

Lloyds of London

the coffee shop days was gone. Here was no place for gossip. It was devoted entirely to business, as a certain quiet and decorum so different from the old days, testified. Jonathan shook hands with his patron and sat down in one of the spare chairs by John Angerstein's desk. He smiled. "Well, sir, I await orders."

"I'll have to have a desk put in here for you, lad—"

The bell rang and a waiter went to the bulletin board and wrote: Garbage scow Bell of Working founders in Thames. Total loss claimed.

"I never underwrite any of the insurance on garbage scows," Angerstein said bitingly. "News of marine matters continues to be very scare. A storm has been raging in the Channel for two weeks and not a boat has put a shore."

"You have splendid new quarters here, sir."

"Oh, yes. We have a soundly organized association now and the association didn't spare money on furnishing our new home. Jonathan, this is a very worrying business. The lack of means of swift communication is very trying. A vessel goes ashore in Scotland and if we knew it here in London twenty-four hours later we might dispatch aid to her, get her off, repair her and save ourselves considerable loss. But it's a week or two before we hear of it and by that time a storm has sprung up and the vessel has been hammered into small pieces."

"Of course," Jonathan agreed, "this lack of swift means of communication does make for greater losses, and greater losses do make for a higher rate of insurance, which doesn't enrich the underwriter a great deal and is a distinct handicap to the ship operator or merchant. I've been giving considerable thought to this subject Mr. Angerstein. I have conceived the idea of a system of semaphores, say five miles apart, the length and breadth of England, to signal news of shipping along our coast. Such a system might easily be self-supporting from its earnings, not only for the transmission of shipping news but also news of general interest to the public—and hence, to the newspapers which sell news to the public. Lookouts at each semaphore station, with a powerful telescope would read the messages and transmit them. Sort of relay system."

"In the daytime, yes. But how about night time?"

"I'm giving that some thought, too. A system of lighting by lanterns."

"My boy, I do believe you're the only man in England who has had the wit to study this important problem and strive to solve it."

"In what condition are my finances, sir?"

"Well, thanks to your frugality and your preference for study, rather than helling around, drinking and gambling, the hundred pounds a year I have managed to

make your capital earn has taken you through Eton and supplied your every need. Thanks to yourself, you won the Cambridge schlorship, so your annual income has still been more than sufficient for your need. Watson has your account made up to date and presently I will give you a check for the amount due you. Unless, of course," he added, "you prefer to leave it in my syndicate, of which you have been a silent partner since you first came here. I think you had better do that. Your salary as my assistant, now that old Waton is getting so old and helpless he must soon be pensioned, should support you in reasonable style. You'll be wanting chambers of your own, of course. Well, take a few days off to attend to your personal affairs. Meanwhile let us have a cup of coffee."

He led the way out of the vast room, through swinging doors into a coffee shop next door. The sign above the door read: Lloyd's Coffee Shop. "I suppose," Jonathan remarked gaily, "you old underwriters couldn't function if, between the writing of policies, you didn't have a coffee shop adjacent, into which you could pop for refreshment."

"Habits," Angerstein rejoined smilingly, "never die until the proprietor of the habit dies. This coffee room is open to the public, and it is called Lloydy's Coffee House, although the owner's name is Meecham. Edward Lloyd has been dead too long to object, and the name had great advertising value. And the coffee is even better than it was in the old days. A waiter here is a waiter and nothing else."

Close to the door that led from the Subscribers Room into the coffee house was a stall where were dispensed newspapers, periodicals, cigars, snuff, tobacco, etc. It was presided over by a pretty, pert, common young girl. Angerstein nodded to her: "Good morning, Polly."

"Good morning, Mr. Angerstein." She touched a small hand-bell to arouse the attention of the waiters. Angerstein and Jonathan seated themselves at a table and a waiter rushed over to take their orders.

"You must get to know Polly, Jonathan," the elder man said. "She's a rare good sport and will give you many a laugh."

"Who is the somewhat overdressed and smirking dandy talking to her now? Is he connected with Lloyds? I met him coming out of the Subscribers' Room as I came in."

"That blot on the fair record of nature Jonathan, is one Lord Everette Stacy." And Angerstein added, unconsciously humorous and quite and afterthought: "I do not like the fellow. He has approached some of my colleagues on the subject of investing money in their syndicates—a silent partner, you know. He knows of no other business that will pay him such high interest on his money. I want nothing to do with the fellow."

"From the look he is giving you now, sir," Jonathan opined, "He would like to have something to do with you."

CHAPTER SEVEN

While waiting for their coffee, Jonathan and Angerstein studied Lord Everett Stacy at Polly's counter. The girl filled his snuff box for him and handed it to him in a business-like manner. "There you are, sir. The very best Maccaba. Two shillings, if you please, sir."

Lord Stacy gave the girl a sovereign; when she handed him his change he imprisoned her hand. "You keep the change, my pet," he said.

The girl gave him a quick appraising glance. It was evident that her experience with this sort of masher had been very extensive; she knew how to handle his kind without driving away his trade. She simpered, permitted him to continue to hold her hand and, with mock sincerity, said:

"Oh, I'd like to accept the gift, sir, but—I caun't. Really, sir, you're very kind, but—my mother always says: 'Polly, wotever yer do, never tyke money from a gentleman.' Please, sir, do not insist."

Reluctantly Stacy released her hand. "Mark the bounder," Angerstein muttered. "He tried to win Polly's favor by giving her the change from a sovereign when every penny the fool has is borrowed from trusting money-lenders. They loaned him a frightful sum—at huge interest, of course—on the strength of his marriage to the largest fortune in England. But Lady Stacy appears to be a sensible sort, from all I hear. She seems quite content to support him in her home in a reasonable way, even advancing funds for gambling. The fellow's a rake."

Stacy's voice reached them: "Sorry, Polly, but something about you suggested to me that you had outgrown your pinafore."

"Oh, no, me lord. A pinafore should never be outgrown. It keeps a girl so nice and clean."

Stacy chuckled patronizingly and crossed the room. As he passed the table where Angerstein and Jonathan sat he paused:

"Ah, good morning, my dear Angerstein."

Angered by such a patronizing note from this youthful blade, Angerstein scowled and with a chilly nod returned Lord Stacy's salutation, then buried his nose in his copy of the Times. However, Lord Stacy's hide was impervious to this plain announcement that Angerstein wanted nothing to do with him. He drew up a chair and, unbidden, sat down at the table.

"Unless I am very much mistaken, Angerstein, you are rather well acquainted with my uncle, Lord Drayton, First Lord of the Admiralty?"

"I have the honor of Lord Drayton's acquaintance—and you are not his nephew."

"Oh, well, why split hairs? I am his nephew by marriage. My mother, the Duchess of Cheyenden—"

"Yes."

Lord Draton gave me a letter of introduction to you, but somehow I appear to have mislaid it."

"We have met before—on at least two occasions, so I require no letter

from Lord Drayton to commend you to me. You have not—on two previous occasions been able to commend yourself to me. And I do not believe His Lordship ever gave you a letter. Incidentally, you have not been invited to sit at this table, sir."

Sacy blandly ignored this plain hint to be off about his business. He proffered his snuff box to Angerstein, who declined it. Stacy next proffered it to Jonathan, murmuring: "I do not appear to have the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir."

Jonathan could not repress a smile at the fellow's cool audacity. "You are Lord Everett Stacy," he said, "And I am the Akound of Swat. Thank you, but I do not use your brand of snuff."

Lord Stacy helped himself elegantly to a pinch. "My dear Angerstein," he resumed, "I have recently come into an inheritance from my grandmother—far less than I had hoped for, I must admit, for the old harridan was shamefully extravagant. It occurred to me that it might be to our mutual advantage if I employed that money here at Lloyd's—with you or with your syndicate."

"Impossible," Angerstein replied, deliberately electing to misunderstand his lordship's meaning. "I have no place for you in my office."

"My good man, I was not seeking a place in your office. I've my name and social standing to think of. I merely wanted to take an occasional risk—incognito."

"You are taking quite a risk now, Lord Stacy, Jonathan reminded him grimly. "Just 'good man' Mr. Angerstein, once more, you blatant jackass, and you'll go out of this coffee shop on your head."

Stacy gave him a cheerful nod to that and again addressed himself to John Angerstein. "I understand some of the underwriters make preposterous profits."

"With occasional preposterous losses. However, Lloyd's is not a gambling house. No doubt you will find underwriters who will let you in on their syndicates, but I'll have none of you. I hold neither with gambling, nor tilted young profligates who scorn commerce as beneath their station, yet seek to profit by it. Be off with you. The patience of the Akound of Swat is wasting rapidly."

Lord Stacy favored both men with a beaming smile, which he terminated hastily as Jonathan started to rise, and bowed an elaborate farewell.

"Now, what do you suppose that rake had in mind by reminding me that he is a nephew, by marriage, to the First Lord of the Admiralty?"

"I daresay he thought you'd be impressed by his noble connection and hasten to ingratiate yourself with Lord Drayton by obliging his distant kinsman."

"He has something in mind, Jonathan. Well, whatever it is, we shall hear of it in due course."

On a morning three months later, as John Angerstein sat in the coffee shop enjoying a ten o'clock cup of coffee and wondering why Jonathan