

DOUBLE CROSSED

BY

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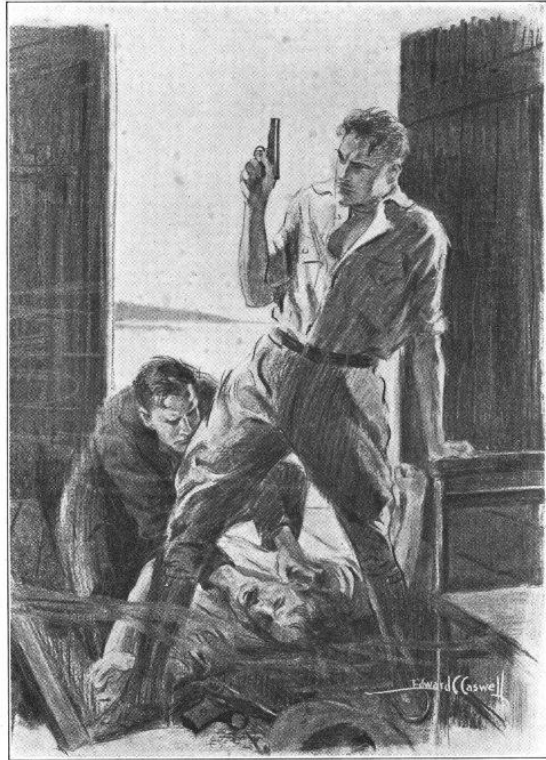
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HE WAS THROTTLING THE LIFE OUT OF THE LITTLE DETECTIVE

TO
GLADYS AND JOE

DOUBLE CROSSED

CHAPTER I

I

A little, knuckly man bounded into Clement Seadon's cabin with an india-rubber violence. He snapped the door closed, and faced the startled young man.

"You're Clement Seadon," he cried; "I'm Hartley Hard."

The young man stopped unpacking.

"I don't think I know you," he said.

"You needn't think. You don't know. I'm a complete stranger to you—in the flesh. But don't talk. I haven't much time."

Clement glanced at the umbrella and obvious shore rig of the bounding little man.

"In fact," he said, in the other's manner, "you have no time at all. 'All ashore' was called two minutes ago."

"Oh, don't talk," panted the little man. "This thing is terribly important. I mustn't lose a moment telling you. You know Heloise Reys?"

"Not at all," said Clement dryly. He began again to unpack.

"For heaven's sake, don't quibble, man. You know her. You came from London to Liverpool in the same carriage as Heloise Reys."

“Oh, that was Heloise Reys,” said the young man, dropping his dress-shirts and looking up with interest. “The Gorgon woman with her called her Loise.”

“Nickname,” said the little man breathlessly. “Her name is really Heloise—What I mean to say is, you do know her.”

“Not really,” said Clement with exasperating (and, one is afraid, deliberate) casualness. “A mere chance acquaintance.”

He refused to tell the little man that, having encountered her in the C.P.R. office, he had determinedly looked out for her on the boat train.

The little man danced about in a fury of anxiety.

“Please *do* remember that I have the barest possible time to tell you what I must tell you. Don’t interrupt. Don’t quibble. You know her. She is good looking.”

“Very good looking,” said Clement, staring at the little man in amazement.

“She is a charming girl,” urged the little man.

“Perfectly charming,” said Clement.

“Of very good family, too,” snapped the little man.

“Probably,” said Clement. “But I didn’t find that out.”

“Don’t have to, take it from me. Very good family. No father, no mother.”

“That,” said Clement, “I shall *have* to take from you.”

His astonishment had given way to a sort of guarded amusement. He was of the genial type of young man, one who could see the humorous side of things quickly.

The little bouncy man waved his umbrella in excitement.

“Do take it from me,” he cried. “No mother, no father. No encumbrances, and no one to control her. Remember that, no one to watch over her. And she is very well off. Very rich.”

Clement could only stare. The little man swept on: “Very beautiful. Very charming. A girl with a gentle, tender heart—much too tender. Too quixotic. A fine character. Good family—and rich. Extremely rich. You understand all that?”

“Look here—what on earth are you driving at?” cried the astounded Clement.

“But *do* you understand?” wailed the little man. “Have you grasped it all? A worthy girl. A girl worthy of any man. A girl that any man can be proud of. A girl——”

This was too much for Clement. “I say,” he burst out, “I say, are you—are you asking me to *marry* her?”

The excited dance of the little man now took on a touch of relief as well as anxiety. “You grasp it. You see it,” he trilled. “Assuredly. Marry her—that’s it.”

“My dear idiot,” shouted Clement. “My dear madman. Don’t you understand that——”

“No time to understand,” skated on the little man. “No time at all. Know it’s all rapid and wrong and amazing, but that’s what

I want. You marry her. You can do it. You're young. Young and handsome and healthy. And a sea-voyage. Sea-voyages are the chance of sentiment. Idle days, luxurious days. Moonlight—looking at the wake. Oh, the very chance for falling in love."

"Do you realize you're talking like an idiot? I've only just met Miss——"

"I know. I know. Awfully like an idiot. That's because I am in such a hurry. I know exactly how it all sounds to you—but, really, I can't help myself. Such a time. But that's what I want you to do—really. Fall in love with her. Make her fall in love with you. Make her promise to marry you. Before she gets to Canada make her promise to marry you. Don't let her put you off. Force her to do it."

Clement sat down heavily on his bunk. He stared amazed at the little man.

"I'm afraid you're mad," he said.

"Mad," snapped the little man. "I'm not mad. I'm a lawyer."

II

Clement wanted to say that even lawyers went mad sometimes, but the little man hurled himself along.

"I'm a lawyer. I'm her lawyer. I'm your lawyer, too—one of them. That's luck. When I saw you come out of the train with her, saw that you knew her, I noted that down as a piece of luck. You see I knew *you* were all right. Knew that through business—oh, I'm a partner of Rigby & Root."

“My lawyers!” cried Clement.

“Yes! Yes! Haven’t I been telling you that? We’re her lawyers, too. When I saw you together, I said to myself, ‘Good, that’s a second line of defense. If I fail to bring her to reason I fall back on Clement Seadon—Mr. Clement Seadon. He’ll be my second line. Good fellow. Good family. Young, attractive, handsome to the eye. Has wits. Has capacity. Has a brain in his head. Has pluck and physical strength, too. Can carry a thing through in spite of danger.’ ...”

As he said that, his rapid eye glinted on Clement. He was staccato, but he was not stupid. Clement stiffened. He was the type of clean, young Anglo-Saxon who did stiffen at the hint of danger. The type that goes about quietly, calmly avoiding trouble—but is not really heartbroken when trouble comes along. The little lawyer saw Clement stiffen, he chuckled internally and continued his express monologue.

“That’s what I said to myself when I saw you. I said, ‘Mr. Clement Seadon has all the qualities necessary. An admirable second line of defense. And well-off, too. Rich. He’s not an adventurer hunting heiresses.’ That’s what I said when I saw you. And I went off to Heloise Reys’ cabin and tried to bring her to reason. Oh, I strove. I strove. I talked my best.”

He stopped and waved his umbrella in a gesture of hopelessness.

“You strove, and strove—and then had to fall back on your second line,” said Clement, helping him out.

Clement's mind was in a curious condition. He realized that all this was madder than anything had any right to be—and yet he was rather intrigued, rather interested. He could not have told why. The fact that the little man was a lawyer, and his own lawyer at that, may have been the reason. Or it may have been that suggestion of danger, of adventure, called to that instinct lying dormant in the young of Clement's race. Whatever it was, mad though he felt the whole business to be, he sat and listened.

The lawyer said, "You are right. I could do nothing with her. I failed. I could not bring her to reason. She is so quixotic. So headstrong. She has the wrongest sense of what is right.... And then I have no proofs. Only fears, only suspicions. I couldn't clinch the matter with her. I couldn't bring home anything to her."

"And what were you trying to bring home to her?" demanded Clement, who really thought he was entitled to some explanation.

"Bring home to her? The truth about *that* scamp. I was trying to make her see that she should *not* go out to Canada to marry him."

Clement gasped. Also he felt a little stab of pain. Heloise was certainly most extraordinarily attractive.

"Marry him? Marry whom? Haven't you just been insisting that she should marry *me*?"

"Of course," shouted the little man. "That's it. That's what I'm driving at."

“But what are you driving at?” gasped Clement. “First you tell me to get her to marry me, then you tell me she is going to marry some one else.”

“Perfectly true,” said the little man. “She is making this journey to Canada to marry some one else, a man named Henry Gunning.”

Clement fell back, too, staggered for thought. “Are you a lawyer,” he demanded, “or are you an apostle of the Mormons?”

The little lawyer rushed over to Clement and caught him by the lapel of his coat. “No! no! no!” he cried. “Please do understand. It is this hurry that has made everything so complicated. She is going to Canada to marry Henry Gunning. But she must not marry him. She must be prevented. That’s what I want you to do. I want you to make her marry you in order that she won’t marry Gunning.”

“And why shouldn’t she marry the man she wants to?” Clement demanded.

“Because,” said the lawyer, speaking earnestly and impressively, “because it’s a swindle. She’s got into the hands of rogues, of swindlers, of criminals. Of that I am sure. The whole thing is terribly evil. And she must be saved. You must save her.”

Clement was about to answer. There was a knock on the cabin door. Clement called, “Come in.”

The door opened about a foot. An evil and repulsive face looked in. The little eyes in the ugly face swiveled all round the cabin in a swift, furtive glance. They took in Clement; they took in the little lawyer. A palish tongue licked purple, dry lips. A husky voice croaked, "Beg pardin, sir!"

The little lawyer snapped, "What do you want, man?"

"Beg pardin," said the hoarse voice again. "Just looking round ter see if all visitors is ashore. Bedroom steward, sir."

The fully opened door revealed the white coat and bobbly trousers of a veritable bedroom steward.

"All right, my man," said the little lawyer, "I'm going ashore in a minute."

"Ha," said the steward, coming in with the satisfaction on his face such as policemen wear when they catch an authentic burglar. "*Should* be ashore. Orders is that all visitors sh'd be ashore. Come this way, sir. Quick, please, sir."

"I'm going ashore in a minute," said the little lawyer.

"Orders, sir. Gotter be now, sir."

"Get out of this," snapped the lawyer. "I'll go ashore before the ship sails, never you fear."

The steward came forward with an air of menace in his bearing.

"You go ashore, now, see. Them's me orders, an' I've got to see that it's done—can't stop arguing."

"I don't want you to," said the little man decisively. "Particularly as Captain Heavy is the person you should argue with. If Captain Heavy was wrong in saying I could stop aboard, I think you should be the one to tell him, not me."

"Ca'pen Heavy.... Why didn't you say that 'efore?" snarled the man. He went sullenly out of the cabin. The little lawyer waited for a minute, then he slipped out, too. He darted up the little alleyway that led to the main passage along the deck. Clement heard him say in a tart voice:

"My good man, I know my way off this ship—you needn't hang about here waiting to conduct me off."

In a moment he was back with Clement, talking rapidly again, but this time in a noticeably lowered voice.

"He's one of them. I thought he was. You'll have to be on your guard against that steward."

"One of whom?" asked Clement, trying to keep pace with the happenings. "One of the rogues, do you mean? Good heavens! are you telling me there is a sort of Villains' Gang of them aboard this ship?"

"I don't say it," said the little man grimly, "but I shouldn't be at all surprised if it were so. It's a big thing, a terribly big thing, my friend, this marriage of Heloise. It is a matter of a million pounds sterling and more."

III

“You are rather stunning as well as other things,” said Clement limply.

He really was feeling a trifle dazed. The little man had so hustling a manner. Also, his own knowledge of the girl, Heloise Keys, was of the faintest kind. She was just a tall, slim girl whom he had found attractive enough to want to know again after his first meeting. She was quite pleasant, quite English, quite natural. Apart from her special attraction, she was just one of the millions of crisp, self-assured and self-contained young women of Britain.

He had met her, as he had said, twice. The first time had been a delightful accident. He had arrived to book his passage at the Canadian Pacific Ocean Service Office in London, to find her there on the same errand.

What is more, there was a certain sense of comradeship in that action, for both intended to sail to Canada in the same ship, the *Empress of Prague*. One shipping clerk attended to both, he left the one cabin plan before them from which to choose their rooms, while he went away on the business of registering their tickets.

Clement had only to glance once at the cabin-plan to make his decision. He had sailed on the *Empress* before. All he had to do was to see whether his old cabin, which had been a comfortable one, was unoccupied. It was unoccupied. He jotted down its number to give to the clerk when he came back.

Heloise and her companion were not so decisive. Heloise, at least, showed all the hesitance proper to people unaccustomed

to sea travel. The other woman was making suggestions, but Clement did not pay any attention to her. She was so obviously a companion, a servant, though of the cultured sort.

The clerk had tactfully pointed out a large cabin. After having spoken in glowing terms of it, he had gone off leaving the decision to the ladies. Clement had nothing against that clerk. As a clerk, he knew his business, which was to fill up cabins. He was merely doing his duty in suggesting that cabin to people who did not know the art of selecting cabins—there were so many people who knew it too well, and would leave that cabin on his hands.

Clement noted the battle of indecision with some amusement. Also with some interest, because Heloise (only he didn't know she was Heloise, then) was extremely pretty. Also he thought she was of that trusting and sweet disposition that will take the word of anybody—even of shipping clerks. Obviously, she was going to follow his suggestion.

When the shipping clerk went to the back of the office Clement saw to it that she didn't. He looked up at her as she puzzled over the deck plan, smiled in a disarming way, and said, "I say, if you don't mind my butting in, I wouldn't take that inner room. You'll find it hot and rather airless, and there's no light at all except artificial light."

She answered him before she thought about who he was. "Are you sure of that?"

“Quite,” he told her. “I know the *Empress of Prague* well; you’ll be quite comfortable on her, particularly if you take, say, that cabin over there, instead of that inner one.”

As he spoke he heard an indignant sniff from the companion. He looked beyond the girl and saw a comely, chilly, thick-set, middle-aged woman. A woman who had a broad and attractive smile which, somehow, did not seem to penetrate deeper than the surface of her skin. It was the sniff and the smile that led Clement to christen her the Gorgon, then and there.

But the girl herself was not sniffing in moral indignation. She was pleased and friendly. “But it is jolly of you to help,” she cried. “You are sure that one over there is the better cabin?”

“As sure as I like light and fresh air,” Clement smiled at her. “You’ll get both in that, you see, it’s an outside cabin. Has—windows—ports, you know. And it’s roomier.”

“Then, that’s the one we’ll have, Méduse,” said the girl, and the Gorgon (really, Clement had been very apt in his nickname) said in a light voice slightly tipped with frost, “That is also the one I suggested. Remember I, too, have traveled on the sea before, Loise.”

The girl paid no attention to that. She did not allow herself to be distracted from Clement, as she was obviously meant to be distracted. She was, in fact, rather pleased to meet a young, good-looking, polished man, who was also to be a companion during the voyage across the Atlantic. She said, smiling, “I’m thoroughly mystified by all this sort of thing. I’ve never done anything but the cross-Channel trip before, and then only by

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