

# **Blotted Out**

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XXI

IN THIS STORY A TIGRESS MASQUERADES AS A BEAUTIFUL  
WOMAN—IN OTHER WORDS, AMY ROSS WAS  
PREDATORY AND CRUEL

## I

James Ross was well content, that morning. He stood on the deck, one elbow on the rail, enjoying the wind and the cold rain that blew in his face, enjoying still more his feeling of complete isolation and freedom.

None of the other passengers shared his liking for this bleak November weather, and he had the windward side of the deck to himself. He was alone there; he was alone in the world—and he meant to remain alone.

Through the window of the saloon he could, if he liked, see the severe, eagle-nosed profile of Mrs. Barron, who was sitting in there, more majestic than ever in her shore-going outfit. She was a formidable lady, stern, resolute, and experienced; she had marked him down as soon as he had come on board at San Juan.

Yet he had escaped from her; he had got the better of her, and so skillfully that even to this moment she was not sure whether he had deliberately avoided her, or whether it was chance. Yes, even now, if the weather had permitted, she would have come out after him with her card.

But, if the weather had permitted that, Ross would not have been where he was. The day before, she had captured him for an instant in the dining saloon, and she had said that before they landed she would give him her card.

He had thanked her very civilly, but he had made up his mind that she should do nothing of the sort. Because, if she did, she would

expect a card from him in return; she would want to know where he was going, and he meant that she should never know, and never be able to find him. Even she was not likely to go so far as to rush across the rain-swept deck with that card of hers.

He could also see, if he liked, the little blond head of Phyllis Barron, who was sitting beside her mother, her hat in her lap. He knew very well that Phyllis had taken no part at all in pursuing him, yet, in a way, she was far more dangerous than Mrs. Barron.

Before he had realized the danger, he had spent a good deal of time with Phyllis—too much time. It was only a five days' run up from Porto Rico; he had never seen her before he came on board, and he intended never to see her again; yet he felt that it might take him considerably more than five days to forget her.

This made him uncomfortable. Every glimpse of that quiet, thoughtful little face, so very pretty, so touching in its brave young dignity and candor, gave him a sort of qualm, as if she had spoken a friendly word to him, and he had not answered. Indeed, so much did the sight of Phyllis Barron disquiet him that he turned away altogether.

And now, through the downpour, he saw the regal form of the Statue of Liberty. It pleased him, and somehow consoled him for those qualms. It was a symbol of what his life was going to be, a life of completest liberty. He had left nobody behind him, there was nobody waiting for him anywhere in the world; he cared for nobody—no, not he; and nobody cared for him. That was just what he liked.

He was young, he was in vigorous health, he had sufficient money, and no one on earth had any sort of claim upon him. He could go

where he pleased, and do what he pleased. He was free. And here he was, coming back to what was, after all, his native city, and not one soul there knew his face.

He smiled to himself at the thought, his dour, tight-lipped smile. Coming home, eh? And nobody to greet him but the Statue of Liberty. He was glad it was so. He didn't want to be greeted; he wanted to be let alone. And, in that case, he had better go now, before they came alongside the pier, and Mrs. Barron appeared.

He went below to his cabin, intending to stop there until all other passengers had disembarked. The steward had taken up his bags, and the little room had a forlorn and untidy look; not an agreeable place in which to sit. But it was safe.

Ross hung up his wet overcoat and cap, and sat down with a magazine, to read. But he could not read a word. The engines had stopped; they had arrived; he was in New York. In New York. Try as he would to stifle his emotions, a great impatience and restlessness filled him.

There were, in this city, thousands of men to whom Manila and Mayaguez would seem names of almost incredible romance; men to whom New York meant little but an apartment, the subway, the office, and the anxious and monotonous routine of earning a living. But to Ross, New York had all the allurements of the exotic, and those other ports had meant only exile and discontent. He thought uncharitable thoughts about Mrs. Barron, because she kept him imprisoned here when he so longed to set foot on shore.

There was a knock at the door.

“Well?” Ross demanded.

“Note for you, sir,” answered the steward.

Ross grinned to himself at what he considered a new instance of Mrs. Barron’s enterprise. For a moment he thought he would refuse to take the note, so that he might truthfully say he had never got it; then he reflected that Mrs. Barron was never going to have a chance to question him about it, and he unlocked the door.

“We’ve docked, sir,” the steward said.

“I know it,” Ross agreed briefly.

He took the note, tipped the steward, and locked the door after him. Extraordinary, the way this lady had pursued him, all the way across! He was not handsome, not entertaining, not even very amiable; she knew nothing about him.

Indeed, as far as her knowledge went, he might be any sort of dangerous and undesirable character. Yet she had persistently—and obviously—done her best to capture him for her daughter.

He glanced at himself in the mirror. A lean and hardy young man, very dark, with the features characteristic of his family, a thin, keen nose, rather long upper lip, a saturnine and faintly mocking expression. They were a disagreeable family, bitterly obstinate, ambitious, energetic, and grimly unsociable.

And he was like that, too; like his father and his grandfather and his uncles. Without being in the least humble, he still could not understand what Mrs. Barron had seen in him to make her consider him a suitable son-in-law.

With Phyllis Barron it was different. He had sometimes imagined that her innocent and candid eyes had discerned in him qualities he

had long ago tried to destroy. It was possible that she had found him a little likable.

But *she* wouldn't pursue him. He was certain that she had not written this note, or wanted her mother to write it. When he had realized his danger, and had begun to spend his time talking to the doctor, instead of sitting beside her on deck, she had never tried to recall him. Whenever he did come, she always had that serious, friendly little smile for him; but she had tried to make it very plain that, where she was concerned, he was quite free to come or to go, to remember or to forget.

Well, he meant to forget. His life was just beginning, and he did not intend to entangle himself in any way. He sighed, not knowing that he did so, and then, out of sheer idle curiosity, just to see how Mrs. Barron worked, he opened the note.

"Dear Cousin James—" it began.

But, as far as he knew, he hadn't a cousin in the world. With a puzzled frown, he picked up the envelope; it was plainly addressed, in a clear, small hand, to "Mr. James Ross. On board the S. S. Farragut."

"Must be a mistake, though," he muttered. "I'll just see." And he went on reading:

You have never seen me, and I know you have heard all sorts of cruel and false things about me. But I beg you to forget all that now. I am in such terrible trouble, and I don't know where to turn. I beg you to come here as soon as you get this. Ask for Mrs. Jones, the housekeeper. Say you have



come from Cren's Agency, about the job as chauffeur. She will tell you everything. You can't refuse just to come and let me tell you about this terrible thing.

Your desperately unhappy cousin,  
Amy Ross Solway.

"Day's End," Wygatt Road, near Stamford.

He sat, staring in amazement at this letter.

"It's a mistake!" he said, aloud.

But, all the same, it filled him with a curious uneasiness. Of course, it was meant for some one else—and he wanted that other fellow to get it at once; he wanted to be rid of it in a hurry.

He had nothing to do with any one's Cousin Amy and her "terrible trouble." He rang the bell for the steward, waited, rang again, more vigorously, again waited, but no one came.

Then, putting the note back in its envelope, he flung open the door and strode out into the passage, shouting "Steward!" in a pretty forcible voice. No one answered him. He went down the corridor, turned a corner, and almost ran into Mrs. Barron.

"Mr. Ross!" said she, in a tone of stern triumph. "So here you are! Phyllis, dear, give Mr. Ross one of our cards—with the address."

Then he caught sight of Phyllis, standing behind her mother. In her little close fitting hat, her coat with a fur collar, she looked taller, older, graver, quite different from that bright-haired, slender little thing in a deck chair. And, somehow, she was so dear to him, so lovely, so gentle, so utterly trustworthy.

“I’ll never forget her!” he thought, in despair.

Then she spoke, in a tone he had not heard before.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I haven’t any cards with me.”

“Phyllis!” cried her mother. “I particularly asked you—”

“I’m sorry,” Phyllis declared again. “We’ll really have to hurry, mother. Good-by, Mr. Ross!”

Her steady blue eyes met his for an instant, but, for all the regret and pain he felt, his stubborn spirit refused to show one trace. Evidently she knew he had tried to run away, and she didn’t want to see him again. Very well!

“Good-by, Miss Barron!” he said.

She turned away, and he, too, would have walked off, but the dauntless Mrs. Barron was not to be thwarted.

“Then I’ll tell you the address!” said she. “Hotel Benderly—West Seventy-Seventh Street. Don’t forget!”

“I shan’t,” Ross replied. “Thank you! Good-by!”

He went back along the corridor, forgetting all about the note, even forgetting where he was going, until the sight of a white jacket in the distance recalled him.

“Steward!” he shouted.

The man came toward him, anxious and very hurried.

“Look here!” said Ross. “This note—it’s not meant for me.”

“Beg your pardon, sir, but a boy brought it aboard and told me to give it to you.”

“I tell you it’s not meant for me!” said Ross. “Take it back!”

“But it’s addressed to you, sir. Mr. James Ross. There’s no other Mr. Ross on board. The boy said it was urgent.”

“Take it back!” Ross repeated.

“I shouldn’t like to do that, sir,” said the steward, firmly. “I said I’d deliver it to Mr. Ross. If you’re not—satisfied, sir, the purser might—”

“Oh, all right!” Ross interrupted, with a frown. “I haven’t time to bother now. I’ll keep it. But it’s a mistake. And somebody is going to regret it.”

## II

A casual acquaintance in San Juan had recommended the Hotel Miston to Ross. "Nice, quiet little place," he had said; "and you can get a really good cup of coffee there."

So, when the United States customs officers had done with Ross, he secured a taxi, and told the chauffeur to drive him to this Hotel Miston. Not that he was in the least anxious for quiet, or had any desire for a cup of coffee; simply, he was in a hurry to get somewhere, anywhere, so that he could begin to live.

In spite of the rain, he lowered the window of the cab, and sat looking out at the astounding speed and vigor of the life about him. This was what he had longed for, this was what he had wanted; for years and years he had said to himself that when he was free, he would come here and make a fortune.

Well, he was free, and he was in New York, and he had already the foundation of a nice little fortune. For eight years he had worked in the office of a commission agent in Manila, and every day of those eight years he had told himself that he wouldn't stand it any longer. But he had stood it.

His grandfather had been a cynical old tyrant; he had thwarted the boy in every ambition that he had. When James said he wanted to be a civil engineer, as his father had been, old Ross told him he hadn't brains enough for that. James had not agreed with him, but as he had no money to send himself home to college, he had been obliged to put up with what old Ross called "a sound practical education."

At eighteen his education was declared finished, and he went to work. He hated his work, he hated everything about his life, and from his meager salary he had saved every cent he could, so that he would get away.

Long ago he had saved enough to pay his passage to New York—but he had not gone. His grandfather was old and ill, and, because of his bitter tongue, quite without friends; he certainly gave no sign that he enjoyed his grandson's company, and James showed no affection for him; their domestic life was anything but agreeable.

Sick at heart, James saw his youth slipping by, wasted, his abilities all unused; he told himself that he had done his duty, and more than his duty to his grandfather. Yet he could not leave him.

Then, six months ago, the old man had died, leaving everything he had to "my grandson, James Ross, in appreciation of his loyalty," the only sign of appreciation he had ever made. It was a surprisingly large estate; there was some property in Porto Rico, where James had spent his childhood with his parents, but the greater part consisted of very sound bonds and mortgages in the hands of a New York lawyer, Mr. Teagle.

Mr. Teagle had written to James, and James had written to Mr. Teagle several times in the last few months, but James had not told him when he expected to arrive in New York. He had gone to Porto Rico in a little cargo steamer, by the way of Panama; he had wound up his business there, and now he wanted to walk in on Mr. Teagle in the most casual fashion. He hated any sort of fuss; he didn't want to be met at the steamer, he didn't want to be advised and assisted. He wanted to be let alone.

The taxi stopped before the Hotel Miston, a dingy little place not far from Washington Square. Ross got out, paid the driver, and followed the porter into the lobby. He engaged a room and bath, and turned toward the elevator.

“Will you register, sir?” asked the clerk.

Ross hesitated for a moment; then he wrote “J. Ross, New York.” After all, this was his home; he had been born here, and he intended to live here.

He went upstairs to his room, and, locking the door, sat down near the window. The floor still seemed to heave under his feet, like the deck of a ship. He visualized the deck of the Farragut, and Phyllis in a deck chair, looking at him with her dear, friendly little smile.

He frowned at the unwelcome thought. That was finished; that belonged in the past. There was a new life before him, and the sooner he began it, the better.

He reached in his pocket for Mr. Teagle’s last letter—and brought out that note to “Cousin James.” At the sight of it, he frowned more heavily; he tossed it across the room in the direction of the desk, but it fluttered down to the floor. Let it lie there. He found Mr. Teagle’s letter, and took up the telephone receiver. Presently:

“Mr. Teagle’s office!” came a brisk feminine voice.

“I’d like to see Mr. Teagle this morning, if possible.”

“Sorry, but Mr. Teagle won’t be in today. Will you leave a message?”

“No,” said Ross. “No, thanks.” And hung up the receiver.

He sat for a time looking out of the window at the street, far below him. The rain fell steadily; it was a dismal day. He could not begin his new life today, after all. Very well; what should he do, then? Anything he wanted, of course. Nobody could have been freer.

He lit a cigarette, and leaned back in the chair. Freedom—that was what he had wanted, and that was what he had got. And yet—

He turned his head, to look for an ash tray, and his glance fell upon that confounded note on the floor. In the back of his mind he had known, all the time, that he would have to do something about it.

He disliked it, and disapproved of it; a silly, hysterical sort of note, he thought, but, nevertheless, it was an appeal for help, and it was from a woman. Somebody ought to answer it.

He began idly to speculate about the “terribly unhappy” Amy Ross Solway. Perhaps she was young—not much more than a girl—like Phyllis.

“Not much!” he said to himself. “*She* wouldn’t write a note like that. She’s not that sort. No matter what sort of trouble menaced—”

It occurred to him that if Phyllis Barron were in any sort of trouble, she would never turn to James Ross for help. He had shown her too plainly that he was not disposed to trouble himself about other people and their affairs.

His family never did. They minded their own business, they let other people alone, and other people soon learned to let them alone. Very satisfactory! Lucky for this Amy Ross Solway that she didn’t know what sort of fellow had got that note of hers.

Still, something had to be done about it. At first he thought he would mail it back to her, with a note of his own, explaining that he was not her Cousin James, but another James Ross, who had got it by mistake. But, no; that plan meant too much delay, when she was no doubt waiting impatiently for a gallant cousin.

Then he thought he would try to get her on the telephone, but that idea did not suit him, either. It was always awkward, trying to explain anything on the telephone—and, besides, she seemed anxious for secrecy. He might explain to the wrong person, and do a great deal of harm.

He began to think very seriously about that note now. And, for some unaccountable reason, his thoughts of the unknown woman were confused with thoughts of Phyllis Barron. It seemed to him that if Phyllis could know how much attention he was giving to this problem which was not his business, she would realize that he was not entirely callous. If she thought he was, she misjudged him.

Perhaps he was not what you might call impulsively sympathetic, but he was not lacking in all decent feeling. He was not going to ignore this appeal.

“I’ll go out there!” he decided. “I’ll see this Amy Ross Solway, and explain. And, if her trouble’s anything real, I’ll—” He hesitated. “Well, I’ll give her the best advice I can,” he thought.

No, James Ross was not what you might call impulsively sympathetic. But, considering how vehemently he hated to be mixed up in other people’s affairs, it was creditable of him even to think of giving advice, creditable of him to go at all.



He arose, put on his overcoat, caught up his hat, and went downstairs. Nobody took any notice of him. He walked out of the Hotel Miston—and he never came back.

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