

# Lottery Prize Loot

By Patrick O’Keeffe

*To catch a rat, you set a trap. But this rat was a clever killer whose escape seemed certain. And Captain Bardsley had only water for bait.*

AS soon as Captain Bardsley heard the news, he went along to the radio cabin. Clark, the new third mate, entered just ahead of him. Rowland, the operator, was seated at his desk, fondling a sheaf of bills.

“Congratulations,” burst out the captain.

“Thanks, captain.” Rowland’s young face was radiant. “It didn’t take long for the news to get around.”

“You lucky devil. The most I ever won was a few dollars, and I have been playing it for years.”

“I think this is the happiest day of my life. I guess you know why,” added Rowland, a little sadly.

The captain nodded. “I’m pleased it was you that won it.”

Rowland glanced up at the third mate. “This is your first trip here, so maybe you don’t know. But my kid sister’s been laid up for about two years now. Something went wrong with her spine. She’s only eighteen. There’s only her and my mother besides me. We’ve spent every cent we had on specialists, even gone into debt. We heard about a man over in Europe. He has a small private hospital, and they say he’s a wonder. But only the wealthy can afford him. Last time we were down here in Santa Clara, I plunged. I bought a whole ticket—twenty dollars’ worth. When we docked this morning, I went up to look over the numbers. I nearly died on the spot when I saw the first-prize number. The lottery office gave me a check in pesos on

the local Canadian bank. I cashed it right away. Got them to give it to me in American money—one-thousand dollar bills, twenty of them.”

“It sure is a good piece of luck for your kid sister,” said Clark.

Captain Bardsley eyed Clark as he spoke. He hadn’t liked the looks of him when he reported on sailing day to replace the third mate who had been unexpectedly transferred to another of the line’s ships. He thought Clark’s thin face somewhat brutish, his green-brown eyes and lips cruel. But he was reluctant to judge a man by appearance only, and he had found him a willing and conscientious officer.

“Keep a good eye on that money,” the captain observed to Rowland with a grin. “It’s a big temptation.”

Rowland smiled while slipping the bills into his wallet. “I don’t think anyone on the ship would be mean enough to swipe it.”

“I guess not,” agreed the captain.

The ship sailed that evening. On the following morning Captain Bardsley was pacing the deck in the bright Caribbean sunshine before breakfast. Moved by a sudden impulse, he opened the radio-room door to have a word with Rowland. He froze in the entrance. Rowland was lying on the floor in his pajamas, his head battered in. The top drawer under his bunk was open. The captain hurried over to it. Rowland’s wallet was inside. But the lottery money was gone. The captain made a quick examination of the other drawers.

Then he closed the door and hastened along to the bridge. The chief mate halted in his paces at the expression on the captain's face.

"Rowland's been murdered and his lottery money stolen."

The chief mate gasped. "Good Lord!"

"I didn't think there was a single man in the ship dirty enough," the captain said. "We've had the same crew now for several months. I don't think anyone of them begrudged Rowland winning the lottery."

"There's one new man aboard," the chief mate reminded him.

The captain met his eyes. "I hate to suspect an officer."

"I don't like the looks of him, just the same."

"I don't either. But—well, he's had a tough time of it. Three years on the beach until he got this job."

"That's his story. The depression is made the goat for lots of things. He might have spent the time in jail. He may be out of a job again when the line's had chance to check up his record."

"Maybe. Well, we'll have to search the ship, though there's not much hope of recovering the money. There's a thousand and one places it could be hidden and never found unless the ship were taken to pieces. From the looks of things aft there, Rowland woke up and saw the thief. There was a struggle, and his head was smashed in with that heavy ebony ruler of his. The murderer must have got some blood on his clothing. We may find it. Get the third mate up here."

**T**HEY both studied the third mate curiously as he came up fully dressed in whites in answer to the chief mate's summons.

"Young Rowland's been murdered and his lottery money stolen," the captain told him.

Clark's jaw dropped. Then his thin face filled with hot indignation. "Whoever was lousy enough to do that should be pitched overboard."

"The mate and I are going to search the ship, so you take over the watch up here. We're going to search all the quarters, both officers' and crew's. You don't mind, of course? I can't make any distinction that might cause resentment among the crew."

"Not at all," exclaimed Clark eagerly. "Go right ahead with mine first."

They went down to the third mate's cabin. Inside, the chief mate observed: "Did you notice he'd put on a clean white uniform this morning?"

"We'll look through his dirty clothes first."

Besides soiled shirts, socks and underwear, they also found three used white suits, but none showed even the tiniest stain of blood.

"He could have thrown it overboard," suggested the chief mate. "And we don't know how many white suits he had to begin with."

They ransacked his drawers, desk, and lockers, but found no thousand-dollar bills. They passed on to the other cabins and quarters until they had searched the entire ship. But neither money nor bloodstained clothing was found. They returned to the captain's cabin.

"We've done all we can," said Captain Bardsley. "We'll bury Rowland at sea and leave the radio room as it is for the police in Baltimore."

"One thing—both murderer and money are still aboard the ship."

"If they don't find the murderer, they'll never find the money. They can search every man going ashore, but they can't keep it up indefinitely. The thief might leave it hidden for months."

"They can cable the bank for the

numbers of the bills and trace him that way.”

“Only after he’s spent the money. That’s what concerns me most. When I think of that poor girl—Rowland once invited me up to his home. She’s the sweetest creature you could imagine. And lying there bedridden. We’ve got to find that money—for her. And we’ve got to find it before we reach port—after that, it’ll be too late.”

“Maybe something’ll turn up. Criminals often make some slip that gives them away,” observed the chief mate hopefully.

**B**UT it seemed as if murder and robbery had to be followed by disaster to the ship herself. For about two o’clock a few mornings later, the alarm bells sounded. The crew came rushing excitedly on deck. The sea was smooth and glittering with moonlight, but the ship had a heavy list to port. Word flew round swiftly that she had developed a bad leak, and it could not be located. The pumps were unable to cope with it; one was choked. She was sinking and would have to be abandoned immediately.

Captain Bardsley was on the bridge, shouting at the chief mate to get the boats lowered quickly. There was no radio operator to send an S O S, but they were within a few miles of the Florida coast. The chief mate was running about excitedly, yelling there wasn’t a moment to lose. The crew piled into the boats. When they were ready to pull away, Captain Bardsley came racing along the deck, grabbed a lifeline, and slid down into one.

“Shove off,” he said to the third mate in the stern.

Clark gave the order. Captain Bardsley made his way across the thwarts to the stern and took the tiller away from Clark.

“I’ll steer for a while.”

The other boat, in charge of the chief mate, was a short distance ahead. But her oars had come to rest. Captain Bardsley told his men to stop rowing. All in the boat glanced towards him curiously in the moonlight.

“Before we go any further,” he began grimly, “there’s a little matter to be settled first. As you all know, the radio operator was murdered and twenty thousand dollars stolen. Now, it’s a dead certainty that the man who stole the money didn’t leave it to go down with the ship. So every man in the boat is going to be searched. And I want each of you to watch the next man to you, in case he tries to hide the money again or throw it overboard.”

There was dead silence except for the lapping of the sea against the boat. Captain Bardsley was gazing in front; yet out of the corner of his eye, he was watching Clark, who sat to one side. Clark was very still.

The captain stooped and handed a flashlight to the bos’un. “You shine that to give me a little more light.” He straightened up again. “Now, Mr. Clark, I’ll begin with you.”

Clark rose and came closer to the captain. He raised his arms outward to the level of his shoulders, while the bos’un directed the beam of the flashlight upon him. He was wearing a two-piece white uniform, with no inside pockets in the coat. The captain went through each pocket carefully, and then felt over Clark from shoulders to feet.

“Okay?” inquired Clark when he had finished.

“Not quite. Hand me that oilskin coat you were sitting beside.”

Clark seemed to hesitate. Then he turned and bent towards the folded oilskin. But as he lifted it, he seemed to lose his balance, and he let go of the oilskin to

grab for support. The oilskin flew out into the sea.

“Grab him, Bos’un.”

The captain snatched up the boathook and lunged at the spot where the oilskin had fallen. He felt it entangle with the submerged coat. He scooped it dripping above the surface and fished it inboard.

The bos’un had flung himself upon the third mate and was struggling with him in the bottom of the boat. The captain dropped the oilskin beside him, handing the boathook to a sailor. He drew a set of handcuffs from his pocket, bent beside the bos’un, and got them on to Clark’s wrists.

Captain Bardsley then picked up the wet oilskin, and from the pocket he drew a

long envelope. It was only a trifle damp. He opened it in the light held by the bos’un.

“It’s the money, all right,” he said with satisfaction.

He saw that the other boat was returning. He took the tiller once more and told his men to pull on the oars again.

“We’re going back to the ship,” he said.

“Back to the ship?” echoed the bos’un curiously.

“Yes. She’s all right. The chief engineer gave her that list by pumping the oil to one side. It helped to fool everybody into believing she was sinking.”