MURDER ON THE HIGH SEAS

MYSTERY SOLVER

Original Story
by Claudia Busto

Assemble the puzzle, read the story booklet, search for clues and solve the crime on the High Seas.
Elizabeth Goodstone awoke promptly at eight o’clock. As had become her daily habit, she gazed out the small circular window at the sparkling cobalt water, checking that she was indeed on a ship. Not that The Victoria was any old sea craft; rather, the glamorous luxury liner had a reputation for being the top method of traveling. Bound for New York from England, the vessel’s guests were from the very most prominent families. Known for its delectable food, superior service, and affable workers, the ship was dripping with amenities. Well-traveled clientele put their names on a waiting list for months in order to be able to enjoy the boat’s sizeable billiards room, several quaint restaurants and cafes, and barbershop, which offered copious beauty treatments. A large smoking room for the gentlemen, a library with hundreds of gold-leaved books, a sitting room for cards and parlor games, and a bar replete with the finest wine and brandy were also aboard. The ship’s numerous concerts and its closing evening grand ball were deemed top social events by its European and American passengers.

Elizabeth considered herself very lucky to be part of such a special voyage. As she brushed her long auburn hair into a topknot in front of her cabin’s walnut dressing table, she silently thanked her family for sending her. Her mother had been exceedingly nervous about her traveling alone, but her father had insisted that it would be good for Elizabeth to acquire some social skills. As her family had recently come into a great deal of money through some very shrewd investments, Elizabeth was now moving in very different circles. This trip was proving to be perfect for mingling with her desired set of acquaintances. In addition, she fancied herself to be somewhat of a writer, having penned two anecdotes for The Chronicle, a local newspaper. Looking forward to collecting some notes for a future story, she thought about behind-the-scenes account of what it was like aboard The Victoria would prove very popular with the paper’s readers. Secretly, she hoped a successful narrative would propel her into being hired as a regular staff writer.

Elizabeth quickly changed into her most becoming emerald green bathing dress and cap, and walked up to the upper deck for breakfast. The stately veranda was already swarming with people lounging happily in the comfortable blue and yellow lounge chairs. Elizabeth settled into a seat near the rail, ready to while away another day reading, gossiping, and playing shuffleboard. A smiling steward passed by and offered her a tray, a strawberry biscuit, and a cup of piping lemon tea, which she gladly accepted.

“Good day, Elizabeth,” a voice gushed in the chair closest to her.

It was Molly Holmes and her husband Henry, who sat at Elizabeth’s dinner table. Molly was a bit older, but quite jolly, with a hearty laugh, and always dressed to the hilt. She came to every meal clad in feathers and full jewels. Henry was a bit more serious. A well-known lawyer in London, he frequently worked on his cases during the day, scribbling furiously in a small leather-bound notebook.

Elizabeth was a bit awe-struck by them both, as they were the sort of folks she’d always looked up to, but had never really gotten to know before.

“Hello, Henry and Molly,” Elizabeth replied. “Another glorious day, isn’t it?”

“It sure is,” Molly enthused. “You missed a wonderful game of bridge last night in the lounge.”

“Really?” Elizabeth inquired. “I retired rather early to my cabin, as I was feeling a slight touch of seasickness.”

“Oh, that’s a shame,” Molly sympathized. She leaned in closer and whispered, “There was quite a scene. Julia Mullins had too much wine and started a row with her husband. She even flirted with the captain and alluded to a time that they had been intimate prior to her marriage… in front of everyone! It was a humiliating incident, and I rather doubt she will show her face on deck this morning.” Molly’s hazel eyes twinkled after telling the scandalous tale.

“Stuff and nonsense,” Henry growled. “Molly, you’d do well to mind your own business, that’s what.”

Molly winked at Elizabeth. “Yes, Henry,” she said, before resuming informing Elizabeth of all the other happenings from the night before.

The day lapsed quickly. At lunchtime, they went to the dining saloon for cheese and tomato sandwiches, and then Molly and Elizabeth promenaded about with Molly’s square box camera, taking pictures of the ship’s many alcoves and crannies. After late afternoon tea and orange short cakes, they played a rousing match of shuffleboard, and then went back to their respective cabins to dress for supper. Elizabeth lingered in a hot salt bath, her hair wound up in curlers. She chose to garb herself in a dark maroon silk dress with frilly sleeves, and walked down the corridor to the elegant dining quarters.

Molly was in one of her customary satin and fur-trimmed frocks, her lively chortle echoing around the room. As usual, there was a captive audience hanging on her every animated word. Elizabeth took a seat in one of the high-backed wooden chairs and said hello to her fellow dining companions.

It was fascinating to listen to everyone’s different accents. In addition to Molly and Henry, seated at the table were Mr. John Clark, a doctor from Boston; Mr. and Mrs. Lang, a rosy-cheeked duo from Wales; and Mr. and Mrs. Russell from New York. Elizabeth considered herself very fortunate to have been seated with such successful and well-moneyed citizens.
The merry conversation flowed at the table throughout the several courses. Dessert was vanilla custard served in little porcelain cups, with coffee, nuts, raisins, and a soft cheese on the side.

The distinguished captain, Edward G. Jones, came over to greet them. A tall, genial man with a handsome moustache, he ran the ship firmly, but still managed to join the guests daily for meals. He shook everyone’s hands with his own perfectly manicured, smooth fingers, and asked how everyone had enjoyed their food. He was eagerly assured that it had all been perfection, as always.

Captain Jones then nodded swiftly, and moved to the next table.

“That was peculiar,” Molly declared. “Usually the captain stays a bit longer. He seemed to be in a rush.”

“Think nothing of it, Molly,” Henry ordered. “The captain is a busy man, and has many people to see. I find it astounding how much he has been able to spend with us thus far.”

“No, it is strange,” Maude Russell insisted. “Why, I saw him this afternoon at tea, and he barely acknowledged me. Usually he stops to chat for quite awhile. You know, he is from New York too, and we like to exchange stories.”

“This has been an annual cruise for my sister and me for the past four years,” Molly said. “She could not make it this time, and so Henry came instead. I have become pretty familiar with Captain Jones over time, and I do declare that he has never been so abrupt before.”

“Well, I grew up summing on Cape Cod with Captain Jones and his nuisance of a brother. We spent every July and August fishing and clam digging, and so I know him closely as well,” John stated. “Perhaps he simply has something on his mind. You ladies can turn anything into a big deal.”

“Hear, hear,” Henry said, clapping John on his back. “So why don’t we men go enjoy some cards, pipes and brandy in the bar, and leave the women to their prattling?”

The other men consented. The ladies were left to go for a stroll around the deck. Molly seized a glass of wine from an attractive passing steward. “Thank you, Franco,” she said sweetly. She turned to Elizabeth. “Isn’t he an absolute doll? He has been my favorite waiter since I started taking this trip. Captain Jones adores him too, as he has been with the boat since its inception. Most of the crew members and employees are new to The Victoria. The captain recently overhauled his staff to give the ship a sense of freshness, but he kept Franco and two other stewards.”

“Speaking of the captain, I still think something was wrong with him tonight,” Elizabeth confided to Molly, as they walked arm in arm. The other women had opted to go back to their rooms. “He was so brusque.”

“I agree,” Molly said, sipping the wine. “He was at the lounge last night, and he was so friendly. In fact, he has always been so friendly. It seems very odd. But you know the men would say we were making something out of nothing... though they wouldn’t notice a snake if it bit them in the grass.”

“Elizabeth laughed, but then gave her a concerned glance. “You look a bit ashen, Molly,” she commented. “Is everything okay?”

“Actually,” Molly said, “I am feeling a tad woozy and out of breath, now that you mention it. Perhaps I inherited a touch of your seasickness.”

“At any rate, I think you should go back to your room,” Elizabeth advised. “Your face looks very pallid all of a sudden.” As a matter of fact, Molly did not look so much pale as she did crimson. Her skin was flushed a strange shade of pink.

Elizabeth walked Molly back to her cabin and then went to her own. Changing into a thin pale blue nightgown and tucking her curls under a lacy cap, she quickly fell asleep against her fat pillow.

Before she knew it, it was morning, and she left her cabin for some breakfast and fun on the upper deck. Molly and Henry, however, never appeared, and she felt somewhat deflated. It had only been four days, but already she had grown quite enamored of Molly’s companionship. There were plenty of other people to talk to, though, and she consoled herself with the thought that she’d see Molly at dinner. The day went by swiftly enough, and it was soon time to dress for supper. This time she selected a pink skirt and pink and white striped waist, taking special pains to put her hair in a twist.

When she got to the dining room, however, again Molly and Henry were nowhere to be found. The others at the table were very curious about the whole thing.

“Last night, Molly felt dizzy while we were ambling about,” Elizabeth told them. “She thought it was just from the rocking motion of the ship, so I am guessing it was a speck more serious than she thought. Henry must be keeping her company.”

When the captain appeared at their table, Maude asked him where Molly and Henry were. He curtly replied what Elizabeth had already suggested, that Molly was ill and Henry was taking care of her. But Elizabeth noticed he was very sallow looking, and his hair was much more unkempt than usual. He walked away from the table and the guests looked at each other in wonderment.

“Poor Molly must be really sick,” Mary Lang surmised. “Even the captain seemed shaken by it.”

“Well, no captain likes a sick passenger,” her husband Michael boomed. “It's
a real shame, too, because I was hoping Henry would play a game of whist tonight.”

“I think I’ll stop by their cabin and check up on her,” Elizabeth said. “Just to make sure everything is fine.”

“I wouldn’t,” Maude disagreed. “It’s very nice of you to consider doing so, but if she is sleeping, you’ll just disturb her. Maybe you should wait until the morning.”

Elizabeth was disappointed, but thought Maude was right. It wouldn’t do to rouse Molly if she was resting. She couldn’t, however, bring herself to join the night’s festivities, and skipped all the activities in favor of turning in.

The following day, she was awake at daybreak. Surprised to be up so much earlier than usual, she realized that a commotion in the hallway had stirred her. She hurriedly dressed and went out in the corridor, where, amidst several people milling about, she bumped into Maude.

“Oh, Elizabeth,” Maude shrieked excitedly. “It’s just awful!”

Maude was wringing her hands and wailing so much that Elizabeth could barely understand her. “What is it, Maude?”

Maude, gasping for breath, finally managed to get some words out. “Molly was sick because she was poisoned! And so were three crew members and another passenger, and now they are all dead!”

“What?” Elizabeth said, stunned. “You can’t be serious. That’s terrible!” and she began to cry.

The two ladies comforted each other, and Elizabeth pressed Maude for more information.

“I really don’t know anything more than that,” Maude insisted. “All I know is Molly was found dead in her stateroom by Henry. The ship’s doctor announced that she had been poisoned. One of the other people on board told me.”

“Is Henry devastated? Have the police been called in? What is the ship doing about the situation?” Elizabeth’s natural inquisitive side was taking over.

“I honestly don’t know,” Maude said, dabbing away tears. “If you’ll excuse me, I simply must get back to my cabin and lay down for a bit. This is all too much for me.”

Elizabeth patted Maude on the shoulder, but was quite taken aback herself. She had grown quite fond of the effervescent Molly, and was shocked by the news. But it was in her instinct to be curious (others considered it nosiness, she knew, but she did not think herself to be a true busybody; busybodies were annoying, and she was anything but). She went back to her cabin to get her notebook and a writing implement. She would discover who killed her companion and the others, and she would get her story for The Chronicle as well.

Pad and pencil in hand, she set out to find the ship’s doctor, Peter Winchester. She found him in the infirmary, having just finished examining a patient. She introduced herself, but decided not to mention anything about The Chronicle, and hid her notebook in her purse. She merely said that she was a chum of Molly’s, and asked for some details. Dr. Winchester looked down at her through his round spectacles and long snout-shaped nose. “I rather think Captain Jones would not like me to discuss the matter until he has made a formal statement to the ship’s passengers.”

“Oh, please,” she begged, batting her eyelashes at him. “Molly was a dear childhood friend.” (A little lie was okay in this instance, she thought; real journalists did it all the time.) “This has all been so devastating, and anything you could tell me would greatly help me out.”

Dr. Winchester sighed heavily. “She was poisoned by cyanide. It should make you feel better to know that Molly died instantly, probably within fifteen minutes of ingesting it, and therefore did not suffer much.”

“She drank a glass of wine when we went for a walk,” Elizabeth ruminated aloud. “And then she all of a sudden got very short of breath, and looked a peculiar touch of raspberry.”

The doctor nodded. “Most likely, the cyanide powder was sprinkled inside her glass, covered by the wine, and its slight, faint almond smell would have probably been undetectable to her. That would also explain why she appeared pinkish to you, as that is indeed a telltale sign of cyanide.”

“And the others?” Elizabeth inquired. “Were they also victims of the same crime?”

Again the doctor nodded. “It certainly seems so. Now if you’ll excuse me,” he said, picking up a clipboard and turning away.

“Thank you so much for your time, Doctor.” Elizabeth said.

She left the infirmary unit, pausing in the hallway to scribble the conversation into her notebook. She stopped in her tracks as she realized she was the last person to see Molly alive, yet nobody had come to question her. How odd, she mused. She would have thought one of the boat’s authority figures would have approached her to ask about Molly’s last few minutes. If Molly had died instantly, as the doctor had affirmed, that means that it was almost certainly the wine that had proved fatal. She thought back to that evening, two nights ago. Molly had grabbed the glass from a tall, good-looking
steward named Franco. Could he be the murderer? Should she go interrogate him or some of the other crew members?

As she pondered her next move, Captain Jones strolled by, and she lightly touched his arm to stop him.

"Hello, Captain," she said. "It's Elizabeth Goodstone from dinner table number six."

"Yes, yes, Elizabeth, how are you?" he said, moving away from her grasp.

"I'm a bit dazed, actually," she replied, "what with the murders and all."

The captain glanced at her and she rushed on, "I know that no official statement has been made yet about the situation, and you'd prefer to not discuss it with the passengers. As a concerned traveler, however, I was wondering what you plan on doing to take control since there is obviously a deranged killer on board. Is this journey going to be stopped?"

The captain held up one fleshy, calloused hand, and Elizabeth recoiled upon noticing how badly his dirty fingernails were in need of cutting. "Miss Goodstone," he softly thundered, his eyes flashing, "This is a ship matter, and while I can comprehend and appreciate your concern, please be aware that the situation is being handled. I will thank you to please use your discretion when discussing this with the other travelers."

Elizabeth grimaced, and walked away, her face flaming. She understood that it was a sensitive subject for him, and a matter of great embarrassment, but there was no need to be so rude about it. Oh, well, time to move on. Clearly the captain was not going to be of any assistance. Perhaps she would have more luck with her fellow passengers, and she was dying to speak with Franco and some of the crew members.

As she was ravenous, she walked to the upper deck for some breakfast, figuring she could observe both passengers and crew there. A waiter brought her a raisin scone and some clotted cream, and she carefully studied him, concluding that he was too short and unattractive to have been Franco.

All day long, people came and went, eating, chattering, and standing at the rail and gazing at the sea. They were oblivious to Elizabeth observing them as though they were acts in the circus. Each person got her thinking, could this be the one? Could this gentleman laughing and playing shuffleboard have callously poisoned another human being? Could this woman have? Did some of them not know what had transpired, or were they so intent on enjoying their vacation that they did not care even if they did know? How was the vessel planning on handling the sordid state of affairs? She subtly and conversationally asked several different people if they had any information, but none did. Most were of the air that they did not want to be disturbed by such unpleasant and distasteful talk, and appeared annoyed by the questions. A few, however, were intrigued and wanted all the gruesome details. It seemed that some people considered real murders quite exciting to be around, like something out of a suspense novel. Although she had learned nothing of worth, she painstakingly jotted down all the conversations in her pad so that her notes would be thorough.

She resigned herself to the fact that she was going to have to talk to Henry in order for a few of her questions to be answered. She wasn't relishing seeing the undoubtedly grief-stricken husband, but she had been meaning to go pay her respects since hearing the news that morning.

With a deep sigh, she stood up and walked to Henry's cabin, rapping softly three times on the heavy red door. A colorless, disheveled Henry answered the knock, his eyes swollen and his face etched in sorrow. Standing in the doorway, he shook his head upon seeing her.

"Elizabeth, I appreciate your utter compassion for coming here to offer your sympathy, but I am afraid that I am in no mood to talk right now."

She had been expecting this, and placed her hand gently on his arm. "I know, Henry," she said soothingly in her best, most maternal voice. "But I'm here to help you and to help Molly, whom I was quite taken with. It's very important that you tell me a few different things about that night, which I am investigating. I won't take up but five minutes of your time, and it would be truly beneficial to finding Molly's killer...um...wrong-doer."

Henry acquiesced, and opened the door for her. His cabin, a suite, was a great deal bigger than hers, although it was in an absolute shambles. She headed to the sitting room area and sat down in the plush red velvet armchair.

"I know it is painful for you to discuss," she began cautiously. "But I really need to know exactly what you found that evening."

"Well, as you know, the men and I went off to play a few rounds of cards," Henry said. "When I came back here about an hour or so later, I found Molly slouched over on the bed. I think she had hit her arm on the neighboring table, because her elbow was all bloody. The blood was noticeably very bright red, and her skin was quite pinkish." His voice cracked, but he went on, "I knew she was unconscious, but I did not know she had passed out until I noticed she was not breathing and had no pulse. I called for the ship's doctor and the captain, and they came at once."

Drawing a deep breath, he continued, "The captain was shocked, as he has known Molly for quite some time now. His assessment was that her death should be kept from the other guests until he was able to discover the culprit. I told him that for the sake of Molly and her family, I'd appreciate his carefulness in handling the situation. Of course, I wanted to ensure that none of those rag-tag
London papers latched on to the story and made a mockery of it by dragging the Holmes name through the mud. You know how those magazines can be... particularly that lurid Chronicle."

Elizabeth had the good sense to feel a bit guilty, and blushed, but Henry noticed nothing, and plunged on. "I remained in my cabin, and Captain Jones guaranteed me that if anyone inquired as to our whereabouts, he'd tell them that I stayed in my room to comfort my wife, who had taken ill. I knew he understood firsthand the delicacy of the matter, because this liner's solid reputation is how he has built his career and a name for himself. He no more wants this story to leak out than I do. It would hardly bode well for him if people knew that five murders had occurred on this ship, especially when we are nowhere near the shoreline. He really thought he'd be able to quickly discover who the guilty party was, neatly and quietly have them taken off the ship in no time, and be washed of the whole affair. Then the others were found dead, and word started to leak out. The captain assured me that he did his best to calm those frazzled few who had heard, and that the ship has not yet been sent into a boat-wide panic."

He looked at Elizabeth beseechingly. "I really don't care to talk about this much more, I'm afraid. I do know that you and Molly had become fast chums, and I genuinely appreciate your concern. Can I see you out now?"

"Yes, and thanks, Henry." She squeezed his hand. "If there is anything at all that I can do, please let me know."

She walked slowly back to her cabin. Something was strange about that whole exchange. Why had Henry not asked her if she had observed anything unnatural that night? He knew she and Molly had gone for a walk together. Wasn't he curious? It was all so strange. She shrugged. Perhaps it was simply too agonizing for him to discuss or dwell on Molly's final gasps of life.

Elizabeth decided to go talk to Franco next, and sauntered to the ship's galley. There she found several stewards in their tailored white uniforms, but none of them were tall and handsome.

"Miss?" a portly, balding steward asked. "You're not supposed to be in here."
"I know, but I was looking for Franco," she responded.
He exchanged a pointed stare with another steward. "Oh, you won't find him here."

"Is he working in one of the saloons right now?"
"Actually, he is deceased," the second steward answered.
Elizabeth's hand flew up to her gaping mouth. "Was he one of the victims?"
The first steward replied this time. "You know about that?"
She nodded. "One of the passengers who was poisoned, Molly, was my good friend."

He shook his head in sympathy and said, "Yes, unfortunately Franco and two of our other attendants, George and Joseph, were fatalities. A shame too, because they were the three longest members of this crew. Franco had been here since the beginning, George managed the bar, and Joseph was Captain Jones's personal assistant. But don't worry, miss, everything is under control. The authorities have been contacted, and they are going to come on board at the next port, which we will be hitting in two days."

"One more thing: do you happen to know the name of the other guest that was killed?"

"Yes, it was a Miss Julia Mullins."

Elizabeth thanked them and left the galley. Now why did Julia Mullins sound familiar? She raked her brain, recalling that it was the woman who drank too much wine and publicly fought with her husband. She pulled a copy of the passenger list out of her purse, drawing her finger down it until she found Samuel and Julia Mullins, cabin 166. Here I come, Samuel, she murmured. She casually thumped on his door. A red-faced, corpulent man answered.

"Yes?" he said, not entirely pleasantly.
Elizabeth cleared her throat. "Mr. Mullins, Elizabeth Goodstone. I am quite sorry to hear about your loss."

He pointed a plump finger at her. "I know who you are. Fancy yourself to be quite the detective, don't you? I've heard that you have been asking tons of questions and getting yourself in everyone's business."

"I don't know what you mean," she stammered, nonplussed.
"People on trips like these talk, and several people mentioned that you were meddling about the ship, nosily inquiring about all sorts of things. Well, my wife just died, and I will thank you to show some consideration." With that, he slammed the door in her bewildered face.

Stumped for a subsequent step, Elizabeth thought she would try her luck with the captain again. His answers had been less than satisfactory before. She marched to his quarters, and found his door slightly ajar.

"Hello? Captain Jones?" she called. There was no answer, and she pushed the door all the way open. The accommodations were enormous! Plush sofas and chairs covered in sumptuous, jewel-toned fabrics perfectly complemented the stateroom's simple mahogany furniture.

"Captain?" she cried out again. There was still no answer, and she walked into a dark back room, noticing a shadow creeping along near the room's wall. She clicked on the nearest light and the shadow froze.

"John?" she gasped. It was John Clark from her dinner table, standing over
the captain's massive walnut desk. A clearly dead Captain Jones was slumped over, his left cheek pressed against the table. Cherry red blood was rushing down his pinkish-hued face. His right hand was resting on the table, and again Elizabeth was repulsed by his long, ragged fingernails. Two wine glasses sat on the desk, one empty and one half-full.

"Elizabeth!" John exclaimed. "I can explain, I swear. It isn't what it seems like. I'm innocent."

Elizabeth surveyed the room. The hulking porthole she had ever seen revealed the stormy sea outside, its violent white crests rising dramatically. There was a nearby door with a heavy padlock on it, and a large rope and big pieces of cloth were perched on the desk. All the observations she had made throughout the course of the journey ran through her mind like a pack of hungry wolves.

"I know what's going on now," she said confidently. She reached for the buzzer against the wall and rang for the ship's authorities.

You don't have to be a nosy aspiring writer in order to know "whodunit!"

WHO was the murderer on the high seas? And how did Elizabeth know?

The Solution

The authorities (the ship's doctor, a few stewards, a purser, and some of the captain's assistants) arrived quickly and gasped at the scene that greeted them: blood, their deceased boss, and two passengers—one, a male looking unsure; the other, a triumphant female.

Elizabeth held up her hands. "Gentlemen, if I may please have the floor to explain what happened..."

They nodded their consent and she began. "You see, John," she said, turning to him, "it was very easy for you to figure it out. You grew up with Captain Jones, and suspected that something was amiss. It was harder for me, never having met him before, but I used my keen powers of surveillance to deduce the truth. I noticed that the victims had one thing in common—they were all people who had some type of familiarity with the captain. The three stewards had worked for him for a long time, Molly was a four-time passenger, and Julia Mullins had apparently been intimate with him before. Therefore the killer was concerned that they had too much knowledge of the captain... and would notice that the new captain was acting and looking a speck different than the true captain."

"What do you mean, 'the true captain'?", one of the stewards asked.

"Does anyone have the ability to open this padlocked door?" Elizabeth questioned in return.

"Yes," the purser asked, reaching into his uniform pocket, and pulling out a key. "But what's inside?"

"The rope and cloth on the desk were definite clues that someone was being held captive and bound inside the locked closet," Elizabeth said. She took the key from him and opened the door. "It's the REAL Captain Jones!" she announced. Sure enough, inside there was a gagged and tied-up man in critical condition, but still very much alive. He was tall and distinguished looking with a moustache.

Everyone was thunderstruck, and looked back and forth at the two identical men—the one dead, the other alive—as though they were at a tennis match.

"Untie him please, John," Elizabeth ordered and resumed holding court. "John had mentioned that he had grown up summering with Jones and his bratty brother. I thought nothing of it until I realized that the first few times I came into contact with Captain Jones, he had perfectly shaped and groomed fingernails. Yet just two days later, he had dirty, repulsive, gnarled hands and nails badly in need of cutting, which is a physical impossibility. Also, people who knew him were saying that he was acting more curt and brusque than usual.
I began to think that perhaps this captain was an imposter, and although John had not mentioned so, I instinctively knew that the captain's brother was a twin.

"A wicked twin," a weak-sounding voice piped in. It was the real captain. He languidly stretched his sore muscles that had been bound for hours and hours.

"David is—was my evil, jealous, and sadistic twin. The Victoria was handed down to me by our late father, who knew that the boat would fare far better with my ambitious nature than my brother's loathsome one. Since inheriting this vessel, I have been very successful, and have gained a reputation for running a fine ship. David always swore he'd get his revenge and that one day the ship would be his, as he believed it was rightfully intended to be. I was acting so strange and curt with the guests on that day because I had just discovered that David was on the ship. He had snuck his way on, and although he at first pretended to me that he had turned over a new leaf, I had a suspicion that he would soon do something malicious." He shook his head. "I never would have guessed though that he would have tied me up, stowed me in a closet, and murdered people. He told me what he was doing, poisoning guests and crew with cyanide, but all tied-up like this, I was powerless to stop it."

"But why did he not kill you too?" the purser asked.

Captain Jones sighed. "David knew next to nothing about operating and managing a ship. He was keeping me alive for some necessary information, which I gave him because all the passengers would have surely drowned if I hadn't. I am sure he would have killed me eventually once he had gotten all the knowledge he needed to run the ship himself. Although, I don't know if he had originally intended to kill anyone else besides me. After all, a boat will hardly be popular once word gets out that its passengers are being murdered, and David could hardly wait for the popularity and success that he thought he deserved. But then he let his ambition blind him, and became greedy, sloppy, and more aggressive about reaching his goal. He obviously thought that once he got rid of those that knew me, he'd be in the clear and have free run of The Victoria."

"Obviously, John, you were his next victim," Elizabeth said. "He suspected you were on to him, didn't he?"

John bobbed his head in affirmation. "I spent many a summer with the two of them. Their personalities are as different as could be, and after knowing them for so long, I even notice some very slight disparities in their facial features and characteristics too." He grinned at Captain Jones. "That tiny freckle on your forehead proved to be a life-saver. I came here to confront David about my suspicions, and he offered me some wine. I carefully observed which glass he had poured for himself, and swiftly switched them without him even seeing me do so. As a result, he drank the poison intended for me. I thought Elizabeth would think I was guilty when she walked in, but luckily this clever sleuth instantly figured out the truth."

"Thanks, John," Elizabeth said modestly. "I'm an amateur journalist, and so my mind is attuned with making quick observations and conclusions. In fact, I work for The Chronicle, and think that this will make a great piece... starting with the type of tourist that goes on The Victoria, and ending with this thrilling tale. Don't worry, Captain Jones, I can assure you that my story will not be at all scandalous, and I will feature your boat in only the most flattering of lights."

"Well, thank you, John and Elizabeth, for saving me and for saving my ship," the captain declared. "I think we should have the usual big closing night ball for tonight instead. What do you two think, does this call for a celebration?"

"Definitely," Elizabeth said. She laughed and winked. "I am up for anything but a glass of wine."