

The IMPOSTOR

By Frank I. Packard



"YOUR FATHER'S DEAD."

Synopsis—Stacey Wallen, first mate of the bark Upolo, in the Java sea, is the sole survivor of the crew, all victims of yellow fever. Ting Wah, Chinese sailor, last man to die, tells Wallen of his and five other Chinamen were sent aboard by "Drink-House Sam," notorious character of Singapore, to kill him. This recalls to Wallen an incident of his childhood which seems connected with the confession. While delirious, Wallen enters in the ship's log the fact of his death and abandons the vessel in a small boat. Wallen's boat drifts to the island of Arru and a Scottish trader there, MacKnight, cares for him. Learning that a ship is in port on the other side of the island, twenty miles away, Wallen, though unfit for the task, starts to reach it, but falls exhausted on the trail. There he is found by a man and woman who are from the ship he was trying to reach. Mott, first mate, and Helen MacKay, a passenger, they convey him to the vessel. The ship proves to be a small tramp steamer, the Monleigh, Capt. Laynton.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

It was a little strange. Ships like the Monleigh weren't in the habit of indulging in expensive luxuries of that description! His brows gathered for a moment; and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he walked forward to the captain's cabin under the bridge and knocked.

"Come in!" bawled a voice gruffly. Wallen entered to face the little man with the thin face and queer eyes—he promptly modified "queer" by "evasive" now—that he recognized as the captain.

"Hello!" exclaimed the captain in suddenly altered tones. "If it ain't Mr. Wallen! And on your pins already! Well, I'll be —! But sit down! Sit down!" He waved Wallen to a seat on the locker and pushed forward the bottle and glass that were on the table. "Sit down, Mr. Wallen, and help yourself!"

Wallen shook his head as he seated himself.

"Thanks just the same," he said; "but I'm still sticking to quinine." "Quinine, eh?" repeated the other. "Yes, of course! Yes—right you are! Well—he poured a glass for himself—here's to you, and just as hearty if I drink alone. And I'll add, Mr. Wallen, that it's to the rummest meeting that ever I've known in my life!"

Wallen watched the man's neat disposal of four fingers, leaned back on the locker, swept his eyes around the



"Captain Laynton—Mark Laynton."

cabin, and, suddenly looking up at the captain again, intercepted a furtive glance that the other was stealing at him over the rim of his glass.

"That ever I've known," said the captain hastily as his eyes dropped. "There'll be a lot to say to each other, Mr. Wallen."

"Yes," Wallen agreed. "I'll confess I'm puzzled on several points, Captain—Laynton, isn't it? I'm not sure I caught the name correctly when Miss MacKay introduced us."

"That's right," said the other. "Laynton. Captain Laynton—Mark Laynton."

"Well, Captain Laynton," said Wallen, "your reference to our meeting being a rum one only leaves me a little more up in the air. I can understand, of course, that you might have heard of the Upolo being missing—or reported lost; but I can't understand how you knew I was on her—or, knowing that, what interest you could have in me."

Captain Laynton laughed a little in a constrained way.

bark's loss until I put in here yesterday and heard there was a survivor from her on the other side of the island—but I knew about you fast enough."

He paused, shot a swift, restless glance at Wallen, then began to pace. Three steps one way, three steps the other, up and down the narrow cabin. "D—n it, man!" he said abruptly. "I've got bad news for you. Your father's dead!"

For a moment Wallen neither moved nor spoke. It was difficult to grasp the full significance of the words. His father—dead!

What did this thin-faced man, with the little black eyes that always refused to meet one's own, who was tramping nervously now up and down a little cabin on a rusty tramp steamer here in the Java sea, at the other end of the world, know of his father, who never left the four walls of that lonely gray stone house in California?

"What do you know about my father?" he found himself speaking in a quiet voice.

Captain Laynton stopped impulsively in front of his table, pulled the drawer open, took out a sheet of paper and handed it to Wallen.

"You'll get the drift of this yourself, I guess," he ventured.

Wallen stared at the paper, at first with curious bewilderment—and then, with the sudden flash of comprehension, he was on his feet. It was a list of the ports of call scheduled for the ill-fated Upolo on her last voyage—ports of call that she had never made.

"What does this mean?" he demanded in a low voice. "How did you come by this?"

"Your father gave it to me," the captain answered. "And now, if you'll just listen for a minute, I'll give you the whole story, and you'll see for yourself. First I might as well tell you, though, that I own this ship. Well, I was in Honolulu—light, you understand—when your father came aboard one evening and offered to charter me for a three months' cruise down here. He made the price right, paid the money down in advance, and I closed with him.

"He gave me the list of ports, and said his son was on a trading bark called the Upolo, and that he wanted to get track of him as soon as possible, and offered an extra bonus for all hands if we made a quick job of it. That's all I know about the reason for the cruise. Well, to cut a long story short, we started away, and were down just south of the line when the accident happened.

"Your father was alone down in his cabin. We heard a shot, rushed below, and, thinking it strange that he didn't show up in the excitement, called to him—but got no answer. Well, we burst in his cabin door and found him dead across the bunk."

"You mean," said Wallen through tight lips, "that he committed suicide?"

"No. Wait!" Captain Laynton shook his head. "It wasn't that. God knows how it happened! The thing went off—that's all. He was cleaning one of those patent automatic pistols. "There was a bottle of oil, a cleaning rag, and a wire swabbing brush on the floor. And"—Laynton poured himself another glass from the bottle, gulped it down, and wiped his lips with the back of his hand—"well, I'm trying to give it to you in a few words—we buried him at sea of course."

Wallen turned his back and stared out of one of the forward portholes down onto the dirty foredeck. Was the man lying? Was he telling the truth? That his father had chartered the Monleigh and sailed with her—yes.

But that his death was accidental—the background of his father's life—the recent attempt upon his own life! His brain was working in flashes. This man Laynton repelled him.

An accident—never! There was no room for doubt—"never go to the East"—it was not an accident—his father had been murdered, on this ship. And then suddenly he swallowed hard.

It was to save him that his father had chartered the Monleigh and come East; for, according to that list of ports, his father somehow had been in touch with his movements, somehow had known the danger he was in, and, trying to avert it, had been murdered himself.

A cold, merciless passion swept upon him. Someone on this ship was the murderer. Was it this man here? What was at the bottom of it all? It was a long arm of vengeance that reached to that gray stone house in California, that reached to Singapore, to this ship, to that sweltering, plague-stricken bark where, strangely enough, he alone had lived!

And now the score was a very heavy one to pay—his father's life! Well—his eyes narrowed—he would pay it! "Did my father bring a native servant with him—a man named Gunga?" he asked dispassionately.

"No," the other replied. "He was alone."

Wallen nodded. "What else is there to tell me?"

"Not much—but what you can guess," Laynton said. "I ran down through the Makassar strait and made for the nearest port on that list—Pohl here. Your father had paid me for the three months, and if I say it myself, when I make a bargain I stick to it. If I could find you inside the three months I was going to do it."

"I don't know what your father was so anxious about, though I understood, of course, that he chartered me because out here, with you touching at those trading stations, he couldn't reach you by mail or cable; but I made sure it was something mighty important and I thought you'd know what it was."

It was almost an interrogation, put naturally, nonchalantly enough—save for a trace of eagerness in the man's tones that was not entirely disguised.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Wallen smoothly.

"You haven't?" Laynton's eyes for once fixed steadfastly. "Well, that's queer! A man don't go to the expense of chartering a ship like this without a pretty good reason, and—"

"I dare say my father knew," suggested Wallen quietly. Then briskly: "The question now is: What are you going to do, captain?"

"Why?" said Captain Laynton. "I thought I'd made that plain enough. When I make a contract I keep it. It's



"These Are Your Father's Papers."

up to you, Mr. Wallen. There's still say, a matter of two months before that charter expires, and the Monleigh's yours until it does—in your father's place. That's square, isn't it?" Wallen hesitated thoughtfully. On the face of it it was both square and honorable. He began to wonder if he had misjudged the man.

And yet, instinctively, in spite of that, there seemed something specious even in the honesty that appeared to underlie the other's motives. He had reason enough to distrust every soul on board a ship where he was morally certain his father had been murdered! Two months—if he accepted the captain's offer. If he had only something to work on!

Something! Yes, he had something. Drink-House Sam of Singapore! Captain Laynton spoke again:

"Look here!" he said in almost hurt tones. "I can't make you any fairer proposition than that. Can I?"

"No," said Wallen instantly, his mind made up. "And I'll accept your offer, captain, and thank you heartily for it."

"Good!" returned Laynton promptly. "Well, with that settled, what's the sailing orders? We've got steam up and can get away any minute you say the word."

"Then by all means get away at once!" he laughed easily. "And"—he hesitated—"let's see! I guess you'd better shape up for Singapore. Yes, call it Singapore for a starter."

"Right," answered Laynton. "Singapore it is! But here—wait a minute, Mr. Wallen." "He hurried to a small iron safe that was built in under his bunk, opened it, and returned with a bulky manila envelope, which he handed to Wallen. "These are your father's papers," he explained. "I collected them together and put them away for safe-keeping."

"Thank you," said Wallen gravely. He stepped out onto the deck. "Oh, by the way, captain," he observed casually, "I notice you carry wireless."

The captain's whistle, pulled from his pocket, chirped shrilly. "You there, forward!" he bawled in a sea voice that was like the bellow of a bull. "Stand by to weigh anchor, Mr. Mott! Hey, Mr. Mott!"

And as the second officer emerged from the chartroom, just abaft the bridge and directly over the captain's cabin: "We'll get under way at once. Let me know when she's up and down."

He turned to Wallen. "Wireless, you said? Oh, yes; it's that blasted new-American law—can't trade in American ports without it now, you know."

Helen Mackay tells about herself to the hero.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

These Are Real Furs



Just now, with Christmas near, the shops are featuring fur garments and fur sets, knowing by experience that a certain percentage of people will be sure to purchase them as gifts. If you are among the number, be prepared to find prices far higher than you have ever known them, and the prospect of their being reduced is not cheerful. Garments made of the finest and rarest skins are prohibitive, except for the very rich, the price of all pelts and the price of labor having gone steadily higher for several seasons. The finest skins have reached the limit and are reported to have made a slight decline, while those that are more common have made an advance all along the line. Wages are not likely to decrease for sometime, and fur-bearing animals grow scarcer. In view of these things a good fur garment, or fur set may be considered a fairly safe investment, and nothing in Christmas gifts is more cherished.

Pretty Neckpieces



Be not mistaken about neckwear or persuaded that the neck unadorned can hold its own against one that is clothed with pretty furbelows. As usual, the approaching holidays find neckwear departments in the stores all blossoming out with collars, fichus, ties, scarfs, gumples, jabots and vestes, singly and in combinations and made of many different materials. Leading off are lace and net, following close are organdie, batiste, scrim and crepe georgette. Then there are narrow silk or velvet ribbons in ties, and an army of knitted scarfs. And every article is a possible gift that will be a joy to its recipient. Just a few pieces are grouped together in the picture above.

The scarf shown at the top of the group, is knitted of light gray yarn and finished at the ends with a tied fringe of the yarn. Its special pride and glory lie in the sprays of roses crocheted of the same wool as the scarf and fastened to its ends.

Just below this scarf the collar and one cuff of a filet collar-and cuff set show such a combination to be easily made. The filet is bought by the yard, measured into the lengths wanted and cut off. The ends of the collar and the cuffs are finished with a very narrow edging of filet and the straight edge sewed to a narrow band of fine batiste.

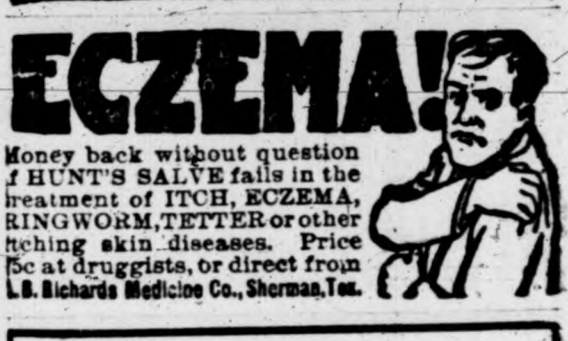
Organdie both plain and cross barred, is ornamented in several ways with pretty needlework and stitchery in collar and cuff sets or with fine embroidery or lace. A long collar of it to be worn with a surplice waist appears at the left of the picture. It is edged with three rows of narrow wall lace. At the opposite side of the picture a collar of linen scrim has eye-

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THE "BLUES" Caused by Acid-Stomach

Millions of people who worry, are despondent, have spells of mental depression, feel blue and are often melancholy, believe that these conditions are due to outside influences, which they have little or no control over. Nearly always, however, they can be traced to an internal source—acid-stomach. Nor is it to be wondered at. Acid-stomach, beginning with such well defined symptoms as indigestion, belching, heartburn, bloating, etc., will, if not checked, in time affect to some degree or other all the vital organs. The nervous system becomes deranged. Digestion suffers. The blood is impoverished. Health and strength are undermined. The victim of acid-stomach, although he may not know the cause of his ailments, feels his hope, courage, ambition and energy slipping. And truly life is dark—not worth much to the man or woman who has acid-stomach.

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