

## CHAPTER XI

### MISCALCULATIONS

Two days later, on a bright afternoon, a young man stood on the edge of a sea-wall called the Battery. It was not the Battery, commanding a view of the outgoing and incoming maritime traffic of the continent's metropolis, but another Battery, overlooking another harbor, or estuary, landlocked save for an entrance about a mile in width. Behind him lay, not a great, but a little, city; hardly more than a big town; before him a few vessels of moderate tonnage placidly plied the main or swash channels.

The scene was tranquilizing; nevertheless the young man appeared out of harmony with it. His face wore a feverish flush; his eyes had a restless gleam. He had only a short time before come to town, entering in unconventional fashion. As the train had slackened at a siding on the outskirts he had quietly, and unperceived, slipped off the back platform of the rear car; then made his way by devious and little frequented side streets to the sea-front.

There, his eager gaze scanned the craft, moving in the open, or motionless at the distant wharfs. An expression of acute disappointment passed over his features; his eyes did not find what they sought. Had that mad flight been for nothing? Had he but run into a new kind of

"pocket" here, all to no purpose?

Mr. Heatherbloom sat down; he was weary and worn. The dancing sparkles laughed at him; he did not feel like "laughing back". Even as he leaned against the parapet a newsboy close at hand called out:

"All about the mysterious abduction! One of the miscreants traced to this city! Superintendent of police warned of his probable arrival!"

The lad looked at Mr. Heatherbloom as he shouted; that gentleman returned his gaze with unflinching stolidness.

"What abduction?" he asked.

"Beautiful New York heiress."

The voice passed on; the fugitive was once more alone with his thoughts. If they had been wild, turbulent before, what were they now? His hands closed; at the moment he did not bemoan his own probable fate, only the fact that the clue bringing him here had been false--false!

Another voice--this time a man's--accosted him. Mr. Heatherbloom sprang swiftly to his feet but the person, an old ducky, did not appear very formidable.

"Got a match, boss?" he inquired mildly.

Mr. Heatherbloom's bright suspicious glance shot into the good-humored, open look of the other; that person's manner betrayed no ulterior motive. Perhaps he had not yet heard the newsboy; did not know--Mechanically the young man answered that he did not possess the article required, but the intruder still lingered; he had accosted the other partly because of a desire for desultory conversation. Mr. Heatherbloom, after a moment's careful scrutiny, showed a disposition to be accommodating in this regard; he even took the initiative--suddenly, asking question after question about this boat and that. Her name; when she had come; where she was going; of what her cargo consisted? The other replied willingly. Like many of his kind in the port, although he could not read or write, he was wise in harbor-front knowledge, knew all the floating tramps and the sailing craft.

"I suppose it's always about the same old boats drop in here?" Mr. Heatherbloom, after a little, observed insinuatingly.

"Yes, always de same ole tubs," assented the darky.

A shadow crossed the other's face, but he managed to assume a light air. "Battered hulks and sailing brigs of a past generation, eh?" He put the case strongly, but the darky only nodded smilingly. His strong point in conversation was in agreeing with people; he even forgot patriotism toward his own port in being amiable.

Mr. Heatherbloom glanced now beyond them to the right and the left; but no one whom he had reason to fear came within scope of his vision. His figure relaxed. When would they come to take him? The newsboy's words reiterated themselves in his mind. "Traced to this city!" Of course; Miss Van Rolsen's millions were at the command of the secret-service bureau; his description had been telegraphed far and wide. And when it should be fruitful of results, what would become of his theory? Nevertheless, he would go on, while he could, to the last.

If he tried to explain they would consider it but a paltry blind to cover his own criminality. He could expect no help from them; he had to triumph or fail through his own efforts. To fail, certainly; it was decreed.

For the moment something in his breast pocket seemed to burn there, a tiny object, now without the frame. Involuntarily he raised his hand; then his figure swayed; the street waved up and down. He had eaten little during the last two or three days. Scornfully in his own mind he berated that momentary weakness and steadied himself. His eyes, cold and clear, now returned to the colored man; he groped for and took up the thread of the talk where he had left it.

"Old hulks and brigs! You don't ever happen to have any really fine boats come in here, do you? Like Mr. Morgan's big private yacht, for example?"

"No; we ain't never seen dat craft yere. Dis port's more for lumber and--"

Mr. Heatherbloom looked down. "I saw an item in the paper"--he strove to speak unconcernedly--"a Marconigram--that a certain Russian prince's private yacht--the Nevski--had damaged her propeller, or some other part of her gear, and was being towed into this harbor for emergency repairs."

"Oh, yes, boss!" said the man. The listener took a firmer grip on the parapet. "You done mean de big white boat w'at lies on de odder side ob de island; can't see her from yere. Dey done fix her up mighty quick an' she gwine ter lebe to-night."

"Leave to-night!" Mr. Heatherbloom's face changed; suppressed eagerness, expectancy shone from his eyes; he turned away to conceal it from the other. "Looks like good fishing over there near the island," he observed after a pause.

"Tain't so much for fishin' as crabbin'," returned the other.

"Crabbing!" repeated Mr. Heatherbloom. "A grand sport! Now if--are you a crabber?" The darky confessed that crabbing was his main occupation; his boat swung right over there; for a dollar he would give the other several hours' diversion.

Mr. Heatherbloom accepted the offer with alacrity. A few moments later, seated in a dilapidated cockle-shell, he found himself slamming over the water. The boat didn't ship the tops of many seas but it took in enough spray over the port bow to drench pretty thoroughly the passenger. In the stern, the darky handling the sheet of a small, much patched sail, kept himself comparatively dry. But Mr. Heatherbloom didn't seem to mind the drenching; though the briny drops stung his cheek, his face continued ever bent forward, toward a point of land to the right of which lay the island that came ever nearer, but slowly--so slowly!

He could see the top of the spars of a vessel now over the high sand-hills; his body bent toward it; in his eyes shone a steely light. Their little boat drew closer to the near side of the island; the hillocks stood up higher; the tapering topmasts of the craft on the other side disappeared. The crabber's cockle-shell came to anchor in a tranquil sandy cove.

Mr. Heatherbloom, although inwardly chafing, felt obliged to restrain impatience; he could not afford to awaken the darky's suspicions, therefore he simulated interest and--"crabbed". He enjoyed a streak of good luck, but his artificial enthusiasm soon waned. He at length suggested trying the other side of the island, whereupon his pilot expostulated.

What more did his passenger want? The latter thought he would stretch his legs a bit on the shore; it made him stiff to sit still so long. He

would get out and walk around--he had a predilection for deserted islands. While he was gratifying his fancy the darky could return to his more remunerative business of gathering in the denizens of the deep.

Five minutes later Mr. Heatherbloom stood on the sandy beach; he started as if to walk around the island but had not gone far before he turned and moved at a right angle up over the sand-hill. The dull-hued bushes that somehow found nourishment on the yellow mound now concealed his figure from the boatman; the same hardy vegetation afforded him a shelter from the too inquisitive gaze of any persons on the yacht when he had gained the summit of the sands.

There, he peered through the leaves down upon a beautiful vessel. She lay near the shore; whatever her injury, it seemed to have been repaired by this time for few signs of life were apparent on or about her. Steam was up; a faint dun-colored smoke swept, pennon-like, from her white funnels. Some one was inspecting her stern from a platform swung over the rail, and to Mr. Heatherbloom's strained vision this person's interest, or concern, centered in the mechanism of her rudder. The trouble had been there no doubt, and if so, the yacht had probably come, or been brought near the island at high water, and at low tide any damage she might have suffered had been attended to. Her injury must have been more vexatious than serious. Would she, as the darky had affirmed, leave when the tide was once more at its full? Her lying in the outer, instead of in the inner harbor, seemed significant. Time passed; the person on the platform regained the deck and disappeared. In

the bushes the watcher suddenly started.

Something at one of the port windows had caught his glance. A ribbon? A fluttering bit of lace? A woman's features that phantom-like had come and vanished? He looked hard--so steadily that spots began to dance before his sight, but he could not verify that first impression. Yet he remained. The shadows on the furze grew longer, falling in strange angular shapes down the hillside; the sun dipped low. At length Mr. Heatherbloom, after the manner of one who had made up his mind to something, abruptly rose.

He walked back toward the cove where he had disembarked. As he drew near the darky caught sight of him, pulled up "anchor" and paddled his boat to the shore. But Mr. Heatherbloom did not at once get in; his eyes rested on the bushel or so of freshly caught, bubble-blowing crabs. He strove to appear calm and matter-of-fact.

"What do you expect to get for them?" he asked, pointing.

"'Bout fifty cents de dozen, boss. Crab market ain't what it ought ter be jest now."

"Why don't you try to sell them to the yacht over there?" Mr.

Heatherbloom managed to speak carelessly but it was a difficult task.

"Jest becos she is 'over there', boss," returned the darky lazily.

"Mighty swift tide sweeping around de head of dat island!" he explained.

"And you don't like rowing against it?" Quickly. "See here, I'll tell you what I'll do. I like a bit of exercise, and just for the gamble, I'll give you sixty cents a dozen for the lot, and keep all I can get over that. The owner of that craft is a Russian and all Russians like sea food. When they can't get caviar, they'll no doubt make a bid for crabs."

"Dat sounds like berry good argumentation, boss. Make it seventy"--avarice struggling on the dusky countenance--"an'--"

"Done!" said Mr. Heatherbloom, endeavoring to disguise the fierce eagerness welling within him. "Here's on account!" Tossing his last bill to the other. "And now, get out. It'll be easier pulling without you."

The darky grinned and obeyed. This was a strenuous passenger truly, not averse to stiff rowing, after a stiff walk, "jest for pleasure". But the dusky pilot had met these anomalous white beings before--"spo'tsmen", they called themselves. And a certain sense of humor, as Mr. Heatherbloom sat down to the oars, caused the colored man involuntarily to hum: I'se got a white man a-workin' for me. He had only finished a bar or two, however, when the tune abruptly ceased on his lips. "Dat's too bad," he said. "I guess de deal's off, boss." Regretfully.

"Eh?" Mr. Heatherbloom looked around. He meant to keep the man to his bargain now, by force if necessary.

"Look dar!" continued the darky.

Mr. Heatherbloom did look in the direction indicated. A puff of black smoke could be seen rising over the island, and--significant fact!--the dark smudge seemed to be crawling along beyond the sky-line of the sand-hill. The young man turned pale.

"It's de Russian yacht, boss. She's under way all right!"

Mr. Heatherbloom continued to gaze. Where the island was lower he saw the topmasts moving along--then the boat herself, white, beautiful, swinging out from behind, with bow pointed seaward and steaming fast.

"Dat's too bad," murmured the colored man. "I done be powerful disappointed, boss!"

The other did not answer. Going! going! He had waited too long to board her. He could not reach her now--he would never reach her. The flame of the dying sun flared in Mr. Heatherbloom's face, but he continued motionless.