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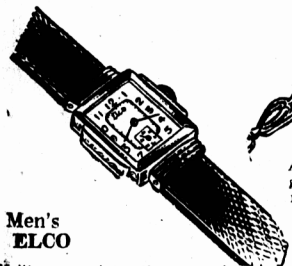
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Slow Boat From Marseilles

By Michael Hastings

continued

"Not a penny," said Oliver firmly. "You can consider yourself lucky to be gaining your freedom. Once the voyage is over, you can do what you like."

Zakas nodded. He was not greatly disappointed in the answer. He felt that if he behaved well there was a possibility of Oliver returning a little. But even if he did not, he still had the two bundles of notes concealed at the bottom of his trunk.

"You shall have no cause to complain," he promised.

"It will be so much the worse for you if I do," said Oliver uncompromisingly. "That's all. You can go now."

For a moment Zakas hesitated. It was a new experience to be ordered about by a man he had regarded as a first mate. Then he reflected that, after all, Oliver was greatly to be preferred to either Prinz or Rutter. With this philosophy thought he left the cabin.

Oliver lit his pipe and lapsed into contemplation. So far, things had gone well. The crew had settled down after the excitement. The passengers had recovered to a certain extent. Panic had gone and now they were eager to know about their fate. He did not wish to keep them in cruel suspense any longer than was necessary. Already, he had informed them that Dr. Rutter had made false promises and assured them that he would do his best for them.

Now the problem was to determine the nature of that best. As a preliminary he had made a thorough search of the cabins set aside for the two doctors and made some startling discoveries.

He wondered whether to consult Lubbe. That amazing man had shown little interest in what had happened on board. His only comment had been: "It was good that nobody came down to tinker with my engines." Perhaps Lubbe was hardly the one to help.

There was a gentle knocking at the door which brought him back from his thoughts.

"Come in!" he called.

It was Vanya. She came across to him, smiling happily.

"I wanted to come before," she said. "Only I thought that you would be busy taking over the running of the ship."

For a moment he held her in his arms.

"There's been more than that to consider," he said quietly.

"I know," she said. "What is to happen to them?"

He understood her meaning, and nodded his head. "I've been trying to work out some sort of a scheme," he told her. "It isn't easy—there are several things to take into consideration. . . They are all terribly worried and quiet. They just sit around waiting patiently, their eyes filled with dumb misery. You see—nobody wants them. They know that only too well. And they dread being brought before officials who will express meaningless sympathy and say that they have no power to act. They feel that they will be sent back—to the same poverty, want, and neglect."

"I know," said Oliver. "The chief trouble is that there is no organization awaiting at the other end. Remember—there were others behind Prinz and Rutter."

"I wondered about that," she said. "I can't understand why they brought so many passengers." She gave a slight shudder. "Of course, there was the operation; but surely they did not need more than one for that."

"I don't think we shall ever know the truth," said Oliver. It was better, he felt, to deceive her. He had suspicions of the sinister purpose of the voyage; for in Prinz's cabin he had found a folded poster. It was not a great effort to imagine that Rutter was the Erik Ritter mentioned. Looking at the photograph he had tried to picture the same face with a dark beard and tinted glasses. And Ritter had performed experiments on human subjects. It was better, he decided that Vanya should not know that. He wanted to spare her as much of the horror as possible.

"I suppose not," she said. "Unless your prisoner talks."

"Prisoner? Oh, the German member of the crew. There were two. One was killed in the fight. The other was wounded. He died early this morning."

Again he left something out. The prisoner was found knifed. And Jim Crow was without his sheath knife, which he said he had lost in the fight. But Oliver remembered Jim Crow's father—killed by the Germans in Africa. Africa can breed dark purposes of revenge. He had decided that there should be no inquiry. No doubt the man deserved his fate.

"So it will remain a mystery," said Vanya.

"It's better that way," Oliver said to her. "It's better for us to look towards the future. Sit down, and I will tell you what I have thought about our problems so far."

She did so. Then she glanced around the small cabin and said: "Are you going to take over the one which the captain used?"

"No. I prefer this. The other is too closely associated with last night. Now then. About the pas-

sengers. I've searched the belongings of both Prinz and Rutter. Most of the things will be thrown overboard. But in Prinz's cabin there is a large suitcase which contains bundles of notes. Some English, some American. So far as I can tell, they are genuine. I expect they were used for current expenses. Probably, some would be required for bribes at the other end.

"I haven't counted the money yet. But there will be a substantial amount for each passenger. Incidentally, I found the money for the crew set apart in another case. Where Rutter intended to land, I do not know. But I have selected a destination with which I am familiar. I was in Central American waters when war broke out. I shall put the passengers ashore by boat. I'll provide all that is possible in the way of clothing and food. Jan Kiernik will act as their leader. I will give him a note to a man I know who owns a plantation. They should receive assistance from him. Some of the money may have to be spent in bribing officials; but the chances should be favourable for them remaining. After all, Europe had nothing better to offer."

"It hadn't that much," said Vanya.

"I can't do more for them than that," Oliver said. "If I could, I shouldn't hesitate."

"And you'll tell them as soon as possible?"

"Yes," he smiled at her. "Rightfully, I suppose I have no claim to the money. But after all, it is Nazi money. It seems to me only justice that it should go to Nazi victims."

"That can't be disputed," Vanya said. "But what happens afterwards?"

"We'll sail south. We can refuel and make Buenos Aires. After that, Zakas can do as he wishes. I wish to remain with her. There is one exception—the French youth. I'll try to find something better for him."

"And what shall you do?" Vanya asked.

"I haven't had much time to think about that. Your father, of course, will go to his friends." Vanya stood up. She moved nearer to Oliver.

"I think you have planned very

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well," she said. "Except that you seem to have done nothing about the most important thing."

"You mean?"

"Ourselves," she said, in little

more than a whisper.

He placed his arms on her shoulders and brought her close to him.

"There's a British Consul in Buenos Aires," he said. "And he

has power to . . ." He paused, con-

fused.

She looked up at him with a smile.

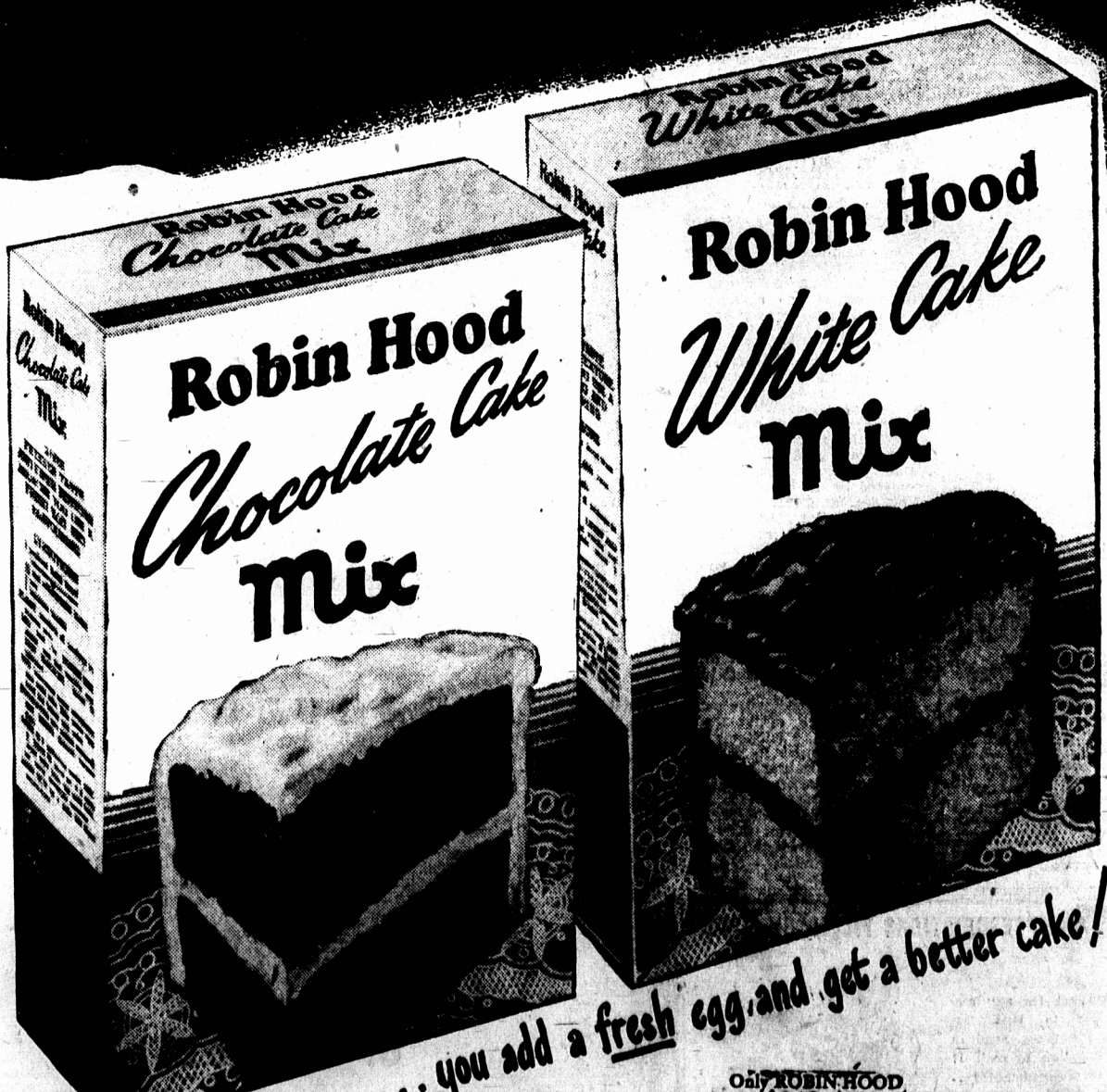
"To what?" she demanded.

"Well—he can—I mean, one of his duties is that he is able to marry people."

"That's what father told me," she said demurely.

THE END

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