

THE RESCUED: A Sequel

Martin Travers died at sea, three weeks out of Bombay. As his widow Edith watched the hastily built box disappear over the side, she thought, well, it wouldn't do to have me turn tail and run back to the shallow seas, would it, with no idea where the brig *Lightning* might be. At the same time, woven into her sensations of guilt and relief, there came an almost physical sense of the *Lightning's* captain, Tom Lingard, standing resolute and firm-lipped by her side, as he so often had throughout the tumult and tragedy surrounding her husband's kidnapping.

She retreated to the stern and watched the wake. This was always her favorite place on the yacht — much to Martin's disgust, for there was no attitude, no taste, no inclination on her part toward anything, at which he did not carp and criticize. *Why must you stare at where we have been? Why won't you focus your attention on where we are going, Edith?* His need to control every aspect of her being had been so overwhelming, and had lasted for so long — nearly ten years! — that even as the barque moved farther and farther away from his discarded corpse, she had to tell herself again, no, he is gone, the fever took him and I am left alone.

Back there, no one could see her smile.

Six months later, she was walking past a London newsstand when a headline shrieked at her. CAPTAIN "HOLY TERROR" ROBINSON TO FACE TRIAL. CHARGED WITH EATING HIS STRANDED CREW. It was winter by then but Edith, in her boots and furs, flushed as if she were back in the tropics. Her man bought the paper, at her request, and when she returned home she sank into a newly re-upholstered chair, brought a teacup to her lips, and nodded her head in recognition. *Frederick Carter, former first mate, is said to be chief witness. Trial will resume at nine o'clock tomorrow morning,*

Edith Travers was a striking woman, tall, with fair hair and a classical profile. In her thirty-fourth year, she moved with a feline grace that neither paraded nor hid itself. She was wealthy when she married Martin Travers, a future MP she was told (mostly by him), and a bloviating bore with nasty opinions about Her Majesty's native colonials. In Africa, he berated a bearer and said, *Your kind is not fit to live*. In India, he laughed in the face of a saddhu and ground his cigar out in the man's begging bowl. In the islands southeast of Malaya, he held forth at excruciating length about his country's sacred right to all the darker places of the earth. Later their yacht grounded on a sand bar and the whole Lingard episode began.

She was wealthier now, she had an imagination, and she had a flair for unusual dress. At nine the next morning, courtroom observers might have seen a tall fellow in a long coat and a good if somewhat oversized hat sidle into the room and settle onto the back bench. The man was angular, clean-shaven, and redolent of tobacco. He wore dark glasses, and did not make a sound other than that made by his trousers as he crossed and uncrossed his legs. He paid close attention as Fred Carter, a sunburned young man with a sailor's walk, testified at length on old Robinson's iniquities, which were many.

As the court broke for lunch, the tall man followed Carter, around the corner into a workingmen's eating place, where the witness sat down at a deal table. The tall man sat down opposite, removed the dark glasses, and opened the long coat. "Hello, Mr. Carter. Do you recognize me?"

Fred Carter's red face turned paper-white. "Mrs. Travers —? Is it — it can't be! Is it you?"

She smiled, shrugged off the coat, and revealed a lady's white silk blouse above the trousers.

"Yes. I didn't want to be conspicuous, so — "

Carter's expression shifted from incredulity to guardedness. "Where is your husband?"

"Dead. At the bottom of the Gulf of Aden, to be more precise. No," she waved her long but delicate fingers, "I did not push him off. He died of fever."

Carter sipped his pint. "I remember he was ill at times during the — during the whole sorry business. Do you know how many people died? Do you?"

Her eyebrow rose to pronounced arches. "As you will probably recall, most of those people were criminal thugs, out to plunder the yacht and disgrace Captain Lingard."

"Well, they accomplished the latter goal, all right." Carter's eyes, already narrow, contracted to blue slits. "While you and your husband, and your Spanish friend, sailed off into oblivion."

"Hardly oblivion. I am here, after all. I have already told you where my husband is. As for Mr. D'Alcacer, he is in Seville and quite well."

"Look, what you did to him — to the Captain —" Carter kept his gaze, what there was of it, fixed on her face. "I tell you, he hasn't been the same man since."

"Where is he?"

Carter laughed, a harsh discordant sound quite out of keeping with his murmurous speaking voice. "I do believe you have the nerve to ask!"

She waited. When it became clear a response would be needed, she said, "I thanked him, you know."

“I suspected as much. From the way Captain Lingard spoke about you. Which,” Carter hastened to add, “was only once, by the way.”

“I want to make it up to him. Is he in need? Does he want funds? Where is he, Carter?”

Carter snuffed. “Have you taken to smoking cigars? To go along with your man’s costume?”

“I lit one of Martin’s in his dressing room, and let the odor seep into these clothes.” Edith grimaced. “I don’t know how you men tolerate those things. They’re quite vile.”

“If I tell you where he is, he will never forgive me.”

“Are you still in his employ?”

Carter sighed. Somewhere a bell bonged one o’clock. “I need to go back to the courtroom. I don’t know why they’re bothering, especially after all this time and considering old Robinson is two-thirds dead at least.”

“That is not my concern.” She extracted a calling card, with difficulty from an unaccustomed trouser pocket, and handed it across the table. “I am at home from eight to ten. I trust I’ll see you?”

As he stood, Carter said, “They say curiosity killed the cat. It may kill me as well.”

“I look forward to welcoming you,” said Edith Travers, assuming her man’s coat again. “It is good to see you, Mr. Carter.”

She repeated that sentiment to him at eight forty-five, when he knocked with some diffidence on her door.

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“My first question,” he said, once they were ensconced on opposing divans in the drawing room. “How came you to appear in that courtroom?”

Edith poured herself a glass of sherry. She was left-handed, Carter noted, and she wore no rings. “I was passing a newsmonger’s. I saw the name of Captain Robinson. I thought of you.”

Carter frowned. “But I never told you — and I don’t believe Captain Lingard would have — about my service with that ill-fated man.”

She looked away. Her face had a remarkable subtlety. She might have been considering the cost of a new dress. “At one point I overheard you, speaking of the matter. One does not forget a sobriquet like ‘Holy Terror.’”

“What do you want from the captain, Captain Lingard, I mean? Do you think he’ll consent to be your second husband?”

She was subtle, he was blunt. Edith Travers blinked, pushed at the lace on her cuffs, moved her mouth before she spoke. “I hardly think I need discuss, with you — ” She was sounding like Martin, she realized. She would strive not to do that again. “Please don’t be offended. I was always in your corner, Mr. Carter.”

“I should think so, considering that awful Shaw whom I replaced. Yet you had the pleasure of his company all the way home, didn’t you?”

She ignored the question. The bumbling Shaw was no more than a smudge on her memory. “I wish to know that Captain Lingard is well, in body and in — soul, if you will.”

“After you ground him to powder, you mean?”

Her gaze remained level. “I was not the one who fired on those — on those supporters of Daman and Tengga. If we are allotting blame for the deaths of the captain’s two friends —”

“Three. You’re forgetting Jorgenson.”

She shuddered. “That awful man. I should have realized what he was planning. When he was playing with those lengths of rope.”

“Lengths of rope?”

“Yes, he would — spread them on the deck, you know — on the *Emma* — light fire to their ends and check his watch. They were fuses, of course. I realize that — now.”

Carter looked at his boots—dull black, salt crust along the seams—against the shining parquet floor. “You couldn’t have known. I can’t blame you on that count.”

“It was Captain Jorgenson,” she went on, “who committed the rash act. He might have waited.”

Carter grasped his glass by the rim; she thought he might throw it. Then he replaced it on the table and let go. “I suppose you want to know what happened next.”

She did not reply

“We sailed north,” he began. “To Celebes, then on to Borneo. The captain traded with some Dutchman, Olmayer, Almayer, something like that. He put up a good show, convinced the Dutchman — wasn’t difficult, you know, that man was in his own private hell of some kind — came away with a cargo of potatoes. Yes, potatoes, in Celebes. I have no idea where they came from. Then Malata. He knew a planter there, a Geoffrey something. There was some kind of ruckus involving a girl.”

“A girl?”

“You may rest easy, Mrs. Travers. Captain Lingard had no concern for her, she was the planter’s problem. Then we fought gales, typhoons, went up the wrong side of the Gulf of Thailand. In Bangkok we stayed for some time in the house of a man called Stein. A German.

Former trader. House full of butterflies, pinned ones, in glass cases. Captain Lingard found them fascinating.”

“Butterflies? Really?”

“And insects too, great black horny beetles with pincer claws. Well, of course they, him and Stein, sat there and jawed all night, several nights as a matter of fact.” Carter leaned back in his chair, his dull black seaman’s coat incongruous against the ormolu. “I don’t doubt they discussed you, Mrs. Travers.”

A smile flitted across her face. “Conjecture on your part, Mr. Carter. Isn’t that right?” She indicated the bottle. “Please, help yourself.”

He refilled his glass and hers, but neither drank.

“I want.” Edith came out with it after a minute. “Captain — Lingard. To know that he is — in — in my thoughts, Mr. Carter.”

“Because I don’t see you coming to live aboard the *Lightning*, you know, like some other captain’s wives. Hanging the wash out on a line. Shooing away the cat. Rubbing liniment on his back. Oh, I’ve seen them, those wives. You are nothing like them, Mrs. Travers, as you must know yourself.”

“Mr. Carter.” Her hand was on the bell pull. “I have invited you into my home, highly irregular of course, particularly for a widow of less than one year. I have advised my servants not to interfere — tonight — but if you persist in issuing these — insults, I will have no choice — ” Edith Travers shut her mouth, appeared to withdraw into herself like a mollusk resuming its shell, then resumed in a different, less lofty tone. “Should you tell me where he is, I have no intention of pursuing him.” Even as she said that, she knew it was a lie. “Given his whereabouts, I might choose to send a telegram. No more.”

Carter fidgeted. Rounded shoulders, tapping foot, abstracted gaze. At length he stirred, as if about to protest, but subsided. He massaged his temples, where his short blond hair was beginning to thin. He glanced once or twice around the room, taking in the mirrors in their gilded frames, the dim portraits of those long dead, the exquisite glass sculptures, the silver-backed photo of Edith herself, in her yachting costume. The late Mr. Travers was not represented in the room. "I am planning to go back to him, you know. As soon as this wretched trial concludes. I'll have to face his wrath, if you — "

"He will not be wrathful." Edith half-turned in her chair, a sinuous movement that appeared to concentrate her femininity and was not lost on Carter. "I will render you blameless," she said. "Trust me."

Captain Tom Lingard stood by the *Lightning's* rail. He read, and reread, the yellow telegraphic paper in his hand. Then he closed his eyes and repeated its contents, word for word, to himself.

"CAPTAIN THOS LINGARD BRIG LIGHTNING SINGAPORE ROADS.
HUSBAND DEAD STOP SAW CARTER HERE ROBINSON TRIAL STOP DO NOT
BLAME HIM I INSISTED STOP ARRIVING BANGKOK SIX WEEKS STEAMER
EGERIA STOP KNOW YOU BEST OF ALL PEOPLE IN WORLD STOP YOU
LIKEWISE ME STOP SUGGEST WE MEET IF POSSIBLE."

The *Lightning* lay at five degrees of latitude. Lingard pushed his hat back on his head. His hand came away moist. Green and ominous clouds filled one corner of the sky, leaving the rest untouched and glaring blue. He had an urge to sniff the telegram, as if it might have been perfumed. He laughed at himself.

"If possible. If possible. Damn Carter and his courtesy. What'll I do with her, I'd like to ask him now. What d'you do with a woman? No. Not a woman. With that woman."

They knew each other best of all the men and women in the world because Lingard had shared with her what he would not with the others. Not with Carter, although as he now acknowledged to himself that had been a mistake, a fatality. If she knew the names Daman and Tengga, both of whom were now dead, it was because Lingard had been reckless, had gambled, had trusted his to that point infallible instinct, and lost. In trying to rescue an eastern kingdom, he had come away with a Western woman.

“That’s something,” he muttered to himself. “That is at least something.’

He decided he would let her come on. Let her come on straight as a die. It would not be in his power to make her return.

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