

days and nights were one for a long time.

The Stella carried hides and fruit and lumber, and, occasionally, two or three passengers, for whose convenience the company had fitted up a stateroom or two, since the demand for these proved steady—people, as Molly learned from the stewardess (whose sole charge she was), for whom a sea voyage had been recommended for various reasons. There had never been more than five at a time and two was the average—one, very common.

The long, blue days slipped by, she ate and slept and lay in the deck chair that had been sent by the party named Richards, and spoke to the stewardess alone, who was used to tired and silent charges, and served her meals on a tray.

She was a quiet, refined woman with a hand often at her heart. Molly found her gasping in the companionway once, fed her quickly from the little flask she pointed at in her pocket, and helped her to her berth, as clean and comfortable as Molly's own. This produced confidences, and she learned that Mrs. Cope (everyone called her that, she said, and treated her most respectfully) had made her first voyage as children's nurse to an English family bound for Rio, who had turned her off on arriving at that port. The stewardess on that trip proved inclined to drink and sauciness, and at Mrs. Cope's suggestion they had given her the post in her stead and she had kept it for five years. An easy berth, she said, good pay, good board, little to do and pleasant people. She ate alone, was practically her own mistress, and the sea air had saved her life, she knew.

THIS Molly could well believe, for she had come to count the days of her ignorance of salt water for days of loss and emptiness. The mornings of wind, the nights of stars and foam, the hot blue moons, sang in her blood and tinted her cheeks; she felt herself born again, the crowded past an ugly nightmare. She says that she had never, till then, been alone with herself for ten years and that she had never had time to find out what she really liked best in the world. We must suppose that she did at least find out, but it cannot be denied that the discovery was unusual.

Mrs. Cope died at Buenos Ayres, suddenly, as she was serving Molly's supper, and Molly, piloted by the first mate, for she knew no Spanish, buried her there and put up a neat, headstone over her grave—the possible lack of one had been the poor woman's one terror, and she had sent every cent of her wages to some worthless mysterious husband whose whereabouts nobody knew. This took all Molly's money but so much as was needed for her return trip, for it has to be confessed of her that she never saved a penny in her extravagant life.

And now we see her speaking, for the first time beyond perfunctory salutations, with the captain, a taciturn recluse of a man, furious just now at some unexpected litigation connected with his cargo and horribly inconvenienced by the loss of his stewardess. Two ladies waiting, literally, on the wharf, have been promised accommodation in the Stella by the owners, and there is not a decent, respectable woman to be found on the whole coast of South America to look after them.

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