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She found herself mixed up with a mixed-up crowd of fabulously rich passengers.

CRUISE NURSE

JOAN SARGENT



Complete
& Unabridged

VOYAGE TO DECISION

Sheila Dorrance was young and lovely, and determined to make the most of her God-given assets. With memories of her impoverished youth always in back of her mind, she set out to use her nurse's training as a passport to wealth and luxury.

And the job as ship's nurse on the pleasure liner *Southwind* certainly provided ample opportunity. There were any number of wealthy playboys aboard, and more than one of them was interested in wining and dining—and maybe even marrying—the pretty young nurse.

But in spite of her longing for luxury, Sheila found herself falling for the *Southwind's* dedicated young medical officer. And she knew that before her job as cruise nurse was over, she would have to decide whether her destiny was to be ruled by her head . . . or her heart!

Turn this book over for
second complete novel

CRUISE NURSE

by

JOAN SARGENT

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I

SHEILA DORRANCE folded the last of the white uniforms—drip-dry because she wasn't sure what facilities there would be for nurses' laundry aboard ship—put it on top of the other clothes already overflowing the fortnighter, and just managed to snap the suitcase locked without having to sit on it. Turning back to the mirror to finish her face, she wondered if she was taking too many clothes. She'd read in travel articles that carrying too many things was a sign of provincialism, but those ideas of making one outfit do the job of four never seemed to work for her.

She was scared, the same sort of scared she had been the day she'd gone into training, her first day in the operating room, and dozens of other times in her life. But her familiarity with the feeling did nothing to lessen it. Nor did it affect her determination in any way. She had taken the job on the luxury cruise for the same reason she had chosen St. Catherine's for her training. St. Catherine's was an excellent hospital, but it was small and each year it added very few new student nurses, so becoming one of the accepted few had been an added challenge. Her high school adviser had urged her to go to State Medical, but Sheila had held to her original plan. She'd get in St. Catherine's, meet a doctor or a prosperous patient, marry him, and never again have to worry about being poor.

Not that she had ever lived in a slum or had had to accept charity—though she sometimes thought that *that* would

have been easier than living with the constant feeling that every penny had to be watched and weighed and bargained with. All the watching and weighing and bargaining had fallen on her shoulders after her widowed mother had died when Sheila was a senior in high school. A tiny insurance policy had seen her through that year while she planned what to do next. She had decided upon nursing because it would not only mean a decent income afterward, but it would be a thorough education that would equip her to mix with the class of people she meant to make her friends some day. The class of people that went to St. Catherine's when they were ill.

It hadn't worked out just the way she had planned. The established doctors at St. Catherine's were all married, and she soon realized you couldn't be sure how an intern might turn out; he might be one of those who could think only of serving humanity and would never bother to collect a bill. And most of her patients had been women, middle-aged ones, and if they had had sons, they hadn't invited Sheila to meet them.

But one of them had suggested this luxury cruise. Mrs. Haverton had been a difficult patient, but she had taken a liking to Sheila and suggested a job on one of the Haverton ships when she was graduated. She had even remembered to write the recommendation which had got Sheila the job. Only how did Sheila know that this would prove the way into her dream any more than St. Catherine's had?

She studied her face with the impartiality of a stranger as she applied lipstick to a better-than-average mouth. Only a mother or a man in love would call her beautiful, she decided, but there might be a good many who would say "pretty." Her hair was blond and beautifully groomed, her eyes brown and shadowed by dark lashes. Her nose—she

CRUISE NURSE

would have preferred a more classical design—had a tendency to turn up. She was no Marilyn Monroe, but, she knew, her figure was passable. Her suit, with its soft mink collar and feminine lines, had been last year's Big Purchase and had cost more than she should have paid for it, but it was becoming. The hat was new, a beret with a mink button, which the salesgirl had assured her was the very thing for traveling. Her slip didn't show, she saw, and the seams of her stockings were straight. Yet some part of her wondered if her taste was really as good as her friends thought.

Then she laughed at herself, more to guard against disappointment than to express amusement. She probably wouldn't be meeting the people who had the money and the leisure for a six week's vacation in midwinter unless they got sick, and then she would be in uniform, not in her smart suit or new beret, or any of the pretty dresses she had brought with her. How silly should she get! Her lipstick went into her pocket-book, where the papers for the cruise already were.

Her self-absorption was interrupted by the appearance of Reba Lawrence, her roommate. "Tom," Reba said, harking back to the fact that she had gone down to the reception hall of the nurses' home in response to the buzzer that had sounded in their room. "He says that he has a ten minute parking place and if you aren't ready he'd better start riding around the block until you come down."

Sheila laughed a bit shakily, jammed her comb and brush into her overnight bag, and breathed deeply to still the trembling inside. "If that isn't just like Tom," she said. "If you'll take the little bag, I'll bring the other two. I guess I'm as ready as I'll ever be."

Reba turned wide eyes on her. "You sound as if you weren't very thrilled about the trip. And it's all you've talked about for months."

C R U I S E N U R S E

Sheila nodded in embarrassment. "Cold feet is all. I'll be fine as soon as I get on the boat. It's a job that ought to be more like a vacation. Nobody ever gets very sick on a trip, I imagine."

The firmness of her words, their tone of cheerfulness, lightened her mood. She put on her olive green coat, picked up her suitcases, and followed Reba down the stairs.

The man standing in the middle of the reception room was stocky and bespectacled and at the moment looked both awkward and embarrassed. He held two green florist's boxes in his hands, one small and containing a corsage of six tiny sweetheart roses. The other was twice the size of the first, and its corsage was made up of two green orchids. The man's grin was rueful. "Me," he said, extending the smaller. Then he held out the more exotic corsage. "And somebody else."

The larger box contained the card of Mrs. Haverton. Sheila had never had anything like the green orchids, which would turn an end-of-the-season bargain coat into something really ultra, but Tom Martin was sweet, and she was already sure that she liked him better than any other man she knew. By the time the cruise was over she hoped she would know whether she loved him enough to marry him and live the sort of skimpy life she had had ever since she could remember. She opened the smaller box, kissed Tom lightly on the cheek, and turned to let Reba pin the flowers on the lapel of her coat. "They're lovely, Tom," she said softly. "Now I feel that I really am going on a Caribbean cruise."

But Tom was still staring down at the bigger box, and his voice was dissatisfied, almost sulky. "I can't hope to compete with Mrs. Haverton when it comes to gifts."

"Would you be sweet enough to help me with my bags," Sheila changed the subject rather than answer this familiar complaint. "I'll take the overnight case, Reba."

C R U I S E N U R S E

"Then I'll bring the orchids," Reba offered wistfully. "Gosh, I never saw anything so gorgeous—and exactly what you ought to be wearing with that coat."

Sheila looked at them a little wistfully herself. She couldn't wear them to the boat when Tom had knocked off work to come and drive her there. And once she was on the boat, she'd be a nurse in uniform, and green orchids just didn't fit a uniformed shoulder very well. It wasn't without an inward wrench that she said to Reba, "Turn around, honey. They'll look pretty nice on a brown coat, and I want you to have them."

The shadows were beginning to gather thickly about Pier 17 when the shabby little car drew up beside the high iron gate that extended from one warehouse to another.

Tom looked out into the near darkness and reported, "I'm sure the gate is locked. Was it really five o'clock that you were supposed to report?"

Sheila was sure, but she got out her papers and looked up the time by the light of the dashboard. "Five o'clock," she assured him.

"It doesn't look very welcoming," he commented doubtfully, getting out and walking toward the gate, which he now saw was locked. Beyond, a pale yellow oblong of light fell across the rough boards of the dock.

But that light, if not exactly welcoming, at least looked as if there was life in this part of the world. Sheila used her entire nautical vocabulary and called out "Ahoy, there."

A grizzled old man stuck his head out of a door which he opened very cautiously, spreading a second oblong of light beside the first. The man spat a long line of tobacco juice into the lighted space and growled, "What you want? Ain't nothin' sailin' tonight."

Sheila, suddenly very business-like, moved past Tom and spoke crisply. "I know that. I'm Miss Dorrance, one of the nurses for the *Southwind*, which sails tomorrow night. I was told to report tonight at five." She turned back her coat sleeve, looked at a watch which was more practical than ornamental, and announced, "It is now two minutes of five."

"Got papers? I gotta check. Can't be lettin' in ever'body claims she's got business out there," the man grumbled, not really mollified.

Sheila produced several pieces of paper clipped together and offered them to him for inspection. He dodged back into the lighted room and pulled the door closed behind him.

"Trusting soul," Reba commented.

Tom grinned. "Rough neighborhood, I wouldn't be surprised, when there isn't a sailing. In another half-hour it's going to be dark as pitch, and I guess he knows almost anything could happen."

The little man popped out once more, the papers still in his gnarled hand. "Yep, yep, yep," he said. "Nurse all right. Five o'clock. *Southwind*. You can come in, miss, but not them others. Can't have partying here ever' night, and there'll be enough tomorrow to last a month." He busied himself at the lock, trying several keys before he found one that fit. The gate swung back with a rusty scream as if it hadn't been opened in years.

"Look here," Tom was protesting. "These bags are heavy, and it looks as if it were miles out there to the ship. Miss Dorrance can't carry them."

The watchman spat again, not quite so generously now. "She c'n leave 'em here. Be taken down to her tomorrow," he explained grudgingly. "Nobody but crew goes through tonight."

Tom was about to protest once more, but Sheila put her

hand on his arm. "It's all right, Tom. Put the bags through, and we'll say goodbye here instead of on the boat."

"It all seems so flat, just leaving you here and not even seeing the boat," Reba wailed. "And I'd be scared to death to walk off in the dark like that."

Sheila laughed. "There isn't much choice, the way I see it." She hugged Reba, and said, "Bye, honey. Take care of yourself." She gave Tom a light kiss, then took her overnight case and moved beyond the gate, just open wide enough for her to pass through.

The irate little watchman locked the gate once more, popped back into his office, and closed the door. Sheila stood just outside the single oblong of light that remained. She wasn't afraid that anything would come out of the dark and hurt her. She wasn't afraid of the dark at all, and most of her nervousness about the new job had evaporated, but she did feel monstrously neglected and alone. With her out of the way, Tom was just as likely to fall in love with Reba, and where would that leave her?

Then she squared her shoulders and went marching off toward the *Southwind*, her needlesharp high heels beating a thudding tattoo on the heavy squared logs which flooded the dock.

II

IT SEEMED to Sheila that she walked miles before she came out where the *Southwind* lay at anchor close to the dock. Since no warehouse rose on either side here, only the dusk

wrapped the boat. Sheila stood for a moment looking up at it.

It was white for the most part, with blue trimmings, and she counted three tiers of rails, which indicated three decks. Of course, she had already known these things from the literature the company had given her, but it was interesting to see the real thing.

She had expected to go aboard on a set of steps as one mounted to a plane, or up a gangplank, but a plain stout board lay across the few inches between ship and dock. She crossed over and once again stood looking about her. For a moment she thought that she was the only person aboard. It gave her an eerie feeling.

Then a deep, masculine voice came out of the shadow at one side of her. "Well, I'll be hornswoggled. A dame. Lady, what are you doing here?"

This is getting monotonous, Sheila thought as she drew herself up to her full height and replied to the shadow, "I'm one of the nurses for this cruise. Will you show me to the—the hospital? Or wherever I'm supposed to report?"

He came out now where she could see him, but she was not much better off. He was both tall and broad, wore dark trousers and a pea jacket, the collar turned up high enough to meet his visored cap. "Yes, ma'am. Of course, ma'am. Sick bay. Your cabin is just off to the left. The other nurse is already aboard, but I'm not sure about the doctor. Give me your bag, miss. I'm the steward."

He had already taken the little bag from her unresisting hand and turned away. They went through narrow doors, down narrow carpeted halls, and around corners until she was completely confused and wondering if she would ever learn her way about the place. The lights were few and dim; the smell of disinfectant was strong. That was a surprise, for

she had expected a cruise ship to be perfumed, or at least to have the salty tang of sea water.

They came out at last in a room with six beds, unmade but looking like regulation hospital beds. With a jerk of his head the steward indicated two closed doors on her right. "Doctor's office and cabin; dispensary. You and Miss Hampton are here." He knocked on a door under which a thin line of light shone.

A firm, low-pitched voice answered at once. "It's unlocked. Come on in."

Her guide opened the door and motioned Sheila to enter first, put down the bag, and departed, leaving the door ajar.

The room was less luxurious than those pictured in the folder she had studied, but they had been passenger cabins. And this room was not unattractive, with its soft green carpet and twin beds instead of the bunks Sheila had half expected.

But Sheila had given the room the most cursory glance, for her real interest lay in the girl with whom she would work during the next two months. She was tall and brown-haired and thin rather than slender. In that first glimpse Sheila thought the other girl's mouth hard, her eyes sad. Her grooming was severe and careful, and she was covering her bed, the one nearest the porthole, with a dark green spread. She had turned an inquiring eye first on the steward, then on Sheila, but had said nothing.

Sheila felt a flush rising to her face. She couldn't remember when she had felt younger or more awkward, and she rushed into speech to relieve her nervousness. "I'm Sheila Dorrance and I'm the new nurse for this cruise."

The other girl looked her over without smiling, as if she had been offered a piece of goods to buy and was thinking it

over. "I'm Rose Hampton, and I've been making this run eighteen months. You're just a kid."

"I'm twenty-one," Sheila retorted, beginning to feel angry rather than inadequate.

"And just out of training, no doubt," Rose Hampton accused.

Sheila nodded, meaning to get the worst over as soon as possible. "But I've a college degree and have had as good training as any school provides." Her tone held a challenge. "Besides, I shouldn't think nursing on a cruise ship would usually demand anything more difficult than giving Dramamine for seasickness."

The older girl sighed. "Just as I thought. You were looking for a soft berth. And if things go well, you may get just that. I hope they do go well, for we're breaking in a new doctor, too."

Sheila's voice was dry. "And I suppose a ship's doctor is looking for a soft berth, too."

Rose nodded sagely. "That's been my experience. Unless he's hiding from something. But generally speaking, ship's doctors aren't anything more than supremely lazy."

Sheila was about to retort, "And you? Just what is your reason for being so long on a cruise ship," when a voice, bass and ironical, spoke from behind her in the big sick bay room. "May I present myself, ladies? I'm Peter Stowe, ship's doctor."

Both girls turned to him as if they were marionettes on strings. It was Sheila who found her voice first. "I'm Miss Dorrance, new this voyage. And this is Miss Hampton."

"I believe they aren't sounding the gong tonight," he went on in an even tone. "But I've been told to tell you dinner is being served in ten minutes in the officer's mess."

He had closed the door to the room that the steward had

CRUISE NURSE

indicated was the doctor's office and cabin, but Sheila saw him still as plainly as when he had stood just under the center light. He was tall, very tall, and big-boned, and almost emaciatedly thin. He was pale, too, and unhandsome with big, uneven features. And he had the reddest hair she could ever remember seeing.

Dr. Stowe allowed them to have the evening for settling into their cabin, but he had them called bright and early the next morning. All day they checked the supplies in the dispensary, making lists and arranging everything to his particular design. Sheila could not decide whether he was being unfriendly and wreaking his hurt feelings at Rose Hampton's indiscreet comments on ships' doctors the night before or whether he was naturally meticulous and possessed of slave-driving tendencies. By dinnertime in the evening she was too tired to care.

Yet she was not the only one who had spent the day working with every ounce of her energy. Everyone on the ship had been busy. The passages, which even after so short a time did not appear quite so intricate and tortuous as they had seemed the night before, gave off a pleasant woodsy odor now instead of their earlier one of disinfectant. When she had a glimpse of a cabin through an open door, Sheila saw that it was freshly made up and pin neat. All the public rooms were flower-decked and wore a waiting air. The crew and officers were uniformed and had the same look of expectancy as the ship.

She sat next to the second mate at dinner. He was a good-looking young man who the night before had looked her over with a pleased eye and made his conversation with her sprightly and mildly flirtatious. But tonight he had the drawn look about his eyes that she suspected she wore.

She looked about her and found that everyone else looked

CRUISE NURSE

somewhat the same. Most of those gathered in the mess were silent, eating as if it didn't much matter whether they ate or not, the rest talking with a nervous intensity that surprised her. She turned a questioning eye on the mate and put her wonder into words. "They all seemed so—so sort of calm and efficient last night."

He smiled. "And they will tomorrow night. In the theatre they call this sort of thing 'first night jitters.' Right now, everybody is checking his mind to be sure he did everything he was supposed to do."

"You're teasing me, Mr. Collins," she accused him. "You've all been doing this for ages."

"Don't nurses and doctors have any sort of nervous tension before an operation?" he asked her, lifting one eyebrow in her direction.

She laughed. "I guess you have me there. Of course they do."

"Well, the curtain goes up, or we enter the operating theatre, from nine until midnight. The ship will echo with laughter and farewell parties and the irate voices of people who aren't satisfied with their quarters or something else, and maybe there will even be a few tears at parting. Then we'll be at sea, and everything will settle into its groove. And that will be that."

Her eyes twinkled. "Nothing ever happens after you put out to sea?"

Laughter in his eyes answered hers. "Naturally not. The line plans that every soul aboard has a good time, that the meals are the very best, that the weather is perfect and everybody goes home and urges his friends to take the cruise. We wouldn't dare have it otherwise."

"Everybody even has perfect health, I suppose," she countered.

CRUISE NURSE

He laughed, and looked less intense as he did so. "At least we provide pretty nurses in case something does happen to their health."

She had caught sight of two other young women across the largely masculine dining saloon and changed the subject abruptly. "Those girls. I haven't seen them before."

"They're the hostess and one of the women from the nursery. They're both a lot older than you, but I'll take you over and introduce you when you've finished your pie. They were both on the last trip. There's a male recreation director—Roger Foreman—and two other girls in the nursery, but I'm not planning on introducing you to Foreman, and I haven't met the girls myself."

But tiredness suddenly swept over Sheila to the point that she didn't care whether she ever met anyone else as long as she lived, and once she was back in her cabin, she only wanted a shower and to climb into bed, turn on the rosy lamp above it, and drowse over one of the magazines Reba had brought for a going-away present.

It was just as well she did have a quiet night, only now and then interrupted by shrieks of laughter and bursts of conversation from the deck outside, for dawn had hardly broken when Dr. Stowe was knocking loudly on their door and calling out, "Miss Hampton, Miss Dorrance. I shall need you both immediately. We've got a case of d.t.'s to deal with."

Rose groaned as she turned back the covers.

"Mark my words. This trip's going to be a dilly. We're starting off with a drunk. Oh, my aching back."

III

MR. A. CARLETON BENTZ, bachelor playboy known to society columns on two continents, gave them a lively hour before the sedation Dr. Stowe administered had taken affect. When at last the patient lay quiet, his face raddled and blue shadows under his closed eyes, Dr. Stowe, in his shirt sleeves, gave a deep sigh and then grinned surprisingly at the two nurses who had been assisting. That smile, which began in his eyes and spread slowly over his whole face, made all the difference in his appearance and in her feeling about him, Sheila decided.

"Good thing we all knew a bit of judo," he said. "Looked for a while like it might be touch and go, but I guess we've taken care of it for the time being. He oughtn't to be left alone, though, and we haven't talked about working hours. I've just learned that I am expected, when not more seriously engaged, to be out on deck being gallant to ladies."

Rose nodded. "Generally speaking, the nurses take twelve-hour shifts, changing each week. The doctor's on call all twenty-four hours. Twelve hours sounds like a very long time, but usually there's little enough to do. The nurse simply has to be here. She can write letters or read or do whatever she wants to. I make needlepoint."

Peter Stowe nodded gravely. "That sounds all right if it's the way it's usually done. Want to draw straws for who stays on duty now?"

Sheila offered another suggestion. "Hampton has been on the run before, which gives her seniority. Let her take her pick. It doesn't really matter to me."

For once the older girl seemed pleased with Sheila. "I'd just as soon stay on now until seven," she decided.

Sheila nodded her acceptance of that. "I suppose I'll go to breakfast then. What about you? Do I relieve you for meals?"

Again Rose smiled at the thoughtfulness. "The steward brings me a tray. The gong has already sounded. You two better go along. I'll be all right with Bentz for a while, anyhow."

Once in the winding corridors, Sheila looked up at the red-haired doctor. She was not short herself, but Peter Stowe was tall enough to make her feel small, feminine, and strangely helpless. He was smiling down at her, and she noted once again how different a smile made his rugged face. As unhandsome as he was, there was something fascinating about his irregular features.

"You're very young," he said. "Just out of training?"

She nodded, flushing a little because she felt he had implied that she didn't know her job. "I trained at St. Catherine's. I was graduated last week with the midterm class."

He nodded, looking serious now but not at all forbidding. "It's a good hospital, and they would have been proud of you this morning. You behaved like a veteran."

She turned an even deeper shade of pink at his praise and spoke more lightly than she had yet spoken to him. "You're not so old yourself. Just finished your internship?"

He laughed aloud at her teasing. "And a year of residency. At City."

She turned wide eyes on him. "But that's a charity hospital," she said, surprised and not knowing why she should be.

He nodded. "It's my opinion that a hospital like City gets

the widest range of cases and that therefore they're best for an internship and residency."

She felt relieved at that. "Then you're going into practice somewhere where your long training will benefit you," she suggested.

"I am that," he agreed. "I'm hoping to get in a clinic in Rowdy Heights and continue on the staff of City. It's what I've looked forward to ever since I can remember."

She was feeling disappointed again. Everything about young Doctor Stowe had cried out of ability and authority. He was the sort of man a sick person instinctively gave confidence to, the sort who could command high fees and exclusive patients. She could think of nothing to say. She wondered what he was doing on a cruise of this sort, but it would be impertinent to ask on such short acquaintance.

"And you're going back to the plush St. Catherine's?" he asked, and she thought that he sounded a little sarcastic.

"I can. If I want to," she answered slowly. "The rich get sick, too, you know, just as sick as the poor." She raised her chin a little in defense of the course she had taken.

"And their gratitude takes the form of all sorts of expensive gifts," he jeered.

Suddenly, she was angry at his attitude. "Yes. And a girl meets doctors and patients she could afford to marry, which is an item worth considering, too."

"Yes, I'm sure," he agreed, and his face had taken on the harsh expression that it had worn the night before. Perhaps it was just as well, she decided, that they were going to their separate tables now. In a moment they would be quarreling, and it would be silly to quarrel with a stranger.

She rather dawdled over her breakfast, trying to decide how she would spend the day. She didn't need to think about sleeping; she had only recently awakened. Usually

there were things to wash out, bits of grooming to be attended to, a hundred things large and small calling for attention, but this morning it was not so. She remembered the folders and what they had promised by way of recreation. The pool would not be open, she was sure, until they approached the tropics, but there were games. And sitting in the sun in the fresh salt air sounded more tempting than anything she could think of. She went back to her cabin and changed from her uniform to a play suit with an orange figure against a pale yellow background. There was a yellow sweater to go with it, and she tied an orange scarf about her bright hair to hold it in place in the wind.

She need not have worried about keeping herself occupied, for scarcely had she appeared on deck when a bouncing ball of a man descended upon her and introduced himself as Roger Foreman. "You're just what we're looking for, young lady. We're about to start a game of deck tennis, and we've only three players. I didn't get your name, but I'll know it next time I see you. I never forget a name that belongs to a pretty face."

Three people had been corralled by the recreation director, two girls and a man, none of whom seemed entirely enthusiastic about the game. The girl whom Sheila decided was probably a secretary who had saved for several years for the trip was Mary Grimes. The tall girl in the simple tailored dress that must have cost a fortune was Angela Masters. Both girls were about twenty-five, Sheila decided.

But the man was the sort she had dreamed about. He was dark and tanned and handsome. He looked as if he was accustomed to polo ponies and a yacht and a foreign racing car. He wore a striped basque shirt and white linen trousers with an ease that looked as if he cared nothing about clothes. He was Clay Masters, the older brother of the girl in the

silk tailored dress, and Sheila was delighted to see that he brightened a little at her appearance.

None of them had quite acquired sealegs yet, and the game moved along in a rather desultory fashion. Sheila was far from expert, but her poor playing was offset by the skill of Clay Masters, who had chosen her to be his partner. Angela Masters played well—one could hardly imagine her doing anything that she would not do well, Sheila thought—but she made no bones about caring nothing for deck tennis as a pastime. Nor did she seem interested in any of the players. Mary Grimes had the air of having her nose out of joint at the appearance of a younger and prettier girl. After the first set they drifted apart, Clay Masters striding along with Sheila.

"Have you had your three laps around the deck?" he asked in a joking tone. "At sea, you're supposed to talk about how hungry you are and how much you eat and then say you always take three laps so that you won't gain. Aren't you going to?"

Sheila met his twinkling eyes with laughter in her own. "I really don't know," she admitted. "I've never been to sea before. But if you say so, I could say it. Or shall we consider it said?"

He laughed aloud. Not, Sheila thought, because she was the greatest wit of all time, but because he liked her. "By all means consider it said. A first voyage is always more exciting than any that follow it. I rather envy you."

They had stopped at the rail and were leaning on it, watching the changing colors of the water the ship was cutting through. Behind them, Roger Foreman bounced up to a young woman and an older one, introduced himself enthusiastically, and went on: "You're just what we're looking for, young lady. We're starting a game of shuffleboard, and we

have only three players. I didn't get your name, but I'll know it next time I see you. I never forget a name that belongs to a pretty face."

Sheila met Clay's eyes, and they both grinned. It was Clay who spoke. "Is that what he said to you? They're the very words he used on my sister."

Sheila nodded. "The very words. But you know, I'll bet he will know everybody's name the second time."

"He might at that," Clay agreed.

A cold, overcultured voice that sounded a little more than middel-aged spoke behind them. "My daughter never plays games with strangers."

"Oh, madam, they wouldn't be strangers. I would introduce them quite properly, I assure you," Mr. Foreman protested. "Quite properly."

There were icicles on the woman's voice. "And you aren't a stranger?"

A fresh, young voice, but one entirely too humble, broke in: "But Mother, surely on a cruise of this kind—"

"A cruise of this kind is often where one meets the most objectionable people, Elise. I have warned you, my dear. Fortune hunters, social climbers, gamblers. My daughter doesn't play games with strangers, Mr. Foreman."

A much deflated Mr. Foreman moved away, and there was a sound of muffled weeping behind them. It clearly wasn't the older woman, for her voice went on in the same firm tone: "I would never have brought you on a trip like this one if Dr. Warner hadn't insisted. Now stop your sniveling and wipe your eyes. A lady doesn't cry where people can see her."

"Poor girl." Sheila made the words with her lips and motioned to Clay that they should move away and out of sight. "Aft and portside," she said aloud.

CRUISE NURSE

Clay grinned. "Aft all right, but starb'd. Do you suppose she's a girl who never has any fun?"

Sheila sighed. "It sounds like it. I think I'd rather be married for my money than be guarded like that."

"Or not have any money," Clay retorted.

"You'd have to have none to be sure of that," Sheila thought, and said aloud, somewhat reluctantly, "I have to admit it, I have none."

"We were talking about first cruises back there, if I remember correctly," he reminded her.

She had already figured out what would be her attitude to the rich young man she was to meet aboard the *Southwind*. She'd admit at once that she wasn't one of the idle elite. She hoped he'd find the difference intriguing, and besides, he'd be sure to find out eventually, and that wouldn't be good.

"It isn't exactly a cruise for me," she explained, "though certainly it's a voyage. I'm part of the crew. One of the nurses."

He looked at her sharply. "You're young for it, aren't you? I was sure you'd have a watchful mama sitting somewhere at hand and making sure you didn't meet the wrong people."

She chuckled at that. "You have to meet some of the wrong people to be sure you know the right ones, don't you? And when nursing's your job, you can't be too choosy."

"Tell me about nursing," he commanded.

"That's a big order," she answered. "Besides, I'm just through training. Besides that, I'd rather hear about you."

"That's the sort of woman my father told me I'd meet someday," he teased. "I was born on a windy day in March in North Dakota, and—"

Her laughter rose again. "Nobody was ever born in North Dakota," she protested. "At least, nobody I ever heard of."

CRUISE NURSE

"Just the same, I was. My father was a cattleman and—"

The dining room steward was going about the deck striking his gong. They both began to speak at the same time. "But it can't be— Where has the time gone?"

"I have to go put on a new face for lunch," she said, "but I hope that that doesn't mean I'm not going to hear about North Dakota."

"Try and stop me," he challenged. "There's dancing to-night. I hope you are going to save me—"

She shook her head regretfully. "I'm not dancing tonight. I'm on duty. I even have a patient."

He groaned. "Not already?"

"I hadn't expected one yet, either, but we have."

"A man?" he suggested.

She nodded.

He grinned. "The lucky stiff. Have cocktails with me this afternoon?"

IV

THE DAYS slipped by with a curious, relaxed rhythm. A few people asked for Dramamine and had it administered. Their first patient sobered up and was weak and sick and helpless; then, on the third day, he went back to his cabin. That night Sheila dozed for a while over a mystery story she had taken out of the ship's library, then wrote her first letter to Reba:

It's sort of a coincidence that I was asked to City Hospital and that our doctor interned there. If he'd stopped there instead of veering off on a boat and I'd accepted the appoint-

ment, we might both be there instead of plowing along toward sun and warm weather. The doctor's a mystery. He's terribly dedicated about his work, and I think he's a good doctor. A nurse gets to know. Yet here he is where all he has to see to is an occasional case of seasickness.

I'm puzzled about the other nurse, too. She's older than we are, twenty-five at least, maybe more, and she tried to act tough until you see her with somebody that's sick. Then she's wonderful. She doesn't pay much attention to me, and though we occupy the same cabin, we occupy it at different hours, so I really see very little of her.

You know how I've always been about money. Well, I've—no, I haven't met her; her mother won't let anybody get near enough for that—I've seen a girl that makes me wonder if it's all peaches and cream. I found out her name's Ferrier, Elise Ferrier, and her people have positive millions and her mother's absolutely rabid for fear somebody will marry her for money. She could be cute, but she looks so beat down that you can only be sorry for her.

But I've saved the best until last. I've met a man, maybe THE man. He's quite the best-looking thing I've seen outside the movies, and his people are cattle ranchers in the West, and he's with me almost every minute he can be with me what with my working and all. Tomorrow we're going to Havana together.

She didn't finish the letter at once but sat staring off into space and dreaming. She and Clay would have a wonderful time in Havana, and almost nobody would know that she wasn't one of the luxurious and idle who made up the cruise.

The day dawned sunny and beautiful, and Havana was pastel and white around the harbor, but the gaiety and expectancy that bubbled up in Sheila was dampened for her almost at once by the two Ferriers. She had been sufficiently

touched by the girl's aloneness that first day to make inquiry as to who the pair were. Mrs. Ferrier was silver-haired and commanding, a big woman with a somewhat masculine appearance. The girl might have been tall herself, but she was stooped and discouraged-looking. Her skin was sallow, her make-up careless, her clothes dowdy. Elise was a complete picture of a girl who did not really care about anything. Sheila felt as sorry for her as she had ever before felt for anyone.

But what really touched off her pity that morning was Mrs. Ferrier's somewhat sharp reply to an inquiry from Captain Ward, who had come on deck to see his passengers off.

"There'll be a boat for you ladies shortly," he had said to them. "Is it your first trip to Cuba?"

Mrs. Ferrier's eyes traveled up and down the length of the stocky little man in a condescending way which must have come as a surprise to the commander of a vessel the size of the *Southwind*. "My daughter has been in Havana three times, and I have been here five," she informed him, "but never on a boat such as this. The last time we came by plane for my daughter's health. Twice before that we were on our own yacht. We shan't be going ashore today. I'm sure there's nothing we could see in a large party that we haven't already seen under happier circumstances. The doctor prescribed sunshine, and Miss Ferrier can get it here on deck better than in the city."

Sheila didn't hear the captain's reply, but her eyes were fixed on the girl Elise, who said nothing in protest but who sighed deeply and hopelessly.

Once in the small boat which would take them ashore, Sheila turned to Clay. "Did you hear that old Gorgon talking to the captain about her privileged daughter and the way she travels?"

"She's a poor, spiritless thing, that Elise," he decided. "Why doesn't she tell that mother of hers to go jump into the harbor and go out on the town. She's of age."

Sheila thought that over for a long moment. "I don't know," she decided. "With a mama like that one who got the whip hand early, it wouldn't be easy. Habit would keep you jumping every time she cracked the whip. Besides, that girl's sick. I don't think there's really anything the matter with her but hopelessness, but that's bad enough."

"I'd like to take her out with us just once and see what she'd be like without mama," Clay answered.

But just then Sheila saw a row of palm trees marching up the parkway of one of the streets leading from the harbor and gave a little moan of ecstasy. "Look, Clay. They look just like something out of a decorator's dream, planted in concrete urns like that."

Clay laughed at her, but not unkindly. "Honey, those are royal palms, and the 'concrete urn' is part of the trunk of the tree, even if it does look like something else."

The little boat had drawn up to the dock now, and Sheila stood up, her whole face alive with excitement. "Come on, hurry. I can't wait to see everything."

Parties of six were already being sent out with driver guides. There would not be any great crowds trampling each other, as Mrs. Ferrier had implied, not on this cruise. Steered by the knowing Clay, Sheila found herself on the front seat away from the driver, with Clay seated in the middle.

"You'll be able to see and hear where you are," he assured her.

She squeezed his hand, fairly bobbing up and down in her seat with excitement. "You're so good to me."

"You're an awfully easy person to be good to," he told her. "Sh-h-h. Listen."

CRUISE NURSE

The driver began his spiel in a slightly accented voice, putting an *es* before every word which began with *s*. Sheila found the capitol exciting, not only as the center of a government but because of the great diamond which had been set in its floor, and she thought the story thrilling of how it had been stolen and returned. The wide street which their guide called El Prado was beautiful with its broad parkway aflame with bright flowers. Malecon Drive along the sea front brought them to Morro Castle, where she saw instruments of torture of the old Spanish underground dungeons which left her chilled more with pity for those who had been imprisoned there than from the dark dankness.

That part of the tour finished, they went to the Hotel Nationale for an eight-course meal eaten so slowly that Sheila didn't realize how much she had consumed until she stood up.

"Goodness, Clay, I'm sure I won't want anything else to eat for a solid week. But wasn't it marvelous? That pompano, for instance."

"I think I liked the coconut ice cream best. Unless it was the chicken and yellow rice. I've always been partial to that."

Afterwards, they drowsed in patio chairs, listening to the roar of the ocean not far away, then had a swim in the hotel pool. Their limousine was back now, and they drove through the suburbs looking at the houses of Havana's wealthiest, and farther into the country where, no matter how poor, the people who lived in the palm-thatched huts had taken time to cut bougainvillea vines into fantastic baskets and cocks and other imaginative shapes. Suddenly Sheila realized that she was tired, that the day was almost over, and that she would have to return to the *Southwind* and go on duty.

"And I haven't had a wink of sleep," she told Clay.

"You're sure you can't stay out until after dinner?" he urged her.

If that isn't just like a person who never has worked for a living, she told herself. She shook her head. "Nope, I've got to get back."

"I'll get us a taxi and see you aboard the tender," he insisted.

"It's been a wonderful day." She sighed that it should be over. "I've loved every minute of it."

He gave the taxi driver an address which she didn't get, but she was almost sure it wasn't the waterfront. She asked about it.

"You don't miss a trick, do you?" He laughed. "No, it's a little jewelry store I know. I think you ought to have something to help you remember today—just a trifle, you understand, a filagree bracelet would be my selection, or a pin, if you prefer."

"But—but—" she protested.

"Five dollars at the outside," he insisted. "Nothing a mother would mind her daughter taking from a man friend, I promise you. I just want to be sure you don't forget today."

"As if I could," she protested. "Even a single minute of it."

Still, it was comforting to have the bracelet there on her arm that night when she knew he was somewhere out in that gay and glamorous city, perhaps dancing with another girl. She turned it round and round, and then because she was both tired and very sleepy, she nodded, and finally put her head down on the desk in front of her. There wasn't a whole floor of wakeful patients here wanting things as there would have been at St. Catherine's. In fact, there was only Peter Stowe and Rose Hampton, and they were both asleep.

V

SHEILA HAD written Reba that she and Rose saw little of each other, and this was strangely true, since they occupied such close quarters. They had been aboard the *Southwind* almost a week before they had anything like a personal conversation. They had been two days and a night in Havana, and toward day they had sailed. Mr. Bentz, that convivial bachelor, came aboard very much the worse for drink and shortly thereafter was seized by his particular demons. As he had the night they had sailed, he landed very shortly in sick bay.

It was all to do again—the physical struggle, the shots, the nausea, and finally, peace and unconsciousness.

Peter Stowe grinned a bit wryly when it was all over, and sighed. "How many ports is it that we are to visit, did the folders say?" He did not expect an answer; he knew as well as anyone else and was saying in his dry way that two of the nineteen ports had been passed and that the medical staff had seventeen more times to sober up A. Carleton Bentz.

Rose had a more practical comment to make. She glanced at her watch and found that breakfast was over in the officer's mess. "We could have something served in here for the three of us. I don't know about you two, but I'm hungry."

Sheila laughed a little, easing from her shoulders the nervous tension of the last hour. "I hadn't thought about it, but I am, too."

And Peter nodded. "I could eat a working man's breakfast this morning, for sure. In fact, if work earns a working man's breakfast, we all deserve it."

Once they were gathered about the improvised table and

the steward had begun to serve their meal, an easy conversation sprang up among the three. "We make a pretty good team when we need to," Peter Stowe observed. "I must admit that I had expected to find the sort of nurses that you seem to have expected the doctor to be. And I'd say we're at least average."

Rose flushed a little under his reference to her tactless words on the night of his arrival, but she went on to defend her stand in her honest, blunt way. "It just stands to reason that an established physician who has a good practice and is doing all right doesn't leave it all and come off on a cruise. We've had fellows just finishing their internship trying to get together enough money to start a practice or to pay off debts made for their education. They're conscientious and careful usually, but you can't exactly call them experienced. We've had one retired doctor who was a whiz. But for the most part, they're just lazy, and shipboard's easy. Usually there's nothing from beginning to end except seasickness."

All the time Rose had been speaking, Sheila had been looking at Peter out of the corner of her eye. He looked different, she thought. In the first place, he had put on weight since the voyage had started and his big features weren't so prominent. He had a good color, too—as tan as anyone with his red hair could ever have—instead of the sick white he had been that first night.

"And nurses?" Peter jibed. "They take up ship's nursing purely for love of humanity, I suppose?"

Rose's rather heavy voice was noncommittal. "They come for different reasons, just as the doctors do."

If she had not thought Peter Stowe poor and not particularly interesting to her in any case, Sheila would never have spoken so frankly. As it was, she said, "I can tell you why I came on the cruise. For the same reason I took up nursing,

the same reason I chose to train at St. Catherine's. I'm pulling myself up by my own bootstraps. I've been poor all my life. My parents were respectable, but they never had an extra penny. I'm not going to be like that. I'm going to have money someday. Unless you're some sort of genius, a girl doesn't make the kind of money I want. She has to marry it."

Peter looked at her, frowning. "But you're a good nurse."

She nodded. "Of course I am. Two reasons. I want to make a good living for myself—as good as possible. And being a good nurse means that you're the one they call to take care of the patients with money in their pockets. At least, at a place like St. Catherine's, a private hospital which depends on gifts and bequests, it usually does."

Peter was still frowning. "But I know St. Catherine's gives the very best care to its charity patients. If a free patient were really ill—"

Sheila nodded. "I've served my time with them, too. And I wouldn't marry just for money. I wouldn't marry that A. Carleton Bentz, for instance, if he were the last man on earth and had the whole thing in his pocket. But if you only let yourself meet wealthy men, eventually you'll find one who falls in love with you and you fall in love with him."

Peter showed a twisted smile. "So that's the way it's done?"

Rose had, up to this time, made no contribution to this discussion of love and money. Now she spoke rather suddenly, as abrupt as usual. "It's not always easy, even if he has money. Sometimes that very thing makes it harder."

Sheila turned to look at the other girl in some surprise.

Rose answered the question in Sheila's eyes. "Yes, I've been married. For almost a year. It was a marriage for love, at least from my side it was. But they were the sort of people—I never could seem to get to know them, to be on the inside with them. I never knew what they were talking about half

the time. It wasn't very satisfactory. And we lived with his mother." Her face had hardened, and her eyes had even more of the hurt look Sheila had thought she had seen in them on that first night. Then Rose cleared her throat as she got up from her chair. "Everyone talks too much on a trip. The idea is that you'll probably never see these same people again, I suppose."

Peter eased the situation a bit by laughing. "Don't rush off, Hampton, I haven't told all yet, and I have my reasons for being on a ship just as Dorrance here has. I'm interested in people and practicing medicine, sure, but if I had the money, what I'd do is research. I'd study viruses. They're truly fascinating. City let me set up a small lab in the basement, and I felt I was beginning to find out *something* when one of them got me. I nearly died. And when I was better, the doctor ordered sun, fresh air, and rest. I thought a job on one of the Federal Fruit ships might be just the answer, especially since I couldn't afford such luxuries in midwinter unless I had something coming in."

Rose's eyes were apologetic, but she wasn't one who expressed apologies easily.

Sheila rushed in contritely. "And we practically accused you of being lazy."

Peter laughed again. "Don't forget. I expected you to be, too."

It was almost as if they were friends, Sheila thought. Maybe they'd really like each other by the time they landed back in home port. It would make the whole trip much pleasanter.

Sheila had not gone up on deck to the place where she was accustomed to find Clay at all that morning, and shortly after lunch a steward brought her a note urging that she meet him in the shadow of the portside lifeboats as soon as

she could. She hurried up to top deck and found him walking back and forth impatiently.

"I hope you aren't trying to ignore me, young lady," he said, teasing and yet somewhat earnest, too. "I've been racking my brains all day to think what I could have done to offend you."

She laughed. "Don't be silly. You know I had a wonderful time yesterday and that I hated to report back to the ship."

He nodded. "I certainly thought that was the way it had been," he agreed.

She nodded to reaffirm the notion. "It was A. Carleton Bentz," she explained, her face solemn, her eyes atwinkle.

"You mean—You weren't with that—that scoundrel, were you?" he inquired. "Look, Sheila, don't you know about him? Don't you even read the papers?"

She chuckled. "I don't have to read the papers or listen to gossip, either. If his behavior were a secret, I wouldn't be saying anything about him, but what I have been doing is sobering him up, beginning at four-thirty this morning. I was on duty, and he came back on ship raging just before we sailed. Or was brought, I imagine. I had to get Rose to help me, and then I subbed for her to make up for her helping me out with him. And then—well, I haven't been getting a lot of sleep these last forty-eight hours."

She had finished her explanation on a light tone and expected him to join her in that mood, but instead, he was indignant.

"Do you mean that you—both you girls—have been subjected to what that man's like when he's been out on a toot?"

She nodded. "But of course. He's sick, like anybody else. It isn't a very pleasant sort of sickness, but then sickness isn't usually pleasant. It's a thing a nurse has to learn to make as

CRUISE NURSE

comfortable as she can for her patient and for herself. But notice, I put the patient first."

She was really surprised at herself. She hadn't meant to put it just that way. She sounded like the girls back at St. Catherine's who had a *thing* about Florence Nightingale and suffering humanity, and she'd never had much use for that sort of talk.

"I don't like it," Clay was still protesting. "They ought to have male nurses on ships."

"You think that sort of thing doesn't happen on shore, my fine-feathered friend? Or are you trying to crowd me out of my profession? There are male nurses, you know."

He brushed that aside almost impatiently. "I guess I just don't like the idea of your being subjected to anything even unpleasant, much less dangerous."

He sounded very much as if he were about to arrive at the place she had wanted him to be. As if he might, right now, in the stillness of siesta on ship, say all the definite and romantic things she had dreamed of his saying. If she should encourage him only a little by making her lot seem truly difficult—

But strangely enough, she didn't want it that way. Oh, sometime in the future. She was in love with Clay, or almost. But she had known him only a week, and that wasn't long enough to be really sure, and she honestly didn't want a ship-board romance.

She spoke lightly again. "Oh, Dr. Stowe was there. We were three against the rich and not quite defenseless Mr. Bentz."

And this time he answered in the mood she had offered him. "Two whole days before Jamaica."

She sighed a little. "I'll be on day duty then. I won't be seeing much of Kingston."

"Don't you believe it. I'll reserve a table at the Victoria, and we'll dance all night. And maybe the market's open at night. It seems to me it is. The market's fascinating in Kingston."

She looked up at him admiringly. "You've been just everywhere."

He looked consciously modest. "Well, in this part of the world, I have."

VI

SHELIA might as well have gone to bed that night. Carleton Bentz slept deeply, snoring a little. She read awhile, played solitaire, sewed a strap on a slip, and pressed the evening gown that she expected to wear the night they would be in Jamaica. Shortly after midnight she lay down on one of the empty beds and slept almost as deeply as Mr. Bentz until morning. She knew it would be all right, for she had a nurse's happy faculty of hearing the least sound a patient made.

It was almost midmorning when she decided to go up on A-deck for a swim. The pool had been open for the use of passengers for several days, but Sheila hadn't been in it yet, and swimming was her favorite sport. Besides, she had promised Clay she would meet him there.

He had already been in the water. His hair looked darker wet, and it was sleeked close to his head. He was only a few shades away from a deep tan. Angela was swimming, too, wearing her favorite white in a daringly cut suit that

showed off every line of her perfect figure. Both of the Masterses waved cordially to Sheila, and she returned their salute, stopping to take off the blue jacket that matched her suit and bathing shoes. Angela had two male passengers in attendance, which, considering the preponderance of women on the voyage, wasn't doing badly at all. Still, Sheila was more than satisfied with the one which fate seemed to be providing for her.

"How's your patient?" Clay asked, coming over to help her balance as she removed her shoes.

She laughed—it seemed very easy to laugh when she was with Clay. "Very weak, very repentant. Never means to touch another drop—until we let him out of sick bay, of course, and he can struggle into the bar. Poor man."

Clay looked at her, frowning a little. "You sound sorry for the guy."

She nodded. "I am. I don't know much about what makes alcoholics. I certainly am no psychiatrist, but he's a sick man, whether it's mental or physical. Last man in is a rotten egg."

They raced for it, and Clay beat her to the pool's edge by a hair's breath. A moment later the crowd of them were playing a rousing game of water polo, their shouts filling the salt air. When it was over, Sheila lay in the sun drying the edges of her soft, short hair and talking lazily. Beyond them the deck steward was passing out eleven o'clock refreshments.

"Is everybody always hungry on shipboard?" she asked.

"Everybody," he assured her.

She looked at the captain, who was talking to a crowd of exclaiming women, seemingly explaining something about the tides or a school of fish to them. "Yet *he's* still shapely at—would you say sixty?" she said.

"At least sixty," he agreed.

CRUISE NURSE

"I'm afraid I'm going to be fat as a butterball by the time this single cruise is over," she worried, but not very deeply.

"Most people lose at sea in spite of all they eat," he comforted. "At least, the young ones do. They're more active than they are at home at their jobs, for one thing."

"Yes, I suppose so," she said drowsily. Sea air made her as sleepy as it did hungry.

The steward had reached the pool's edge and was handing out tiny sandwiches and cool drinks of several sorts of fruit juices and taking individual orders for drinks from the bar. A number of the group drifted away for more comfortable seats, or to go to their cabins to dress for lunch, which would be served at one. Sheila and Clay sat on, not talking for the most part, but enjoying a companionable silence and dangling their feet in the luke-warm water.

"You were going to tell me the story of your life once, do you remember?" she asked into one of these silences. "Now ought to be a good time to tell it. Most of the crowd that was here only moments ago seems to have evaporated."

He nodded. "All except the Ferrier dragon and her victim. Poor mouse. I still say she could stand up for herself if she wanted to. But maybe she's a broken stick by nature."

"I don't think so," Sheila protested. "I think the spirit has been stamped out of her. And you know, she wouldn't be bad-looking in the right dress."

"I don't like the petite type," he told her.

She came back to her original request, after giving him a grin of recognition for the oblique compliment he had just paid her. "I'm still waiting to hear the story of your life. I never knew people who talked about themselves as little as you and Angela. I don't know anything about you. Give."

"O.K.," he agreed, rolling over on his back and clasping

his hands behind his head. "I was born in North Dakota, and my father raised cattle, and—"

She laughed. "You got that far the first time you tried. Go on from there."

But he didn't get a chance. Elise Ferrier had, in her quiet, unobtrusive way, come up to them and was speaking in a frightened, breathless voice: "You're one of the nurses, aren't you. Someone told me you were."

Sheila scrambled to her bare feet, her bathing cap dangling from one hand. "But of course. Miss Dorrance. Can I do something for you, Miss Ferrier?"

The girl's voice was more frightened and breathless than before, but she managed to make it say, "It's my mother. Her heart, I suppose. She just crumpled up suddenly and seems to be in awful pain. If you—"

Sheila was all nurse now. She had pulled her jacket on and was fastening the buckles of her shoes. "Clay," she ordered with the efficiency of experience, "go call the doctor. He'll be in the infirmary I think, or Rose will know where to find him. Now, Miss Ferrier."

The Ferrier girl had gone to pieces, rubbing her hands together as if she were washing them. Tears ran down her pale unmade-up face now that she had got help. Sheila patted her shoulder and led her back to her mother's side.

Mrs. Ferrier was, as the girl had reported, drawn over, her arms close about her as if they could brace her against pain. There was sweat on her yellowish face. Sheila touched the woman's almost hidden wrist and found it clammy cold even in the warm, tropical air.

"I'm Miss Dorrance, the nurse on board, Mrs. Ferrier," she began just as crisply as if she were wearing her uniform instead of the rather flamboyant blue bathing suit. "The

doctor will be here in a moment. Miss Ferrier, has your watch a second hand?"

The tiny jeweled watch didn't have enough face to accommodate anything more than the two conventional hands, and Sheila's own watch was in her cabin, so she had to give up any notion of taking the ill woman's pulse with any accuracy, though she could tell that it was racing. If Mrs. Ferrier knew that Sheila was there, she gave no sign of it, but her daughter looked at the nurse gratefully. Sheila went on studying the patient. Heart attack? It didn't look quite like that to her, but she'd wait for Peter Stowe.

When he came, Peter gave one look at Mrs. Ferrier, then lifted her in his arms and strode away toward sick bay, her daughter, Sheila, and Clay trailing behind them. Gently, he laid the patient on one of the empty beds and leaned over her to begin his examination.

She was still bent over as with a cramp. Her face still wore the contorted, yellow look. Sheila thought of appendicitis, then thrust the thought from her. The Ferrier girl had said heart.

After a moment, the older woman gave a little sigh and relaxed, closing her eyes. Peter was taking her pulse. Rose had joined the group about the bed.

In the midst of the pulse-taking, Mrs. Ferrier struggled to a sitting position and looked about her.

"What's that man doing there?" she demanded, her eyes fixed on the recumbent figure of A. Carleton Bentz.

"He's ill, Mrs. Ferrier," Peter Stowe answered. "There are folding walls that divide the room into several when necessary, but we didn't take the time since your case seemed acute."

Her eyes had moved to Clay and were, if anything, even more critical. "And this person. These strangers. And you, young woman in the bathing suit, what are you doing here?"

"I'm a nurse," Sheila announced somewhat uncertainly. "Your daughter—"

With pain that would have been evident to the most casual eye, Mrs. Ferrier pulled herself to her feet and stood, swaying a little and holding on to the head of the bed. "My daughter has a tendency to be hysterical. I had a slight cramp which seems to have grown easy now. I never had treatment from a strange doctor. I have medication from my own doctor in our cabin. Come, Elise."

Leaning rather heavily on her daughter's arm, she made an exit like a stage veteran, holding herself stiffly upright.

"B-but— But—Doctor, that woman's really ill," Sheila heard herself protesting.

Peter Stowe nodded as he looked at the retreating figures. "But she will have none of me. You heard her. And I'll give her a blue ribbon for courage. She's still in pain, though it has eased off some. She'll be back unless I miss my guess."

"Angina?" Sheila asked.

He swung about, astonished. "No. What made you think of that?"

"The severity of her pain. And the girl said heart trouble," she explained.

He shook his head. "I'm sure it isn't, though I certainly had little enough time to make certain. My guess, and mind you, it's only a guess, is that it's appendicitis."

"It could rupture," Rose said.

Peter nodded, his eyes back on the door through which the mother and daughter had disappeared. "Very likely, if it hasn't already. But I can't knock her down, drag her back, and examine her, can I?"

VII

SHEILA WAS awakened the next morning by what she thought of as "English"; not American but the soft *a*'s and the rhythm peculiar to the speech of those who live on the British Isles. Looking out through the porthole of sick bay, she was startled to see the blackest Negroes she had ever seen, naked from the waist up and wearing tattered and soiled white duck trousers, swarming the dock and shouting to each other. She laughed a little at the idea of Negroes speaking "English." The very idea seemed incongruous, though she understood perfectly in her mind that on Jamaica they would.

It was some time before seven, when she would have to go on duty, but the sunshine outside was bright, the sky the sort of blue the poets sang about, the clouds as white as fresh gardenias. Even though she had not really slept well as she would have in her own bed, she was used to nights when her subconscious was always alert for any movement of her patient, and as such nights went, last night had been an especially good one. She did her hair over, brushed her teeth and thought longingly of how good a shower would seem. And how good it would be to go out and walk on the dock.

But this was her twenty-four hours on duty that came at the end of the week each time she and Rose changed shifts. Still, she had tonight and Kingston to look forward to, and the day would pass. Mr. Bentz was still sleeping, and she went to the porthole again to look out.

Peter joined her there.

"Going to be a perfect day for our tourists," he said when their low-voiced greetings were done.

"Yes," she agreed wistfully. "The way it looks now, it

couldn't be lovelier. Are you going out on the town with the others?"

He shook his head. "It's my intention to try to keep our friend Bentz sober if it is at all possible. Another toot like the last two, and we could have a burial at sea."

Sheila looked at the sleeping figure. "He really doesn't look very well, does he? But can you keep him there when we are ashore? Won't he be up and at 'em as soon as he's dismissed?"

Peter studied his patient a moment before he answered. "He would if he were dismissed, but I don't intend to dismiss him."

"Can we even keep him in sick bay?" she asked. "If he knows we're in port, isn't he going to be out of here? He's really about as well as when you dismissed him before."

The doctor chuckled. "In the first place, he's not going to know we are in Kingston if I can help it. It's my plan that to-day and tomorrow you'll keep up the sedation just as we did yesterday. It may not be the very best medical procedure, but we have to consider the circumstances. If he gets to a bar—or are they taverns in an English place like this?"

Sheila grinned at his sudden break into humor. "Or ale-houses, I imagine."

"To, get back to business, another drunk is just what the doctor didn't order. We'll keep him under both our eyes and dismiss him when we get out of port." He grinned at her roguishly.

Rose appeared just then dressed for the street in a big hat for shade, carrying a straw bag and gloves, her slim feet in straw sandals.

Sheila looked at her half enviously. "I must say you look like a Southern voyage."

Rose smiled. "I'm glad you approve. I got all this on the last trip. I guess there won't be any junk to add this time, but you never know. What time is the tour starting?"

"Ten, I think. You're dressed early," Peter told her.

"I'm not going with the mob," she told him. "I've tried that. I thought I'd go see what there's to see all by myself."

"A good-looking woman like you?" he teased. "If I didn't have to keep an eye on A. Carleton Bentz, here, I'd beau you out myself."

Her eyes twinkled. "Fresher men than you have tried," she assured him.

Breakfast arrived, and Rose, smiling a little at herself, took off her hat and put her bag and gloves beside it, and sat down with the other two. "You know, I feel excited, almost the way I used to when I was a kid, as if something wonderful might happen today. I swear, I don't even sound like myself."

The other two laughed, but it was Peter who spoke. "Could be this is your real self instead of that other one."

She was more serious now, but still there was not the sting in her voice that both Sheila and Peter had heard there before. "Now you're making like a psychiatrist. Nope. That other one is the real me, all right."

"Anyhow," Sheila broke in, "I hope something that's wonderful does happen. It certainly looks like a good day for it."

Rose had been gone for a long time, and the last of the tours had just disappeared from the dock when Carleton Bentz roused.

"I want a drink," he announced hoarsely, his words still a little slurred, his face belligerent.

Peter came to him at once. "Sure. A very diluted one. You've sort of worked yourself into the hospital by tieing on too big a one, my boy. Take it easy now."

But A. Carleton had no intention of taking it easy. He

reared up in bed and looked about him wildly. "I'm on a boat. I didn't know I was on a boat."

Again Peter's voice was soothing. "Sure you did. We're on a Caribbean cruise. Remember? It was in Havana that you had too good a time."

The man wasn't going to be eased back to bed that easily. He shook Peter's hands from him and tried to stand. But the effort was too much for him, and he fell back. There was a frightened look on his pale face, and the circles under his eyes darkened. "I want a drink, I tell you," he muttered, then began to swear at the top of his voice.

At Peter's order Sheila poured a little whiskey into a glass, added water and the sedative he had prescribed. The sick man reached for it eagerly with a trembling hand, brought it to his mouth, and took a deep drink, the glass rattling against his teeth. Hardly a second later, he had spat out what remained in his mouth, flung the glass against the opposite wall, and begun to swear. "What are you trying to do to me? Poison me?" he shouted.

He made it to his feet this time and stood there swaying. "Somebody's hired you to kill me. Somebody thinks he'll inherit my money, eh? I tell you, you'll never get away with it. I'm no fool. Get my lawyer. Get—"

But he was still very weak and lurched against the bed. "Going to be sick," he decided. "Sick all over the place."

When that was over, Peter gave him an injection, and he and Sheila sat beside him until he was asleep.

"His heart's not doing too well, it seems to me," Sheila whispered, then, remembering the doctor and nurse relationship between herself and Peter, flushed. "Sorry. I shouldn't have said that. It wasn't my place."

"Protocol, maybe. But you'd be an idiot not to know that

that's a mighty tired heart. One of these times it's going to conk out on him in the midst of one of these celebrations."

Sheila nodded. She knew she was supposed to be impersonal and detached about patients, but she'd never quite managed it. She was sorry for Mr. Bentz. She'd have said, just hearing about him, that he had everything, but he must be utterly unhappy. And now his heart was in serious condition.

Peter watched her sorrowful face and spoke after a moment. "It's too pretty a day to stay cooped up like this. Go outside and walk up and down for a half-hour or forty-five minutes. He's all right now. And then you can let me get a bit of sun. All right?"

She took up his offer with eagerness. She felt that she would give anything to fill her lungs with the air outside, to take long strides and swing her arms and get the whole unpleasant scene she had just passed through entirely out of her mind.

It was on the second time around the deck that she caught sight of the Ferriers coming toward their deck chairs. Though the sun was warm, almost hot, the daughter bore a heavy-looking deck blanket on one arm. Her mother leaned on the other. Sheila was surprised to see the mother out at all, but there she was, making slow but determined progress. By the time Sheila came abreast of them, Elise had seated and covered her mother with the blanket and was looking out rather wistfully at the town beyond the waterfront. Sheila smiled and spoke.

"I'm glad to see that you're feeling better, Mrs. Ferrier."

The haughty matron bowed rather stiffly in recognition of the greeting but made no other response. The girl, somewhat timidly, said, "Thank you, Miss Dorrance."

Sheila moved on. She wondered if she had been telling the

truth when she had said Mrs. Ferrier looked better. Her color was, if anything, worse than it had been the day before, and her face was drawn as if she suffered. The girl knew all this, Sheila thought, and was worried. How foolish the older woman's unbending standards were. She had been in too much pain to stand upright; yet she would not give in and allow a strange doctor to treat her.

"And she could die of peritonitis as a result," Peter said gravely when Sheila reported what she had seen on her return.

The evening was all that Sheila had dreamed it might be. She and Clay and Angela and her date for the evening had gone first, clad in evening dress as they were, to the market, where Sheila had fallen into the temptation of all tourists to buy all sorts of things offered there—things for gifts, things for herself: straw luncheon sets; flowers, shoes, and handbags; gay hats. They made quite a sizable set of bundles, which they decided to check at the hotel desk.

Dinner was delicious, and the band was excellent. As Clay had promised, they danced away a good part of the night, and not once was Sheila tired, nor did she remember that it had been twice around the clock since she had been properly to bed.

Yet she was not entirely forgetful of the day past. Her mind kept turning back to Peter Stowe, and poor Carleton Bentz, and Rose Hampton. It was a wonderful evening, and she would remember it as long as she lived, but she wondered if Peter liked dining out and dancing and gay, frivolous things that belonged to his years. She realized there were a lot of things she would like to know about the young doctor.

VIII

THE TWO days in Kingston, Jamaica, were behind them. Mr. Bentz, pale and not entirely steady on his legs, had been dismissed with a warning against further drinking and orders to report daily for Rose had returned from her tour of Kingston her old sharp-spoken self. The medical staff of the *Southwind* relaxed into its more usual state of merely being on hand "in case of—"

It was wonderful, Sheila decided, to have her evenings free instead of her days. She still dined with the ship's officers, but immediately afterward she went back to her cabin, put on one of the two evening gowns she had brought with her, and waited for Clay to knock on the sick-bay door and take her up to the ballroom to dance. She had never been so gay.

Nobody could have called her the belle of the ball, but she never lacked for partners other than Clay, and since the evening they had spent at the Victoria, he had danced with no one else. That he was waiting for her to be released from her current partner gave her a warm and cherished feeling. The cruise was turning out to be all that she had wished.

But tonight Clay was less patient about these other partners than he had been heretofore, and before the evening was over he firmly directed Sheila's steps to the deck. She was glad for her light evening wrap, for though there was no sharpness in the southern breezes, it was cool. They stood for a while at the rail, resting on their elbows and watching the flow of phosphorous angling out from the boat.

At first they talked idly, comparing Havana and Kingston, each an exotic port in its own way. "Spanish," Sheila insisted,

"is a lot more foreign than anything English can ever be. England's more like a part of the United States that you don't happen to live in. Different but not really foreign."

Clay shook his head. "The Spanish are different all right, and when I'm away from English people and English ways of doing things, I find myself thinking much as you do. Then I get into one of these English ports down here and see English people and the way they do things, the way they think, and they're not like us at all. More different, in a way, than people who speak a different language. It always makes me mad." He laughed. "Most unreasonable, I'll admit. They've got a right to be different, having grown away. Still it irritates me as much as if they had fooled me on purpose. I'm the same way about Angela. Because she's a member of the family brought up the same way I was, I expect her to be a lot more like me than she is."

Sheila frowned at him, trying to make it a mock severity, yet wondering if what she was saying was not true. "That's pretty overbearing, isn't it? Suppose Angela wanted you to think like she does?"

He laughed again. "Oh, she does, and I don't, and that surprises her and rubs her the wrong way. But I'm older, and I—"

She laughed, too. "You are an illogical creature. The English ought to be like the Americans because you are an American. And Angela ought to be like you because you are older."

"Oh, I admit that it's really because I'm me," he agreed. "And that it's for that reason I'd rather live among the Spanish. I don't expect them to be like me, and they know that I'm a crazy American and would be disappointed if I turned out to be like them."

"You like the Spanish better than the English?" Sheila

probed. It seemed very important just now that she find out everything she could about Clay and what made his world go round.

"N-no. Not like them better. I'd just rather live with them. You see—"

But he didn't finish his sentence, and Sheila didn't prompt him. They stood there in silence, watching the brilliant stars that made the sky seem even lighter than it was by day, and the bright, silver water that made a wake for the *Southwind*. After a time it became a somewhat uncomfortable silence.

Sheila, thinking how much easier it was to sit silent with Peter Stowe, and crediting the fact to their having the subject of medicine in common, hunted for a new line of conversation. After a long, awkward moment, they both spoke at once.

"Sheila," Clay said in a rather tense voice, and added nothing to the name.

"I have been thinking—" Sheila began, then, when the tone in which Clay had spoken her name came through to her, forgot what she had been thinking. *I'm not ready to be even a little bit serious*, she thought in mild panic *Clay's sweet, and we do have fun together, but I don't really know much about him, not enough even for "going steady."* She used the expression of her high school days, smiling a little at the thought.

But Clay didn't want to know what she was thinking. He took her in his arms and kissed her, gently, urgently, then passionately. It left Sheila shaken. He had kissed her before, but they had been light, gay kisses. This was different.

She shook her head as she withdrew from his arms. Her voice wasn't quite steady or her tone nearly so light as her words. "I—wasn't quite expecting that," she said.

"But you were cooperative," he protested, an overtone of triumph coloring his words.

"Y-yes," she agreed, doubtfully. "But it has occurred to me that we don't know each other very well."

He shook his head at her. Even there in the dimly lighted stern of the boat she could see that his eyes were full of laughter. "I feel as if I knew you very well, my cautious darling. My life's an open book. What information do you want on me? I'm single, and always have been. I'm a fairly solid citizen, and my folks belong to that category, too. I'm healthy and—"

It was Sheila who shook her head now. "It isn't facts I'm talking about, Clay, and you know it. We've been having such good times together. Let's don't rush things. Let's sort of let everything go along as it is for a while."

He laughed at that. "Excuse my saying it, but you sound just like a girl."

She laughed, too, then. "Anything else you'd rather I'd be?" she asked pertly.

After a moment he grew more serious. "If you feel I'm still a stranger, and it's not facts you want, what do you want to know?" he asked.

Sheila was puzzled how to answer. "The—the things you know about people you've known a long time, I think, and very well. Their moods and what they mean, what worries them and what makes them angry, the things they like to do, what the expression on their faces mean."

His eyes were still somewhat amused. "Things I like to do," he mused. "I like taking you out on the town. I like dining with you. Dancing with you's wonderful. And I particularly like kissing you."

He might have repeated his earlier kiss then—Sheila wasn't as reluctant as her head had bidden her be—had not

someone appeared to starboard. It was a girl, bearing down on them in great haste. As she drew nearer, Sheila recognized Elise Ferrier. She was trembling all over, and her face was as pale as its new tan would allow it to be. She burst anxiously into speech.

"It's Doctor Stowe," she began, rather incoherently. "He's sent me for you. He wants you down there in the infirmary at once."

"B-but, it's your night off," Clay protested to Sheila.

Elise burst into tears. "It's my mother. She's had another of those attacks, and Dr. Stowe wants to operate. Oh, I don't know what to do."

Clay, who stood nearer to her, patted her shoulder. "Buck up, honey. You're going to have to be the head of the house for a while, and crying won't help."

She wiped her eyes on the backs of her hands. "No. Only I've had no experience at making decisions. M-mother—"

Sheila put an arm around the sobbing girl. "Come along, Elise. Making decisions isn't so hard once you get the hang of it, and if I were you, I'd do exactly what Dr. Stowe advises. I haven't known him long, but long enough to know he's a very capable doctor. He wouldn't be advising an operation unless he was absolutely sure it was necessary." She had spoken with a great deal of conviction, so much so that it sounded strange in her own ears. She *was* sure that Peter was a good doctor, and she wondered a bit just how she was so sure. He'd really not had a difficult case since she had known him.

"I'll come along, too," Clay suggested. "There might be something I can do."

As soon as she entered sick bay, Sheila noted the bustle of activity. The engineer's second mate was standing on a ladder in the middle of the room rigging up a strong lamp, and

two spotlights were being placed by two of the crew. Rose was taking instruments out of the sterilizer and laying them out in operating-room style. Two others of the crew moved a long table into the center of the room. To one side, Peter Stowe bent over Mrs. Ferrier, preparing her for surgery.

Sheila stopped beside him. "I'll be with you as soon as I can get into uniform," she promised.

His voice was sharp, crisp. "Make it snappy," he ordered.

Elise and Clay hovered in the doorway, both of them looking somewhat like uninvited guests at a children's party, only pale and uneasy. Mrs. Ferrier was green and drawn and reduced by pain to a dependence that probably she had never known. Her eyes were glazed by the sedation she had already had, and one white, well-manicured hand clung to the doctor's white-coated uniform.

Like a fireman who has heard the bell, Sheila disappeared into her cabin, and was back in an improbably short time, her fresh uniform crackling as she moved. "What now?" she asked Rose, seeking orders.

"Appendectomy. It burst, just as doc thought it might. I'll administer the anesthetic, and you'll assist Dr. Stowe," she summarized briefly. "You can take over here." Rose shot out the words as if they were bullets. Sheila looked at her calm but intent face and nodded. "I'll wash up."

Peter moved toward the door, and Sheila could hear him speaking urgently to Elise, "I'm no more eager to perform an operation at sea than you are to have me do it, Miss Ferrier. But neither would I like to see your mother die of peritonitis. And she might in spite of modern drugs with that drainage from a burst appendix."

Clay had a brotherly arm about the frightened girl now. "An appendix operation isn't such a serious one any more, Elise," he said. "You just depend on Dr. Stowe. He'll do a

bang-up job, and your mother will be as right as rain in a few days. You'll see."

Elise was clinging to his hand with the same helplessness her mother had showed a moment before toward Dr. Stowe. She turned tear-wet eyes up to Clay's face. "You'll stay with me? Until it's over?"

"Until it's over," Clay promised.

Elise nodded to Dr. Stowe. "Then go ahead," she said.

Gently, Clay led the girl out into the hall and found her a comfortable chair.

IX

SHEILA HAD operation-room nerves. She had had surgery training at St. Catherine's of course, but that was some time ago and was subtly different. She wondered about Rose and moved close enough to her to ask, "Are you an anesthesiologist?"

Rose's voice was rougher and more abrupt than ever. "I've never done it before."

So that was that. Sheila wondered wryly if Peter Stowe had ever removed an appendix, if his hands were as cold and damp as hers. He certainly looked confident enough, standing there at the sink, washing up. She moved forward with his gown, tied it in the back, and held out powdered rubber gloves.

The workmen who had been busy about the room took their ladder and tools and departed, looking back over their shoulders as if they were afraid they might be kept there.

CRUISE NURSE

Peter was directing Rose in arranging the anesthetic apparatus now, his voice low and calm. Then he approached Sheila and looked at her sharply. "You all right? You've done surgery?"

She wasn't all right. She was tremulous inside, almost as frightened as she had been before her first operation. But she had managed to get through that, and she would get through this somehow. She managed to smile a little. "Quite all right, thank you. And I had operation training not too long ago. Do you know about her heart, Peter? Elise says it's very bad."

He shook his head at that. "I never tested one with a stronger or more regular beat. The girl asked me about that, too, and I told her, barring something unforeseeable, that was one thing we didn't have to worry about. And she can take antibiotics. The girl knew that."

The captain arrived just then, accompanied by two stewards. The older man wore an anxious face.

"This going to be all right?" he asked, his voice a little hoarse. "I can manage a storm, or trouble with a ship, but this—well, I'll just have to leave it in your hands, and I'm not used to that. I don't like it."

"No sir. But you wouldn't want me to be anxious about your running the ship." Peter smiled amiably at him.

The captain clapped him on the shoulder. "I see young Masters is looking after Miss Ferrier. You have my best wishes and my trust, boy. Do your best. These are the boys you asked for. They are at your service."

Mrs. Ferrier was not entirely unconscious, but she was no longer fighting the idea of receiving services from strangers—or anything at all. Instead, she floated in a haze in which nothing was of any importance. Under the doctor's instruc-

tions, the stewards lifted her from the bed in which she lay and carried her to the improvised operating table.

Carefully, Rose administered the anesthetic. Peter talked to Mrs. Ferrier until she slipped away into unconsciousness, then checked her blood pressure and her pulse for one last time. "Keep what check you can on them, Miss Hampton," he ordered briskly, and turned to Sheila.

She had spent the short interlude checking the instruments, naming them over to herself as though they weren't entirely familiar, in case that, under the strain and strangeness, she would not be able to connect instrument with the doctor's demand quickly enough. Now the waiting was over.

In a firm, low voice Peter called for his scalpel. Sheila clapped it into his hand. A moment later the incision lay open, scarcely three inches of rosy flesh beginning to ooze blood. The trembling inside calmed down, and Sheila shifted unconsciously into an automaton, efficiently following the doctor's orders. She watched his long sensitive fingers push aside the first, the second, then the third layer of muscles, saw him insert an instrument into that tiny opening and clip out the offending appendix. Something within her rejoiced as it does in any workman when he sees another do a job skillfully and confidently.

Rose reported in an expressionless voice on blood pressure and heartbeat. Sheila could almost believe that she was back at St. Catherine's. Quickly, Peter finished what he had begun. She did not know how long it had been, but it seemed to her that the time had been incredibly short. And finally Peter Stowe stepped back from the table, stripped the gloves from his hands, and mopped his forehead with the sleeve of his white gown.

"I'll mop up," Sheila offered.

"We'll see to recovery," Peter added. "Are those two boys the captain lent us still out there?"

He took off his gown now, rolled it up, and flung it into the corner of the room. Rose went about turning off the glaring lights, leaving only the subdued ones which usually burned all night. Peter went outside, announced that the worst was over, though he did not think Elise ought to see her mother just yet, and motioned the stewards into the big room once more. Again he directed their moving Mrs. Ferrier, and then she lay breathing stertorously in one of the hospital beds.

Sheila set about cleaning up, replacing instruments in the sterilizer, putting soiled linen into a hamper, even mopping up the floor. The stewards took away the table, and suddenly the room was so silent that the patient's breathing seemed twice as loud as it had been before. Even Sheila's muffled sigh as she stood up and stretched echoed.

"I've helped with a whole morning of operations, some of them with complications, and not been so beat," she announced softly.

Peter grinned. "I know just what you mean. But nary a complication, thank God."

"What is this about her heart?" Sheila asked, unbinding her hair and shaking it out into a semblance of its usual style.

"I dunno," Peter answered. "Unless it's a myth to keep that mouselike daughter in complete subjection. I certainly found no trace of such a thing. Maybe her heart beats extra fast by way of a tantrum and she's convinced that she's dying. I've known women like that."

"I've heard of 'em," Sheila agreed.

The three of them sat there for a while, Rose beside Mrs. Ferrier's bed, just relaxing. Slowly, Mrs. Ferrier's breathing grew quieter. It would not be long now before consciousness began to return.

Peter glanced at his watch. "It's getting pretty late. Or early. I think I'll let Elise Ferrier in to see that her mother's not too badly off, then send her to bed. She ought to be getting some sleep."

"You too, Dorrance," Rose told Sheila. "Seven o'clock comes early."

Sheila yawned. "I'll take two hours," she said, "then I'll spell you, Rosie. You must be as tired as I am."

"But you've got tomorrow," Rose protested. "Tonight was my duty."

"I can nod during the long day," Sheila said.

Rose snorted. "I wouldn't count on it, my girl. This one looks like a difficult patient, ordering about no matter how sick she is."

Sheila looked at the flushed face of the older woman and grinned. "I wouldn't be surprised. But just the same, I'll be back in two hours."

Clay stood by the door while Peter ushered Elise to her mother's bed. The doctor was speaking soothingly. "It couldn't have gone smoother. She's going to feel a great deal better most of the time now. That appendix has been bothering her for a long time. She's not out from under the anesthetic yet, so of course she won't know you, but you have my word for it, she's going to be fine."

Elise stood looking down at her mother, who seemed strangely shrunken as she lay there with her white hair in pigtails. Suddenly, she stooped and kissed her mother's cheek, then, blinded by her tears, stumbled back toward Clay.

Sheila watched the two leave without speaking to the others in the room. A wry smile twisted her tired face.

"You know," she said, "it has just occurred to me that I may have done myself out of a very satisfactory escort, beau, boy friend, or what have you. I've yet to see a strong man

who could withstand an oh-aren't-you-marvelous look like that one from a weak and helpless female."

Peter laughed. "Think nothing of it, Sheila. Mama will be conscious tomorrow and calling for daughter's ministrations constantly. See if she isn't."

Sheila turned that picture over in her mind and wasn't entirely pleased with it. "I'd hate to win by default," she said, and went off to bed and promptly to sleep.

X

MRS. FERRIER was sleeping quite naturally when Sheila came to relieve Rose. Peter Stowe was still sitting at the desk, writing letters, Sheila thought when she glanced at him. Rose was nodding in her chair, but Sheila was sure that her patient had to make but the slightest noise or movement when the other nurse would be wide awake again. She had, for some time, thought well of her fellow workers, but this experience had given her fresh proof of their efficiency, as well as the warm feeling that they had done good work as a team. She awakened Rose and sent her to bed, then spoke to the doctor.

"You might as well get some sleep yourself, Peter," she advised him. "Mrs. Ferrier is doing very well, isn't she?"

He nodded. "Even better than I had hoped."

"I'll call you if there's the least change," she promised.

Yet he did not leave at once, and she found herself sitting down to talk to him. "I was thinking while I dressed," she began, using the whisper which the sickroom demanded, "that

that poor Ferrier girl ought to have a few days to have fun in once in her life."

He chuckled. "I thought you were worrying about losing the boy friend to her."

She shrugged. "I guess I'm not honestly crazy about Clay after all, though you must admit that he's quite the best-looking thing you ever met."

"And rich, too, I should imagine," he suggested.

Sheila sighed a bit then. "And probably rich, too—the only rich man I ever met that wasn't positively ancient, or married, or completely uninterested in me. You know, Peter, I think I could have had him proposing this evening if I hadn't gotten cold feet."

"I thought from what you said last night it was Elise Ferrier who had broken into things," Peter countered.

"Well, she did, sort of," Sheila admitted. "But somehow I'd gotten the feeling that Clay and I were strangers after all. I kept remembering that we had known each other less than two weeks and that I really knew nothing about him. He's started to tell me about himself half a dozen times, but something always interrupts. I don't even know if he works, and, if he does, what at."

"And that matters?" Peter asked.

"M'h'm. Some," she mused.

"And how much money he has means more. Haven't you found out about that yet?" he teased.

"No. I—I haven't really thought about it much," she confessed. "We have fun together, and that seems to be all that matters."

He grinned at her. "Sheila Dorrance, you're a fraud. You're not honestly looking for a rich man. That's just the way you talk."

"Oh, yes, I am. Only I guess it just isn't Clay, and anyhow,

I keep thinking about that poor Elise and how she never has any fun or is allowed to be young, and it seems a shame to me. I thought we could arrange it so she could be out on deck by herself some while her mother is recovering."

"And how do you think that can be arranged," he asked, "Mrs. Ferrier being what she is? Do you want me to hypnotize her?"

"Sort of. Couldn't you go all full of authority and make hospital rules? For instance, visiting hours. The rest of the time Mrs. Ferrier must have complete rest. Wouldn't that work?"

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I suppose it could."

"And you could tell Mrs. Ferrier you were anxious about her delicate heart and—" she began.

He shook his head firmly. "No, I couldn't encourage her in believing something that I know isn't true, but she just might be the sort who believes in remaining in the hospital for a while after an operation. She might if it doesn't occur to her that her daughter is running around without supervision. If she thinks of that, she'll be out of here like a wildcat. Maybe tomorrow."

"Soon enough, you can bet your bottom dollar," Sheila agreed. "But maybe we can give that kid two or three days."

Sheila began her campaign shortly after seven the next morning, when Elise knocked on the door of sick bay. Elise had on no makeup, and there were dark shadows under her eyes. She was still almost as pale as she had been the night before, and she asked, in a breathless voice, running all the words together, "How is she this morning? I've been so anxious about her."

Sheila put her finger to her lips, tiptoed out, and closed the door behind her. Even so, she spoke in a low voice. "She's

been sleeping naturally and has no fever. Her heartbeat is strong and regular. She's fine, but she'll need rest most of today. You know that operation was quite late last night. I think she'll sleep most of the day. You may look at her if it will make you feel better, but try not to waken her."

She opened the door about a foot and allowed the daughter to peep in at her gently snoring mother, then closed it again, softly.

"She looks—just like she always does when she's asleep," Elise whispered.

Sheila nodded. "She's fine. You can come back about ten and talk to her for a half-hour if you like. The doctor's most insistent that she rest as much as possible. Now if I were you, I'd fix up as if you were going to a party and go to breakfast. The primping and the food ought to set you right up. And afterward I'd go take a brisk walk. You've had a strenuous night of it yourself."

Elise reacted as she usually did to orders. She nodded and dropped her head and muttered, "Yes. Yes. That sounds like a good idea. I'll do that."

Sheila returned to Mrs. Ferrier's bedside, shaking her head at herself, and smiling a little. *And now that I've got her mother off her back for a while, I set myself up as boss on the very same grounds Mrs. Ferrier probably set herself up on. Because I have the girl's good at heart. People are funny, and maybe I'm funnier than most.*

Still she hadn't convinced herself that it wouldn't do Elise good to be on her own for a few days.

And, indeed, the girl did look rosy and refreshed when she came in at ten to speak to her mother. Clay was with her. Sheila caught a glimpse of his dark head as he left Elise at the open door. Mrs. Ferrier, Sheila was glad to see, was

turned away, so, though she was awake, she couldn't see that quick clasp of hands.

Mrs. Ferrier did note, however, the high color of the girl's face. "Good morning, Elise," she greeted her daughter with a voice almost as strong and crisp as usual. "I must say you are looking unworried and well as anyone could wish."

Some of the girl's color faded under the sharpness of the words. Elise stooped and kissed her mother's cheek. Her voice was apologetic. "I have been worried, though. I waited outside the door most of the night, and I was here as soon as I could come this morning. I've been very anxious about you, Mother."

Mrs. Ferrier sniffed. "It's ten o'clock now."

"I told her, as I explained to you, Mrs. Ferrier, that the doctor was most insistent on your getting all the sleep you could and that we had to give you breakfast and a bath and clean up. I told her ten o'clock, Mrs. Ferrier."

Elise pulled up a chair and sat down. "I've been following a prescription, too, Mother. I had a cold shower, then breakfast, then a brisk walk around the deck three times. I feel better than I have in I don't know when. It's a beautiful morning."

But she didn't mention Clay Masters, Sheila noticed, neither as a part of last night nor this morning. Perhaps, Sheila thought, Elise wasn't quite so meek as she had seemed.

"I hope you aren't overdoing things, Elise," her mother warned. "You know I brought you on this cruise at doctor's orders. You were supposed to rest and have fresh air and sun."

"That's what I have been doing this morning, Mother. I'm sure Dr. Blake wouldn't disapprove of a little walking. I felt wonderful when it was time to come in."

Mrs. Ferrier looked her over with a disapproving eye. "You

should have had a sweater on, Elise. You know how easily you take cold."

"Yes, Mother," Elise agreed, dropping her eyes to her hands clenched tightly in her lap. "I forgot, but I will remember before I go out on deck again."

"And I hope you aren't getting entangled with all sorts of common people, child. I guess it is your father in you. A common streak. Either one of you would always talk to anybody who happened to be passing by. Water seeking it's own level, I suppose."

Elise's fresh color had all faded now. She looked, in spite of her soft pink sports dress, as subdued and colorless as she had this time the day before. Sheila glanced at her watch. The half hour wasn't up, but she spoke with the authority that her position lent her.

"The doctor wants your mother to rest, Miss Ferrier. Suppose you run along now and she can have another nap. You can come back this afternoon for another half-hour."

Rose came back from her cabin just before noon. She looked a bit puffy about the eyes but otherwise just as usual when she was not wearing her uniform, rather nondescript and lacking in style, though neat as a pin. She jerked her head in the direction of the patient and asked, "Asleep?"

Sheila nodded. "The doctor, too, as far as I know. The old lady's doing almost too well. She'll be back in her deck chair with Elise covered up beside her in two days."

"The girl been in?" Rose asked then, yawning unashamedly.

"Mama was quite up to bullying her, sick as she is," Sheila reported. "What she should wear and who she should talk to. I could throttle her."

"You don't know," Rose protested. "Maybe the girl likes being told what to do. Some people do, you know."

"I don't know it," Sheila answered in a dissatisfied tone. "That girl would be friendly if her mother would let her. She'd be healthy, too, only the old lady's bent on making a hypochondriac out of her."

"I still say, you never can tell from a short acquaintance," Rose insisted. "Take the man I married. I think I told you his family had money? His mother was just such a one as that. When he was in the hospital—he'd been in an automobile wreck and was all broken up and I was nursing him—she'd come into the hospital and bully him until his face would get red, and after she'd gone he'd have a temperature. He never said anything to me about it, but I was sure he hated it."

She paused and looked out of the porthole as if she had completely forgotten Sheila. Then, after a moment, she took up the story again.

"He kept on seeing me after he was discharged from the hospital, and once we ran into his mother on the street. She didn't say much to me, but I wasn't left wondering if she liked the idea of me for her precious son. She dressed him down proper when he got home, and he came along and insisted that I marry him that very day. And you know where we went when we came back from our honeymoon? Right back where he could hide under his mother's skirts. And she set out to make a lady of me. Only I have my own ideas of what I want to be like. I told Porter how I felt, and he said he knew. If I'd just be patient. Well, I was for about a year. He hadn't done anything or said anything—no more to his mother than to me, far as I knew. One day I had enough. I walked out. Haven't seen anything of either one of them since. Maybe your little friend's like Porter. Honestly likes having somebody telling her how deep to breathe."

"And you never let him know where you were or anything after you left?" Sheila was wide-eyed with amazement.

CRUISE NURSE

"When you're through with a thing, you might as well be through," Rose said, shrugging, "and I was through. I left town and worked as a chambermaid in a hotel until this job turned up. I have a friend at the registry, and she promised to keep it all secret. She got me the job with this ship."

"How—how long has it been?" Sheila asked, wondering if she was rushing in where angels would fear to tread.

"Going on two years," Rose answered, and her tone managed to be suddenly breezy. "Well, that's my sob story for today. Don't know what made me unload it on you except that playing god to one of these sad birds may be dangerous and the last thing they want. I guess it's time to eat, and I missed breakfast this morning."

XI

THE NEXT DAY the *Southwind* docked at Martinique. Sheila, who had been interested in the British accents of the stevedores in Kingston, had a fresh surprise in store for her here. Most of the stevedores here were women in full, bright-colored skirts and ornately tied headdresses. And they sang lustily in French, their voices high-pitched, yet nasal. They made an exhilarating picture in the clear tropical sunlight, with carefully wrapped bundles balanced expertly on their heads.

But she had no time to wonder what the bundles contained. Mrs. Ferrier was calling fretfully from across the room.

"I am most uncomfortable, Miss Dorrance. I'm sure such a thing is unnecessary. I should have known better than to let

some inexperienced young whippersnapper experiment on me. I should have forbidden it."

Reluctantly, Sheila returned to the bedside and spoke soothingly, not mentioning the fact that Mrs. Ferrier had not given permission for her operation nor been in any condition to refuse it. "People are nearly always uncomfortable the third day after an operation, Mrs. Ferrier. It's gas, and it does make you uncomfortable. Dr. Stowe will be in to see you soon, but right now he has suggested you get up and walk some. It will relieve you, I'm sure."

Mrs. Ferrier had a good deal to say about the new-fangled notion of getting a person up when she knew she was too ill to move, and Sheila kept on with patience and the firmness that is part of a nurse's professional equipment until she had her patient on her feet and walking across the floor. The exercise did relieve Mrs. Ferrier some, but still she was annoyed and impatient with Elise when that young woman appeared to visit her mother. Sheila motioned the girl out of the room when Mrs. Ferrier began to scold and made her report.

"You know what they say about an invalid. If he's cross, he's not too terribly sick. Your mother will be feeling better tomorrow. She doesn't need you here to scold. It only excites you. The crowd is leaving now for sight-seeing. Have you ever been to Fort de France before?"

Wordlessly, Elise shook her head.

"Then run along and see it," Sheila directed her, remembering Rose's words of the day before about interfering in someone else's life. Still, Sheila was not ashamed that she was ordering Elise Ferrier about. "Who knows when you'll get here again, and they tell me it's a fabulous town."

Elise nodded and fled.

About four that afternoon Rose appeared in the doorway,

looked at Sheila's tired, strained face and grinned. "Seems to me you were the one who sent me off to bed before day this morning. Now I'm returning the favor, sort of. Get your glad rags on, and you too, doctor. They're having their pre-Easter festival out there. I was here for it last year, and it's very colorful."

"Mardi Gras?" Sheila asked. "But I thought that ended the night before Ash Wednesday."

"It does everywhere but here," Rose explained.

"Yes. And it's Planter's Day as well. Market day, for the uninformed," Rose added. "You'll enjoy it all. Hurry now."

The market was not far from the docks, and Peter and Sheila found it by following their ears. The cries of the sellers, each in a tiny enclosure with his goods, were as enchanting as the sight of them. Several were mere girls, though there were also toothless grandmothers. They advertised shrimp and yams and breadfruit and bananas. Others who strolled up and down with great straw baskets balanced on their heads peddled more varied fruits and vegetables. One woman even had a basket full of dolls in the same holiday dress as her own.

Sheila took one of the dolls in her hands and tried out her schoolgirl French on the smiling woman trying to sell them. The woman shook her head and replied in a spate of French that sounded unlike any French Sheila had ever heard. Once again she spoke a hesitant sentence that brought an unintelligible answer, and a laugh that was familiar in Sheila's ears. She swung about and faced Clay, his sister Angela, Elise, and the young engineer's mate from the *South wind*. It was Clay who had laughed.

"It's not any sort of French you learned at school, Sheila, or even the sort you might have learned in Paris. They have

their own version here. You wanted to know about the costume?"

Sheila nodded. "They're beautiful, aren't they? I don't see how any woman could be anything but lovely in one of them. Do they wear them all the time?"

Clay shook his head. "We were lucky to find them today. It's because it's holiday time. They dress like anybody else other times. The madras—that's the headdress—is a four-cornered scarf that tells the state of a lady's heart. You count the points that are left showing. If there are two or three tied down, that is a sign her heart is engaged. This girl with only one point sticking up is not encouraging anybody. She's either betrothed or married."

Peter laughed. "I see a fetchingly pretty one over there with four points in the breeze. This might bear looking into."

Sheila reached out and tucked her hand into the crook of his arm. "You came with me, doctor," she reminded him demurely.

Angela had come forward and was studying one of the dolls, too. "I'll take two of these, I think. That embroidered blouse and the bright plaid overskirt tucked up like that might give me an idea for—oh, maybe an evening dress, later."

Sheila looked at her questioningly.

"I'm a dress designer. Didn't you know?" Angela asked. "I've just got my spring and summer line off and am resting before going to work on the fall things. Only I guess a designer never really rests. She's always looking for new ideas, and this might be one."

"And you designed all those wonderful clothes you wear?" Sheila asked.

Angela looked mischievous. "I did indeed. And I wear

them with the idea that somebody might get to like them enough to buy a copy back in New York."

Sheila looked at her half enviously. "You're the best advertisement I can imagine. But you're awfully young to be a designer, aren't you?"

Angela nodded. "I'm just a beginner, really, but someday I hope to have a shop of my own. How much did you say the dolls were, Clay?"

When the bargaining was done, each of the girls had a doll in her hand, and they turned away to continue their walk through the market, past trestle tables where vari-colored gerbera daisies and freckled tiger lilies, roses, and orchids stood in bright-colored pails.

Peter touched Sheila's elbow. "May I buy you an orchid? And maybe we could take one back to Rose?"

Clay protested. "Don't do that. We can take the girls out to ride in the country, and they can pick them wild."

Elise, who had been looking rather uneasy, said, "I'm afraid mother is already expecting me."

Peter shook his head. "I hate to disappoint your conscience, Miss Ferrier, but she's been sleeping most of the afternoon. She's more comfortable and the sleep is good for her. I think, too, that the day in town has been good for you."

She flushed under his admiring eyes. "It's been a wonderful day. I can't remember when I've had such a good time. I'll never forget it."

"There's really no reason you shouldn't stay for the evening," Peter urged her. "It's tonight that the festival is at its height. There'll be dancing in the street. At least stay and have dinner with us. And pick an orchid growing along the side of the road."

And she was persuaded, obviously as much by her own desire as by Clay's cordial insistence.

The countryside was beautiful, with ferns as big as trees, with oranges and grapefruit and bananas growing in every farmer's back yard. Sure enough, their driver-guide stopped at the edge of a swampy spot and let them get out and pick orchids to wear that evening.

Elise shook her head at the suggestion that she take one to her mother. "She'd be hurt if she knew I'd been enjoying myself all day when she was lying there ill. I—I think I won't call it to her attention."

Dinner was late, and they had it at a sidewalk cafe—snails, roast duck with orange sauce, a salad mixed at their table, and finally chestnuts for dessert. The meal took longer than any Sheila had ever eaten, yet it did not seem too long, for there was so much laughter and gay conversation. Like Elise, she was having a wonderful time.

Dancing in the main street began before they had left their table, the dancers coming streaming down the streets, flambeaus aflame, musicians gathering in impromptu groups and playing airs which the dancers sang. Filled with the spirit of the holiday, the Americans rose and joined the others and were very late getting back to their ship.

In bed, in spite of the late hour, Sheila found herself wide awake. Clay had asked her to see Fort de France with him before Mrs. Ferrier's operation, and he had whispered to her when they had met at the market that he had been on his way to pick her up when he had caught sight of her. He had, after the tenets of good manners, given her more attention than anyone else all evening, but she had noticed that he usually found them a seat where he would be sitting beside Elise. There was also the way he danced with Elise. Their dancing together had a tender quality that Sheila could not help seeing. Clay's entire manner toward the other girl was protective.

Sheila weighed that manner of his. She and he had laughed together a good deal, had enjoyed being together, Clay as much as she, she was sure. But he had never, even on that night when he had kissed her and she had suspected that he was on the verge of asking her to marry him, treated her as he treated Elise.

He would have asked me, too, if she hadn't come along just then about her mother, she told herself. Then, more honestly, she remembered how she had felt. Reluctant and half-frightened.

Really, the mood had passed before Elise came, and it was just a mood, she admitted to herself. *For a second there after Clay kissed me, I was excited and crazy about him. But as soon as he got even a little serious, I started backing off. It was an instinctive feeling. And if I've lost him, it's nobody's fault but mine. I can't go blaming that poor rabbit of a girl, Elise.*

XII

THE *Southwind* left Fort de France the next morning at dawn. Mrs. Ferrier had had a good night and would undoubtedly have had her daughter once more in protective custody by the end of the next day, but for a quirk of nature. Spring is not the season for storms in the Caribbean, but during the evening that day the *Southwind* ran into a storm.

Sheila was on duty at Mrs. Ferrier's bedside and was feeling twice as glad as usual that she would soon be relieved; she had had almost no sleep the night before, and

Mrs. Ferrier, after the habit of those who have been quite ill and were recovering, was being more demanding than ever. The *Southwind* was a big ship, and Sheila had not yet noticed the swells that were beginning to make themselves felt. It was with a light step and a lighter heart that she set about righting the room and then sat down to bring her chart up to date.

She was making her entries in her clear, exact penmanship, and then her hand faltered as she broke out in a sweat the likes of which she had never felt before. Then her stomach seemed to rise from its customary place in a drunken lurch. Her throat filled, and a second heave would have had her acting like the traditional novice at sea. Swaying, she crossed the room and took out a bottle of ammonia and held it to her suffering nose.

Mrs. Ferrier chose that moment to awaken groaning. "I must have a pan at once," she moaned. "I'm very sick."

Sick herself beyond anything that had happened to her before in her whole life, a cold, sweat-dampened hand about her own throat, Sheila sought out the pan and brought it to her patient. Then she hunted a second and used it herself. It was thus that Peter found them, and Peter was as yellow, as gray-lipped, and as miserable as the two women.

By the time Rose came to the rescue, a Rose nauseated only to the point of being depressed and uncomfortable, there were three for her to minister to. Only a sprinkling of passengers appeared for dinner that evening, and only a few of them remained through all the courses of the meal.

The already busy stewards gave out Dramamine to the sick under Rose's direction. By morning everyone but Mrs. Ferrier was better.

During the night Mrs. Ferrier had moaned that at least she did not have to worry about Elise for a few hours, for the

girl could not do anything foolish while confined to her state-room with *mal de mer*.

"The child just doesn't seem to develop judgment," Mrs. Ferrier had confided to Rose in a comparatively quiet moment toward morning.

Rose felt that she could have told Mrs. Ferrier why her daughter was a little short when it came to separating the sheep from the goats. If Elise hadn't been allowed to make even minor decisions all her life, how could she be expected to develop judgment? But a question of that kind to a woman like Mrs. Ferrier would be wasted breath, the nurse decided.

It had been a very busy night, with practically no sleep on the *Southwind*, but Sheila began to feel a great deal better toward morning, slept for a while, and turning their planned schedule topsy-turvy, insisted that she should take the day shift. Peter, too, had recovered, with the help of his own prescription.

Mrs. Ferrier was no longer vomiting, but she insisted that she was as nauseated as ever. She lay with her eyes closed, her lips pressed close together, her hands unrelaxed beside her.

"But surely you're feeling better, Mrs. Ferrier," Sheila insisted, bending toward her.

Mrs. Ferrier did not look at her, but it was necessary to open her lips to speak. "I am never better after *mal de mer* until I have reached land again. I was having experience with such trouble before you were born, and I do not mean to have a chit of a girl telling me how to behave at this late date. A small glass of champagne would perhaps relieve me slightly, but I can assure you that I will know no real relief until I have my feet once more on terra firma."

Sheila turned to Peter, rolling her eyes up and shrugging

her shoulders. He motioned her to the other side of the room.

"Do you really think she's nauseated?" she asked. "She was vomiting rather badly in the beginning, and sick as I was myself, I was afraid she would tear open her incision, and I gave her Dramamine in a hurry. I don't believe she's really vomited since Rose gave her a second dose."

Peter nodded. "I was going to ask about that. Just queasiness isn't going to hurt her, and I'm afraid I'm not psychiatrist enough to convince her that if she stood up, went on deck, and breathed fresh air, she'd feel all right. Besides, the water's still pretty rough. She just might fall or be thrown against something, and that could be bad. She's doing very well right where she is—unless you can't stand it."

Sheila laughed. "I've had five to tend to, each as much of a pain as she is. I'll manage."

"How about your boy friend? Is he too sick to take over with our helpless young friend Elise? I wouldn't want to alienate your young man with money," Peter went on.

Sheila produced a smile too brilliant to be real and took on Mrs. Ferrier's stately tones. "My daughter Elise, like me, suffers from the first swell until we are once more on land."

Peter laughed. "You know, you're pretty good at that. Maybe you could do that imitation for the seaman's concert on our return trip."

Sheila made a face at him and was about to reply when Mrs. Ferrier's weak voice spoke. "If my head were wiped with *eau de cologne*, I am sure that I should feel some relief."

Sheila hastened to comply, and Peter came, too. The ministrations of both a doctor and a nurse ought to help even Mrs. Ferrier's determined miseries.

But Sheila's mind was busier than her hands. She'd definitely had a sinking feeling when Peter had urged her not to forfeit Clay's regard. The very idea of her being a dog-

CRUISE NURSE

in-the-manger over the two most attractive young men on the ship disgusted her. Yet the night before last, she had been too upset to sleep over Clay's possible defection. And now she was let down because Peter seemed willing that she be interested in Clay. This sort of thing was unlike her, she told herself, and then was not sure that it was.

The Dramamine Mrs. Ferrier had had made her drowsy, and she soon dropped off to sleep, but Sheila wasn't left to grow moody about what she was beginning to think of as her shortcomings. The door to the passageway outside opened just a narrow slit, and Elise's rosy face peeped in. Sheila put a finger to her lips to signal silence and slipped quietly out to join the other girl.

"I'm sure Mother is just miserable," Elise began, looking conscience-stricken, and yet not losing any of the glow she had brought with her. "I hope she hasn't hurt herself, after the operation and all."

"She's fine," Sheila told her. "She's been a little sick, but she's asleep now, and though she insists that she's still sick, I think it's left over from times when she was sick for days and she can't quite believe she isn't now. But look here. Aren't you one of the susceptible?"

Elise flushed and nodded. "I always have been at the least sign of weather. And to be honest, I began to feel uneasy yesterday afternoon. Clay rushed me to the steward who was doling out medication for seasickness, and by dinnertime I was fine. Sat up in that nearly empty dining room and ate every single course. And afterward Clay and I took a brisk walk around the deck all wrapped up in our raincoats. My face and hair got awfully wet, but I had a wonderful time. Later, we danced to records. The band was knocked out."

"It sounds like fun. I was sort of sick myself," Sheila admitted.

"Clay says," Elise began with a little happy chortle, "that the reason I've been sick before is that I just stuck in my cabin. That really I'm one of those people who might have been a Viking the way I love boats and everything about them. He says I'll probably never be sick again."

"Maybe you won't," Sheila told her, wondering if there would ever be a man who could make the difference in her that Clay had made in Elise. Up to now she'd known a lot of men whom she had liked, but she'd never known one she wanted to quote as if he had the final answer to every question. She guessed she wouldn't grudge Clay to the other girl if he meant that much to her.

"Sheila," Elise began hesitantly out of the moment of silence that surrounded them, "Clay was your friend. Is your friend. He'll want to be taking you dining and dancing as soon as you can get away from things here, won't he?"

Sheila gave her a smile and a quick hug. "I shouldn't think so," she said. "Clay and I had fun together, but we aren't in love with each other, if that's what you mean. I saw the other night in Fort de France that he was becoming very interested in you. Only—" She hesitated to go on with what she wanted to say. There was never any telling how a daughter might take even the slightest criticism of her mother no matter how much truth there was in what you said.

"Only what?" Elise insisted.

Sheila swallowed and plunged. "Your—mother isn't going to like him, is she?"

Only now did the bloom on Elise's face fade. It disappeared like mist before the sun, almost as if it had never been there. And she did not seem to be able to find anything to say.

Sheila tried again. "He doesn't belong to the exclusive set you and your mother do, does he?"

Even after Elise had wet her lips, she was unable to get a word out. She only shook her head.

Sheila cleared her throat. "You know, honey, sometimes the things we want in this world have to be fought for. You've never been much of a fighter, have you?"

Elise's eyes as she raised them to the younger yet more experienced girl were full of uncertainty. "N-no. I've never been a fighter at all. I hate rows. It's much easier to—just go along. I guess I'm just a coward and always have been."

Sheila took Elise's shoulder in her hand and shook her affectionately. "You have to find something worth fighting for sometime in your life, or you haven't done much living. Your mother may be here two more days. You think about—about things meantime, hear?"

XIII

EVEN BEFORE she began to suffer from seasickness, Mrs. Ferrier was difficult to convince she should be up and about for part of each day, and afterward, she was given to insisting that lifting her head from the pillow made her dizzy and sick.

"A humane man, a sensible man, wouldn't ask it," she told Peter.

Peter took that smiling. "I've never claimed to be a humane man, Mrs. Ferrier, but good medical practice says that continual exercise hastens healing. I think it would also say that fresh air would help seasickness. There's hardly a ripple on the water this morning."

Mrs. Ferrier did not open her eyes. "I am always seasick,

once I have begun to be, until I put foot to the ground, Dr. Stowe. I have traveled quite enough to know my own reactions, though I know you never can tell young people anything. They always know everything."

Peter allowed himself another smile. If he had ever met anyone who could not be told anything, he thought, it was Emily Ferrier. Without really meaning to, he asked a direct and tactless question. "How old are you, Mrs. Ferrier?"

The eyes she had been holding closed so long popped wide open now, and she gasped out the question he had already put to her. "How—how old am I?"

Peter nodded gravely, as if he had meant all along to ask just that. "I should like to have it for my records," he told her. "No question's really impertinent if a doctor asks it."

Mrs. Ferrier sighed. "No, I suppose not. I'm sixty-seven." Her eyes searched his face to see if he was surprised. She might be a tyrant, but she wasn't beyond vanity.

But he accepted her statement with a nod. "Then you're young enough to be certain your opinions are correct, aren't you?" he said, smiling.

She closed her eyes again and for a moment did not say anything. When she spoke, she seemed to have changed the subject entirely. "I was quite old when Elise was born—old to be having my first baby, that is—forty-two. My husband, Elise's father, died that same year. I had married very young, and Mr. Ferrier was a great deal older than I. It left me with—a great many decisions to make."

"And you were afraid you might make the wrong ones and therefore stuck to each all the more stubbornly," Peter ventured, for the first time understanding her and, because of that, feeling sorry for her. "You would let your doctor at home, the family physician you've spoken of, make decisions about your health, though, wouldn't you, Mrs. Ferrier?"

"Oh, yes," she said quickly.

"And I didn't do too badly when I operated, did I?" he went on in the same quiet voice.

She flushed at that, as if he had criticized her. "You did very well, Doctor," she said frostily.

"Then you will be willing to do as I direct, won't you?" he insisted. "You will sit up some this morning, and this afternoon you'll allow Miss Dorrance to help you take several steps. And tomorrow I think you should walk about the room, say twice?"

She was still exceedingly cool. "Dr. Fletcher would never suggest such a thing. When I had Elise's tonsils out, she was in the hospital two weeks and came home with a nurse."

"That was probably—twenty years ago? Before the Second World War?" he asked, then went on without asking for an answer. "I'll wager that Dr. Fletcher would see things quite differently now."

She spoke fretfully, going on with what she had said rather than answering his implied question. "When Elise was born, I was in the hospital three full weeks and didn't put my foot on the floor until I had been at home a week."

Peter's voice cracked like a whip. "Miss Dorrance, I want Mrs. Ferrier up in a chair for at least a half-hour immediately. See to it, please."

Mrs. Ferrier moved her head so that she might study the stern face. She saw no yielding there.

Sheila had moved up to the bedside quietly. "Come on, Mrs. Ferrier, I have a blanket over this chair—just a step or two from your bedside. And here's your dressing gown, which your daughter brought in yesterday. That's right. Just slip your arms into the sleeves."

There was no yielding in Sheila's voice, either. Mrs. Ferrier, with the nurse's help, sat up. Then more hesitantly, while

Sheila talked to her as a trainer might to a half-broken horse, she put her feet to the floor, stood up, took three steps, and seated herself in the prepared chair.

Only then did she sniff in self-pity. "Dr. Fletcher would never had expected this of me."

Sheila edged herself around behind the old lady and joined her hands above her own head in congratulation. The doctor winked at her, then addressed his patient. "Now that wasn't half-bad. You're quite comfortable, aren't you, Mrs. Ferrier?"

Mrs. Ferrier didn't answer, but she sat in the chair for the designated half-hour.

Elise made her daily visits to sick bay, cajoled her mother with perfectly truthful comments on how much improved she was in looks and how much progress Dr. Stowe and Miss Dorrance said she had made. Mrs. Ferrier insisted that she was still seasick, that her side was unbearably sore, and that she was sure to have adhesions.

Everything moved forward as smoothly as could be expected until the morning the *Southwind* docked in Trinidad. That day, Elise was early for her visit and wore such an air of suppressed excitement that her mother, as wrapped up as she was in her own illness, could not fail to notice.

Rose and Sheila had changed shifts the day before, and Rose was on duty now, Sheila in her cabin preparing to go into town with Second Mate Jack Collins. Mrs. Ferrier was as obedient to Rose's commands as she had been to Sheila's, and she obviously respected both girls only less than she did Dr. Stowe, though she just as obviously didn't really like any of them. The arrival of her daughter, dressed in a sports dress a good deal more becoming than Mrs. Ferrier remembered its being, and with a scarf tied jauntily about her hair, reminded the good lady that there were people who were obe-

dient instead of commanding. She looked Elise up and down with a belittling eye.

"I suppose you think you're going to go out into town with that rabble that's been seeing all the tourist traps since we left New York?" she inquired scathingly.

Elise's voice was low but surprisingly firm. "Yes, Mother. I do think so."

"Ordinary. The last one of them. I can't have you running about with people of that sort, you know, Elise. You'll stay on board like the lady you are."

Again Elise answered in a tone that was all the more positive for being quiet. "No, Mother. I'm going with the rest in a few minutes. You needn't worry about my doing anything I shouldn't. And I'll be back in time to have tea with you this afternoon." She ended cheerfully, bent to kiss her mother's cheek, and was gone.

Mrs. Ferrier gazed after her with her mouth open. After a moment she turned a mottled purplish red, sat up, and said in a venomous voice, "Miss Hampton, get my clothes. I'm going to dress and go on deck this morning. I have been an invalid long enough. Too long, perhaps."

Trinidad was a fascinating town, Sheila thought, and Jack Collins was just the person to show it to her and the other young people who made up the gay carload. He had been on the island too many times to count and wouldn't have bothered to come ashore except that Sheila was worth showing it to, he had told her privately. The crowded town was divided into several separate villages. Sheila talked to an aristocratic-looking East Indian girl who wore a diamond in one nostril much as Sheila might have worn an earring. She demonstrated with a gold-trimmed purple sari that a really good sari could be drawn through a wedding ring in spite of its 4-

foot width, and several of the girls from the ship bought her wares in colors like a pale and complete rainbow. Chinese in brighter silks hurried through the streets as if they were behind schedule, old men and women, delightful babies, and young girls with demure faces. Samoan women wore sarongs with square-cut blouses and went on bare feet, as graceful as if each step were a ritual dance.

The English, poised as if they were at home on their fog-bound island, wore sweaters tied by the sleeves about their shoulders, and because the visitors saw most of these at the country club, most of them seemed to be carrying tennis rackets.

"It's like a trip around the world in miniature," Sheila told Jack Collins, her eyes shining. "People from India, Samoa, China, and England."

"Yes," he agreed. "And that dark girl just coming in is probably pure Spanish. They're part of the island, too."

There was one thing that Sheila learned during that day that seemed interesting but which she never once thought of as being at all important. Jack Collins told the whole party about it at lunch as a bit of gossip which might interest them.

"We're getting a new passenger before we leave here," he announced.

"But don't we get a good many at these ports—those who got off the ship at one port and catch up at another?" Clay asked from his place beside Elise.

"Yes. Those. But this one's different. He's flying down from New York to join us for the rest of the cruise. A Mr. Fred Champion. Must be in a hurry to get the sun when another cruise starts in another week and he could have the whole thing."

"That sounds silly to me," Angela commented. "With the

plane and all, it will cost as much as the whole cruise, I'd think."

Jack shrugged. "People get funny notions. If you don't believe it, try running a cruise ship."

They laughed at that, and Clay came to his feet. "Elise, if you're going to get back in time to have tea with your mother as you promised, we'd better be going," he said in a tone of gentle command.

Elise came to her feet a little breathlessly. "Thank you for reminding me. I've had such a marvelous day, I'd almost forgotten."

Angela grinned at Sheila. "Looks like my brother's got just what he wants in a girl. Everybody in our family's bossy, and we have terrible times, sometimes. But this one would mean 'love, honor, and obey' if she said it."

Sheila shook her head, laughing. "I never thought he was bossy."

The sister of the man in question made a small face. "You didn't know him very well, did you?"

Jack was standing, too. "I'm sorry to break up the party further, but I've got to go on duty pretty soon."

Sheila, who had been wondering how she could get back without going with Elise and Clay, agreed. "Me, too. Have fun for us, the rest of you."

XIV

WHEN SHEILA had heard the report of Second Mate Collins concerning the passenger who was to arrive by plane, she had

had a quick mental picture of the plane landing on the boat deck of the *Southwind* in the manner of a fighter swooping down on a carrier, as she had seen in newsreels and war movies. Nothing of that sort happened, and by midmorning the next day she had put the whole thing out of her mind. Certainly, she had not mentioned it to anyone.

Mrs. Ferrier had spent the night in the infirmary but announced her intention, soon after Rose came on duty at seven, of going up on deck for the morning as she had done yesterday. Peter, delighted at this sign of recovery on her part, had praised her determination and gone off to breakfast with Sheila.

"I've got to take her blood pressure and generally see that she is in fine fettle, but after that, how about going into town with me and seeing if we can get a car and drive in the country?" he suggested.

"Do you think there will be any cars when all our tourists have gone their way?" Sheila asked him. "I'd love to go and see the countryside. Usually the places the tourists seem to gather are city, and so many cities are pretty much like other cities, though I can't say that for this trip."

"That's because the places we've been aren't really cities," Peter told her, "and you're quite right about cars. The tours use only limousines, and there won't be any of those left, I'm sure, but maybe we'll be able to find a broken-down old taxi that won't be too uncomfortable."

Elise was at her mother's bedside when they returned to sick bay. Mrs. Ferrier was speaking in her old tone of command: "You know what my heart's like, Elise. The operation has been terribly hard on it, and I may have an attack any time. I don't see how you can go flouncing off on a pleasure jaunt with perfect strangers when I am really so ill."

The girl was beginning to look distressed and guilty, and Peter rushed to her rescue.

"That's just what I came back for, Mrs. Ferrier. To check on your heart and blood pressure and how your incision is healing. But really, I think you've come through a trying time splendidly." He got his stethoscope from an apothecary chest across the room and came and bent over her, thumping and listening after the manner of doctors the world over, having her breathe deeply, hold her breath for a moment, then let it go.

At a nod from him, Rose came and prepared Mrs. Ferrier's arm for taking her blood pressure, and Peter gave this part of the examination the same careful attention he had given his checking of her heart.

Then Rose brought fresh bandaging, and Peter took off the old dressing. Elise, standing close, looked down at the red scar with wide eyes. "But it's hardly three inches long," she exclaimed in amazement. "I never saw a smaller incision."

Rose nodded. "I've seen a lot of appendix operations in my time. I never saw a more skillful one than this. You can tell the difference between a good appendectomy and a poor one by the length of the scar. The little ones are done by good surgeons."

Peter laughed a bit self-consciously. "The little ones save a lot of stitching."

"And a lot of healing and soreness," Rose insisted.

Peter became at once a doctor attending professionally and impersonally to a patient, "Mrs. Ferrier, if you are expecting to die of a heart attack, you're likely to live to be ninety. Your heart sounds as young as that of any of these girls here, I'll warrant. Your blood pressure's normal. I think by the time we get to Haiti you'll be able to go sight-seeing yourself. Now, let's get you up on deck where you can sit

in the sunshine as you did yesterday. You're much stronger and better for having done that, aren't you?"

If Mrs. Ferrier's blood pressure had been normal when Peter took it, Sheila would have guessed it was twenty points higher now. The woman's lips were drawn into a straight line, and her face was flushed with anger. Her eyes stabbed at the young doctor, then moved venomously on to the two nurses, and finally rested on Elise.

Her daughter bent and kissed her cheek. "You'll be all right, Mother. As Miss Hampton has told you, Dr. Stowe is quite capable, and you'll have more and better attention than I could give you."

Mrs. Ferrier's head twitched angrily on her pillow. "Well, if you want to leave me to the mercies of strangers to go off with people you never had seen three weeks ago—"

Elise was surprisingly firm as she cut in: "Yes, Mother, I do."

As she and Peter walked down the dock, Sheila went back to Rose's praise of the technique of the operation. "You know you were every bit as good as Rose told that old haridan."

Again Peter looked a bit embarrassed under praise. "An appendectomy isn't such a difficult piece of surgery as all that, and I'm not properly a surgeon, either. But I admit I trained under a good man."

"What is your specialty then?" she asked.

He grinned at that. "I'm on a bit too low a rung of the ladder even to consider myself a specialist," he explained. "But if I had a specialty, it would be in the viruses. I've been doing a little research as assistant to a great man in the field. It's the theory of most men in that field that cancer is a virus.

CRUISE NURSE

Certainly a lot of things are virus diseases, and any discoveries in the field are bound to be helpful."

Sheila nodded contritely. "I remember now. You told Rose and me that soon after we started on the cruise. I'd think research would be an awful grind, and it doesn't pay very well, does it?"

He glanced sharply at her, remembering the emphasis she had said she put on money. "That depends. If you work for a pharmaceutical house, the salaries are fairly high. If you work on your own and find something that they can use, they'll buy it at a fair price, I believe. But I'm sure there are men just as gifted as the successful ones, just as dedicated, who work all their lives and find out only negative things that help no one except other researchers. I never heard of a research man getting rich."

They had reached the practically empty taxi rank, and a wizened old man whose teeth were largely nonexistent got out of a taxi of comparative age and came toward them. "Take you someplace, sir. Fine car. Show you places other folks won't see." He leered as if these places might be of doubtful morality.

Sheila, not impressed by the driver, his chariot, or his promise as a guide, looked about and found nothing better. Peter was looking doubtfully at her. She nodded her consent, and he began to bargain with the old man.

Once the car was started—a car without a muffler and with more rattles than any Sheila had ever ridden in—Peter turned to her with a grin. "You know, we're taking a terrible chance. Suppose we get out of town and this museum piece breaks down? We could miss the boat, you know."

She laughed. "I guess we could. Like one of those romantic stories about being marooned on an island."

"I'm afraid this is too well populated to fit into those

stories," he countered. "I'm afraid we'd have to apply to the American embassy to send us home."

"Or hire a plane to catch the *Southwind* at its next stop. Haiti, isn't it?"

"Woman, you do have extravagant ideas," he told her in mock horror.

"It isn't really my idea at all," she assured him, and went on to tell him of the passenger who was supposed to arrive today to join the cruise.

"What on earth would he want to do that for?" Peter asked.

"Every cruise ought to have a mystery, oughtn't it? Well, this is this cruise's," she suggested.

They had not come to anything that really resembled country, but the houses were smaller now—shacks with palm-thatched roofs and little patches of gardens in the back, chickens scratching in front, and children, black, brown, white and yellow, tumbling everywhere, many of them entirely naked. Even chugging past as slowly as they were in the peopled old car, it was impossible to tell much about the children, but Sheila, with her nurse's eye, thought they didn't look very healthy. Some were terribly thin with distended bellies. Some had angry-looking sores. She had never seen children in such poor condition.

But instead of speaking of them, for they made her rather sick at heart, she returned to the subject she and Peter had been discussing before they got into the taxi.

"Why does a man take up research against the sort of odds you were talking about back there, Peter?"

"I could say the love of humanity, I guess," he told her thoughtfully. "But it isn't really that. Or at least, it's not all that. It's curiosity. Do you like mystery stories? I should think so, from that remark about every cruise having its mystery."

"Love 'em," Sheila answered. "Though I must admit that sometimes I turn over to the last chapter before I'm through to see 'who done it.'"

"I think it's the same sort of feeling that sends a man looking for causes in medicine," Peter continued after a moment. "Just as a mystery story is a search for 'who done it,' a scientist's search is for the criminal. Only in medicine he's a much worse killer than even your murderer who kills three or four times during the length of a book. He's out to get the whole human race. And Man's got to prove that he's stronger and smarter and quicker. It's the excitement of the chase."

"As much as I like that sort of thing in books, I'm afraid I wouldn't have the patience for the work," she said ruefully. "If I were to go in for research at all— and I'm not sure I'm fitted for it temperamentally—it would be with the idea of helping kids like these we've been passing. Are they really as unhealthy as they look, do you suppose? Or have you noticed them?"

"I've noticed them," he answered. "Hookworm and ringworm, perhaps. And poor diet, certainly."

At this point the car gave an asthmatic cough and several jerks that seemed to indicate that it was in its death throes and came to a dismal halt. The driver turned his rheumy eyes on them in an unintentional comic despair.

Sheila looked about them at the shade cast by thick tropical growth and giggled a bit nervously. "You the seventh son of a seventh son, or something, foretelling the future?" she said to Peter.

At his blank face, she laughed again. "Aren't you the young man who foretold our getting cast on a desert island?"

Peter grimaced at the accuracy of his idle words and climbed out and began to peer into the interior of the car's engine with the old man.

CRUISE NURSE

"We're not out of gas, are we?" Sheila asked, climbing out, too.

The old man rolled his lower jaw about and shook his white head. "No, miss. Looks like we done lost something out of here, but I ain't just certain what."

"And we've passed almost no cars since we left town," Peter mourned. "Nor do the houses we've been passing look as if they'd have any cars or phones."

"Just the same," Sheila decided, "I think I'll go back to the last one we passed just in case there should be. It isn't far."

Peter looked up from his study of the car's insides. "Don't eat anything. Or drink, either. I'll come along after you if I find we're going to be long."

XV

IN THE hot sun and walking, Sheila thought it seemed a great deal farther to the mud hut than it had seemed going in the car. She had worn low-heeled shoes, but by the time she arrived, her feet burned and ached. The children who stood staring at her from the yard, their eyes big in thin faces, were kinky-haired, and the color of strong tea with milk. Many were completely naked, though the bigger girls wore dresses like the Mother Hubbards she had heard described but never seen.

"Good morning," she greeted them brightly. "Is your mother at home?"

Nobody answered. A small boy eating a banana stopped to

concentrate on the newcomer. A slightly larger girl seemed bent on putting her entire hand into her mouth. Even the adolescent girls only twisted their skirts and continued to stare in silent wonder. Seven children, Sheila counted.

A tired-looking woman came then and peered out the door, her head wrapped in a *tignon* much less ornate and colorful in style and brightness than those Sheila had seen in Martinique. "Leddy?" the woman said on a rising note.

"Our car has broken down up the road," Sheila heard herself saying. "I wondered if you might have a telephone."

Now the woman gaped at her just as the children were doing. If she had ever heard of a telephone, she gave no indication of it.

"Or an automobile? Do you have an automobile? We would pay you to take us back into town," Sheila pursued her questioning.

Wonderingly, the woman shook her head looking as amazed as if Sheila had asked if she had Aladdin's lamp hidden in the hut.

"Then may I come in and sit down?" Sheila asked. She had reached the door now, but the windowless room was too dark for her to see anything that was inside. Still, there was an odor that came out to her, an odor that spoke of too many unwashed bodies and too many meals cooked in a place that was never aired.

That's what real poverty smells like, she told herself, repentant. *And I always thought we were poor. That woman would think my family rich.*

"Nothin' to set on," the woman told her somewhat sullenly.

"Out here under that palm tree then," Sheila suggested.

The woman nodded. "If you want."

Her hostess disappeared inside the house once more, and finding nothing better to do, Sheila followed her own sug-

gestion and sought a place under the tree. She had sat in more comfortable places. The ground was flat and of beaten clay, hard as a rock, but the shade was welcome. She took out a monogrammed white handkerchief with lace about the edge and wiped her damp face. The children came and made a circle about her, not coming near but still staring. She knew exactly how a man from Mars would feel if ever he landed on the earth.

Finally, the largest of those who wore nothing at all, a boy of possibly ten, moved out of the circle and disappeared around the house. Sheila cleared her throat.

"You're all brothers and sisters?"

One of the older girls nodded then. "Mammy in there borned us all."

The little boy who had left came back then with an orange in one hand and a banana in the other. Self-consciously, he edged up to Sheila and held them out to her. She rejoiced that this offering, because it had to be peeled, could be eaten safely.

"Why, thank you," she told him, smiling.

He stood staring so intently that she felt in a moment she would have to squirm under his gaze. But he then gave his considered opinion: "You're pretty."

Again she said, "Thank you," and set about eating the banana. She was ravenously hungry. The children seeing her eating seemed to like the idea for themselves. One by one they went into the back yard and came back with fruit, and one little girl darted into the house and came back with two fistfuls of rice she began at once to eat. The tallest of the girls wet her lips and worked up courage enough to speak.

"You from England?"

"The United States," Sheila told her.

That seemed to mean nothing to the girl, and she said

nothing else. To relieve her own uneasy feeling, Sheila began to ask questions. Their father and the older sons, she learned, had walked into town to sell their pig, and if they did not spend the money on rum, would bring back things their mother needed, but perhaps they would buy rum. And perhaps no one would buy the pig. He was not a very fat pig.

The girls' dresses were of dingy homespun and unironed. It was a drab world for this family, and, from what she had seen, for other families up and down the road. Sheila sighed, again ashamed of her own plenty. She looked over the flock, noting rotting teeth even in the little ones, a twisted spine, an eye that was undoubtedly blind. Not one seemed like the children she was accustomed to at St. Catherine's.

After a while the mother, holding a wailing baby and with a not much larger one clinging to her skirt, came and joined them. Once settled she gave one flat breast to one child, the second to the other. "You come on boat?" she asked Sheila.

Sheila began to talk then, telling them about the *Southwind*, about the United States. Othello could not have had a more entranced audience. She talked on and on.

It was midafternoon before she saw a car, and as if by some miracle, it stopped before the house. It was a limousine, not one of the shabby leftovers that she had supposed were all that was available after the parties from the ship had taken their toll. And then Peter was getting out and coming toward her. There were others in the car.

She jumped to her feet and hastened to meet the doctor. "Where did you get it?" she asked, nodding her head toward the car.

"It was coming in from the airport. You heard the plane arriving just a little while ago, didn't you?"

CRUISE NURSE

Sheila shook her head with the same sort of wonder her recent listeners had offered her.

"I can't think why you didn't," Peter insisted. "It must have gone right over here."

"I was talking," she explained, and Peter laughed at her.

She turned back to the dark-skinned family then. Negroes they were, and heaven knew what else. "You've been so kind," she said, offering her hand to the woman and taking her dirty, bony one to shake. "Would you take this and get yourself something you need?" she asked, fumbling in her bag and coming up with an English pound.

The woman's eyes glowed for a moment, but she shook her head. "No, leddy. No," she refused gently. Then her eyes dropped to the bright scarf that Sheila had tied rather coquettishly about her head to keep her hair in place.

"You will keep this. To remember me by," Sheila insisted, untieing the scarf and holding it out.

The woman smiled then and took the square of silk. "I remember anyhow," she said.

In the car with the elderly couple, a handsome but troubled-looking young man, and a man who looked as if he might have come from another of the English islands, Sheila began to speak hurriedly to Peter, as if there would never be time to get everything said. "Peter, they're all sick. I don't believe there's a really healthy child in that house. And they're so poor."

"Of course, honey. They probably think you're as rich as you always thought the patients at St. Catherine's were. Only they're really poor."

They let the airport limousine drop them at a restaurant, and, hungry as they were, they ate largely in silence.

"What did you do with our old driver?" she asked at last

when she had pushed back the fruit they had had for dessert.

Peter laughed. "I offered to pay his way in in the limousine, but he refused to leave that old wreck of his, so I paid him what we had promised and left him with it. I don't know how he'll get it repaired out there. I've heard of ravens feeding his sort, but I never suspected them of being mechanics, especially those who furnish missing parts. But he looked quite happy when I left him."

In sick bay that night Sheila was thinking over the long, and for the most part, happy day. The night light burned dimly, and she made doodles on the blotter before her. It was just after ten, and Mrs. Ferrier had returned to her own cabin for the night. It was just as well, Sheila decided. Perhaps before morning A. Carleton Bentz would be brought in sodden drunk or screaming.

She was about to drop off to sleep when a shadow fell across her desk. A man came into sick bay, a man who looked somehow familiar, yet whom she didn't connect with the *Southwind*. She had never seen a much handsomer man, but he looked anxious and as if he hadn't slept in a long time.

She stood up in her very best professional manner and asked, "What can I do for you, sir?"

He looked all about the big room as if he expected to find one of the beds occupied before he spoke. "You're the nurse in charge?"

"Yes sir."

"Do you have a Mrs. Champion here?" he asked then.

She shook her head. "We've only had one woman patient on this trip, sir. But Mrs. Ferrier went back to her cabin to-day."

"No," he said, his worried eyes moving about the room once

more. "Mrs. Champion is a nurse. Thank you. And good night."

Only when he had gone did Sheila remember where she had seen him. He'd been in the car coming from the airport. He was probably the new passenger who'd come in today on a plane. *Mrs. Champion*, she thought. *That's funny.*

XVI

MR. BENTZ was brought into the infirmary for sobering up, but he was less belligerent than usual and before long was sleeping heavily, only his snores reminding Sheila that she was not alone. Knowing that her patient was drugged and would not awaken, she lay down and slept.

The next morning as she and Peter were at breakfast, she found herself thinking of the passenger who had come in the night before asking for "Mrs. Champion."

"Peter," she asked thoughtfully, "was Hampton Rose's married name?"

He looked up at her from his oatmeal, startled. "I haven't the least idea. Why?"

"I was just wondering," she answered. "A funny thing happened last night. Do you remember that terribly good-looking young man who came into town with us last night? He was sitting up by the driver."

Peter thought a moment, then nodded. "Of course I wasn't as conscious of a handsome young man as you were, but I do remember him. Why?"

"I think he must have been the passenger who flew down

to take the rest of the cruise with us. Anyhow, he came into sick bay last night and asked for a Mrs. Champion."

Peter turned that thought over in his mind and shook his head. "I don't believe there's anyone by that name on the whole passenger list. I don't remember it, anyhow."

"I'm pretty sure there isn't such a person. As sure as I can be from checking the list, which I did this morning," she explained, and sat with her chin in her hand, seemingly lost in thought.

"And what set you off on the subject of Rose's married name?" Peter asked.

"I was just thinking. He said Mrs. Champion was a nurse on the *Southwind*. I'm not Mrs. Champion, and that left Rose."

He laughed. "If that isn't just like a woman, adding two and two and getting seventeen. More than likely Mrs. Champion was the nurse whose place you took. You don't know what her name was, do you?"

"I never heard anybody say," she admitted. "Yes, that's probably what it was. Peter, you do take the excitement out of things."

He patted her shoulder. "I don't mean to. That's just the way it sounded to me. You can make a whole romance out of it if you want. Maybe he's Rose's long lost husband come back to claim her. He didn't say he was Mr. Champion, did he?"

She made a face at him. "Now you're making fun of me. He didn't say what his name was, just asked about Mrs. Champion, and I told him there was no such woman there in sick bay. He merely said she was a nurse, and went away. Isn't Mrs. Ferrier coming for another check-up this morning? We'd better be getting back."

But that wasn't the end of the worried young man who

had asked for "Mrs. Champion." Sheila had been talked out of thinking that he might be looking for Rose, but she still thought he was the mysterious passenger who wanted only half a cruise. Before she and Peter had reached the last turn on the way to the infirmary they heard Rose, her voice so raised that every word was distinct: "No, I don't want to see you or talk to you, now or ever," she was declaiming angrily. And just as they reached the turn in the passage the young man hurried past them. His face was very red, and he looked as angry as Rose had sounded. Sheila grabbed Peter's sleeve and hissed in his ear, "There he goes now. It was Rose he wanted. Did you hear her?"

He grinned, though his tone was dry. "I'm not exactly deaf."

But if there was a mystery, Sheila didn't have the nerve to ask after she had glimpsed her co-worker's stormy face. As quietly as she could, she passed through the infirmary and retreated into her own cabin.

Up on deck a bit later she found Clay wandering about disconsolately, biting on the stem of his pipe as if he hated it. She went up behind him and spoke in a teasing voice. "She's down in sick bay with her mother. The doctor's checking over the good lady once more."

He turned toward Sheila, his eyes full of relief. "I was afraid said good lady had turned thumbs down on me permanently."

They fell into step and resumed walking about the deck. Sheila shook her head. "Far be it for me to say she hasn't. I, for one, don't think you'd be her pick for her darling daughter. But they are down there, just as I said."

He put his pipe back in his mouth and frowned. "She doesn't need Elise to stand by while she interviews the doctor. She's trying to come between us."

"I hate to be discouraging," Sheila admitted, suddenly serious, "but that's my notion, too. You're going to have to fight for this girl, my lad. She's been browbeaten too long to put up much fight on her own behalf, and now her mother's back in her old form. But Elise was right brave yesterday and the day before."

He looked flushed and boyish. "Sheila, she's wonderful. She's just what I've been looking for all my life. So feminine and sweet and—" He broke off as if there were no other words at his command.

Sheila thought of what his sister had said of him, but didn't add "—and biddable," as she might have. Instead, she said, "She is sweet, Clay. You latch onto her before that mother of hers turns her bitter and rebellious inside."

He nodded. "I'll do that," he promised.

They were interrupted at this point by a steward who brought a cablegram to Clay. He excused himself, read it, and thrust it into his pocket. "From the fruit company," he said by way of explanation.

"The Federal Fruit Company?" she inquired.

"Of course," he said.

"Clay, do you own it?" she asked then.

He swung about and looked at her with complete bewilderment. "Own the company? I should say not. What ever gave you such a crazy idea?"

"I—it just came to me," she stammered. "It's certainly none of my business. I shouldn't have asked like that."

He laughed. "It's no secret from anybody. I'm the resident manager in Santa Teresa, and I've been home on vacation. My child, that's a million-dollar operation in Santa Teresa alone. Do I look like that kind of money?"

"I thought you did. I didn't know what sort of job you had, of course, or if you had any. You never said. And your

clothes, and especially Angela's. I've never seen clothes like those Angela wears," she finished wistfully.

"So you thought I was a millionaire playboy." His hearty laugh rang out over the water. "You know about Angela's clothes, don't you? Didn't she tell you?"

Sheila nodded, somewhat abashed. "It was taking a vacation this time of year, and a cruise of this kind," she defended herself.

He chuckled once more. "And here we are traveling on passes. What a let-down we must be."

"N-no," she said, somewhat doubtfully. "I don't think so. Only you should have seen the letter I wrote my roommate when I first met you and Angela. Still, I doubt if you'd have recognized yourself. What'll I tell her when I get home?" She was seeing the humor of it now herself.

But Clay had grown serious again. "Maybe if I really had all that money, Mrs. Ferrier would think better of me."

Sheila considered that. "No, I don't think that's it. You know, I think a lot of that bluster of hers is because she's afraid her decisions won't be good ones. I don't think she trusts herself to judge strangers the way most people have to every day, so she's scared of them. That's what Peter thinks too."

"I'm afraid that doesn't help my situation much," he said ruefully, "since I'm not a millionaire and I am a stranger. Look, Sheila, do you realize how often you are saying 'Peter thinks' these days?"

She looked at him wide-eyed. "No. Am I?"

"You are," he assured her gravely.

HAITI WAS warm and green with palms like feather dusters against the sky. It was a French-speaking island, and most of its residents were brown as chocolate. Angela knew a dress designer there whose things were amazingly inexpensive, and she and Sheila hurried off to have her make Sheila a dress, which she would mail on when it was complete. Angela and she would talk design and perhaps exchange models. Sheila was very excited over this brush with the world of high style.

Then in the afternoon she and Peter took a busman's holiday and went to hospitals and clinics. It was one of the clinics that filled Sheila with a vicarious despair. The patients were impoverished if the rags they wore and the emaciated condition of their bodies were any indication. And Peter's diagnostic experience helped him to guess that some of the trouble came from dietary deficiencies.

"Not that there isn't plenty of most things they need growing wild, right around them, if they just knew how to eat," he went on. "It's the same way at home—oh, not the things that grow wild or can be had free—but the people who need most to know about nutrition seem to know the least about it."

Sheila shook her head. "We don't have people that poor at home," she insisted. "And we don't have beggars on the streets the way these places do."

He shook his head at her. "That's a matter of whether beggars are allowed on the streets. They aren't necessarily the poorest people, or the sickest, either. You've moved in too exclusive circles, my good girl. When we get home, I want to show you a thing or two."

C R U I S E N U R S E

She thought that over as she sat on duty that night. She could remember her mother's saying more than once, "It's so important to have the right address even if you have to live in the poorest house in the neighborhood." And they had. She had never had a friend and hardly an acquaintance who had not had a great deal more than she had had. Yet she had never known what poverty was. Or hadn't she? Wasn't trying to live beyond your means the real poverty? For once she did not spend most of her night on duty napping. She was, instead, weighing all the things which had seemed important to her all her life.

There was no patient in sick bay, and after she had seen Mrs. Ferrier up on deck and left her there, out of the wind but where she would get the sun indirectly—Elise had once again declared her independence after a prolonged verbal scuffle—Rose went back to the infirmary, put everything in order, and was checking drugs with an eye toward making an inventory when she heard a voice behind her.

"Rose," it said, "I'm taking no more nonsense from you. I've come to talk to you, and I'm going to if I have to lock us in here and tie you in a chair."

She looked around, startled. She knew the voice well enough, but she thought she had settled matters between them yesterday. But the tone was strange, angry, determined, and desperate. The man in the doorway was very much aware of the surprise in her face.

"Rose," he said a bit more gently, "sit down and listen."

She had never had a command from him before. He had sometimes pleaded and often requested, but he had never told her flatly what to do. Before she thought to protest, she had already obeyed.

"I've been looking for you ever since you left home," he told her. "It's been a long time."

She nodded as if for her, too, the months had passed slowly. Her voice held a note of hesitancy. "I know. I didn't want you to find me. But I thought you would quit looking when two or three weeks had passed. I thought probably you were married again by now."

It was his turn to look surprised, and hurt. "But you're my wife," he protested.

She did not look at him now, and her voice was very low. "I know I didn't divorce you, but I've been out of the country for a long time and—there are always ways to get out of an unsatisfactory marriage if you don't want to stay in. I knew your parents didn't want me for your wife."

He had sat down too, and was now staring at his thin hands, loosely clasped between his knees. "They never did. But that didn't keep me from marrying you."

There was a flash of passion in her voice then.

"And you took me to their house to live," she cried. "I'd have been happy in a one-room apartment with you, but I couldn't breathe there, with the two of them criticizing everything I did, every word I said, even every thought I had."

He nodded somberly. "I know. How I know! It was the same with me. They expected perfection from everybody. I grew up with it. And they had impressed on me that no girl could be happy in the sort of home I could provide. It wouldn't have been much, either. Dad saw to it that I never made enough to be independent."

She looked up, compassion and understanding coming into her eyes. For a long moment neither of them spoke, and when she at last broke the silence, her eyes were damp and there was the sound of tears in her voice. "I know. But I was so sensitive to what they thought of me. And they did try

to make me over practically from scratch, Fred. You know that. I tried, too. I really tried to be what they wanted."

A faint grin came to his mouth and was duplicated in his eyes. "I know a bit about that sort of thing, too. But it can't be done, darling. Nobody ever pleased them."

Again there was a silence, longer this time. They were lost in those months of their marriage, the waste and heart-break of it. Again she was the one who spoke.

"But why didn't you tell me how you felt?" she asked.

He shook his head, puzzled, "I thought I had. Or that you understood without my saying anything. I always thought you understood, Rose."

It was her turn to smile ruefully. "But I didn't, and I am not a mind reader, Fred. I honestly thought you didn't care if they picked on me."

"People ought to talk to each other," he decided, saying the words slowly as if he had just made a momentous discovery. "I was worse about it than you, and you didn't have much to say until there at the last. And I meant to surprise you."

"S-surprise me?" she echoed him.

He nodded. "I should have told you that I had some money coming from my grandfather on my twenty-fifth birthday. Enough to buy a house. I meant to tell you on my birthday. But Dad sent me away on a business trip, and you were gone when I got back. I had picked out a half-dozen houses that I could afford, and we were going to look at them on my birthday, and you were going to choose."

Her eyes searched his face painfully for a moment; then she rose, disappeared into her cabin, and appeared after only a moment with a man's sweater in her hands. "I made it for your birthday that year, your twenty-fifth. I tried to give it away, but I couldn't seem to. H-happy birthday, Fred."

He took it and they looked at each other with damp eyes. He was about to move toward her and take her in his arms, but she forestalled him with a gesture that he was to sit down again.

"People ought to talk to each other," she quoted him with a faint smile.

"It wasn't a happy birthday," he said angrily, remembering. "You were gone, and my father and mother claimed they didn't know you were gone. Even most of your clothes were left behind, hanging in that closet just as if you'd stepped out. Your perfume was everywhere, and your engagement ring and your wedding ring lay on the dresser. There wasn't even a note."

"N-no," she agreed. "And they didn't know where I was. I didn't want any of you to. I thought you meant to keep me living there in that dark, unhappy house the rest of my life, and I couldn't bear it. I ran away and hid."

"Even the detective I hired didn't find you until last week," he told her.

"It wasn't so hard," she explained. "The head of the registry was an old family friend who had had two or three unsatisfactory marriages herself. She was pretty bitter about them. I dropped your name— Well, all my nursing records were in my maiden name anyhow—Rose McLain. She sent me out of town on a case in the country, then to Florida with a woman. And all the time I used my middle name, Hampton, instead of my surname. Then this job opened up, and it kept me out of the country pretty consistently. Your man tried the registry where I kept my name, but Connie didn't give him even a hint."

"I know. But he eventually found out from the registry. Over the phone. Someone there let it slip. He didn't learn that you were going under the name of Hampton, though.

But when he told me a Mrs. Champion was nurse on the *Southwind*, that was good enough for me. It was certainly worth flying down here." He stopped, then after a moment of silence, said, "I still don't have a house."

"You're surely not asking me to come back to your parents' place?" she said. "Or maybe you aren't asking me to come back at all. Maybe you've come to ask for a divorce." Her voice rose almost hysterically.

He was quiet, firm. "You know better than that, Rose. I don't even live at home myself. I'm living in an apartment with three other fellows. I took the money I would have used for a house to buy myself into a business."

That startled her. "You don't work for your father now?"

He shook his head. "You remember that I always thought I'd write a novel? And the family thought I was crazy, that I'd never make it? They might have been right about it. But I do have a gift with words. I bought my way into an advertising business, and for a beginner—I started right at the bottom, I'm not doing badly. And I'm crazy about the job, too. I can even afford that one room you were talking about a minute ago. Maybe two rooms." He was smiling his faint smile once more.

"And I could go on nursing," she began breathlessly. "Only, at home this time. Maybe in a doctor's office, so I'd be home when—"

He was on his feet. "You will come back to me then. You—"

But again she had moved off and was shaking her head. "Let's not be hasty about this, Fred. Part of our trouble before was marrying in haste. You said when you were here the other day that you'd signed up for the rest of the cruise. Let's learn to talk to each other. Let's get some courting time in. Let's—"

He laughed aloud. "If I haven't forgotten, courting includes kissing, so—"

The kiss began somewhat tentatively. Then all the hunger and heartbreak of the time they had been lost to each other was in it, and Rose was as eager as he.

When Peter came in a moment later he found them still in each other's arms. Rose, flushed and bright-eyed, drew away and made the introduction in a very breathless voice. "Peter, this is my husband, Fred Champion. Fred, Dr. Stowe."

XVIII

RATHER TO her own surprise, Rose stuck to her first determination to keep things between herself and Fred on a comparatively platonic basis until the boat docked in New York.

"It's not only that we have to build a better foundation this time, Fred dear," she insisted. "I signed a contract for the voyage, and I'm keeping it. The fruit company's been good to me when I most needed it, and I wouldn't feel right about deserting them now."

He tilted her face up to his and kissed her. He was not nearly so humble as he had been on that day when he had been uncertain whether she loved him. "When you *thought* you needed them, dearest," he corrected her. "You had a perfectly good husband who would have taken care of you. Maybe not so well as you can take care of yourself, but well."

She was indignant. "I'm not going to have you talking about yourself like that, Fred. If you'd rather I didn't work after we're married, no matter how poor we are—"

He laughed at her. "After we're married. Have your forgotten we are married? If you insist on finishing out here, I guess I can't stop you, but after we're back home, I want your job to be me. I don't make a big salary, but I do own a substantial slice of the company. We'll make out. You're off nights, aren't you? Isn't Miss Dorrance on then?"

Rose nodded.

"Then may I have the pleasure of your company for dinner and dancing tonight?" he asked, his eyes alight.

She went into his arms. "Oh, Fred, it's wonderful to be going out with you again. You know, I've tried dancing with other men, even dining out with them, and it simply wasn't any good. Mostly, I've just stuck on the boat or gone sight-seeing with the tourists. But tomorrow Sheila and I change shifts. I'll be on nights then."

And the next night Peter took Sheila dancing. They went with the usual crowd—Elise and Clay and Angela—and a Mr. Beaumont, an Englishman who had come aboard at Trinidad.

"I've been dragging you about to places that made your conscience hurt, honey, and I'm really not an entirely serious young man, even if you might call me a man with a mission. We'll dance all night if you say so," Peter told her when they were planning the evening.

Sheila shook her head, laughing. "That would be fun if I were one of the passengers, but suppose Mr. A. Carleton Bentz is brought on board fighting drunk tonight or early in the morning? You and I have to be there to meet him."

"Now who's the serious young person," he said.

But even so, the evening wasn't all frivolity. At about midnight, they found themselves seated next to Clay and Elise. The former looked worried and was absent-minded. Peter finally asked what the trouble was, and as an answer Clay pulled an envelope from his pocket.

"They're not doing so well at Santa Teresa," he said, frowning down at the letter. "The doctor's sick—the doctor at Teresita—Santa Teresita City—where the company's local headquarters are. They're having an epidemic there—it's about thirty-five miles from Santa Teresa, and several of our people are down with it. I'm thinking of flying down in the morning."

"What kind of an epidemic?" Peter asked, his professional curiosity aroused.

"That's the trouble," Clay answered. "It's something they haven't ever seen before, either the native doctors in town nor our company physician. Here, read it yourself." He tossed the letter, still in its envelope, to Peter.

The doctor opened it slowly and began to read, his face growing more serious as he went on.

"Some of these symptoms sound a bit like cholera," he said when he had finished, his face more somber than Sheila had ever before seen it.

The other three answered almost with one breath. "But nobody has cholera any more."

Peter shook his head. "That's what most people believe, but it isn't true. It's rare, very rare indeed, except in Asia. I've never seen a case. But I've done some reading about it because it's a virus disease. Santa Teresa's a port. It could be brought in from Asia, though it seems more likely that it would have come in on the Pacific side of Central America."

Clay shook his head with vehemence. "I'm sure we don't get boats from the Orient there. Not once in a blue moon."

"Are the health authorities always on their toes? Or are they careless the way many small ports allow them to be?" Peter asked sharply.

"I don't really know," Clay answered thoughtfully, "but I'd say yes, they're sometimes careless. I know they don't insist on inoculation, and every now and then there's a flareup of typhus, typhoid, or smallpox. Our people are all inoculated for everything we've ever heard of there, but if this should be cholera—" He looked frightened by the implications.

Peter was drumming on the table with his long, slender fingers. "There'll be hell to pay if it is."

Clay stood up. "If you'll excuse me, I'll go and call New York and try to get headquarters or at least somebody from headquarters right now. Terrible hour to be calling, but it's certainly important."

Sheila, aware of the possibilities of tragedies which lay in the situation, glanced down at her watch and calculated. "It'll be nearly two, but I'm sure you ought to call. Even if it turns out to be something simple, all precautions ought to be taken."

Peter had been thinking the problem over. "Don't you think you ought to talk to one of the nurses at Teresita first? You'd know more about what to tell New York if you did."

"No, I wouldn't," Clay contradicted. "I wouldn't know what to ask the nurse or what her answers meant." Suddenly he snapped his fingers and turned to Peter. "Look, doctor, how about your talking to them at Teresita. You'll know as much as anybody can without going there, wouldn't you?"

Peter looked up gravely. "Yes. I should think so. If I were there or if I had excretion to study under a microscope—"

"Talking to them's the next best thing," Clay decided. "You girls excuse us?"

As they walked away Elise's eyes followed Clay's tall figure with concern in them, and Sheila spoke into the silence. "You think a lot of him, don't you?"

Elise turned to the table as if she had been away on a long journey. "Clay? He's wonderful. So strong. So decisive. He always knows what he wants and how to get it."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if you are one of the things he wants," Sheila teased.

Elise answered very gravely, as if Sheila had asked a serious question and had the right to an answer. "He's asked me to marry him. I'd like to."

"Then why don't you?" Sheila demanded.

Elise frowned. "I don't know. Mother'd raise an awful row, but that's not it—no matter who it was I wanted to marry, she'd do that. It's—I've always lived in one house, in one town. Even when Mother and I travel, we take our own drinking water and then boil that. We've almost never eaten off the boat, and then only in the very best American-run hotels. I guess I'm a hypochondriac. Anyhow, I think about germs and what it would be like to raise a child in a far-off corner of the world where people are so dirty."

Sheila could see the problem, but she began almost at once to see the other side of it. She said, "On the other hand, we have a lot more automobile accidents in the United States than they do in these places. If you had a child, he could very easily be run down crossing the street or riding a bicycle or—"

Elise shuddered. "I don't know whether I'd ever be brave enough to let him ride a bicycle."

Sheila looked off in the direction in which the two men had disappeared. "That would be one thing you could depend on Clay for. He'd be pretty well balanced about even his own child, I'd think. You could trust him."

CRUISE NURSE

Elise's eyes had gone off dreaming again. "I could, couldn't I? He'd know, and I'd always know he was right."

Sheila almost snorted. *The idea of believing anybody was always right, even a man you were in love with!* she thought. But Elise would always need somebody who could make most of her decisions, somebody she thought wise beyond anything human.

Meanwhile Clay had gotten the one-room hospital at Teresita and was shouting questions at a nurse there. The doctor had died, and there were seven others who were ill there. The doctor's had been the only death in Teresita but the other patients were pretty ill, and one of these was the other nurse. There had been very few deaths in Santa Teresa, but most of the people in the town were ill. Yes, there was vomiting, dark vomit, but she had seen no blood among her cases. There were terribly high fevers and a sickening odor about all the patients.

When Peter had asked everything he could think of, he hung up and turned to Clay. "If it's cholera, it's not the most violent type. Look, do you have any influence with the government down there?"

Clay rubbed his jaw. "Yes. And no. They don't like American interference, but on the other hand, most of their cash money comes from us. Why?"

"Call up somebody and tell him to start spraying for fleas and lice. Tell him to get busy on rat extermination. All those are carriers of viruses."

So Clay made a second call and argued in a spate of Spanish, listened, and argued again. At last he turned once more to Peter. "They don't have the necessary material for such an extermination—not on the scale you think is necessary."

CRUISE NURSE

Peter looked frustrated for just a moment. "Would it be possible to fly it in?"

Once more Clay rubbed his jaw, not quite as full of authority and decisiveness as Elise thought. "I'll call central office and see what they think," was all he promised.

It took only a little less time to get New York than it had the people they had wanted in Santa Teresa. Peter, feeling that Clay's conversation with his business superior was a private matter, had stepped outside the booth, and after a while Clay pushed his head through the doorway and spoke to the other man. "They want to talk to you, man. Here."

A clipped, intense voice came over the wire. "You're the ship's physician on the *Southwind*, Stowe?" it inquired.

Peter said, "Yes, sir," and waited.

"Would you consider going tonight by chartered plane to Santa Teresa and taking charge of sanitation and health there?" It was as bald as that. No conditions, no mention of salary, no talk of how long the commitment might last.

Peter felt as if someone had knocked the breath out of him. He didn't answer for a moment.

The clipped voice came again. "Dr. Stowe? Are you there?" "Yes, Mr. Preston. I'll go."

XIX

THE OTHER couples had returned to the table by the time Peter and Clay came from the phone, and explanations had been made for the two men's absence. The hour was later than Peter and Sheila had meant to return to the ship.

CRUISE NURSE

All of them were beginning to be restless by the time they were reunited.

The two men were very serious, almost withdrawn. Clay went at once to Elise's side. "I'm sorry, my dear, but we have to get back at once. Peter and I are leaving for Santa Teresa in about an hour on a chartered plane. There's a flu epidemic there."

Elise's slender hands clenched together in what looked like almost agony. "But—but it's so sudden, Clay. You hadn't planned to leave the ship until it reached there."

He shook his head. "It's something new. I called the home office, and they think I'm needed at Teresita immediately. There isn't much time. Come along, my dear."

Elise got up like a sleepwalker. Clay put her wrap about her shoulders and made a salute to the others. "The boat won't be docking at Santa Teresa in case this thing should turn out to be something really serious. If you want to be kind, say nothing about this matter to the other passengers. Some explanation will be made by the authorities, and you know how hysterical people can get about these things."

The others took deep breaths. "Flu? That's not so bad when you consider what it might have been," Angela said.

Clay and Peter shook hands all round; Clay kissed his sister's cheek; and Clay and Peter, Sheila and Elise went out together to the entrance where a taxi waited. But at the last minute Clay closed the door on the other two and called after them as they left the hotel, "We'll be along immediately." To Elise he added, "I—want to talk to you."

Yet once they were seated in their own cab, he made no move to speak, and it was Elise who asked a question in a harsh, unhappy voice. "Is it really flu?"

"No," he answered. "No, I think it's not. Peter is sure.

Though he's not exactly positive what it is, he believes it's a mild form of cholera—not the worst, but bad enough."

Her hands, white against the dark of her dress, twisted unhappily. "Clay, take me with you," she said in a choked voice.

That brought his eyes to her face, and he smiled in surprise. "Is this the girl who loved me but thought maybe she couldn't live in a foreign country because it wasn't clean?" he asked her.

"Don't—don't tease me about that now, Clay," she begged. "Sheila was pointing out to me tonight that people could have illnesses and accidents anywhere, even at home. Please, Clay. If you were to go into that epidemic and die, I wouldn't want to live. Honestly, I wouldn't. Take me with you."

He bent and kissed her tenderly. "I can't, sweetheart. Not tonight, anyhow. It's a dangerous place right now, and I'm going to have enough on my mind without having to worry about your getting an infection. For the women and children whom no boat will take away from Santa Teresa just now, I must keep myself clear of further worries. I'd lose my mind worrying about you. But I'll come to New York when things blow over and talk to your mother. You can depend on that. Will that do?"

She was in his arms, clinging to him, weeping. "B-but suppose you should be ill, Clay? Suppose you should—die?"

He took her in his arms and held her tight. "That's a word we don't even think about. Here, Elise. This is a ring that's been in my family nobody knows how long. It has a family crest from England on it, and I wear it all the time—have since my father gave it to me when I was twenty-one. I don't have a proper ring for a lady—not a diamond soli-

taire or anything like that. You take it with you. You can be sure that sooner or later I'll be in New York to claim it. And a bride."

She took the fragile old gold ring and slipped it on her finger, then laughed in spite of the tears in her eyes. "I'd be able to wear it on two fingers, Clay. Oh, I know. I can put it on a chain around my neck."

"Where your mother would know nothing about it." He spoke the sentence in a way which showed disappointment.

In the dim light of the car she looked at him sharply, saw the hurt in his face. She leaned forward and kissed his cheek. "I'll tell her tonight. I promise. Only, Clay, as soon as you possibly can, write to her and tell her about yourself. I know so little, and those things mean a great deal to her. Your family, your financial standing, your position."

He took her in his arms again. "My brave girl. Suppose the sort of person I am isn't acceptable? Suppose—"

She put her fingers over his lips and he kissed them, but it was she who spoke. "You're satisfactory to me, Clay. And you know, I've found out something about Mother on this trip. If you're very firm with her she fusses, she complains, she acts hurt, but she gives in in the end quite gracefully."

Straight from his farewell kiss, Elise went to her mother's room. A gentle, lady-like snore greeted her as she opened the door, and Elise almost repented her promise to break the news to Mrs. Ferrier tonight, but swallowing and clenching her fists, she went over to the bed and shook her mother's shoulder.

Mrs. Ferrier reacted immediately, sitting up and speaking sharply. "There you are, and high time, too. I must say it's most thoughtless of you to stay out so late when you know

I never sleep a wink until you're in bed. And when I've been sick, too."

Elise resisted temptation to tell her mother she had heard her snoring. Instead, she said, running the words all together into one, "Mother, I'm going to be married."

Mrs. Ferrier's voice was acid. "I suppose it's that man Masters you seem to have lost your head about."

Elise was very meek. "Yes, Mother."

"And I suppose there's nothing I can do or say to change your mind," Mrs. Ferrier went on.

"No, Mother," Elise said with equal meekness. Mrs. Ferrier wept a bit, stormed a bit, then finally said, with a deep sigh. "You know it will be good to have a man in the family after all these years."

Elise cried then, and curled up on her mother's bed and told her all about Clay. She was almost perfectly happy. And after all she'd be seeing Clay in a little while. He had promised.

Sheila had asked Peter the exact question that Elise had set before Clay. "Is it really flu?"

And he, like the other man, had answered, "No. I'm sure it isn't."

"Cholera?" she prompted then.

"I'm not sure," he told her. "It might easily be. Anyway, somebody's got to take charge immediately. The company seemed to think I was the one."

"Of course you are," she agreed. "Viruses are your specialty. It's the only sensible thing to do."

"I shall miss you," he said then, his voice so controlled it sounded impersonal.

She didn't answer immediately. When she did her words

were so surprising that he gasped. She said, "Oh, but I'm going with you."

He stammered so long that she thought he was never going to get his protest out in understandable words. "B-but you can't. It's dangerous. Don't you know people die of the stuff?"

Her voice was still calm. "Certainly I do," she assured him. "But right after doctors they're going to need nurses, lots of them."

"The company is flying down nurses from New York," he told her, still arguing against her determination.

"Then it won't be such an awful nuisance to them to fly one down to take my place on the ship," she told him.

"Sheila, I can't let you—" he began weakly.

"You've nothing to do with it," she told him, "letting or otherwise. I'm a big girl now, and—"

He shrugged and gave it up somewhat after the fashion of Mrs. Ferrier when she saw that she was beaten. "You won't meet that rich man you're looking for in the middle of a cholera epidemic."

Having won her point, she laughed. "Oh, I don't know. Maybe the president of the company will be so grateful to me that he'll fly down and marry me."

He laughed, too. "I don't know for sure if I even got the gentleman's name. Prescott, Preston, something like that. But he sounded married to me. You've got ten minutes to pack necessities, young woman."

Fifteen minutes later, Peter and Sheila and Clay met on the deck as arranged. Elise had helped Clay to pack, bidden him good-bye, and returned to her cabin.

"Bye, Sheila. Wish us luck," Clay said. "Get a move on you, man."

Peter's voice was deep and for some inexplicable reason,

proud. "She's going with us, Clay." He held her overnight bag with two fresh uniforms in it.

Clay looked from one to the other of them, then grinned. "Well, I'll be eternally fried," he said.

XX

IT WAS six weeks later. The little hospital at Teresita was empty of patients, though the three people who sat before tall, cool drinks at the flat desk just inside the entrance looked thin, hollow-eyed and almost exhausted. But they were gay with the sort of laughter that approached the hysterical.

"Where are all the girls, that's what I'd like to know? Four of them the company sent down here, and I haven't had time to even see if they're pretty," Clay cried.

Peter laughed. "They aren't pretty, particularly, unless you judge them on the grounds of pretty is as pretty does. With that as a standard, they're beautiful. And two of them are girls only in the sense that a woman over fifty says of her friends 'the girls are coming to play bridge tonight.'"

Sheila joined in the giggling. "I sent them up to bed. They were walking in their sleep when we finished cleaning up after the Mendez child left. And I still am."

"I suppose the doc here and I should be flattered that you waited for us," Clay teased.

"You should be at that," she agreed. "But the real reason was that I'd never been a head nurse and may never be again. I guess I wanted to stretch it out a bit."

CRUISE NURSE

Their hilarity subsided as quickly as it had risen. Sheila stared moodily about at the room. It was clean. The narrow beds freshly made; the windows were washed but uncurtained, as they had been since the epidemic had begun. She thought that the place looked depressingly bare. She decided that that was because it had been so cluttered so long. She sighed. "Nine deaths."

"Considering that nearly everybody on the compound had it, more than two hundred in all, that's not bad," Clay said heavily.

"It's pretty darn good," Peter said. "The percentage was three times as high in Santa Teresa."

"Even then, it was a light type," Peter explained, "as I knew as soon as I got here. I checked the viruses with some I found in a textbook. My main worry was that they would mutate into something worse. Viruses do that without rhyme or reason, so far as science knows."

Sheila nodded. "I prayed that we could get it cleared up before that happened."

"I guess we all did," Clay added. "No cases developed after we really got the place cleaned up. We were lucky to be able to do that as quickly as we did."

Peter groaned, remembering. "I hope I'll never have a job like that again. Clay, how much sleep did you have last night?"

Clay grinned. "A whole night's worth. Three hours. A man couldn't ask for more."

"I could," Peter said. "I'm planning to sleep twenty years like old Rip van Winkle."

Sheila yawned. "How long was it Sleeping Beauty slept? Seventeen years, from the day she was christened until she was old enough to marry? I'd settle for that."

"It wasn't like that," Clay remembered. "She was old

enough to do spinning or something of the sort. And she slept until things had grown up into a great wall about the castle, don't you remember? I think that was a hundred years. And that's for me."

"You'll make a beauty, asleep, with a long beard," Peter jeered.

Sheila was a little more restrained in her yawn then. "Sleep might not make a beauty of me, but a week of it would help."

"Elise thinks I'm a beauty," Clay said plaintively.

"When did you talk to her last?" Sheila asked him.

He beamed. "That's why I didn't sleep longer last night. I talked to her just after nine. She and her mother are flying down next week. And the day after they arrive, the wedding's going to be. I've been commissioned to ask you to be bridesmaid, Sheila. All right?"

She was wider awake now. "I can think of nothing I'd like better. But is Mrs. Ferrier honestly coming?"

"Honestly," he said. "I really think she's completely reconciled. Elise says she is."

Sheila widened her eyes in mock admiration. "Who are you, Clay Masters? I can't think of anybody even among the royalty who would be grand enough. And there's no billionaire your age that I know of."

Clay leaned forward and whispered from behind his hand. "I'm going down in history. Mrs. F's crystal ball has told her that I'm going to be the first man on the moon."

She snapped finger and thumb. "That's it. You're from outer space. I should have known it."

"What I came for," Clay said, serious again, "wasn't only to tell you about the wedding. I've had a communication from headquarters in today's mail. Only it's addressed to you, Peter."

He took a letter from his pocket and handed it to the

other man. "I won't wait to see what's in it because I already know in general; I've been talking to the big boys over the phone. Get some rest, both of you, and be pretty for the wedding. I don't want anybody looking undernourished and like he or she had a couple of black eyes. My prospective mother-in-law might change her mind. Good-night, kids."

"I'll be getting back to the girl's dorm, too," Sheila told Peter, getting up too.

He put his hand on her arm to detain her. "You wait and see what's in the letter, Sheila. Maybe they're sending us back to the States."

"Both of us? Together?" she asked, sitting down again.

He grinned at her. "I'm too worn out to do any courting, and I'm poor," he told her, "but I hope if I'm going anywhere we're going together." He had torn open the envelope now, and he began to read the letter aloud:

"Dear Dr. Stowe,

"The board of directors have decided to erect a memorial to Dr. Fischer who died during the recent epidemic in Santa Teresita and the others who lost their lives there. It is our opinion that a foundation for research on viruses in Central American diseases would be the thing. I have been asked to offer you the place as head of research. If you will consider such work, we will discuss the matter further, settling such things as salary, staff, and—"

Peter broke off as if his voice had failed him. He gazed off into the distance as if he actually saw something there. Then he shouted one word, "Psittacosis!"

"What about parrot fever?" Sheila asked.

"It's a virus disease," he explained.

"And," she went on, a mischievous look in her eyes, "you

said something about if they were sending you anywhere, you'd like me to go along. Does that still hold if you're staying?"

His eyes had their own twinkle. "I'm not rich or going to be."

When he had kissed her—not at all like a man too worn out for courting—she spoke from the shelter of his arms. "Rich? You're the richest man in the world. You know what you want, and now you have the means of accomplishing it."

"Both things I want, darling," he told her.