wireless office. Can you come at once, and have some one send Dr. Maher?"

"What's the matter?" demanded the Captain gruffly.

"I can't very well tell you over the 'phone, sir," came the response; "but you and Dr. Maher are needed immediately."

With a slightly puzzled expression on his bronzed face, Captain Deihl turned to Dr. Maher, the ship's surgeon, who had been his opponent in the pinchle game and now sat staring idly out of the window.

"Tennell wants both of us down in the wireless office at once," the Captain explained. "He won't say what's the matter."

"Wants me?" inquired Dr. Maher. "Somebody hurt?"

"I don't know. Come along."

Captain Deihl led the way along the hurricane deck, down to the main deck, and along the narrow passage to the wireless office. The door was still locked. He rapped sharply, impatiently.

"Who's there?" came from inside.

"Captain Deihl. Open the door!"

The key turned in the lock, and First Officer Tennell's white face—white even beneath the deep tan—appeared.

"What's the matter, Mr. Tennell?" demanded the Captain brusquely.

"Please step inside, sir," and the first officer opened the door. "There's what's the matter!"

With a gesture the first officer indicated the corner of the cabin where the wireless operator's desk stood. Sitting before it, as if he had dropped back utterly exhausted, was the operator, Charles Ingraham. His head had fallen forward on his breast, and the arms hung straight down, flabbily. His back was toward them, and against the white of



The Captain Was Puzzled.

his shirt, just beneath the left arm, a heavy handled knife showed. A thin line of scarlet dyed the shirt just below the knife handle.

Captain Deihl stood stockstill for one instant, then turning suddenly closed and locked the door behind him. Dr. Maher took two steps forward, wrested the knife from the wound with a slight effort, flung it on the floor, then dropped on his knees beside the chair.

"What is all this, Mr. Tennell?" demanded Captain Deihl at last.

"I don't know, sir," was the reply. "I found him like that."

Dr. Maher rose after a moment, with a hopeless shake of his head, and minutely examined the wound. It was a clean cut incision; the knife had been driven in and allowed to remain. The blade had passed between the ribs and had reached the heart. Dr. Maher noted these things, then stooped and picked up the knife. It was a long, heavy, broad bladed, dangerous looking weapon. After satisfying himself, the surgeon passed it to Captain Deihl.

"It was murder," he said tersely. "He could not have stabbed himself in that position. You keep the knife; it may be the only clue."

"Murder!" the Captain repeated involuntarily. "How long has—has he been dead?"

"Perhaps ten minutes—certainly not more than twenty," was the surgeon's reply. "The body is still warm, and the blood flows."

"Murder!" repeated Captain Deihl. "Who could have killed him? What could have been the motive?"

He stood staring at the knife silently for a time, then lifted two keen, inquisitive eyes to those of his first officer. Dr. Maher too was staring straight into Tennell's face, and slowly, under the sharp scrutiny, the blood mounted again to the tanned cheeks.

"What are your orders, sir?" inquired the first officer steadily.

"How long were you in this room, Tennell, before you called me?" asked Captain Deihl.

"Two or three minutes," was the reply. "I was in my cabin forward, preparing the despatches which were to go ashore, according to your order, sir. The wireless was going then; for I could hear it. I noticed after a time that it stopped; so, hav-

ing completed my despatches, I brought them here directly. I found Mr. Ingraham just as you see him."

"H'm!" mused the Captain. He was still staring thoughtfully into the other's face. "Was the door locked?"

"No, sir. It was closed."

"And this knife, Mr. Tennell?" The Captain examined it again and then passed it to his first officer. "Do you know it? Have you ever seen it before?"

Without any apparent reason the first officer's face whitened again and he dropped down on the bench, with hands gripping each other fiercely. Dr. Maher was staring at him; Captain Deihl seemed surprised.

"You know whose knife it is then?" asked the Captain finally.

"Yes," and the first officer's head dropped forward. "It's mine!"

There was a long dead silence. The hands of the first officer were working nervously, with heavy fingers threading in and out. Dr. Maher turned away suddenly and idly fingered some papers on the operator's desk.

Captain Deihl's heavy face grew set and stern. "Did you kill him, Tennell?" he asked.

"No!" Tennell burst out. "No!"

"But it is your knife?"

"It would be useless for me to deny it, sir," replied the first officer, and he rose. "It was given to me by Mr. Forbes, the second officer, only a few weeks ago, and he could identify it instantly. I lost the knife yesterday, and last night—I shall ask you to corroborate this, sir—I posted a notice in the fore'sle offering a reward to anyone who should find it and return it to me."

Dr. Maher turned suddenly upon them. "And isn't it true, Mr. Tennell," he demanded, "that you and Ingraham had some—some serious disagreement a few days ago?"

Again the first officer's face blanched. "That is true, yes," he replied steadily. "It was a matter of ship's discipline. This was Mr. Ingraham's second trip with us, and on other ships he had been allowed certain liberties which the discipline of this ship compelled me to curtail. There was a disagreement, yes."

Dr. Maher nodded as if satisfied, and turned again to the desk.

Captain Deihl stood staring straight into the eyes of his first officer for a time, and then cleared his throat. "I want to believe you, Tennell," he admitted at last. "I have known you and believed in you for fourteen years. Now tell me why you call me here, show me this, and then admit things which—which you must confess make it look black for you. Now, Harry Tennell, if you ever in your life told me the truth—tell it now—man to man!"

The first officer read the friendliness behind the stern, commanding voice, and there was a grateful softening of the glaring eyes. "Man to man, John Deihl, I'll tell you the truth, but it's hard to believe, and I doubt if you will understand it," he said slowly, deliberately. "I did have a row with this man," and he indicated the crumpled figure in the chair,—"a nasty row in the hearing of half a dozen of the crew. That was several days ago. To-day I came here in the course of my duties, and found him like this. I recognized the knife instantly as mine—the one I had lost. I am not a coward, John Deihl,—no man knows that better than you do,—yet for a moment



"Do You Know This Knife?" Asked the Captain