

SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL, elegant, chic; her well-proportioned symmetry a credit to the design boards, where she had begun her life twenty-five years before. With age she had acquired the poise of a mature woman, and yet her sleek lines confirmed her breeding. She was called *Naiad*.

Naiad had been designed for pleasure; built for luxury and comfort. She was a phoenix, born of the deaths of more than a dozen Celtic Line ships gone down in wartime, mined, torpedoed, shelled, bombed in the trans-atlantic convoys between the Liverpool bar and the Statue of Liberty. The Celtic Line invested their total compensation in the building of the *Naiad*, aiming their sights at populations war-sick and utility-bored. A quarter of the Celtic Line board of directors resigned over the decision, preferring depleted pensions to their depleted fleet.

Naiad was built before plastic. Her hull was of the finest British steel alloy. The forests of Burma provided sweet-smelling teak woodwork: rails, decks, cabin and stateroom panellings. Mahogany from India, ebony from Africa, bird's eye maple from the American woodlands.

Twenty years old she might be, but she outclassed her modern rivals. Every cabin was

built as a separate self-contained unit, with showers and bathroom fittings equal to those of the best European hotels. For the passengers, there were no such things as 'bunks'. Bunks were for seamen, argued the board; passengers were used to beds, and they would have them, along with the finest air-conditioning, the best quality carpeting, the most tasteful decoration, and impeccable service at all times.

On the *Naiad's* nine deck levels there were two swimming pools, one indoor and heated, and the other outdoors. There were two large dining saloons, two lounges, a dance hall with a cabaret stage, a cinema, a gymnasium, seven bars, a deck-tennis court, sites for various games, and, recently added, a sauna bath, a nightclub/discotheque and a section over the stern where gun enthusiasts might while away a few daily hours shooting clay pigeons as they curled upwards from the spring traps mounted on the rails.

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Patches of yellow sunlight, reflected from the water beneath against her sides, shimmered, giving her movement as she lay alongside the deep water berth of Southampton's Western Docks. Her white paintwork was mid-day dazzling, making it impossible to stare at her for more than a few seconds. The tide was on the make and *Naiad*, feeling the swell beneath her hull, tugged gently at her moorings, as though she knew in a little while she would be back out to sea again.

A crane moved on dry rails on the wharf, its wheels ringing, inviting a screamed chorus of reply from a waterspout of seagulls begging edible jetsam beyond the *Naiad's* stern. A uniformed man, one of the mates, squeezed his deep pitched