MUTINY

An Adventure Story

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CHAPTER I

THROUGH THE WINDOW

I WAS heading straight toward adventure, and I did not know it. Danger and doubt and strange, wild happenings on land and sea lay dead ahead like a nest of hidden rocks, without a ripple of the waters to betray their presence in a ship's path.

A man can read the imminence of a storm in the barometer, but one gets no warning of the angry waters which I was approaching when I started out on that sullen Sunday afternoon; but if I had sensed what I was coming upon in its fulness, I would not have altered my course; rather, I would have crowded on more sail.

I was—and am still—a seafaring man, but this is not a yarn of ships and their ways; such things as happened offshore might have taken place on land. I mention my calling so that you will understand why I turned my steps down the narrow street when

I started to take my walk, instead of going westward toward San Francisco's wind-blown hills.

The bay drew me as it always draws those who seek their bread and butter on the sea. I do not care whether he is a common forecastle hand or the master of an ocean liner, your sailorman is as bashful as a country girl when it comes to facing the city's uptown life, and always hangs close to the harbor side. So, instead of making a good swinging tramp of it, I steered my course down Clay Street among the dingy, silent warehouses with their iron shutters and their bewildering odors; came out on the embarcadero and, because it was the nearest craft, I bought a ticket and followed the crowd aboard an Oakland ferryboat.

I had been a week or so ashore, just long enough for the land sights to still hold forth an appeal; not long enough to have got the cold smell of Bering's fogs out of my nostrils and the memories of anxious night watches out of my mind; but for all that, long enough to be a little restless, itching to fare forth again. To all appearances there wasn't a chance for me to get a ship until the next spring. With the homing of the great fleet which had been carrying freight and passengers to Cape Nome and St. Michael during that summer of the big gold rush, there were mates and masters a-plenty seeking berths.

It looked like a quiet winter, and I had hired lodgings for the season in one of those dingy buildings which used to line lower Clay Street in the days of San Francisco's shabby picturesqueness before the great fire. The realization that I was on the beach, that life was going to be just a long succession of Sunday afternoon walks until the ice broke in Bering next spring, came over me during the ride across the bay—and of course the itching to be off again immediately grew sharper.

The foolish little steam trains which used to do suburban service on the eastern shore before the recent electric lines, were hissing and clanging in the shed at Oakland Mole. I took the one which was handiest, and within a matter of sixty seconds was being jolted along a track which led southward between Oakland's dirty western fringe and the marshlands which stretch in their turn between the estuary and the lower bay.

I was staring idly out of the window, when I saw the house for the first time. It stood in the middle of the flat lowlands as solitary as a ship at sea. Why any man had chosen to build it in the center of this expanse of dreary salt grass with the multitude of winding channels and pools and great patches of orange-colored mud encompassing it, is one of those

mysteries which the outskirts of every great seaport city hold. And the mad builder had further gratified his freakish whims by painting it a vivid pink.

A two-story house, with narrow eaves, no porch or wing—just a bare square—and not an outbuilding or even a fence. Its boards were fashioned to resemble squares of stone, painted hideously in pink.

It was a sight to set a man thinking. The windows were boarded up, but there was about that solitary monstrous square of pink a suggestion of human life. As if some one were hiding behind those hidden windows, crouching within the dusky rooms.

As the train clattered by the rotting wooden shed I saw a ruined walk made of short bits of plank laid crosswise, leading away from the fragment of a station, and on the walk, a good two hundred yards from the track, a man trudging with bent head toward the house.

Then the train whooped on by and the whole thing went out of sight. I dare say I would have forgotten about it if it had not been for the reappearance of that man two hours later.

I had wandered in the meantime around Alameda, which offered little enough in the way of distraction on that somber afternoon, and finally caught a train back to the ferry. Approaching the pink house on the

marsh I saw him coming toward the little station. As had been the case before, his head was bent, but on the other occasion he was going slowly and this time he held it low in his haste. He barely made the track in time and there was a very perceptible protest in the manner of the train's stopping, as if the engineer were playing even for his tardy signal by giving us a good shaking up. I was recovering myself from this punishment when the new passenger entered the coach.

He was a blocky old fellow, round-faced, with an enormous mouth that seemed ready to twine back around his ears if he should start to smile. His eyes were small and it occurred to me that there was something furtive in them as he glanced about the coach. I know he was looking to see whether any one was watching him. He was my fellow passenger all the way to San Francisco, for I saw him leaving the ferry with the crowd at the city side. After that I lost him—for the time.

I had dined by myself in a Market Street café and had spent the evening at the Tivoli—that was in the good old days when a man could have his comfortable smoke watching the comedians and listening to the chorus—and I came back to my room in the rain. Good heavy rain, with a wind to whip it under your

umbrella. I entered the building by the Clay Street door.

It was a quiet block, without any elevator, and the rooms in the rear were let for lodgings, while those fronting Kearney Street were occupied by offices. I had often come in by the Kearney entrance, but I had never seen a client climbing the stairs to one of the lawyers whose names were printed on the doors of that corridor.

My room had a window opening into what my landlady was pleased to term a court. When I came into the chamber I headed for the gas jet, which was near the window. I had the match in my hand and was about to light up—for I had it in mind to write a certain letter, of which I will speak later, to my father—when I chanced to look across this so-called court. The shade of the window directly opposite was up.

That window opened into the office of William Jaspro, attorney at law. I knew it because I had read the sign on his door. But that was the only reason I did know, for I never had caught sight of the tenant himself, nor had I ever seen any one entering or departing from the office. Furthermore, the blind had always been down and only the lamplight in the evening had betrayed the lawyer's presence. Now I

saw into the room and what I beheld made me change my mind about lighting my gas jet.

A man was standing at the door, a lean man, and from where I was I could see that one of his eyes was bad; the eyeball was discolored, as if it had spoiled. But that was as much of his face as I got a look at then, for a dark handkerchief draped the features from the nose down. He had his back against the door, one hand upon the knob, and in the other hand he held a revolver. Another man was beside the window, a thickset fellow, and I had just time to see that he, too, was wearing such a mask as his companion wore, when his arm swept downward and the shade closed with the movement. I turned and hurried out into the hall.

I had it reasoned out before I reached the door of William Jaspro, attorney at law, that the lean man's attitude—with his hand still on the knob—probably meant he had not yet turned the key in the lock. I wondered where the lawyer might be—I had got no sign of him. And in the next moment I was throwing myself against the door.

It gave, and I almost fell into the room, but not too quickly to recover myself and spring for the man with the spoiled eye. I caught him while he was still staggering from the shock of my onslaught. I

gripped his wrist and wrenched it; the pistol clattered to the floor and then the thickset fellow was upon me. He was a burly man and quick, and I saw the handkerchief mask fluttering before his expelled breath as he closed in.

It lasted less than ten seconds, but that little space of time was crammed with action, and I had my hands full before it was over. His undoing lay in his revolver; he was groping into his pocket for the weapon when he flew at me, and he was still tugging at it when I met his onslaught with a blow below the waist. I fought hard and foul, for I was fighting to win with my life at stake. I shook him with that first blow, and while he wavered I thrust my knee up into his stomach. By that time I managed to get hold of his pistol hand just as the weapon came into sight.

His breath was gone, and he was fairly staggering, but he hung to the revolver like grim death. Centering all my energies on getting it from him, I had stepped back a little and had no grip on his body or garments. Thus I gave him his chance to break free with one mighty swerve and before I could leap for him he had gone. The other man must have crept out into the hall before him, for I got no further sight of him at all.

I pulled myself together and looked about the room to see my neighbor for the first time. William Jaspro, attorney at law, huddled in his wide-armed office chair with his face livid from fright, was the man whom I had watched walking to the pink house on the marsh that afternoon.

CHAPTER II

UNDER SEALED ORDERS

I STOOD there for about a second, I suppose, and took my first impressions of the man who, in an hour's acquaintance, turned the whole course of my life. Although I saw him only for a short time and did the things which I was to do in the company of others, the memory of him remains vivid in my mind, just as the memory of the lightship marking the entrance to a harbor abides with the helmsman who steers his ship past it through the dangers of a bad channel. I have a picture of William Jaspro, the creases in his fleshy cheeks, the droop of his enormous mouth, the flickering light of dread in his small eyes.

I realized right then that he was fearing things which were yet to come rather than those which had already taken place, that the danger from which I had rescued him was only an incident reminding him of other hazards still impending. He gave me the feeling that he had waded into deep waters and, finding himself beyond the safety zone, sensed the presence of greater depths near by.

He did not move, but strove to speak and, gasping, failed; which gave his mouth a fearsome twist. Then I caught sight of the revolver which I had wrenched from the grasp of the man with the spoiled eye, and as I bent to pick it up I noticed the heavy odor of tobacco smoke in the room's warm air. Carrying away these incongruous impressions—the one of comfort and the other of unquiet—I turned and ran, with the pistol in my hand, after the vanished thugs.

That was what I believed them at the time, and, after all, I was not wrong when it comes to the question of moral turpitude. A man is what his methods are. I heard the stir of people in other rooms; voices were sounding behind doors which lined the corridor. I took the stairs, with one hand on the railing, in two long leaps, and felt the dash of raindrops in my face as I emerged into Kearney Street.

I halted to get my bearings, looked up the thoroughfare and down; there was no sign of fugitives. Directly opposite, a figure showed in a shadowed doorway, but as I started across it whipped out of sight within. I increased my speed, heedless of what consequences my desperate appearance with that revolver in my hand might evoke, and caught the man halfway up a flight of stairs.

When I managed to make my purpose clear he answered—with a composure which struck me then as being odd after his panic—that he had just come around the corner and taken shelter from the rain. I remembered some time later that his sleeve, which I was grasping, was quite dry. He was a little man, and in the half light his face showed, sharp-eyed, thin as a weasel's.

I left him in the doorway and retraced my steps to the office of William Jaspro. He had arisen from the wide-armed chair and was standing with his two fat hands on the table before him facing the door when I entered.

"Did you get them?" His question came with an indrawn gasp. I shook my head.

"Good!" he said quite loudly.

"What's that?" I demanded. "Good?"

"They're dangerous," he muttered, and his eyes lowered before my astonished gaze. "Yes—good for your sake." He pointed to a chair and, sinking into his own, "Sit down," he bade me more composedly.

The tumult in the neighboring rooms had subsided, but I had hardly taken the seat to which he had gestured, when the heavy tread which marks the coming of a policeman anywhere the world over, sounded in the hall.

"Come in!" The lawyer answered the knock on the door.

The usual perfunctory examination with the inevitable vest-pocket notebook and stub pencil inclosed between thick fingers as its accompaniments, gave me fresh food for thought right at the start. For, although there was a telephone on the wall within ten feet of the armchair where Jaspro was sitting, the police had received notification, so it developed, from a neighboring room.

The officer seemed to take it as a matter of course that the victim had been too badly shaken to send in the call himself. He was not deeply interested in the case anyway; I could see that with half an eye. Those were, you will remember, the old days, and San Francisco has changed her ways since.

When it came to a description of the robbers I was astounded by the lawyer's words and angered by a quick, sly, sidelong look which he gave me as I started to protest.

"Both of a size; tall men and large; I'd say a hundred and eighty pounds; black hair—I'll swear to that—the two of them," was what William Jaspro said. I had intended giving over the revolver which I had picked up, but now I changed my mind. This affair was none of my business so long as the victim

chose to handle it. No use of turning a good automatic over when it was not going to help serve the ends of justice. I said nothing about it, and when the officer asked me to describe the highwaymen, I shrugged my shoulders, telling him I had not had time to look. But I did mention the man in the stairway across the street when I was narrating the circumstances of my fruitless pursuit, and the patrolman nodded wisely.

"Ought to o' hung onto him," he chided me gravely and took his departure, apparently to see if there were any sign of the fellow there now.

William Jaspro turned his small eyes on me in appeal when the door had been closed.

"You'll not say anything——" he was beginning, but I cut him short and informed him that I was on my way now to my own room, which information I proceeded to verify by leaving at once. And when I had regained my dingy apartment, I lighted the gas jet by the window and sat down to write that letter to my father of which I spoke before. It was a long letter and there is no need of going into its details, but I must tell you of it in a general way, for it has its own part in this story.

Henry Dolan is my father. My first name is Robert. If you know anything of shipping on the Pacific

coast you are familiar with his name and character. He has left the impress of the latter on his business and the business of other men. He had wanted to play the ship's master and have me play the foremast hand when it came to my own course in life. The trouble with that was my own heritage of obstinacy, and my consequent departure from home in Seattle four years before this narrative begins.

There was no trouble and there was no scene; we simply could not hit it off and I went. He told me that when I chose to come back to take my place in the business—which controls many things besides its own formidable fleet of cargo carriers—the place would be ready for me. In the meantime I had enjoyed making my own way, alone and unhampered. Not only that, but I was not anxious to go home yet —nor to take my place under orders.

But I was homesick for a sight of him. I wrote at considerable length, telling him what I had been doing and how I had been getting on. I had my master's papers and knew a few things about handling men and ships. Also, I let him know that I missed the sight of him and was thinking of him—in short, I unbent a great deal, for my neck had been stiff when he last saw me.

I was rising from the table where I had been writ-

ing when footsteps sounded outside my door and there came a knock. To my call William Jaspro entered.

"Mr. Dolan," he said. I showed my surprise at his knowledge of my name. "I've asked the landlady about you," he told me coolly, "and I'd like a talk with you, if you don't mind."

"Sit down," I bade him, but he shook his head.

"In my office?" He was wise enough to put it as a question. I could not actually dislike him, in spite of what I had heard and seen a little while before; there was that in his small eyes and his big, comic-mask mouth which made dislike impossible.

Fresh tobacco smoke still hung in a thin blue haze, and its odor made his office seem very snug. The rows of yellow books around all four walls, the comfortably cushioned armchair, and the table with its tobacco jar accentuated this impression. William Jaspro took his seat in silence, and I found mine without a word.

"You see, I own this building," he began, "and the landlady has been my tenant for a good many years. I didn't want you to think she'd gossip about her roomers to every one."

I acknowledged the explanation with a nod, and he took time to fill and light his pipe.

"You're a seafaring man," he went on, "and not

at work." He paused and I made no answer. "Well," he resumed, "that's point one. A man of ships and not at work. Now, here's point two—you're of good people. I knew your father myself in a business way—small matter, but I remember him—years back; he wasn't so big as he is now."

I frowned, for it was plain that my landlady must have been keeping a sharp eye on me—and perhaps my mail too. Else how would she have known about my father? There had been some letters from the office up home written on company stationery and inclosed in its envelopes, letters from men in my father's office; and she had evidently seen them on my table. But William Jaspro paid no heed to my vexation.

"Honest and of good family. Point three," he continued, "is you're able to handle yourself mighty well. Which makes me think that I've not even thanked you." He smiled propitiatingly and it was like looking on one of those masks you see in windows at Halloween time. "The idea is, you could be of great help to me and others."

I started to protest for I was not anxious—at that time—to run afoul of any more of this under-cover business; but he made a gesture, half command and half appeal.

"You would further the interests of *justice*." I

noted his emphasis on the last word, and had occasion to remember it afterward. There is no one more capable of distinguishing between actual right and the letter of the statutes than a lawyer, after all.

"How?" I asked.

"By going—to—work—on—a—certain—case." He separated every word from the one following by a perceptible interval of time, and in that interval wagged a fat forefinger.

I shook my head.

"You leave me in the dark right in the beginning," I reminded him.

"All that I can tell you," he said, "is that others need help besides myself. And need it sorely. And they are"—his voice became defiantly assertive—"honest people." He repeated the last two words. "They are in danger," he added quickly.

I thought of the pink house in the middle of the marsh and then, somehow, I began to feel like yielding. It was curiosity. I think he saw it in my eyes.

"There is nothing I can tell you, nothing I have the right to tell." He was speaking with a certain heavy gravity. "But I can appeal to your—your love of fair play."

"How do you know I have such a love?" I coun-

tered, but I was weakening, and he knew it now. He pressed his point the harder; and to make a long story short, I allowed my itching for action, which had been torturing me all that afternoon, my liking for him which was growing already in spite of the evasions which I had witnessed on his part, and above all my curiosity, to get the best of me.

In the end I went under sealed orders, and so plunged into the remarkable affair which had begun before I had come on the scene and was now in process of darker developments than I could have dreamed of.

"And now what?" I asked him when we had arranged the matter of my employment and my pay, which latter was decent enough.

"Pack a bag and lock your room and come here within the hour," he bade me.

CHAPTER III

THE PATH OF LIGHT

I DID some thinking while I was making my preparations, and the upshot of my reflections was that William Jaspro was in a tight fix. This lawyer, who had done well enough to become a man of property and was old enough to settle down in rusty quiet with his pipe and yellow books in that snug inside room, was dodging about in the dark like a thief. The thief's fear of a hand on his shoulder was with him all the time. Even while he had been speaking with a sort of fierceness of the honesty of this enterprise—a fierceness which in itself went far to show that he was on the defensive on that very question—the furtiveness kept creeping into his eyes.

He had told me enough to guide me in my packing. I made a change into my sea clothes and tossed such belongings as would last me through a few weeks' cruise, into my bag. Before I rejoined him I went out to the nearest box and mailed the letter which I had written to my father.

The rain was coming down in sheets and the nearest street lamps were blurred, but as I stood there at the box I noticed a figure in the doorway across Clay Street. One man on Kearney and another on Clay; it looked as if both entrances to our building were being watched.

I found my employer awaiting me, cloaked to the eyes in an old-fashioned cape mackinaw, and when he rose to go forth with me I could hear his noisy breathing clear across the room. His plump cheeks were as pale as paper, and his words came in shaky jerks as he asked me how the weather was outside. We left the building by the Clay Street door, and as we walked down the block eastward I glanced behind, just in time to see the man leaving his doorway in our wake.

William Jaspro saw me turning my head and whipped a look over his own shoulder. He said nothing, but quickened his pace, and the two of us went on down the sidewalk almost at a dogtrot. I took a second observation before we had gone a hundred feet, but the street was empty.

"He's gone," I told my companion.

"Yes," he answered—and there was a sort of weariness like fatalism in his voice—"he never follows far." Which made it all the worse to my way of

thinking, for if one shadow was willing to give up the dogging there must be another somewhere to take up the trail. What was more, they must have some idea of where we were heading for, or at least believe they had. But I said nothing of this; time enough to cross the bridges when one came to them.

Down among the odorous commission houses we came upon a hack—those were the days before taxicabs had crowded out their slower predecessors—and while we were making toward the gleam of its twin lamps, a drunken man came lurching on us from among the bales and crates which littered the pavement, all but blocking traffic in this neighborhood.

He was, it struck me, too extremely drunk; and he had appeared too suddenly to suit me. Moreover, we were just coming into the radiance of a corner gaslight at the time. I looked more sharply at him as he drew off on another tack, and then I leaped for him. For one of his eyes was spoiled. But, all in an instant, he sobered to complete agility; dodged my outstretched hands, and made off like a lean hound.

I halted after two or three strides and saw the lawyer hurrying on down the street; he waved me to follow, and when I caught up with him did not so much as listen to my announcement, but urged me to-

ward the waiting hack. The door was open and the driver was on the box.

"Same place as last night," William Jaspro bade him and threw himself inside the vehicle.

I followed, but took time before I closed the door to look behind. A little hole in the wall of a saloon was casting a pool of yellow radiance on the cobblestones back in the next block. Within that illuminated area I got sight of a lean figure, bent double, running toward the groggery. Then I flung myself back on the cushioned seat and listened to the rattle of the iron-shod wheels on the granite paving, while the hack dipped and swayed like a ship in a seaway; and the rat-tat-tat of the horses' hoofs told me that our team was taking it at a fire-engine gallop.

We swung around a corner and I tasted the reek of harbor mud in the rain-soaked air. A block, another, and then two more; we turned to the left, and presently I heard the hollow beat of the hoofs on planking, the rumble of the wheels on wood. And when we stopped I knew that we were on the docks.

It was a dingy nook among tumbled-down wooden warehouses, and the lights of the ferry building were blazing away two hundred yards or so to the northward. We emerged from the vehicle in blackness that smelled of rotten piles and decomposing tidal

ooze. Through the deep mutter of the rain I heard the swishing of the water in the near-by slip. A dock lamp made a dull-red blotch in the darkness, and beyond I could make out the distant glow of Oakland across the bay.

I happened to glance across East Street. A man showed in the light which gushed from the glazed doors of one of that thoroughfare's numerous groggeries. He was holding one hand above his eyes as if to shield them from the obscuring raindrops; and as he halted in that attitude—I had caught sight of him while he was still coming forth from the saloon—there was that in his body's pose which told me he was peering straight toward us. While I was looking the driver spoke to his horses and the hack rumbled away.

William Jaspro nudged me.

"Come on," he quavered. We plunged through the gloom down a narrow gangplank and came out on a float. A voice hailed us from the night, asking us who we were.

"All right," the lawyer answered in a lower tone. "It's me, Jaspro. And now, quick! You got to make a run for it again, I guess."

By the glow of a match I made out the cockpit

of the biding launch and got aboard. The match went out. We were in darkness again.

I felt my way to a cushioned locker and heard the lawyer's breath whistling through his teeth as he sank down beside me. The engine coughed; the little craft surged forward. I heard the raindrops beating on the deck house between the motor's sharp explosions and the slap of waves against her prow. We were speeding out into the harbor without a spark of light.

My companion's voice came out of the blackness of the little cabin.

"I heard a story once," he said with husky attempt at levity, "the optimist—falling from the top of a sky-scraper, you know. A man in a fourth-floor window heard him saying as he went down: 'Well! So far, so good.' That's us. So far, so good! Eh!"

"Suits me," I answered and chuckled.

There is something pitiable—the more so because it is half comic—in a fat man's show of fear; but this fat man was game. I was assured of that in my own mind. It was the gameness of one whose whole body is shaking with physical loathing against what it must encounter, one who must kick himself into every move he makes.

I was young and big enough to like trouble, and I

wondered what it must be like to go through what he was going through at this time.

A ray of white light came stealing over the water after us, showing every crest, illuminating every smooth trough; it bathed the stern; the figure of the man in the cockpit showed outlined against it. And now the whole framework of our craft trembled with the shudder of the speeding motor; our wake showed boiling, bubbled with myriad phosphorescent globules.

"We beat 'em last night," William Jaspro told me. "We can beat 'em again to-night."

The streaked reflections of the dock lights drew away behind us until they merged into a long row of parti-colored radiance, already dimmed by the rain. The white eye that was following seemed to be lessening in its brilliance a little already. And before we had passed Goat Island I knew that, barring untoward accidents, the race was ours.

My hopes were verified within another mile. But, if the launch had distanced them in this same manner the night before, and they were satisfied to take up the chase to-night again, they must have a fairly definite idea of where our trail was going to end. I said as much.

"Think so?" William Jaspro answered. "Well, I guess you're right. I was beginning to get the idea

myself this evening—when I hired you" He lapsed to silence, and I heard his noisy breathing close beside me between the coughs of the engine. "They've not found what they're after, anyway."

The water about us was running more quietly. I made out the loom of the land on either side, and I knew now that we were running up Oakland Creek. Lights showed as we passed on, the lights of dockyards, of coal bunkers, and other structures by the waterside.

We ran beneath the bridge, and now the pace slackened; I caught a glimpse of a dark hulk close beside us; another loomed ahead. The masts of the salmon packers appeared like a grove of trees outlined in the night, shadowy and barely perceptible against the lowering sky.

We ran alongside a schooner at half speed, reversed and came to a stop. I climbed out, bag in hand, and the man in the cockpit, who had not uttered a word since his first greeting, showed a light. The lawyer gripped the man ropes and mounted a short Jacob's ladder. I watched him climb clumsily and pondered over the mysteries of this emergency which had brought the old fellow into such untoward action under cover of the darkness. Then I followed, and when I had flung my legs across the low rail, I

stood on the deck of the schooner getting my bearings.

The first thing a seafaring man does is always to make out what he can of the craft he has boarded. I could see enough to know this fore and after was three-masted and slender as a gull. From somewhere off in the darkness I heard a dog barking, probably a watchdog on the deck of one of those north-going ships which were lying here over the winter. A heavy clanking came from under my feet. I knew that men were busy overhauling things down in the engine room.

William Jaspro led the way aft, and a voice hailed him softly out of the darkness. The scuttle opened; I got sight of the speaker on the companionway stairs, then we two plunged below, and I closed the scuttle behind us at the lawyer's bidding.

It was a neat cabin and spacious—but I will describe it in more detail later on. It has no place in this narrative as yet.

"This," my companion was saying, "is Mr. Robert Dolan, your new mate. Mr. Dolan, Captain Wilson."

I took my skipper's hand and looked into his eyes. They met mine fairly enough, bold eyes, and there was a dash of hard recklessness in them. He was a hand-

some devil, somewhere in his late thirties, but lean and hard as a boy, black-haired, and swarthy as an Indian.

"Got to clear out some time to-morrow at the latest."

The lawyer added the news to the introduction so quickly that the skipper dropped my hand.

"Man," said he, "it's absolutely impossible."

"We got to," the other repeated dully, and flung himself upon a locker. "I can't argue. If you're not off inside of that time, we're——" He shrugged his fat shoulders and made a helpless gesture with his two hands before him.

Captain Wilson bit the ends of his black mustache and stood there glowering down on him.

"Well," he said finally, "it's no time for wasting our wind in talk if that's the case. If I knew what's ahead of us—what it's all about—why——" He swore. "I'm taking your orders, Mr. Jaspro," he ended grimly. "We'll get downstream with the morning tide, and you be on hand. There's the crew and" —he turned to me—"you can give me a hand in getting things shipshape to-night, then, Mr. Dolan; that's one satisfaction."

But the lawyer interrupted him.

"I've got to take Mr. Dolan ashore with me," he

said. "For one thing, I need his help—or mebbe I will. I was held up to-night, and Lord knows what would of come of it if he hadn't showed up just in the nick of time. Then—I—there are the other parties; and I want him to have a talk with them."

Now that was bad business—taking a mate away from his skipper, and over the latter's head, to talk with owners over their affairs. And it did me no good in the eyes of Captain Wilson. I saw it right then, and I started to protest. But the skipper himself silenced me with a laugh which was not altogether good-natured.

"Mr. Dolan," he said, "I'll have you know this is queer business—if you don't know that much already. It's not being run the way a seafaring man is used to seeing things handled—at least, not as far as I have seen things go so far. When you come back aboard, and we're off to sea—then you'll find things different. Just now—well, you're"—he pointed to William Jaspro—"under landsman's orders."

He turned to the lawyer: "Want anything more of me? If you don't—I can hurry them up a bit in the engine room." He left us with the words.

"There's a boat," William Jaspro told me, "tied somewhere back here by a rope. If you'll get it in

hand and fetch it round to that infernal ladder, we'll go ashore."

I was busy at this and the lawyer was awaiting me on deck, when the white pathway of light rays which had followed us across the bay came creeping over the waters of the river and enwrapped both of our figures. I called out a warning, but it was too late.

CHAPTER IV

THE PINK HOUSE

THE launch had come out from behind one of the ships which was moored below us; now she ran right on past the schooner, so close that I could have tossed a pebble aboard her. I saw the forms of several men on her; I heard their voices, and one laughed. William Jaspro stood as if he were rooted to the deck. I waited until the coughing of the engine was growing fainter beyond us upstream; then I brought the boat around to the manropes.

"That finishes us now," the lawyer said and ended with a groan.

But he seemed to gather himself together in the instant and climbed overside into the skiff. There was no sign of the craft which had brought us across the bay, and I remembered having heard her motor drumming off into the distance when we had gone below. I followed my employer, after bidding him to hold fast with a boat hook; took the oars and, under

his instructions, rowed to the Alameda shore. Eventually we drew up alongside a dilapidated little wharf.

The rain had eased off now into a clammy drizzle. I let the lawyer lead the way ashore and presently found myself beside him in the middle of a railroad track. We struck off in the direction of Alameda, whose lights showed in a great yellow blur, and when we had gone perhaps a hundred yards he spoke for the first time since giving me my directions whither to row.

"I don't know," he said dully, "I don't know." I had a notion to remind him that I knew, if possible, even less than his nothing, but there was a despair in his leaden voice which made me hold my peace. We went on in silence, and presently I thought I recognized the rotting little shed of a station when I first caught sight of it through the gloom. He halted in its shelter.

"Hark!" he whispered, and gripped me by the arm. A moment passed.

"Did you hear anything?" he asked in the same hushed voice.

I told him that I had heard nothing but the faint swishing of the salt grass in the rising wind. "May as well get on to the house," I ended. He drew away from me with a choking exclamation.

I told him then how I had seen him from aboard

the train and instead of reassuring him it only increased his distress.

"Heaven knows how many others may have seen me, too!" he quavered.

"Well, when it comes to that," I replied rather roughly, "I've an idea some of these other people—whoever they are—know a lot more about your comings and goings than you think they do. I notice they had some one on hand at every turn we made. If you'll let me suggest, I'd say we'd best be getting on. We can talk it over when we're under shelter—and sure we're out of hearing. There could be twenty men around here, listening, and we'd never be a bit the wiser."

That set him off, and he struck out without another word to find the little boardwalk which led across the marsh. I was the one to make the discovery, and now I took the lead. A good half of the cross planks were lacking, and every twenty or thirty feet one or the other—and sometimes both of us—would miss our footing. I had a couple of bad falls, and the lawyer fared even worse.

Then, of a sudden, before I was expecting it, I saw the loom of the house right in front of me. It stood out blacker than the night itself, a forbidding shadow, and the damp marsh smells came to my nostrils, the

whisper of the wind in the coarse grass was in my ears. William Jaspro limped past me and knocked ever so quietly on the door. The stealthiness of that summons was in keeping with the nature of the place. Silence followed; there came a footstep somewhere within; a voice called:

"Who's there?" There was a sick quaver in the tone of that demand which prepared me for what I was to see. When the lawyer had announced his name, and I had followed him through the door, I was not surprised at the appearance of the man who confronted us.

His hair was as white as paper and the skin hung loosely in yellowish folds over his cheeks. The pallor of his lips and the blaze of his dark eyes made a strange contrast, and his nose was thin, hawklike. That man had aged within a few months, or a year at most. In the prime of his middle life something had shaken all the vigor out of him and left his whole frame listless. Sickness for one thing; it showed in his movements when he walked; he was even now recovering from a siege of some sort which must have racked him sorely. And, for another thing, dread.

He was a bold spirit; his eyes proclaimed that indomitability which makes a man ride himself and others mercilessly; but he was always listening for

the coming of some one. He was in flight. When a man starts to run away he can never hide the fact, try as he will. This white-haired man of middle age, with his dragging limbs and shaken body, was being hunted like an animal. I was sure of these things before I had fairly stepped inside the room.

The fool who had built that pink house here in the middle of the marsh, had plastered its walls. The dampness had rotted the coating until it had broken away in patches exposing the laths. There were some sticks of furniture and a red-hot stove. And over on one side against the wall a number of small leaden boxes—ten in all as it afterward turned out—bound with iron straps. William Jaspro shuddered, and we all went closer to the stove. Within its little area of parboiled air we took our seats on two cheap wooden chairs, but the white-haired man limped back and forth, rubbing the palms of his waxen hands.

"You're late," he turned and faced the lawyer as he spoke. Then flinging his hands before him in a gesture whose futility was like that of an irritable patient in a hospital bed: "Man! When do we get out of here?"

"Late," William Jaspro answered heavily, and his shoulders were sagging now. "Yes, and lucky I came

at all. It looks——" He paused and shook his head.

"They're here then!" The other interrupted sharply and fear gave him a look that made me shrink from him. Jaspro rose and drew over to one side. They stood there; the lawyer talked in a half whisper, and I saw the eyes of one and then the other going to me as he went on. I wished I had been sensible enough to remain in my room instead of going forth on this extremely dubious matter. I resolved that when they ceased their conference I would withdraw and leave them. I was done with it. If they were in the right, why all this night prowling and all this dread? They finished their whispering and returned to the stove.

"Mr. Dolan"—the lawyer indicated me with a gesture, and the other extended his waxen hand—"Mr. Langton." There was a hesitation in the manner of his pronouncing the last name which was not lost on me. I suspected it was an alias right then. But I took the hand and shook it.

"He'll help us out of this—er—crisis—I've an idea," my employer went on, clearing his throat as one who tries to hearten himself to proceed. "All we need is a little boldness—er—just a dash you might say—er—Langton, and we're out of the woods. And I'm sure of him. I'm——"

I was on the verge of interrupting him, to tell him that I could not see my way to going further—not unless I had absolute convincing assurance in the way of evidence that the thing was fair and aboveboard, when another interruption came. The door of the next room opened, and a girl stepped out into the lamplight.

She was young, not more than twenty; I knew her for the daughter of the white-haired man before she crossed the room and placed her arm over his shoulder as he sat there before the stove. I knew it from the marked resemblance and from the manner in which her eyes went to him at the instant of her entrance. Large eyes and dark; she was a little thing; small, with a delicacy of feature and figure which suggested fragility.

Yet she had in her eyes and in her bearing that peculiar indomitability which one sometimes sees in small women. One look at her and you would swear she would go through things which would overwhelm many men. I think it was that spirit more than anything else which made my heart go out to her in one great leap as soon as I set eyes on her. That and the charm of her dainty femininity.

She merely said: "Father," and I saw her eyes looking down at him.

"I'm going to help," I said as resolutely as if I had never had a doubt on that question from the very beginning, "but I've got to know what I'm doing—what you are heading for—if I'm to be of any service from now on." She watched me while I was speaking; I knew she was appraising me as women do; and my pulses beat a little quicker, for I caught something like appeal in her eyes.

William Jaspro was on his feet now and quite courtly for a fat man, too, as he made my introduction, but her father broke in impatiently before he was decently through.

"You tell him, Jaspro." And then taking the words out of the lawyer's mouth: "What d'ye think," he asked me sharply, "do they know we're here?" I shook my head.

"Can't say," I told him, "But they know enough to——" I hesitated.

"To run me down any time now. Isn't that it?"

I looked at the lawyer and he caught the question in my eyes.

"Here's the situation," he said. "The schooner sails to-morrow, and to-night we must get Mr. Langton and his daughter aboard." He glanced at the strange boxes. I went over to the pile and lifted one of

them in my two hands; it weighed a good one hundred pounds.

"And bring these aboard, too?" I asked. I knew —and they knew that I knew, for only a fool would have guessed otherwise—that only something very precious could be the cause of so much concern.

"A team," Jaspro told me, "is due within the hour."

"And the men who followed us across the bay saw you on the schooner," I reminded him dryly. "She'll never sail with her passengers and that cargo if your friends, who seem to be so anxious concerning your movements, can help it."

It was quite apparent that they could help it, too; I read the fact in the lawyer's worried face and in the yellow features of the sick man. I did not like the affair; I'd have deserted them then and there if it had not been for the girl. For all I knew Jaspro might be a liar and her father a common thief, but—she was already trusting in my help; her eyes were on me all the time. I swallowed my compunctions; the chance of aiding in wrongdoing did not impress me somehow as being as serious as the idea of abandoning her. She was no thief at any rate.

"If they'd not happened to see me," the lawyer muttered.

"Chances are," I interrupted, "they've known it longer than you think. The schooner's going to be watched from now on, anyway."

Silence followed. Jaspro sat holding his chin in his two hands, staring before him, frowning. Langton was bending forward as if to embrace the stove; I could see him shivering. His daughter continued to regard me steadily. She was the first to speak.

"Can you do it?" she asked quietly.

"I'll try," I promised her. "Let me think."

CHAPTER V

"HEARING THINGS"

THE plan came to me soon enough. There was nothing wonderful about it, but it was the only solution that offered, and time was going by. The team of which Jaspro had spoken would be on hand within the hour to take the queer boxes away; and there was always the chance that the men who had been spying on the lawyer might overhaul us at any moment.

It turned out as I had hoped. The launch was standing by upstream. She was to carry boxes to the ship. I had seen enough of her to know her for one of those sea-going craft which the fishermen use off the Farallones.

"We'll have her run in to a landing up above there; put the passengers and cargo aboard," I said. "Then she can slip away and meet the schooner somewhere off the lightship to-morrow." It meant some discomfort for the sick man and the girl, but I imagined discomfiture would be preferable to these dismal quar-

ters. All hands seized the suggestion with a sort of despairing eagerness.

I left them in something of a fever of excitement and set forth alone for the waterside, carrying a note to Captain Wilson from the lawyer and instructions as to how to reach the launch. Jaspro was to accompany the wagon with the leaden boxes, and, when these had been placed aboard, one of us would go back to the house with the team and bring the other two down to the landing. It seemed that neither of them had the slightest idea of the geography hereabouts.

It was a little after three o'clock in the morning when I left the pink house on the marsh. I stood before the door for a moment partly to accustom my eyes to the blackness, partly to listen for some sound of prowling enemies. I never saw a darker night; the wind was driving the rain straight before it; a man might as well try and look about him in the bottom of a mine. Which suited me all the better, for if I could not see, neither could any one who might be searching for me. As for sounds, there were plenty of them, but they all came from the storm as far as I could determine.

I found the skiff where I had left it at the little landing, and I sculled out to the schooner without any

more sound than an occasional ripple from the oar's blade. Captain Wilson was on deck with a demand as to my identity before I had fairly got on board. I handed him Jaspro's note, written on my suggestion, and he took me below into the cabin, where he read it with a puzzled frown. His brow cleared when he had gone over it the second time; and then, without a word of comment, he scratched a match and burned the paper, smudging the black remnants to ashes under his heel.

"Very good," he said quietly. "I take it I'm not to have your company until I'm at sea."

I am sure that the idea of clearing without his passengers and cargo was something of a relief. I asked him concerning the whereabouts of the launch. It seems she was awaiting a signal from the lawyer to return and pick him up, but beyond that the skipper could tell me little. I had to take Jaspro's rather vague instructions as my guide in finding her. So I shook hands with the captain, wished him luck, and he accompanied me to the rail, where he cast off when I boarded the skiff.

I took the oars and pulled upstream. The tide was at the flood and would be running out with the current behind it within a short time; but I had to take it slowly, for one reason lest I make too much

noise, and for another that I might keep a lookout for our power craft, which I knew would be keeping somewhere close to the bank and under cover if it were possible.

I was treading my way, keeping close to the Alameda shore. The necessity for constant vigilance against dangers to which I was not accustomed was enough to fray my nerves. I was pretty well on edge inside of a half hour. Another fifteen minutes had gone by, and I was almost on the point of despairing of ever finding the wanted craft, when I ran right along her side under the lee of a landing stage.

There is no doubt that William Jaspro, whatever may have been his shortcomings as a strategist, had good judgment in hiring his men. Wilson, the captain of the schooner, was an example to the point, as I was to learn later; the launchman was another, as I found out now.

He was upon me with a boat hook before I had fairly sensed his imminence, and I believe he would have brained me had I not the presence of mind to proclaim my identity before the weapon descended. He checked the blow as soon as he heard my voice and asked my pardon civilly enough. I climbed into the cockpit and told him what I had come for, and then I asked him if he had seen anything of the other

powercraft which had come so near to being our undoing.

"She passed me going upstream, sir," he answered, "with five or six men aboard. Soon after she came back and ran so close I could of laid holt of her with the boat hook. There was only one man on her then, and he saw nothing of me, I'll swear to that."

I began to congratulate myself that we had started things moving. It was pretty clear that the pursuers were getting ready to close in somewhere. I hoped that "somewhere" might not be the pink house on the marsh. We cast off and poled the launch to the next landing some hundred yards above us, the one Jaspro had designated as our meeting place; and while we sat there in the shelter of the little deck house I listened to the drumming of the raindrops and the swishing of the wind, straining to catch the sound of men moving in the darkness, but there was no sign of any one save our two selves.

At last I heard the tramping of horses, the jingle of harness, and the rattle of wagon wheels. With the relief which these noises brought came new apprehensions, for it seemed to me as if that team would awaken the whole neighborhood and bring down upon us every lurking spy who had been left

on this side of the bay. However, William Jaspro and the driver were the only arrivals.

I told the former of what news I had learned from the launchman and learned from him that everything was quiet when he left the house. He had encountered no one along the road. It looked as if we had a pretty good chance of giving them the slip if luck held a little longer. We set to work like madmen transferring the wagon's load to the biding launch.

The three of us were burly men and used to bending our backs in labor; but a hundred pounds is not an easy load to carry through the dark and to strike a light even for a moment was out of the question. The footing was bad and a misstep meant a fall into the river. But we tore into the task, each man saving his breath for the labor. I do not think that any one ever handled the same weight over the same distance in any less time than we made.

The last leaden box was aboard, and two or three bags and one trunk were in transit. Thus far not a single alarm had come to interrupt us. And then —just as I was laying my own burden into the launch—I knew that some one was talking close by. I had imagined the same thing before, but this time it was a certainty. I bade the launchman go aboard,

took the teamster with me, and found William Jaspro where we had left him at the horses' heads.

"They're over there." He pointed in the direction of the railroad track. It ran parallel with the stream's course some fifteen or twenty yards distant, and the road crossed it coming down to the landing stage. I hearkened while the teamster took the lawyer's place, whispering to his animals to quiet them.

The track was on a twenty-foot embankment, and by looking sharply I could barely make out the forms of several men bunched there against the sky line. Their voices came to me in a confused blur. Here on the low ground the wagon was in deep shadows. Its black cover came fairly between that group and the team, hiding the animals. The interval between us and the right of way was littered with heaps of salvage from broken ships.

"Stay here," I bade the lawyer, "and don't make a move till I come back." I slipped away at once, and made my way on hands and knees toward the foot of the embankment. I was able to get within five yards or so of the track without showing myself in the open, and I crouched behind a pile of old iron close beside the right-of-way fence. Now the voices were plain, the words distinguishable; I counted

four men, vague shapes against the lowering night sky.

"Nothing there," the speaker swore. "You're always hearing things. Besides the orders was to wait here for Doc. If we start in to rooting round we're liable to make a racket and ball things all up."

"Some one coming now," another voice announced, and I could hear the footfalls down the track. One of the party gave a low whistle. The answer came out of the night, and as the new form revealed itself approaching, the others started toward him in a bunch. From where they met, any one of them could have spat upon me in my hiding place. Just then one of the horses stirred, shaking his harness.

"What's that?" a voice demanded, but the newcomer silenced the speaker with an oath.

"Want to spoil it all?" he growled. "I've got 'em located. Not a quarter of a mile away, the two of 'em, I tell you."

"And I tell you, there's some one down there by the crick." It was the man who had given the alarm. "If there is, it's none we're after," the other assured him easily. "I've been watching the place since dark down by where the schooner's laying. Right after you fellows come upstream in the launch, there was two of 'em went ashore."

"We saw them two," another interrupted, "when we went by; on deck they was."

"I know," the newcomer told him sharply, "and I saw 'em when their launch brought 'em. Now listen —here's the p'int: They went ashore; pretty soon one of 'em went back aboard the schooner. I was watching the land trying to figger where he'd been, and I saw a light. Remember that old house in the middle of the flat? 'Twas there. I just been over to the place—and heard a man and woman talking inside. Not a chance fer a mistake. It's the parties we want."

He lowered his voice until I had difficulty in catching what he was saying. "Keep quiet about it and do what I tell you, and we'll have 'em inside of fifteen minutes now." Already they were starting down the track.

I crept back to the landing and told the news to William Jaspro; and while I was talking I had a mental picture of the girl waiting beside her father in that moldy room. I could see the joy lighting up her face as she heard approaching footsteps, and see it turn to terror when those men came into the door. I did not wait for the lawyer to speak. "You get aboard the launch. I'll go back and try to get them away."

"But where are you going to bring them?"

Aye, where? It was a poser. I did some swift thinking in that moment while we two stood facing each other in the darkness. The creek was beyond consideration now. Jaspro and the launchman would be lucky if they could slip away downstream with those miserable boxes and avoid detection.

We had to find another rendezvous, and that was all there was about it. It struck me at the time that the farther this was from here the better. Once the schooner got beyond the heads and took the mysterious cargo on board from the launch, she was reasonably safe to run whither her captain pleased. There flashed before my mental vision a picture of the coastline as I had scanned it many a time on the printed charts, with every headland, every cove and bay and port.

"Get on," I cried, "and follow out the plans the way we've made them. When you see Captain Wilson out at sea to-morrow tell him to run down to Monterey Bay and stand by off Moss Landing. If I can get them out of this, I'll bring them down there, and when we signal with a lantern, he can send a boat ashore to take us on board."

It was just about one chance in a hundred. He realized that as well as I did. But he never made a

protest. After all, it was the only opportunity that offered—and those five men were already well on their way to the pink house on the marsh. We did not take the time to say good-by. In silence we struck off in opposite directions, through the dark.

CHAPTER VI

"OVER THE TOP"

THE teamster who was standing by his horses when I came up left their heads and climbed to the driver's seat. "Where's Jaspro?" he demanded. "I thought he was to go back after them two."

I boarded the wagon without another word. Here was an unexpected ally, and I saw a chance to win the race with this new help. But he was doing some thinking on his own account, and when we had crossed the railroad tracks he spoke.

"Fellow," he told me, "this here's queer business. Only for me knowing old Jaspro—always good pay and never kicked about a bill, and"—he swore at the horses—"there's that girl. D'ye see her? The one at the house."

"I saw her, but I don't know much more than you do about this business. Maybe not as much. But I'm not going to let that bunch get her if I can help it."

"They're after her?" He cursed the team again. "Say, I'd hate to ditch her myself." He urged the

horses on. The road was vile; it was all that I could do at times to hold my place by clinging to the seat. He assured me that it would be worse directly. "After we make the turn we got to take it at a walk. Holes every few feet that a horse would break a leg in if he was to trot."

"Will you stand by then," I asked him, "where the roads join? I'll finish faster afoot. If I can get those two to the team——"

"Then we can play fire engine all the way to Alameda," he finished for me. "Sure, I will. If I get in jail over this, why, I guess old Jaspro will bail me out." I never got a look at that teamster; I've never seen him, save through the darkness, to this day. But I'll make a wager that he has an honest face.

He pulled up a few moments later and told me: "Just follow the road; it runs straight to the house. Can't miss it, for it's all the way there is. Once you're off of it, you're in the water to your waist."

I had not gone twenty yards before I took a header in one of the holes which he had mentioned; from that point on I made progress in a series of brief dashes, each of which came to an end in another ugly fall. Finally I saw that if I kept it up this way I was going to put myself out of the race with a broken bone or two, to say nothing of knocking what little

breath was left from my body. I slackened my pace to a swift walk.

Sometimes I wished that I had not given up the wagon, but I reflected that the noise of its approach would surely alarm the other party to greater haste, while I was able to make the intervening distance in less time than the horses. Besides which I knew that a mishap to the team would probably destroy our last chance for safety. I went on through the pouring rain feeling my way in the blackness, staggering over the bad footing, stumbling in the chuck holes, until I saw the gray loom of the house ahead of me and paused to listen.

A voice sounded in the direction of the railroad track. It was not more than fifty yards away. I heard a loose plank rattle on the narrow walk. Evidently I was winner by a margin so narrow as to leave the ultimate result in the gravest doubt. I found the door and never stopped to knock. I stepped within; the room was quite dark, but a gush of light came with the opening of the door which led into the front of the house, and Langton's daughter stood confronting me. Her face was pallid and her eyes were wide with fear. I placed my finger on my lips.

"Quick!" I whispered. "They're out there in front." She nodded and turned on the instant.

Outside I heard another plank rattle, and I swore under my breath. It seemed several minutes, but it could not have been more than a few seconds before she was back with her father, and I noted that the two of them were cloaked.

"I do not think," the girl told me under her breath, "they are as far as the front door yet."

"We'll chance it anyhow," I said, and slipped outside ahead of them. As I emerged into the darkness I was ready for anything; but the night gave forth neither sight nor sound of any enemy. The two fugitives were beside me, and the door closed silently. I whispered to hurry down the road, and as they started, I came on behind them. It was like walking in a funeral; the man could hardly drag his feet; and I felt the sweat running down my body as I heard the pad-pad of stealthy footsteps coming around the house.

My feet refused to move with any swiftness, and at each stride I felt as if I were weighed down with lead. Yet we had gone a good hundred feet before that first prowler gained the rear of the building, for I heard him stumble over one of the bits of timber which had tripped me a few minutes before.

I closed in and joined my two companions. "You

must make him hurry faster," I told the girl, and took his arm. "Come now," I bade him.

He uttered the only sound he had made since I had entered the house—a whispered groan. All the despair that comes from physical helplessness in a moment of great danger was contained in that gasp. I slipped my arm about his body and told him to throw his over my shoulder; and in this manner I half carried him up the broken road.

Silence endured behind us. The wind muttered and the rain splashed. I could hear the gasp of Langton's indrawn breath at every stride he took, and once, when he slipped, the scrambling of our feet in the mud made a noise which I thought would wake the dead. It was not that I was afraid.

A vast impatience was making my nerves bristle until I was ready to start at the dropping of a pin. The desire for movement was leaping through every restrained muscle, and to keep on repressing it was maddening. We had made another hundred feet and then a third. The noise of knocking came down the night wind. It gave me a great start; the very fact that I had been expecting it all this time made it hit me all the harder when it did come; and Langton fairly collapsed. I heard his daughter whispering to him; he stiffened at her words and thrust his lamed

limbs before him with a resolution which he had lacked before.

I knew as well as if he had told me that it was of her that he was thinking, of the things which would come to her—and not of what was awaiting him in case these men caught us. And, no matter what disgrace he might have brought upon himself and this fragile, little thing, no matter what wrong he might have done, I felt my heart go out to him a little. The knocking stopped. It was resumed within an instant. This time it was a hollow, long roll. And then a voice came:

"Open there. We're officers!"

I could not help drawing away a little from the man whom I was holding at those words. I felt him shaking as I resumed my former position. I looked over my shoulder just in time to see a sudden flood of light gushing out into the blackness, cutting the night on either side as sharply as a knife; a fan-shaped pathway of yellow radiance that showed every little object on the earth, revealing the forms of two men.

In the instant both shapes dived in and were swallowed by the dark bulk of the building, from whose open door that brightness flowed. And then I plunged onward, dragging the man whom I was supporting so

swiftly that his limbs hung loose and helpless, his feet scraped in the mud and the roadway.

A pandemonium followed; across the distance came the noise of feet pounding on the uncarpeted floors, the bang of doors, the crash of furniture thrown about. It ceased as suddenly as it had begun and was succeeded by a little interval during which the only sounds were the hissing rain, the rushing of the wind and our own sloshing footsteps in the muddy wagon track.

Then voices clamored, the voices of men, but they were more like the intermingled yells of wolves who are crying on a reeking trail. I glanced behind again and saw several forms in the fan-shaped patch of light outside the open door; they were running headlong toward the road. I turned my head.

"We'll make it yet. The wagon's not one hundred yards away."

Langton gasped something which was lost in the whistle of his breath; the girl uttered a soothing word, and I felt her arm slipping out around her father's form below mine. We staggered onward for some distance and I was sure that I could hear the jingle of harness as the waiting horses stirred, when my foot went into a hole and I pitched forward on my face, dragging Langton with me. He groaned aloud, but

before I had got up, he was already scrambling to his feet.

Now we had not lost more than three seconds in that accident, and yet the time was enough to change the whole issue of the race. It was a case of fight; some one must make a stand. Down the road I heard the beat of running feet. How many of them were after us I could not tell, but there were several, and one of the pursuers was drawing so near that we could never make the wagon before he overtook us.

"Take him on," I bade the girl, "I'll hold the road. And with the words I loosed my hold of Langton's body.

She made no answer, but I could hear her encouraging her father as they hurried into the darkness. I took my stand, crouching in the shadows at the side of the wagon track. The footsteps of the pursuers were coming closer. Some one cursed back there in the blackness, and I heard a sloshing thud. One of them, at any rate, had come to grief in a pitfall. Another voice sounded still farther back; the foremost man was within fifty feet by this time, and he was running straight upon me.

I waited, immovable, and let him come on. He never saw me until I straightened up before him; and as he halted—so abruptly that his feet all but slipped

from under him in the soapy clay—I swung for where I judged his chin should be; swung wide and with all my body's weight behind the blow.

I felt the sharp sting in my knuckles and heard the smack of their collision, and he was huddled in the roadway at my feet. But before I could turn to resume my interrupted flight another form showed and a third beside it. They were right upon me almost as soon as I saw them and fighting as they came. I got a great blow between my eyes which made my head fairly sing and flung a shower of stars before my vision, and in the same instant a pair of arms gripped my waist. The three of us went down together with a mighty crash that left me breathless.

But if I was shaken by that fall, so were they; and I had a large advantage which had come to me through the very handicap under which I had labored while I was in flight. For, while they were running at full speed over the bad ground in the darkness, I was taking it, perforce of necessity, with slowness; the consequence of which was their own utter breathlessness at the very beginning of the encounter. Now they were, for the instant, spent.

Nor was that all; their very odds of two to one made them go counter to each other's efforts in the gloom, while I was working to a single purpose, a

purpose which I understood; it was not my first rough-and-tumble mêlée, you see. I had been, as I have said, a whaler's mate. So, as soon as I struck the earth, even while the shock was jarring my very bones, I set to work with the one object of getting free.

One of the pair had fallen right upon me and the other must have been dragged down alongside the two of us. The first man started feeling for my throat; and while his fingers were fumbling about my collar, creeping up toward my windpipe, I gathered my legs toward my body, hunching up my knees; then let fly with both feet. The kick caught him in the mid-section and I heard him grunt as he went flying from me. I flung myself upon the other the moment that I was freed from the weight of his companion and felt one futile blow glancing from my body; then showered a whole volley down upon his face and leaped to my feet.

One of the prostrate men was rising close beside me. He made a lunge and missed, and without waiting to return the compliment, I took to my heels. I could hear the horses stamping ahead of me as I raced up the road. I got sight of the wagon and a voice cried out. It was the girl. I answered with a shout, and in the next second leaped over the tail

gate. A pair of hands gripped me by one foot. I kicked backward and felt the grip relax. Then the team plunged forward, and I heard the girl's voice beside me. "He's here, father," she cried. "We're safe."

Somewhere behind us a man cursed. I got one last glimpse of the patch of light emerging from the open door of the pink house in the middle of the marsh.

CHAPTER VII

GOOD SAMARITAN

I DO not know the name of the town. I think it must be San Leandro where I learned how fear can stop a man's heart. The horses had done all they could for us; they were in no shape to travel farther through the clogging mud of those low country roads when we entered the village. I bade the driver set us down at the railway station and leave us to work out our own salvation as best we could.

When we entered the lighted, empty waiting room I saw how hard a way my companions were in. Langton was shaking with a chill until his teeth fairly rattled in his head; the girl just managed to drag herself to one of the benches and sank down beside her father with a sigh of utter weariness.

I was, of course, accustomed to hard weather and, although I steamed like a wet horse, my blood was running warm enough. But when it came to looks I must have been a worse sight than either of them. Mud was caking me from head to foot, and my face

was streaked with dried blood from a cut over my eye. I looked them over and I realized that, unless I wanted a sick girl and a dead man on my hands, the best thing I could do would be to find some decent shelter and hot food.

Some one was making a mighty banging of tin cans on the farther end of the platform, and I went out there to make inquiries. Two Portuguese farm hands were unloading milk tins from a wagon, and in answer to my question they pointed to a blaze of light almost directly across the wide street. The girl brightened a little when I told her the news and straightway began to brush some of the dried mud from her skirts and tucked away some strands of disordered hair. Then she smiled bravely into my eyes.

The hotel was one of those French pensions—half inn and half road house—which used to be found in every village around San Francisco Bay. The landlord, a burly, ruddy-faced fellow with heavy-lidded eyes, met us in the dingy little parlor. He did not even shrug his shoulders when he saw us nor give us as much as a second glance.

With that beautiful composure which only the men from southern Europe are capable of he took us in as if travelers were in the habit of staggering into his hostelry with blood and exhaustion smeared on

their faces and furtiveness written in their eyes. He bowed, called his wife, and took his own departure, leaving us to her care.

She was a comfortably buxom woman, hard-handed, with great, knotted, bare forearms and a shadow of a mustache, but teeth as white as snow and a smile that was enough to make a man kiss her on one of her red cheeks. She fairly cooed over Langton's daughter, and was out of the room, to return in a few seconds with steaming coffee and buttered toast. That coffee put heart into all three of us, and we sat there in the dingy little parlor on garishly upholstered chairs, surrounded by walls adorned with colored prints of zouave soldiers going into action, Napoleon on horseback, and the Eiffel Tower, sipping the hot fluid. I asked our hostess whether we could get rooms. Inside of the half hour we were upstairs, and I was enjoying the soft, cool caress of spotless linen sheets.

I had taken the opportunity to look at a time card in the railway station and had learned that there was a southbound train at precisely ten minutes after two that afternoon. I left orders with our hostess to give me a call at half after one. The next thing I knew some one was rapping on the door.

The rain had ceased some time during the morning;

the sun was out and everything was dazzling when I looked through the window. I saw a two-horse open carriage coming down the roadway from the north when I went out to knock at the doors of my companions. Then I went back to my room to wait, thought better of it, and started downstairs.

Here I must digress a little to describe the geography of that battered little road house and its surroundings. The stairs came down into a narrow hallway which opened at one end into the dingy parlor where we had had coffee on our arrival, and ran the length of the building to a rear door. Several other doors opened from this passageway, one of them into the kitchen just beside the back entrance.

Behind the house was a yard, where fowls were enjoying the span of life, which preceded their metamorphosis into chicken *en casserole;* beyond several outbuildings was a low stable. A cypress hedge inclosed the yard and there was a narrow gate opening into a lane. Beyond were other houses and the town. In front of the inn the roadway came down from the north; across it, the station stood between us and the railway tracks.

When I reached the bottom of the stair and was about to step into the narrow hallway I noticed that the door opening into the parlor was wide open, as

well as the front door which gave entrance from the street. Through the latter I saw the vehicle which I had noticed coming down the road from the north halted before the inn. The driver was holding the reins and two men were talking quietly in the rear seat. I stopped to draw back a little out of their view and heard our landlady saying: "There is notheeng wrong?" A man's voice answered. "Oh, no. Nothing at all. They're friends of mine. Just tell me their rooms, and I'll step up and have a word with them."

She told him and he thanked her, and I retreated up the flight of stairs, where I stood in a dense shadow. He said something more—and I saw her coming down the hall. A door closed; I judged it was the one that led into the kitchen. I heard Miss Langton's voice upstairs.

I think it was that that saved the situation. For, instead of going back to his companions in the carriage, the man whom I had overheard talking in the parlor, stepped into the narrow hallway—to listen, I suppose, to what she was saying. I was on my way downstairs as soon as I heard him. He gained the foot of the flight and found me standing a step or two above him. By good fortune he had closed the parlor door.

"If you say a word," I whispered, "I'll pull the trigger." I leveled the automatic revolver which I had kept myself instead of giving it to the policeman in William Jaspro's office on the previous evening, so that its muzzle was level with his one good eye. He made a curious sound, half choke, half gasp, and stood as if he had been frozen to the floor.

I once heard a whaler say: "It ain't success makes turning a trick interesting. For when things go smooth, it's just one, two, three and you're done. But when something happens—when there's some one sees you or some one hollers—that's what starts things that's fine to listen to when it's all over with."

I had reached precisely this stage in the present venture. Now that things weren't going "one, two, three," it is interesting—to describe when it is done and over.

I did not have time to think. I had to do things as they came to me. It was a matter of seconds and a very few seconds at that. And a matter of luck "March," I bade him between my teeth and pointed down the hall toward the back door. I followed at his heels with the revolver's muzzle against the small of his back. I kept my coat shoved forward with my left hand the better to conceal it, and we two went straight out of the door, into the little yard, across the

bare inclosure as far as the cow shed, where I made him turn in.

"I intend to kill you if you make a sound," I warned him again. "Go into that stall." There was an upright of thick timber beside the rear of the stall. A cow regarded us in mild consternation from the adjacent pen. I found a couple of halters and bound the man with the bad eye to the upright, bound him hand and foot and did it with a quickness which had come to me in my years at sea. After which I stuffed his mouth with a wad of hay and then tied my handkerchief over his face to keep the gag secure, and left the place.

The landlady met me in the hallway. "A gentleman——" she began.

"I'm going out to have a talk with them," I answered on the spur of inspiration.

She turned and went back into the kitchen.

I made the stairs at a bound. Miss Langton was just emerging from her father's room and he was leaning on her arm. In a few words I told them what had happened. We came down into the passageway; the coast was clear. We slipped from the building as silently as thieves.

No one stopped us as we left the yard by the back gate. We went—how slowly I cannot tell you, Lang-

ton's lameness made me fairly grind my teeth with impatience—up the lane, and I took them around another block before I dared to turn toward the main street.

The train was in at the depot. It had been there for two or three minutes. We crossed the street, and I saw the open carriage standing in front of the road house; the men were still sitting as I had first noticed them. It seemed an age before we gained the railroad tracks and boarded the rear coach. I fairly panted for the train to move. It did not stir.

CHAPTER VIII

TROUBLED TRAVELERS

THE depot building stood between us and the inn. I sat there in my cushioned seat staring at its yellow walls, wondering what was going on beyond them. It seemed as if an eternity went by. At last the conductor sung out his long-drawn "A-a-abo-o-oard." And even then we did not move.

As if to make up for his tardiness the engineer started his locomotive with a jerk which fairly wrenched my back. Complainingly the wheels revolved; we passed the station, and I saw the vehicle still standing before the road house. One of its passengers was climbing down into the street. And that was my last glimpse of the place, for some trees shut it out a moment later. I speculated feverishly concerning what would be going on within the inn; when would they find the man with the spoiled eye?

There were few people in the coach. I had my seat behind my two companions. Once past, the girl turned and looked around at me. Dark circles of

weariness were below her eyes; but the eyes themselves were resolute, and now that resolution vanished for the moment before a glance of thankfulness. Thankfulness to me. Her lips moved, but I did not catch the words. I did not need to; I read them in her expression. She was telling me her gratitude, and I felt my cheeks go warmer as I muttered some sort of acknowledgment.

After that she resumed her attention to her father, and I saw her head going closer to his; her hair was brushing his cheek. He raised a waxen hand and stroked the tresses gently. During the four hours of that ride I watched them sitting thus, and it came to me that theirs was a great affection. I was to learn the depths of that love and the causes for its warmth, the circumstances which made them cling so closely to each other, in good time.

Now and again I thought of my own position and my relation to this affair. Up to the last hour I had acted as any man must act toward a young woman in distress. But since I had held that revolver on the man with the spoiled eye the whole situation, as far as I was concerned, had changed. I had sense enough to realize that no one would be going about as he did trying to apprehend fugitives unless he had some manner of legal authority, and my knowledge of

cities was great enough to make me sure the authority which he possessed came from a star.

Evidently he had the law behind him. Which made me a fugitive from that same law. I was now in as bad a case as these two whom I had chosen to help; the three of us were in the same boat from this time on. And as I thought upon it, I did not waste any regrets over the matter. For one thing, I was young and owned my share of the recklessness which a fellow has in his twenties, and for another—there was the gratitude which the girl had bestowed upon me in that brief look, to make me satisfied at least in part.

After all, the law means next to nothing to most of us when we come to shaping our own conduct; its significance is great only when we apply it to what other men do. As for ourselves, we always regulate our actions by a more primitive code than any written statutes and only ask ourselves whether we have done that which leaves no sting of conscience after it. That was how I felt this afternoon. I made sure in my own mind if I had the thing to do over again I would follow the same course. As for the future, why then I confess my satisfaction oozed away.

Things were badly mixed, and before I was done with this adventure, it was a reasonable certainty that

I was going to face some music to which it would not be pleasant to dance. One cannot aid fugitives in getting themselves and ten boxes of very precious loot out of the country when a troop of legally authorized men is after them without having a pretty definite assurance he is going to be called to account in the end.

All of which naturally set me to wondering about the stuff in those boxes and who really owned it; who were its rightful claimants. How had this badly frightened, sick man come into its possession? What, in Heaven's name, was it anyhow? And above all, where was Langton heading when he got aboard the schooner? I had a-plenty for my thoughts to feed upon while the train roared southward on that sunshiny afternoon.

The sun was slanting westward when we came through the upper reaches of the Santa Clara Valley and down long before we left the train at Castroville. Two or three country jehus were calling for customers at the edge of the depot platform and I chose an honest-looking young fellow with an open rig.

"Is there," I asked him, "a place where we can get a bite to eat before we go on?" He pointed out a typical regulation railroad hotel across the street; and I bade him await us outside while we were served.

The little hamlet of Castroville was about a mile away. We stopped there briefly while I went into the general store and purchased a lantern with enough oil to fill it. The proprietor was a burly fellow, and while he was waiting on me I happened to notice a sizable metal star pinned to his vest. Evidently he was the township constable. I had that guilty feeling which every man knows who has ever had occasion to dread the long hand of the law.

"Now," I told our driver, "take us over to Moss Landing."

He looked around at me. "What place?" he asked.

There was, I suggested, a wharf; he said there was, but did we want to go there? He placed an emphasis on the last word which made me pretty certain that the place must be deserted, and that suited me all the better. I answered that we did.

It was a lonely road across wide, flat lands where the wind sighed coming from the bay, bringing with it the scent of salt water which was grateful to my nostrils, and a chill which made my two companions huddle the closer together. Occasionally we would pass a row of tall gum trees whose leaves were rustling mournfully, and now and then we saw the light of some farmhouse while dogs barked at us in the distance. The air grew cooler; the tang of salt

in the wind became more evident. We rumbled out along a wooden bridge, and I heard the lapping of water underneath us; now the smell of the long mud flats overweighed the salt smells. At last our driver halted his horses.

"Here you are," said he. I helped the others out and paid him and, when he had driven away, I lighted the lantern. We were indeed standing at the landmark end of a long, dilapidated wharf. As far as the town is concerned it might have been engulfed in some tidal catastrophe—or never have been at all—for all the signs of life that showed.

I presume the inhabitants had gone to bed already, although it was not much more than eight o'clock. Far ahead of us at the farther end of the wharf I could just make out some sort of a low building, and as that promised shelter we set out for it. It proved to be a shed used for storing such cargoes as were landed in this place, and we got within its lee, which was pleasant after enduring the cold touch of that sea breeze during our long ride. Here we waited a good three hours.

I was the first to sight the schooner's lights. And she was well in before she showed them, too. I stepped out to the very end of the structure and waved my lantern. Almost at once the pleasant rattle of

ropes and blocks proclaimed that a boat was being lowered. The thud of oars in the rowlocks followed presently.

"They're coming," I announced.

I felt a soft hand on my arm and the girl's voice was in my ear. "I heard a wagon up the road there," she whispered. "It's just now stopped." And then a horse stamped on the planking at the landward end of the wharf.

"Keep the lantern," I told her, "and when the boat comes, do you two get on board. Call to me when you've done it."

It was the Castroville constable. I recognized his voice as soon as I came within earshot, and if I had not known it I would have been sure of him anyway.

"You just stay here," he was telling some one. "They're where you said all right. I'll get 'em."

And I perceived that our honest young driver had been too honest for my purposes; he had betrayed us to the seeking law.

No doubt the message of my doings at San Leandro had come across the wires, and the whole country was up after us. While I waited for him to come on I smelled the reeking tidal mud below me. The sound of the thumping oars grew plainer. I prayed that

the boat might be prompt and that there might be no delay in taking on her passengers. Now I saw the bulk of the approaching man in the gray night, and a moment later he caught sight of me.

"You, there," he called. "Stand where you are!"

I wondered whether he was bearing a weapon to enforce that order and, wondering, obeyed. For that suited my purpose. The oars were growing louder; the boat was near the wharf. The constable of Castroville stepped up out of the night and gripped me by the arm. The sound of the oars had ceased. I heard voices drifting landward with the night breeze. My two companions were being taken on board.

"Where's the others?" he demanded gruffly.

I sparred for time. I knew how slow the man Langton would move when it came to descending the ladder which led to the waterside.

"What others d'ye mean?" I countered.

"That'll do now," he rebuked me. "You know who." I think he heard them then for the first time, for he drew a little away from me, as if to listen the better, leaning slightly forward as he did so. I pulled back with all my force and then as he resisted the movement, lunged forward suddenly. Our bodies came sharply together. I seized him by the shoulders with my two hands, and tripped him with one

foot. He almost somersaulted with the violence of the assault, and I managed to give him a good hard thrust to make assurance doubly sure.

In this I quite outdid my own expectations, for the push, catching him already off his balance, sent him out over the stringer at the edge of the dock, and I heard him land in the mud below me with a mighty splash. I waited no longer, but turned on my heel and ran for dear life.

CHAPTER IX

A GRUESOME DISCOVERY

WHEN I reached the end of the wharf I could see the boat below me with the lantern between the thwarts. The faces of the two passengers showed dimly in the sick, yellow rays, and the two men at the oars were looking up at me. As I began climbing down the ladder which led to the water, my back to the yawl, I heard a muttered oath, the swish of an oar blade in the brine, the rattle of a rowlock. I glanced over my shoulder, and a good six feet separated me from the gunwale.

The voices of the sailors came to me across that interval; one was growling like a dog and the other was remonstrating with him. Miss Langton cried out. Then, before I could give the order which was on the tip of my tongue, the little craft came drifting back. I lost no time in dropping into the stern-sheets.

"Give way," I ordered the seamen, and while they were pulling out I caught the noise of feet on the planking.

The constable of Castroville was begging his companion to throw him a line and be quick about it. The schooner's lights showed dead ahead.

"What," I demanded, "d'ye mean, you men, pulling away without me?"

There was no answer for a moment, only the thump, thump of the oars in the rowlocks.

"My mistake, sir," the nearer of the pair said in a silken tenor. "Orders was to look out for trouble, and you came running——"

I let it go at that, but I could not help wondering why Captain Wilson or his second mate had not come along in charge of the yawl on so important an errand. The sailor who had not answered was still muttering under his breath; I caught an oath and bade him hold his noise.

When we were aboard the schooner a few minutes later I got a better look at the pair of them. The one who had made the apology and taken upon himself the blame was a rangy fellow, with a dead-white face all spotted by freckles, and little tight curls of rope-colored hair. His eyes had that peculiarly disagreeable redness around the rims that certain red-headed men's lids have. The other was a thickset, swarthy fellow, with a cynical droop to his lip ends and a perpetual scowl. He smelled of jails.

While they were still taking on the yawl under orders of the cheerful, ruddy-faced second mate, I convoyed my companions to the cabin. Captain Wilson was awaiting us and greeted us warmly enough, although I took it as strange that he had not seen fit to step up on deck to meet his passengers. His black eyes went swiftly over us, resting briefly on the girl with a look of sympathy, on her father with wonderment but half concealed, and lingering on me a little longer.

I saw the flicker of a smile at the corners of his mouth as he scanned my mud-plastered garments; it deepened a little as his glance traveled to the cut over my eye, which was still unbandaged and was bleeding afresh from the wrestling match with Castroville's constable.

The schooner was under way. I felt her heeling over as she came about, and I heard the gurgle of water along her side. I drew a deep breath of relief for it seemed to me in that moment that our troubles were over; at least, the sea was my own element, and I understood the ways of her men and ships.

Captain Wilson was for calling the cabin boy; the cook had hot coffee ready, he was telling his passengers, and they must be ready for it by this time. But Miss Langton had dropped on a locker beside

her father and was so obviously done out that he took her word for it and showed the pair their staterooms. When they had retired he ordered a bite to eat and sat down facing me with the table between us.

"Those boxes," he cursed them, "are in his stateroom." He jerked his thumb toward Langton's door.

I had clean forgotten our mysterious cargo for the time being, and I remembered that the sick man himself had not so much as mentioned it. Evidently this fact had also impressed the skipper. "Guess he's glad to be aboard, boxes or no boxes." He shrugged his shoulders as if perhaps he thought Langton might have another guess coming.

"He's pretty near all in," I told him, "and when it comes to that, we all are." I started to say something of our adventures, but the bold-eyed captain raised his hand.

"None of my business," he interrupted me. "I got troubles enough to handle my end of this affair." He cursed the boxes again. "This morning Jaspro boarded us from the launch and give me my orders. Just off the lightship we were. He was about as limp as a wet dishrag. I dropped him aboard that launch and we lost no time in clearing out. This is bad business! Whatever is in those cursed lead packages is more than I know. But it's precious. And

there it lays, a fortune, in that after stateroom, and every man on the crew talking about it from the time those lousy dock scourings stowed it away. Fact! "I came on the whole forecastle holding a session over it an hour after we'd left the lightship; making their reckonings, they were. Most of 'em argues that it's gold, and they were figuring, according to the weight of those boxes, at two hundred and fifty dollars to the pound. Two of 'em had been at Nome —I'll take my oath on it they were run out of the camp for thieves—and they were doing the talking. Well, I put a stop to that right off the reel and sent 'em about their business. Since then I've stuck around the cabin, leaving Grey on deck.

"I'd like to know," he swore again, "where Jaspro managed to find the crimp that shipped that crew for him. Six of 'em, and rotten jailbirds every one." He drank some coffee, slammed the mug down on the table. "I'm getting this off my mind," he explained. "Grey's not much more than a kid; come from a Pacific Mail liner and is new to this fore-and-after business. And Jaspro speaks well of you. I've got to depend on some one. Looks like you're the man."

"D'ye think——" I began.

He waved me aside with an impatient gesture.

'Don't think anything," he said. "We're bound for Honduras—make what you please of that."

I did instanter—that was the haven of fleeing men, of those who sought freedom from extradition. I had suspected it, but now I felt a little sick.

"But that's none of our business," he continued; "we're here to follow owner's orders. And that brings me back to the crew. They smell Honduras and—well, here's your dock rat's way of looking at it—stolen gold and five sturdy lads in the forecastle. 'Why not dig our own fists into them boxes ourselves, lads?' That's their talk, you can lay to that."

We finished our coffee in silence, and I lighted my pipe. It was beginning to look as if I had jumped from the frying pan into the fire; but for all of that I was thankful that I was at sea. I had dealt with sailormen before. Mutiny was an old story with me. However, I knew this skipper right now for a man of parts; he was not one to take false alarm; and if he had found it necessary to bide close to those boxes of unknown treasure I could bank on it for a surety that there was likely to be blood flying some time soon.

I thought of the girl in the stateroom and, knowing the ugliness of such situations as the skipper antici-

pated, I was more worried than I had been heretofore. I think Captain Wilson saw it in my face.

"Aye," he muttered, "there's that girl. I wish——"

His wishes concerned William Jaspro and the ten leaden boxes, and they dealt with our employer and our cargo in a manner which it is just as well not to set down for polite reading. Some moments later I happened to remember the incident that took place when I was boarding the yawl and I recounted it to him.

"One of those fellows was trying to get away without me, and I don't like his excuse now that I come to think of it. He was too ready with it."

"Like as not you're right," he assented. "One hand less in the cabin is one hand less to deal with in case of——" He paused.

"Mutiny," I finished for him, and he shrugged his wide, straight shoulders again.

"I suppose we may as well turn in now." He glanced at his watch. "After midnight. If you'll——" He did not finish, for he happened to be looking at my face, and what he saw in my eyes must have impressed him, for he stopped. As for me, I was not looking at him at all.

I had been glancing about the cabin. It was lined with the staterooms, two opening off directly aft,

and two on either side. Forward a door led into a sort of alley which led past the engine room and the galley on one side of it and on the other the quarters of the engineer and cook, to the forecastle.

My eyes, wandering about the place, had reached the door and they happened to rove downward. There was no coaming at the bottom of that door and the crack was fairly wide between it and the floor. I saw what I first took to be a little rivulet of water oozing slowly under the portal from the passageway, leaking into the cabin. But as I continued looking, it struck me as being too dark for water. At first I could not make myself realize what I was beginning to suspect; and then the suspicion strengthened until realization was forced upon me. It was a rivulet of blood.

CHAPTER X

THROUGH THE MANHOLE

CAPTAIN WILSON watched my eyes, and although I felt his look upon me I could not avert my gaze from that sluggish rivulet of crimson which crawled upon the deck gleaming under the lamplight. Then I knew he had followed the direction of my look. He sat for a moment in silence before we both rose. I started to say something, but he shook his head and gestured for me to remain mute. Thus we went softly to the door, and I flung it open.

I was expecting anything, ready for any one, and so was he. We stood there crouching, prepared to fight for our lives. There was no living being in the alley which led forward between the engine room and the amidships quarters; there was no dead. Only the gruesome evidence.

The door of the amidships quarters opened while we were standing there, and the engineer emerged into the passageway. His little scalp-tight cap was pushed back on his head showing a mop of blond

hair, his face, with the light from the cabin fairly upon it, was cheerful, unconcerned; he was whistling. Slowly his face changed as he read the concern upon our own, the whistling stopped, and he looked down.

"Easy, Larson." The skipper raised a warning hand. "Quiet's the word. Bad business here."

The young fellow nodded and stepped toward us, still staring at the darkening patch upon the boards.

"Never heard a sound, sir," he whispered. "I stepped into the steerage there to have a cigarette. Why, sir, I'd take my oath nobody's been by this hour back." His eyes met ours fairly and he shuddered. "It ain't natural," he muttered.

While he had been talking I had caught through the noises of the engine room which was hard by and the natural sounds of the ship, the intermittent growling of voices from the forecastle. The skipper was chewing his black mustache; his eyes were two slits as they met mine. I pointed to the forecastle. He nodded.

"Do you stand by here, Larson," he said quietly, and we crept forward.

But when Captain Wilson flung open the door we found two men seated on upended buckets, playing seven-up. A putty-faced pair, with signs of drink and lines of evil marked upon their features. And

their eyes were shifting from the instant of our entrance. The skipper went to the bunks; I saw the forms of two other hands and I'd have sworn they were asleep. He made no sign of any kind.

"All right," he told me unconcernedly, "we'll be on our way."

Within the alley he merely shook his head. And we went aft, with a word in passing to Larson to keep his ears and eyes open for trouble; we hurried through the cabin and up on deck. The swarthy, thickset fellow who had kept his silence during his fellow boat-puller's explanations off the Moss Landing wharf was at the wheel.

"Where's Mr. Grey?" Captain Wilson demanded. By the light of the binnacle I could see him scowling.

"Up forward some'r's a few minutes back, sir," he answered. "That's the last I seen of him."

"And Lewis?" The skipper's voice was sharp.

The helmsman pointed and I saw a figure standing near the main rigging; I recognized it as the lathy form of the boatman who had been so ready with his apologies. Captain Wilson kept his eyes upon the sailor's face and after a long, steady stare: "Go forward, Mr. Dolan, and take a look. Tell that sea

lawyer there to take the wheel and we'll have a word with this fellow in the cabin."

He scowled at the helmsman, who shifted his quid and spat to leeward.

Forward there was nothing to report on; no sign of body, blood, or any disorder that I could see. I bade the fellow Lewis go aft and take the wheel and joined Captain Wilson in the cabin. He was sitting on a locker leaning back against the bulkhead and his eyes, half closed in their scrutiny, were on the face of the erstwhile helmsman, who stood before him sturdily enough with his cap in his two hands.

"Now, Ross," the skipper said curtly, "out with it. What did you see?"

The man turned his cap over twice, swallowed, and threw his head back.

"Nothing, sir." He growled the answer defiantly.

"I've a hell of a notion"—Captain Wilson relieved his mind with a passing oath—"to clap you in irons right now." The man shut his teeth tightly, but remained mute. "Have you been below?" the skipper thundered.

"Not since I come on watch," the other answered steadily.

"Lewis been below?" the captain went on.

"Can't say, sir." The seaman shook his head doggedly. "I been keepin' me eyes on the——"

"Get out on deck," Wilson interrupted. "And, mind you, I'm half in the notion of ironing you this minute. If you've a liking to keep the handcuffs off of ye, don't leave me hear of your saying a word of what's gone on between us. Get now." The man turned and departed in silence, and when he was out of earshot:

"Mebbe he's telling the truth," I suggested.

"Mebbe," the skipper nodded sullenly, "and mebbe not. I tell you, Mr. Dolan, it's that man Lewis I'm afraid of most. But now—the question is, where's Grey—or Grey's body rather? Poor devil! I liked that lad."

We made the search that night, and nothing came of it. We combed down the forward parts of the schooner without result. And when morning dawned we were beginning to assure ourselves that the man Ross had lied; they had murdered the mate and thrown his body overboard.

"I could iron the whole pack of 'em, and chances are it's the wisest thing for all I know," the captain said. "But something tells me to say nothing. Them dock rats up forward are bound to spill it. I never saw the sailor yet who could stand a waiting game."

So we did. The sea was running high and the breeze continued fresh. The schooner was rolling a good bit, and we saw nothing of our passengers during these next few days. I was engrossed in this mystery and watching every moment for some sign that would give me an inkling whom to fall upon. For fall upon some one I knew we must and that right soon—unless we wanted them to do the attacking.

That crew were slinking to and fro, on watch and off, like men who have seen ghosts. Their faces—tallow faces most of them at the best—were leaden with ugly fear; their eyes were furtive. Not one of them—save the fellow Ross—but would pass the back of his hand over his mouth like a boy caught stealing from the pantry whenever I came upon him; and if I happened on him suddenly, not one but would jump at my approach as if he had been struck. With it all there was a dirty something in their eyes like the coming of bad weather in the sky.

The crew of six moved about like men who were seeing ghosts and itching to do more bloody work because of the very presence of the specters that were riding them. That was the way they seemed to me, and when I spoke to the captain about it he smiled grimly.

"The swine," he characterized them. "They have got to get it off their chests somehow. Keep your eyes open and we'll get 'em dead to rights yet."

We ran straight down the coast and kept our auxiliary power at work to help the wind, putting the miles behind us as fast as we could. And then one morning Miss Langton appeared in the cabin, with her father leaning on her for support. It was a pitiful sight to see the girl holding up the weakened frame of the sick man against the lurchings of the schooner. She smiled when her eyes met mine and greeted Captain Wilson with a pretty apology for her *mal de mer,* which he took gruffly enough. I could see that he did not fancy his two passengers at all. He held them responsible for the whole affair; and that was not so far wrong either, for it was that mysterious stuff in those boxes which had started the march of tragedy on the *Dora.*

If I resented the captain's brusqueness with the girl she sensed his hostility at once. Before she had been in the cabin half an hour she knew that there was something in the wind. We were at breakfast, and I saw her large eyes going from the captain to me and from me to the captain as if she were trying to read the nature of the new development in our faces.

After the meal she took her father to the deck, and they sat there for an hour or more, when the freshness of the air became too much for him and she packed him off below. When he was in his stateroom she returned to the cabin and found me smoking. I started to put up my pipe, but she begged me to keep it alight.

"My father always used to smoke one," she said, "before he came back."

I wanted to ask some questions, but naturally forbore. In a moment she had turned to question me.

"There's nothing wrong, is there?"

Now, Captain Wilson had shown plainly enough his desire to keep the thing quiet, and I felt the necessity of secrecy. I could only shake my head and answer: "Nothing." It did not satisfy her, however, and I could see that she was troubled at what she knew for my deceit. Shortly afterward she retired to her own room, and I did not see her again until late in the evening, when she found me in the cabin.

Ever since the murder of the second mate and our discovery of the blood patch in the passageway, the demeanor of the crew had been growing worse from day to day. And I had kept increasing the sharpness of my own surveillance during all this time in

consequence. This evening I was sitting as usual on the starboard locker with the door open that led into the alley. While I was all but out of sight myself, I could see up forward, clear to the door of the forecastle bulkhead, whenever I pleased.

"Will it be long," Miss Langton asked, "before we arrive?"

I assured her it would only be a matter of a short time. I asked for her father.

"I think he is improving just a little," she told me and I saw her brows cloud. "If only I could be sure of what you told me this morning—that there was no further trouble."

What she was going on to say I do not know, for just then a sound out in the passageway made me lean forward. I saw the door in the forecastle bulkhead open and a head was thrust out. One of the tallow-faced seamen was peering into the alleyway. The door closed. A moment later, while I was still leaning forward, there came from behind that closed door a heavy clanking sound—the sound of metal striking metal, as if some one had let an iron weight fall. And I knew what it meant.

There was a manhole in the forecastle leading into the hold. As I recognized that noise for the fall of the cover, it flashed upon me that we had made only a

cursory search of the hold on the night of the murder; I had never been satisfied with it myself. I rose and asked Miss Langton to excuse me; and then as I was about to leave the cabin I stopped and came back to her.

"Captain Wilson," I said, "is asleep in his stateroom. If I do not return in a few moments will you call him and tell him I've gone into the hold?" She nodded, but I saw the fear in her eyes.

I slipped out of the cabin and into the engine room. Larson was evidently having a smoke in the steerage, for he was not there. I went to the manhole and listened for any sounds below; hearing none, I lifted the iron trap. It was all dark below; no sign of life. I lowered myself into the hold, and managed to let the manhole cover back into place behind me. I had hardly done this before a scraping sound came from up forward. A flood of light entered the dark hold; voices came and the words made me certain that I was about to learn the secret of where the murderers had stowed the body of the mate.

CHAPTER XI

THE DEATH DEN

THE hold was divided amidships, and I was standing with my back against the bulkhead in black darkness. My legs were outspread, my feet wide apart on the ballast. The *Dora* had been a pleasure craft before William Jaspro got hold of her for this cruise, and her former owners had weighted her down with pig lead. The chunks of smooth metal made poor footing, and I was bracing my shoulders against the planks behind me, steadying myself against the vessel's pitch.

Before me the flood of light poured down from the forecastle manhole, spreading until it rested in an irregular circle on the heaped lead. In this cone-shaped area of brightness, which was as distinct and as sharply divided from the surrounding darkness as if it were composed of a different element instead of the selfsame air, dust motes were zigzagging slowly hither and thither; and into that radiant space the voices came.

At first there was a confused jumble; three or four men muttering in undertones; that cleared away and one spoke alone. I recognized a husky asthmatic catch which came at the end of every other word as belonging to one of the tallow-faced pair who had been playing seven-up on that tragic evening when Captain Wilson and I had burst into the forecastle right after discovering the patch of blood.

"I tell ye," he wheezed, "I won't lay a hand on it. That's me."

"And I tell youse"—the speaker gulped, and fear's sharp excitement made his words come shrill, but I knew him for the other card player just the same—"youse'll bloody well bear a hand along with the rest of us or I'll mash——"

A third voice interrupted him, and I could hear an accompanying growl along with this fellow's remonstrance which told me that there must be four of them up there at least.

"Stow that guff, you two. The both of ye was plenty quick to croak him." The speaker swore in a ghastly monotone. "Ye're scared of him, now he's nawthin' but a stiff, and yowlin' at each other like a pair o' drunken women. D'ye want the hull ship's comp'ny down on us?"

Silence followed, and that which broke it made my

spine tingle as if the little hairs were rising from their roots.

"Whisht, Whitey!"

It was unmistakably a summons and as unmistakably was directed into the nether shadows which were enwrapping me.

The one who had called thus stealthily swore and: "What's come over the man? He said——" There was more of it, but I was not listening to the words; I had other things to hearken for and they meant life or death.

Whitey was the name by which the lathy sailor Lewis went among his mates; I had heard them call him thus a dozen times. Captain Wilson had always feared him above the others, and so had I. If there was organized conspiracy reaching throughout the whole forecastle crew, he would be the brains behind it. Quite evidently I was down here then in his company. More than that, the fellow must have been here before me; when I had heard the manhole cover go back into place up forward a few minutes ago, it was after his descent; and he would have seen my entrance. He knew where I was standing to an inch—and of his whereabouts I had no idea at all.

This was a fine game of hide-and-seek that I had

jumped into—with the seeker having all the knowledge, myself in utter ignorance, and death for him who was tagged, one-two-three and out! I listened for some little sound, the stir of feet, or a man's breathing; and all that I could hear, besides that cursed voice at the manhole, was the talking of the water along the schooner's side. I began to shift my body, drawing it away from the bulkhead ever so little so that there might be no scraping of my clothing against the planking to betray the movement; inch by inch I changed my position. And always I listened.

I lifted one foot and set it down again very carefully; raised the other, and as I was holding it thus, I caught a little clink of metal. One of the pigs of lead had been disturbed. As nearly as I could judge that sound was just about ahead of me, and not more than six or eight feet away—perhaps it was less. I set down the foot and crouched, staring before me until my eyeballs fairly ached.

It seemed as if there was something there. At first I had a hard time making myself believe it, but gradually it came over me that it was not my imagination working, but my eyes telling me the truth. A grayish-black shadow was lying so close to the heaped ballast that it merged with the latter. My friend, Mr. Lewis, was crouching where he had

dropped when I lowered myself almost upon him. Or was that Lewis? I thought of the dead man.

Had I only had the sense to bring my pistol with me I could have solved the problem. But I was weaponless; I had not so much as a jackknife in my pocket at the time. And, if I leaped barehanded and landed on the dead man, the living enemy would be on top of me before I could recover myself. No chance of his having neglected to go armed, I could be sure of that. So I stared the harder and it seemed to me that the shape might be stirring now. Ever so little if at all, but—yes, that was movement.

I crouched a little lower to make the spring and—I saved my life by doing it. For, as I gathered myself thus together, there came a leaping blur; I heard a man's breath sobbing forth and something fanned my scalp. I heard a vicious thud against the planking. The sleeve of my assailant brushed my cheek as the blade thumped into the wood where my own chest had been less than a second before.

It had come so unexpectedly that it left me, for the instant, dull. And while I hesitated I heard him panting as he tugged to free the knife. By the mercy of good fortune he had put all his strength behind that blow and now he pulled in vain. I closed with him and, closing, gripped his wrist.

What he had been striving to do, I helped him by my tug upon his arm. The knife came forth with a jerk and the schooner rolled at the same moment. What with her movement and this sudden freeing of the blade we both went down upon the ballast in a squirming, cursing heap. And all the time I clung to that right wrist of his as they say a drowning man clings to a plank. If I had died then I believe they would have had to pry my fingers loose from the lean and sinewed forearm, and I am as positive they would have had to use similar methods to loose his fingers from the wooden hilt.

I remember strange things about that fight in the darkness of the hold: the pressure of the leaden pigs on my back; the hoarse breathing of the man Lewis against my ear; the gurgle of water lapping against the schooner's side; the shaft of lamplight falling from the forecastle, the jumble of muttered voices above. Once a rat ran right across my face; I can hear the creature's startled squeak to this day and feel the cold, hurried touch of his little feet.

But when it comes to what I did at first and what the lean seaman did there on top of me, it is a different matter. I can call to mind no details; only a vague blur of tugging and twisting, of stabbing pains from the leaden pigs that were gouging into

my back, and of constantly changing effort on the part of both of us, effort that shifted and took new form as bits of glass do in one of those kaleidoscopes they used to have when I was a boy.

I took fleeting thought of those four men at the manhole striving to pierce the wall of the gloom which enwrapped it on every side. I had a mental picture of their ugly faces ringed around the aperture, their eyes wide with horror at this untoward interruption of their gruesome task, the disposal of the murdered man's body. How soon would that horror give way to the light of determination? If they had not been superstitious curs, all four of them, I would have had them down on top of me before this.

Then that phase of the struggle passed and my mind began to work more coherently. I fought to get out from under him, and at every twist I made, he squirmed to combat me. At the same time I kept my grip on that right wrist. But gradually the advantage began to pass to him. The force of our bodies was being poured into the fight and now perspiration oozed over us. His forearm became as slimy as a fish. It twisted between my inclosing fingers, this way, then that; my hand slid down closer to his. I knew there could be but one end to that. And I did not purpose waiting that consummation. Before

he could make the sudden wrench which would slide the hand free, I changed my tactics.

Putting all my strength into an upward movement of my body, I felt his go counter to the heaving which I was making. Then abruptly I sank backward, pulling him toward me. He came against me with a thump. His face struck mine. And I slid my right arm around his neck. In that same instant I managed to get a scissors hold on him with my legs, and I believe I would have fairly broken him in two if he had not gone limp with the pain of it. I was out from under him and on my feet at once.

Nor was I any too quick. As I sprang up I saw a form in mid-air within that cone-shaped area of brightness under the manhole. One of our audience had gathered courage. He was on his feet and facing toward me already; I could see the murder in his eyes, the blade of the knife in his hand. I stooped, picked up one of the pigs of lead, and hurled it at him; then followed with another. The second struck him fairly between his ugly eyes and he went forward in a sprawling heap.

Lewis was coming toward me as I whirled about; I barely got sight of the gray blur which his form made in the darkness and the faint glimmer of his upraised knife blade. I bent to pick up another leaden

pig, and at the moment the schooner gave a nasty lurch. I went pitching toward him, falling on my face, but as I fell I threw the chunk of lead.

It struck home and he halted for an instant; and in the time I managed to roll to one side. When he sprang he did not find me beneath him, but came head foremost on the heaped ballast. I had another of those handy little leaden pigs in my fingers, and when he struck at me, I turned the blow. I felt the burning sear of the blade against my ribs, and I knew my own blow had gone short. I gathered my limbs in under me to rise, but he was upon me now and I saw the knife blade clearly hovering over me.

I say I saw those things plainly. Aye, and I saw his face, all twisted with malignant lines that squirmed among his ugly features, as he was in the very act of delivering the blow. It did not come upon me then why I was able to see those things, for action was taking place too swiftly; but later—only a moment or two. afterward—I realized that the flood of light which was pouring over the two of us was from the uplifted manhole cover in the engine room, and the voices which were coming down upon us were those of the men who watched us in this instant while death was poised above my heart.

CHAPTER XII

THE ONLY SAILOR

THERE followed a flashing moment whose beginning saw the situation which I have tried to describe, but its end witnessed an entire reversal of our positions. The change began the instant Lewis was making his first movement to drive his sheath knife hilt deep between my ribs. He was drawing back his upflung arm and his lank torso to place his body's weight behind the blow; his pale eyes dilated, gathering light which the widened pupils shot forth again; his nostrils spread, drawing in a mighty breath; his whole bony face was twisted with deep wrinkles of hateful concentration.

In the radiance which poured down from the open manhole, little beads of sweat glistened under his kinked hair. The movement went on to its very climax and then, while his back was bending rearward like a bow and his arm was stretched rigid completing that tense curve, it ceased. It was as if he had been petrified by some abrupt miracle.

His face changed. The blazing hate went out from his eyes, blanketed by a shadow, and even as the knife hovered uncertainly, a hundred squirming lines of fear replaced the wrinkles of deadly concentration. Before I fairly realized that, Captain Wilson was dropping through the manhole, the weight upon my body had grown less and, whipping a swift glance over his shoulder, Lewis leaped aside. Death passed me so closely I had felt his cold breath on my cheek.

The skipper alighted right on top of me. As we scrambled to get our feet beneath us, the intervening darkness swallowed the seaman's lean form; before we had fairly risen, it disgorged him again into the lighted area beneath the forecastle manhole. The fellow whom I had struck down with the leaden pig was at the moment staggering uncertainly toward us; the blood from the blow that had left him helpless up to now was streaming down over his features, filming them in a thin red mask.

When his companion burst out of the gloom the man turned and leaped toward the opening to the deck above. But Lewis thrust him aside with a straight arm buffet and sprang like a lank monkey upward through the aperture. The sailor all but fell. Recovering his balance, he turned a yell so filled with

utter terror that it took me aback like a blow between the eyes, and I stood there watching him as he turned and made for the safety from which he had been so unceremoniously hurled. Two or three pairs of hands shot down through the opening and dragged him up. I heard their voices upraised in a babel of conflicting curses and accusations.

The skipper and I lost no time in getting up into the engine room; I had a glimpse of Miss Langton in the alleyway. Her eyes met mine, as they had done on the train that afternoon when we left San Leandro, and I thought that there was a fleck of leaping color in either cheek. The cook was standing before her, with his back toward her, his face toward the forecastle. He was a little man, round-eyed like a bird, as mild a steward as ever served a meal on shipboard, and when I saw that he was holding a huge bread knife in his hand I was near to laughing. Even in that tense moment the incongruousness of the man with the weapon struck me. Larson was in the engine room.

"I got a bell for half speed while you were below sir," he said quietly. "Shall I mind it?"

"Who's at the wheel?" the skipper demanded. I told him that I had left Ross as helmsman an hour

or so back. And I remembered now that I had not seen that ill-favored seaman among our enemies.

"Stand by out there with cooky," Captain Wilson bade Larson, "and sing out if they try to rush ye. Mr. Dolan, do you come on deck with me?"

We passed Miss Langton at the doorway opening into the cabin. I do believe that the captain never saw her at all, for he brushed right by her. I managed to give her a word of thankfulness, however, and bade her get back where she might be more safe. Also, I took the time to snatch my revolver from my stateroom and caught up with Wilson at the head of the companion stairs. Sure enough, here was Ross at the wheel; in the light of the binnacle his face showed, scowling as ever, the lips drooping at the corners as is the way with those who have looked too long on the wrong side of life.

"Ye gave a slow bell?" the skipper was saying. I looked into the night; it had come on thick, although there was no wind and the sea was calm; one could not see the schooner's length.

"Logs!" The helmsman spat to leeward as was always his way when he began to speak. "Thick as the hair on a dog's back."

Captain Wilson said nothing until he had turned the

marine telegraph to the signal which had been disregarded.

"Now"—he turned on the sailor—"how about this mess up for'ard? What d'ye know?"

"Nawthing." The man answered quietly as he had answered very much the same question once before, but this time he went on: "I kep' away from 'em while they was doin' their talkin' an' I told 'em to leave me alone. I'm here, shipped as a foremast hand, and"—he spat again—"I ain't got the fancy to be hung, sir. Nor neither do I want to get a knife in me back."

I understood his position, and so did Captain Wilson. Just a poor devil of a common sailor, bedeviled by harpies when he was ashore, robbed by every bartender he came in contact with, preyed on by every crimp in every port along the seven seas. Nothing but hard weather and hard words for him when he was at sea. I do not doubt but it must have been a sore temptation to shove his fists into that fancied gold in the boxes we were carrying. And I am very sure he had smelled his good share of jail air before this time. It came to me that he was walking in a tight place and he knew it; also that he was doing the best he could.

"Just now," the captain told him quietly, "ye're the

only sailor aboard this ship." He jerked his thumb forward. "Mutineers."

The man said nothing, but gave the wheel a turn.

"Ye'll berth aft for the present," Wilson went on, "and lend a hand with us when trouble comes."

"If I don't have a lookout, sir, I'm bound to jam her nose into a bundle o' them logs," Ross growled. I could make them out now myself, all about us, "as thick as the hair on a dog's back," as the man had truly said. It was in the days of the big cigar-shaped log rafts—when they used to tow them so frequently from Puget Sound to San Diego—and one of them, as often happened, had broken in two in a recent gale, to drift down into these waters which we were traversing, leaving every billow as a deadly ambush where the currents took them. I looked at the skipper and he nodded.

"I'll stay up here and keep an eye on the fo'c's'le scuttle. Do ye get below and hold the gangway."

"If ye don't mind me givin' ye a word, sir," Ross broke in, and he was not sullen now as he had been. I presume it was a relief for the poor devil to find a side at last in this mix-up affair, even if that faction was likely to be the losing one. "They're li'ble to make the break between decks. I've heard enough to make me bet on that."

"Very good," the captain told him and made a gesture to me to get below. "Send Durkee up here. I can use him for lookout anyhow." Durkee was our bird-eyed cook. I gave him the order when I came between decks and took up my vigil in the alleyway alone on his departure.

An hour went by. Miss Langton and her father had come into the cabin and were sitting side by side at the table; I could see them watching me whenever I turned my head, and more than once I thought that the girl was reassuring the sick man with talk of what I had done during our eventful journey from the pink house on the march to Moss Landing. Once the door in the forecastle bulkhead opened very slowly and a frowsy head showed in the aperture, but jerked back out of sight with a precipitancy which would have been ludicrous on a less grave occasion, when the furtive eyes lit on me standing there with my pistol in my hand.

This waiting business was wearisome. I was beginning to wish with all my heart that that ugly quartet would make a rush and so bring matters to an issue, but there was no further sign of their presence. I could not even hear the mutter of their voices behind the bulkhead any more. Captain Wilson came down into the cabin. Larson took my place in the passage-

way while I went back in obedience to the skipper's beckoning.

"All quiet," I informed him and he told me that none of the mutineers had so much as poked his head out of the forecastle scuttle. He was about to go on when Langton's voice cut in on our conference. Save to bid one or the other of us good morning or to pass some other brief civility, it was the first time the fugitive had addressed either Captain Wilson or myself since coming on board the *Dora*.

I noticed that a certain tremulousness such as belongs to those very weak from sickness had almost departed from his speech and that his eyes owned a healthier brightness than they had back in the pink house. With these first faint signs presaging the return of strength, there had come to him a sort of fierce eagerness, as if now that life were more worth the living, he was bent on holding to it at any cost.

"Captain," he said, and laid his thin hand on the skipper's sleeve, "if you'll bring us through safe"—he paused while he withdrew the hand and pointed to his stateroom—"there's nearly half a million back there. I give you my word now that you're to have——"

Captain Wilson stiffened from the crown of his blue cap to the toes of his polished shoes, and his

face was stony, his eyes cold, as he interrupted that offer. Very quietly he spoke, and somehow that made his words cut the deeper to my way of thinking.

"I don't know what's in those boxes that you've got back there, and it's none of my business why you're taking passage on this schooner to Honduras. My business is to put you and that cargo ashore where I have been told. And, sir, when I have done that you have my word for it, I'm through with your stuff, whatever it may be."

He turned to me and began outlining his plans. Miss Langton rose; her eyes flashed briefly, then grew tender as she helped her father to his feet, and the two of them left the cabin.

"My idee," the skipper was saying, "is this. Stand by and wait. They're bound to row up for'ard there about what to do next. When they make the first break, between decks or on top, we'll be ready for 'em and make it so infernal hot for 'em that the whole pack will turn against the man that made their plan. You keep watch here below, and I'll do the same on deck. Sing out when you have to have help; I'll do the same."

With that he left me.

I stood there for a moment while impulse was seiz-

ing hold of me and, when it had got its grip, I went to the door of the after stateroom. To my knock Miss Langton came.

"I only wanted to say," I told her, "that Captain Wilson is a worried man; the ship—your safety and that of all on board—you understand. I'm sure he has no more doubt than I have about——" I hesitated at the word and she named it for me.

"My father's honesty, you mean?" she interrupted softly. "Thank you. I am sure of what you say about yourself." I flushed, I think, for I know I felt the blood coming to my cheeks. It was, indeed, just what I wanted to say, for I spoke from impulse. I could not bear to leave her in that stateroom with the skipper's hard words. And yet, I was dead sure that I had lied in making that apology; I was certain that the captain had meant it all; and moreover, I was sharing his distrust of Langton. I did not understand at the time the motive which had prompted me. I saw the girl's eyes looking into mine as she came out into the cabin and closed the door of the stateroom behind her.

"If I can be of any help——" she said. It occurred to me that she could be of a great service by simply biding here and, in case of movement on the upper deck, letting me know what transpired there

beyond my sight. I told her this and took my station in the alley; and now, as Larson resumed his place in the engine room, there came a stirring beyond the forecastle bulkhead; low voices sounded. I beckoned the engineer forth as the sounds grew a little louder. It was clear that the mutineers were preparing to make their next movement.

CHAPTER XIII

COLOSSAL BLUFF

I DO not know what bloodshed would have followed had it not been for a little accident. How small a weight can turn the advantage one way or the other when men are fighting for their lives. I discovered that accident while we waited in the gangway for the charge.

I fully expected to have to kill a fellow being or two, and I cannot say that I was feeling bad over the prospect. The thought of the girl back there on the companion stairs and what would come to her in case the mutineers prevailed, was making me see red. I was fairly shaking with eagerness to have them come. I knew that they did not suspect the existence of my revolver, and I was reasonably sure that when the first of them dropped, the others would turn and run like a pack of curs. I was hoping to get Lewis, who was their brains and furnished the purpose that kept them going.

I took a look at that automatic pistol which I had

acquired from the man with the spoiled eye in Jaspro's office. I lifted it up for closer scrutiny; it seemed to me that there was something unusual in its appearance. It was an old pistol, of European make, and since that time the mechanism has been improved. The delicacy of the movable parts which did the ejecting, reloading, and cocking when they were forced into new positions by the push of the recoil, was the reason for the improvement. I got an illustration of that overfine adjustment now.

When I strove to draw back the sliding jacket I found that it was hopelessly jammed. I remembered now how, in hurrying after the skipper when we went on deck a few minutes ago, I had been thrown a little off my balance by a lurch of the schooner and had knocked the pistol against the bulkhead. Evidently that blow had done the work, and I had been putting my faith in a pound or so of dead hardware.

I swore and tossed the revolver back into the cabin, then faced about. Larson was standing beside me in the gangway with a steel bar which he had brought out from the engine room. His sleeves were rolled up; his little scalp-tight cap was shoved away back on his head so that his mop of blond hair showed all touseled; his blue eyes were flashing, and he looked like an old Berserker. He glanced at me inquiringly;

but even as I was about to tell him my reason for discarding the pistol, the door in the forecastle bulkhead swung open with a bang and the mutineers surged forth.

Then the two of us clenched our teeth and faced round to meet the rush. Larson swung his bar over his shoulder like an ax. I doubled my fists; they were all I had to depend on now. The four seamen were out in the gangway in a scuffling rush. The rays of the forecastle lantern bathed them in a yellow flood, and the light from the cabin fell on their faces. The schooner rocked to the dip of a receding sea and, with the shifting of both lamps, shadows traveled over their heads and shoulders. But the picture which had come with the first full glare remained.

The two putty-faced sailors, who had been playing seven-up on the night of Grey's murder, were in the van, and the one whom I had struck down with the leaden pig while I was fighting in the hold was still wearing his red mask of drying blood; his eyes rolled and the whites showed in startling contrast to that dark film upon his cheeks. He had his sheath knife in his right hand, and the fingers of the other hand were opening and closing spasmodically.

His companion, who was opposite me, was brandishing a belaying pin, and the sick pallor of his features,

working as they were in his excitement, was more nasty to look upon than the bloody mask which his mate was wearing. Just behind this fellow came Lewis, crouching, thrusting his ugly head beyond the shelter of the shielding form ahead of him, then withdrawing again. I could not see his weapon, but I was reasonably certain he was putting his trust in the knife which had come so close to being my undoing a little while ago.

The blood from that cut he gave me was sticking to my shirt, and when I moved I could feel the smart of the wound to remind me of what might be now in store for me. Of the other man I saw nothing, save an uplifted arm and a gnarled hand clenched over a bit of steel very much like that which Larson was swinging by my side. I can remember the tattooing on the upstretched forearm, and the fluttering of the shirt sleeve, torn away clear to the elbow.

To these things which I saw came an accompaniment of scraping feet, the thump of rapid steps, and the curious indistinct mutter of their voices. They came on swiftly with that guttural growl, and we two sprang forward to meet them.

At the first shock of our meeting I held my eyes on the man in front of me with the belaying pin. His lips flew back and he struck a sweeping blow that

would have crushed my skull like an eggshell if it had gone home. But he had been too eager about it, and had swung his weapon in too long an arc. I leaped aside, and twisting as I leaped, closed in.

The belaying pin came down beside me, and the man pitched forward to meet my own blow with his advancing body. I drove my fist deep into his stomach, and then went down before the onrush. The four of them were packed so tightly they came almost as one, and the man did not walk who could have held his feet against them. I got a kick alongside the head, and heard the trampling of feet all about me, and they were on past.

A man was floundering on the planks beside me as I started to stagger to my feet. It was the man I had hit before between the eyes. The scuffling of heels sounded all about me again; a blur of moving forms blotted out all else, and I was being kicked about like a football among a crowd of boys. Then I found myself bounding up with my legs under me, and everything going round and round; the bulkhead beside me whirled away and reappeared once more. I saw the man who had been struggling beside me just a moment ago, crawling on his hands and knees toward the forecastle.

Before him the others were running like a trio of

frightened sheep. I thrust one hand against the bulkhead to steady myself, and heard Miss Langton's voice. She was beside me now. I saw the pistol, which I had discarded, and her hand.

"Take it!" she commanded, and she repeated the words sharply.

The giddiness was clearing away enough to let me think more coherently. Larson was getting to his feet in the cabin doorway; his shirt was almost torn from his body; his eyes met mine, and I could see him smiling. The mutineers were in full flight, not even stopping to look over their shoulders.

"Take it!" the girl cried a third time, and then, lowering her voice: "They ran when I pointed it—they don't know."

As I took the weapon I realized how she had done the thing which we two had failed to do, and had done it with that useless pistol—turning the tide of the battle just as they were in the full flush of their success. Her face was as white as paper, and her lips were very tight. And no wonder; she had worked a colossal bluff on those murderers, knowing that if one of them showed the first symptoms of courage under the muzzle of that futile bit of iron, she was lost.

They were fighting one another in their haste to get

through the forecastle door at the same time. The wounded man crawled on after them, and the door banged shut. I started down the gangway and Larson came beside me.

"May as well get those knives away from 'em, don't you think, sir? Now, while the gettin's good?"

I nodded; that was what was in my mind when I had started.

"Hurt you?" I asked him. He shook his head.

"Got a scratch from that fellow's toad sticker before I laid him out," he answered quietly. "That girl; she saved our bacon all right that time."

We were before the door, and I was about to sing out, ordering them to open when the engine-room gong sounded. A jingle of bells followed. That clamor meant full speed astern. Larson turned and rushed away without a word, but before he had gotten halfway to his post there came a shock which threw us from our feet. I heard a terrific crash. The schooner shivered like a frightened horse.

CHAPTER XIV

A BUNDLE OF LOGS

THERE followed an interval during which the engine-room gong clanged one sharp command after the other. The last peal left her lying on the heaving swells, as one who has halted to gather strength and stanch the wounds which have been dealt her. I could hear the gurgle of rushing water in the hold. Captain Wilson came down the companion stairs and through the cabin on a run to where I stood with that useless pistol in my hand, guarding the closed forecastle door.

"Bundle of logs," he growled. "Must o' been a thousand of 'em, and we come into 'em bows on. Where in the devil was Larson?"

I told him how the engineer had been right in the thick of things when the signal came, and I added a brief account of what had taken place between decks. He glanced down at the pistol when I came to the windup, and then with a flash of admiration in his eyes, back at Miss Langton. She was in the cabin

beside her father, who had come forth from his state-room after the collision and was seated on one of the lockers watching us with evident anxiety.

"That girl's the true stuff," the skipper said, "if the old man *is*——"

He did not finish; I knew what the word was at which he had hesitated. Thief! I had been on the point of saying it myself, more than once. Her face tightened as her eyes met his. Deep anger looked from every feature. But Wilson was not wasting thoughts on women's feelings now. "We've got to call all hands," he said.

My heart went out to him at those words. He spoke as coolly as if the men were waiting beyond that bulkhead to obey his first command, instead of crouching there with blood on their hands and the lust for further murder in their black hearts. When a man takes things in that masterful way he is going to carry his point. He had hardly finished before he strode forward and flung open the door. I think that three of them must have been standing there with their ears to the portal. There they were in a tight bunch, and the very precipitancy with which they were drawing back added to my suspicion. The fellow who had fared so hardly in the hold and in

the alleyway was holding one hand on the edge of a bunk to steady himself, and looking a little sick.

"On deck there, now!" the skipper roared. They hardly cast so much as a fleeting glance at my leveled pistol before springing to the brief ladder that led up through the scuttle. Even the wounded man managed to move with a pretty fair show of briskness, mopping the red trickle out of his eyes with the back of his hand as he went.

Perhaps their alacrity in obeying orders may seem strange to a landsman. But you will remember that these fellows were foremast hands, and had spent their days being kicked about by mates. Taking orders was as natural to them as taking food. If the sight of the boxes had gone to their heads, Miss Langton's pistol had sobered them with a jerk, and Captain Wilson's roar had brought them back to the realities of their dreary life.

Moreover, as I have mentioned, the pistol was still in evidence. I caught the wounded man and his putty-faced companion giving Lewis a black look while they were scurrying up to the deck before us, and I knew then that the lathy sailor had some work cut out for him if he hoped to get his conspirators back to mutiny again; but I did not fool myself into thinking that he was unable to do that work.

"Look lively, now!" Wilson barked out an order.

While they were bending their backs there in the dimness of the forward deck to carry out the command, he beckoned me out of earshot.

"Take Ross below. See what ye can do to patch things up. I'll have them man the pumps, and if ye'll get some planks over that hole, we'll lower a bit of canvas to sheath the bows. Then head her for the land—I'll beach her if there's a living show for it."

I handed him my harmless but useful pistol—we were walking aft, as Wilson was to take the wheel when Ross left it. Miss Langton stood facing us.

"I can use that," she said coldly, and reached for the pistol. "Let me watch the men; that leaves you free to handle other things."

Without a word he yielded the weapon, and she walked forward toward the toiling sailors. As her form grew more indistinct in the shadows up there—"Miss Langton," Captain Wilson raised his voice to the quarter-deck roar of the sea bully—"first of those men that lags when I give an order, shoot him down in his tracks."

"Without fail," she answered in a steady voice that carried full conviction.

I got one look at her, half hidden in the gloom, with the pistol in her hand, a very little figure on that

heaving deck with the long sullen seas enshadowed in the surrounding blackness, and before her the group of men whom I could barely make out, working now as zealously as sailors ever worked. And I thought on how slender a chance her safety depended among those brutal dregs of seaport groggeries, with the ocean waiting out there in the night to swallow the ship and every one of us. Then I beckoned to Ross, and he followed me below.

Langton was still seated on the cabin locker when we passed through; I could not deny him a word of reassurance, and I saw his pallid face lighten as I went on by. If he were a thief he was suffering more of torment than most malefactors have to endure when the law has caught up with them. I had witnessed too many evidences of his great love for his daughter to doubt that in the slightest. And I could not help feeling sorry for him in spite of my misgivings. I had been close to him during our flight to Moss Landing, and I had caught some fellow feeling for him, being myself also a fugitive; moreover, I had not the same anxiety for the safety of my ship which Wilson had. Had I been the *Dora's* master, perhaps those leaden boxes in the after stateroom might have made me hostile to the man who had brought them there to put the ship in jeopardy.

I could hear Captain Wilson bellowing orders, and the tramp-tramp of the seamen's feet on the deck above me as Ross and I went on forward.

Securing several bits of planking, nails, tools, and a lantern, we lifted the manhole cover and I dropped into the hold to alight in water which rose halfway to my knees. By the light of the lantern as the sailor passed it down to me, I took a look around. The incoming flood was making a noise to stop a man's heart, but that flood was not the first thing my eyes lit upon.

Right beside me, huddled against the bulkhead within a foot or two of where I had struggled with Lewis, lay the body of the murdered mate. Even while I looked, Ross dropped through the manhole; I saw his heavy face change. He uttered a low oath, and I heard him name Lewis as the object of his curse. Then Larson lowered the planks, and we two rushed forward to see what we could do toward stopping the leak.

One of the logs had stove a hole in the bow through which a man could thrust his head. The sea was pouring in like a column from the nozzle of an enormous hose. We fought against the force of that stream while the water spouted over us, bathing us from head to foot, and we wrestled with the stubborn

planks, holding them in place. There were heart-breaking moments when it seemed as if the ocean outside were playing with us, as if it would let us get just so far and then——

But in the course of time we nailed one plank into place, and after that the second went on more easily. When we had the hole covered after a fashion, and two or three parted seams battened over, I left the sailor bracing our covering with some bits of timber and hurried on deck.

Captain Wilson had forsaken the wheel and was up forward with two of the mutineers, lowering a weighted sheet of canvas before the bows. At a word from the skipper the pair rigged a bos'n's chair. I watched one of them lowering his companion overside to nail the sailcloth fast; you would never have thought that these two fellows had been roaring down the gangway, brandishing their weapons as they sought our lives, only a little while ago. The pumps were going with a clank and a thud that was good to hear.

"I'll give Larson a slow bell in a jiffy, now," the skipper said, "and if she can stand it without opening up, we'll go ahead full speed. What's chances, d'ye think?" I told him it looked as if the pumps could

now check the inflow sufficiently to keep us afloat until morning.

"We'll beach her, if that's the case, barring bad luck and more logs." We were on our way aft when I remembered Grey's body and informed him of the discovery.

"I'd have ye get him up here as soon as ye can find the chance, for it's in my mind to give Grey a decent burial. It's comin' to him," declared the captain.

I got a glimpse of Miss Langton in passing, standing where I had left her, with the revolver in her hand, and as I looked, Lewis turned his head from his labor at the pumps; his eyes lingered on her for a bare moment. I nudged the skipper, but he had seen and was on the fellow's back like a terrier on a rat, buffeting him from side to side with blows that must have made the mutineer's head sing.

"Another look like that, miss, and use that gun. It's my orders," he told the girl breathlessly.

She merely nodded, and her lips made a tight line; her eyes were hard. I could not tell whether that hardness was from determination or from dislike of the man who had given her that command.

The water had grown deeper in the hold by the time I dropped through the manhole. The leaking

flood was filming the inner surface of the planks up forward for a considerable distance from the stem. Ross stood scowling upon it; his coat was gone; the shirt also; from the waist up he was stark naked, and I saw the slitted rags where he had crammed them between the spreading planks. He cursed the sea in a deep-throated monotone as if it were a living enemy.

We got Grey's body up through the manhole and out on deck. There we hastily sewed it up in a piece of sailcloth and weighted the shrouded bundle with pigs of lead. And then we gave him what the skipper had demanded—as decent a burial as we could.

The engine-room gong sounded its signal; the ship lay to, and we bared our heads while Captain Wilson raised his hand in silence. He stood there for a moment, bowing as one who prays, and although his lips did not move, I know that he was thinking, as I was, of the cheery-faced young fellow who had given up his life trying to do his duty like a man.

Ross and I held the body balanced on the rail. Up forward the mutineers toiled at the pumps. The girl stood at her post, with the revolver in her hand; once she glanced back at us; and then she turned her head to attend to the stern vigil which she had elected.

The skipper nodded; and we let the mate's body go into the darkened sea.

A moment later the gong clanged in the engine room, and we were under way once more. And now I wondered whether the rest of us might not soon be enwrapped by the same cold waters which had taken one of our company unto themselves. It was not the first time I had seen death come close to me, but on those other occasions before this cruise, there had been none but men to share the danger. Now there was a woman, and her presence made the whole affair take on a different guise.

CHAPTER XV

BAG AND BAGGAGE

I WOULD not mislead any one that this is a tale of wild action against wind and wave. Quite the contrary; we were prepared, if necessary, from the time of Grey's burial, to take to the boats; but that danger passed and we had only to wait for morning and the nearness of the land. When the schooner came to her end she finished her career as sedately as an old lady who winds up her life in bed. The hazards that we encountered were brought by men, whose worst passions had been stirred by that cargo in the leaden boxes.

Inside of an hour after the *Dora* was headed toward the hidden coast the menace of the logs had completely vanished. The sea was growing calmer every minute, and before long only a low swell, as gentle as a sleeper's breathing, gave us evidence that the ocean was under us.

The clank and thud of the pumps mingled with the motor's exhaust; now and then a sailor spoke to one

of his mates; the scuffle of their feet sounded plainly in the shadows up forward. Miss Langton had turned the pistol over to me and had gone below.

The loyal Ross was at the helm, and the skipper stopped beside me after a trip to the hold.

"She's just about going to make it, according to my reckoning," he said. "Only for you two doing a good job up for'ard, we'd be taking to the boats. D'ye know," he went on abruptly, "I've been wondering about Grey. How the thing happened. Must o' been soon after ye come aboard that evenin'." He pointed to Lewis, who was bending to his toil in the dimness ahead of us. "Aye, there's the man."

I remember how I had heard that voice in the forecastle putting the accusation to the fellow with the bloodied head and told him of it.

"Like enough, as far as that goes," he acknowledged; "but it was Lewis all the same—he laid out their course for 'em. And give the orders, don't ye forget it. He tried to leave ye ashore, and when he slipped down on that he had 'em get Grey. But how did Grey come between decks there?" He pondered for a moment, and then answered his own question.

"'Twas Lewis did that—pulled him on by some play or other, and through the fo'c's'le where we'd not see it. And while Grey was looking to find what

deviltry he was up to, the other dock rat slipped up behind and knifed him. Chances are," he sighed, "there'll be more of us getting the same unless ye take the knives off that bunch right now." There was no trouble in carrying out the order. I brought four sheath knives to the skipper.

"Never a kick and never a look," I told him. He shook his head.

"Which means they've got others, ye can lay to that," he answered composedly. "Well, deal 'em out —Ross, Cooky, Hanson, and one for yourself. Time's coming when that gun won't work its bluff any longer, or I'm mistaken. Look at that sea lawyer now!"

The fellow Lewis was turning his head to watch us as Wilson spoke.

"If I thought I could get away with it, I'd hang that bloody pirate this night, and take my own chances with the courts afterward," the captain muttered.

The schooner was filling slowly in spite of the pumps. The hours went by; and at last the darkness began to wane; I caught the first barely perceptible whiteness to the east. Soon afterward I made out the loom of the distant land. And long before the sun had risen we were straining our eyes toward the coast line of Baja California.

The two boats were ready, each with its store of provisions and its keg of water. Captain Wilson took the wheel, and there followed an hour during which we felt our way southward, while I stood in the bows looking for a suitable place to beach the ship. Just as I was beginning to fear that we would have to make a run for it and take our chances with the rocks, I made out a little bay.

In ordinary weather, with anything of a sea running, it would have been no better than the stretches beyond, excepting for the fact that there was, in the bight, a moon-shaped beach, perhaps a half a mile in length. The schooner had settled pretty low, and as the skipper brought her about, heading her for the sands, Larson came on deck to announce that the water was ankle deep in the engine room.

"Give her full speed and stand by for a bell," the captain told him.

A few moments later, with a labor that was pitiful to feel, she was making her last dash.

Behind the crescent of yellow beach, sand dunes rolled away toward low hills; the hills climbed to the feet of tall, gaunt mountains. A rocky promontory inclosed the cove to the northward; at the south the seaward cape was backed by a round, rocky knoll. As we came in we passed almost under the shadow

of engirding summits, and the last breath of wind died down. The water about us was of the deepest blue. A little fleck of white showed here and there to mark the hiding place of ugly rocks.

Then, when we were within a half a mile of the land, the *Dora* met her end. One moment she was panting onward on an even keel, a moving, breathing, living thing; and in the next she was as sad a sight as one can look upon—her masts askew, her decks canted to an ugly angle, one rail buried in the gently heaving blue, the other high above the waters.

It came all unexpectedly. From where I was standing in the bows I could see no sign of the rocks that gripped her bottom; but I felt the *Dora* shudder at their first touch, and before I had raised my voice in warning, I heard the engine-room gong sounding. The signal was too late to do her any good. The shuddering increased; there came a rending convulsion that went through all her timbers, and she halted so abruptly that I would have gone overboard if I had not seized a stay to steady myself.

The skipper dropped the wheel.

"All hands," he called. "Man the boats, and lively, now!"

As the men scrambled to the rail he apportioned

them to the two yawls, putting me in charge of one and Larson of the other.

"I'll stand by on board," he announced quietly, and called two of the crew aft. "And you two with me." There was just a little reluctance about the lathy leader of the mutineers as he obeyed the order. Wilson stepped closer to him.

"You dirty dock's scouring," he said. "Ye don't seem to understand that I'm itchin' to kill ye." He caught the fellow by the collar and spun him round. "Get below, the two of ye, and fetch up the stores. Quick, now!" The pair of them were flying down the stairs as we lowered the yawls.

It was a mercy that no sea was running now, for what little wash there was climbed lazily over the after deck at every undulation of the deep-blue surface. Ross and the cook went with Larson's yawl, which was laden down with provisions and baggage. I had the two fellows who had been playing seven-up for oarsmen and took on our two passengers. Langton said never a word from the time he embarked until the passage was over; but his eyes were constantly fixed on his daughter's face, and there was a sadness in them which was pitiful to see.

Indeed, I thought a man's sins do come home to him on this earth; for, in spite of myself, I could not

regard him otherwise than as a fleeing thief. I wondered whether he was ever going to see Honduras; and if he found that haven of fleeing men, whether he and the girl would taste any real peace down there.

The mutineers rowed with a will; even the fellow with the bloody face was pulling on his oar like an able seaman. The ultramarine water was as placid as a mill pond, and the golden beach sloped down to it all glistening in the morning sun. Gulls screamed and wheeled overhead. I glanced behind and saw the *Dora* lying on her stricken side, her masts canted at a sharp angle. And far out at sea I saw the dark line of approaching wind. In another hour or so the swells would be breaking over the schooner. There was no time to lose.

A sleepy surf lapped the gleaming beach of gold, leaving a broken line of white that vanished and reappeared. A schoolboy could have made a landing in a leaky punt this pleasant morning. But I knew that the time was fast approaching when the breakers would be running in like race horses, and that their booming would fill all the air.

I bade the oarsmen pull harder, and presently the yawl scraped bottom. The mutineers unshipped their oars and leaped out; they dragged the boat in, and a

minute afterward I lifted Miss Langton in my arms and set her ashore, dry shod as a lady alighting from her carriage. I cannot forget that passing moment while I held her little form and felt the presence of her so close to me. Then I turned away from her and bore her father to the sands.

I threw off my coat and tucked the pistol which had done so much to insure our safety into the waistband of my trousers before we made the return trip to the schooner. Captain Wilson was standing by on the deck; he nodded when I pointed out to sea. The dark line was growing plainer; it seemed to me as if I could make out the presence of rising swells a mile or so beyond the headlands.

"Aye," he said, "we have got to stir ourselves."

He bent his own back helping to lower away boxes and bags overside; we took on every pound we could without danger of foundering, and even the mutineers seemed to have entered into the spirit of the race against the weather, for they sweated like good fellows at their oars.

We beached the cargoes, and when we came the next time, "The cask, now, men," the skipper ordered.

They slung a line about it and lowered the precious water to the yawl. The sea was rising before we were halfway to the beach with our two cargoes of food

and drink, and when we made our landing the surf was rolling in—enough of it to show us what we had to expect.

Wind and wave were both in evidence as we went back to the wreck, and the swells were washing over the larger portion of the deck. The *Dora* was groaning like a wounded being; the sound of rending timbers came from between decks. I saw water dripping from the garments of the two mutineers who were standing by beside the skipper; they were soaked from head to foot; and then my eyes went to the leaden boxes.

I knew that Lewis and his companion must have had a hard time of it getting that cargo from the after stateroom, for the wreck had settled until the stern was all but out of sight. Yet there was a fierce eagerness in the faces of that pair which told me that they had been ever so willing to perform the task. Too willing. That glint in their eyes boded no good to any of us. The lathy sea lawyer glanced at me, and I instinctively laid my hand on the butt of the pistol at my waist.

"Lively there," the skipper bellowed; "go to it, or we'll be losing some of 'em yet." They scrambled to their toil, and the boxes came down overside, one after the other. When the last leaden chest was in

its place between the thwarts, even Captain Wilson was ready to leave the *Dora*. Her decks were no place for living men, who had any desire to keep the breath of life within themselves. At his command, Lewis dropped into my boat, and he took the remaining seaman with him. Both yawls put off, and now we saw the white line of the surf unbroken before us; the swells were rolling in so deep already that when we went into a trough we were out of sight of the sands, which gleamed in the morning sunshine like burnished gold.

Outside the breakers we tarried briefly while the skipper and I watched to choose the most advantageous moment for starting on our final landward rush. I saw ours and gave the word; the men bent to the pulling; the oars swept in rhythm back and forth; we followed an advancing crest and, when it broke, swept on until we came up to the wet sands in the midst of a boiling smother of foam. I leaped out and helped the sailors drag the boat in. Captain Wilson's yawl grounded almost alongside. My heart thrilled with the sight of that finish; as pretty as two horses coming under the wire neck and neck.

Then something made me glance around. Lewis was standing between two of his companions. He must have spoken the news to them, for their eyes,

like his, were fixed on me. They were not gazing at my face, but——

My hand sought my waistband as I realized the direction of that concerted look. It groped for the butt of the pistol. And it groped in vain!

When I looked down the pistol was gone. I must have lost it during our work out there at the wreck or in that moment of struggling in the backwash of the surf.

I glanced up again, and I saw the change that had come over the mutineers. All of them were staring at the leaden boxes which lay between the thwarts of the two yawls. Already they had turned their eyes away from me, as if I were not worth the trouble of a passing thought; as if they had these boxes in their own possession now and only needed to pry them open to behold the wealth which had led them to put their necks in danger of the hangman's rope.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE FOG

THERE was not a doubt about it; the reins of leadership had passed into the hands of Lewis. He stood there on the wet sand with the sea wind blowing his flimsy shirt and dungarees back tightly against his gaunt form, and even while Captain Wilson was shouting orders, it was he who ordered the mutineers to obey.

The skipper caught the change of situation in that same moment. His eyes went to the sailor's ugly face, then came swiftly to mine, and he read there the message of my dismay. He glanced down at my empty belt, pressed his lips tight, and then went on giving the crew directions to carry the leaden boxes inland to the sand dunes; his voice was as steady as if he had never a doubt of their obedience.

And they did obey. Lewis had bidden them to do it, and knew that I had seen him too. He smiled, unabashed at that knowledge, and bent his back along with his fellows; and once, when I had occasion to tell

him to move more swiftly—which I did the more eagerly because I was expecting the issue of disputed authority to arise at any minute—he complied with as subservient an "Aye, aye, sir," as the most exacting sea bully could ask.

"That fellow figures to take his own time about it, and to make a clean job of us when he does start," Captain Wilson told me while we were watching the little line of men bearing the packets up the slope of the first pallid dunes. He chewed the ends of his mustache as was his habit when he was perplexed. "I'm afraid we'll have to stand by and wait for the squall to break," he growled.

It was the only thing to do. We had the knives, but even if we were able to carry the day, we would only end by making a massacre of it. And there was the chance that we might lose in case of a hand-to-hand conflict. We could not afford to take chances at this time.

That was my way of looking at it as well as the skipper's, and we got some evidence to show us that we were not so far out in our surmises in a very short time. The men were busy at their carrying, loyal hands and mutineers alike, trudging from the water line up through the dry, shifting sands to the cache; but our three steadfast followers, Ross, Larson, and

the cook, were left to make their own portion of the procession on every trip. The enemy hung together and hung close. I noticed when they were making the third pack that two of the leathern sheaths, which they all wore sailor fashion on the back of their waists, were not empty now.

"Aye," Captain Wilson growled when I called his attention to the fact. "They must of rooted up those knives aboard the wreck. Well, we've got to keep our eyes open—and if ye're so inclined ye might pray for some vessel to pick us up before night."

As he was speaking, Lewis laid down his burden, which happened to be the last of the leaden boxes. The fellow's face had flushed a little with the work of carrying and the freshness of the wind; now as he stood there gazing down on the packet the color deepened and his eyes lighted. He said a low word to one of his companions, and he clapped the man on the back. Then the other two came up beside the pair and joined them in their scrutiny of the pile of treasure. Their eyes were murderous.

One of the quartet, happening to look up, caught us watching them and dropped his head at once; but his hangdog demeanor vanished as Lewis raised his eyes and smiled right into Captain Wilson's face.

"Come, now," the skipper roared. "Get those

stores up. D'ye mean to be all day about it?" But there was no jumping to his order now; they slouched back to the beach, talking in undertones, glancing over their shoulders at the boxes as they went.

"I have been in some nasty fixes in my time," Wilson said when they had gone beyond earshot; "and have clawed my way out of them; but to my way o' thinkin' this here's worse than anythin' yet."

But trouble only showed its teeth that morning, and then lay down to bide its time. We were all too busy for the moment in the common good. Mischief developed later in the day. I doubt whether Lewis had made any plans, but he was canny enough to realize that he must carry his campaign through with a rush when he started. His three followers were not the sort to stand fast for long, once they were facing danger. They stowed the stores in one great heap upon the seaward slope of the first dune; and then all hands busied themselves in fixing up a sort of camp.

We rigged a shelter for our two passengers out of sailcloth, planting two spare oars in the sand for a support. This done, they gathered driftwood, of which the beach had more than one would naturally expect, considering there was not a stick of timber growing along the coast for hundreds of miles.

Sleeping quarters for the rest of us were made

without a word on either side. Then and there the party divided into opposite factions. Five of us stowed our scant bedding in the trough behind the first dune, and the four mutineers dropped such bundles of tattered blankets as they had salvaged from the forecastle at the foot of the seaward slope. They did not propose to sleep out of sight of those leaden boxes.

At noon time we knocked off to snatch a bite of canned beef and ship's biscuit. The five of us messed with our two passengers—silently and unsociably enough, for the weight of that cargo was on every man's mind. The enemy gathered in the lee of that same cargo for their lunch. I watched Lewis from my position near the crest of the first dune. He was sitting on one of the leaden boxes, and now and then, while he was devouring his food, he would slap the little packet fondly with his hand or point to it; and when he did these things, talking the while to his fellows, the faces of those three thugs would blaze with the light of greed.

It was while we were busy with the completion of the camp, some time early in the afternoon, that the sea fog came creeping in across the waters of the little bay, now turned dull gray. The wreck was already hidden under the advancing mists, and the

shore line of the two capes was fast vanishing. The sight of gray fog is always associated since that afternoon with the feeling of alarm; and with the sensation of impending peril always comes another which makes my heart go leaping with a thrill of exaltation.

The thing took place when I went at the skipper's bidding to explore the southern cape and arrange a beacon there to signal passing ships. But before I departed on that expedition a little incident occurred which would perhaps have materially changed all our destinies had it not been for Captain Wilson's obstinacy.

Langton and his daughter had been talking together under their canvas shelter for the last half hour. While the captain and I were discussing the advisability of making a beacon fire, the sick man came forth from the sail-cloth lean-to and touched my companion on the arm.

There was no concealing the fact that Wilson did not like Langton, and if the latter had been in any doubt on that matter before, he had assurance now. For the skipper turned and eyed him with disfavor.

"Well," he said coolly, "what d'ye want?"

The sick man turned color, and I could see that he was deeply hurt. He had been improving since he

had come to sea, but he was still far from good health. His voice shook, as is the way with those whom illness has sorely weakened. I noticed the girl standing down below us in the trough of the dunes, watching us; and there was a flash in her eyes which showed me she had witnessed the skipper's bruqueness.

"Captain Wilson," Langton said, and pointed to the leaden boxes, "there is something I want to tell you."

The other frowned, and I thought at first he was going to move off, but he seemed to think better of it, for he checked his step.

"You're thinking"—Langton's voice shook more than ever now; but it was with feeling rather than with weakness—"that I'm"—he hesitated painfully, and then the word came out with a gulp—"a thief. Those boxes—all this trouble." He compressed his lips tightly. "Man! I'll have you know, and those fools of sailors——"

The skipper was scowling as he broke in.

"I've told you once," he said curtly, "that neither your affairs nor that cargo's any of my business. And I don't want to hear any more about it either. That's flat." He turned his back on the sick man.

Langton stood there for a moment, shaking as if in a chill; then walked down to the girl. I saw her

arm steal around him as they went back to their shelter.

"Now," the captain told me, "here's a pretty mess! Us and these murdering foremast hands of ours waitin' for the minute when we're to dig into one another, and Lord help the side that loses. And here comes this fellow trying to make me believe he's an honest man. I'll take my oath he'd think he'd settled all our troubles if he could do that." He spat to show his disgust.

Somehow I could not share his feelings. For one thing, I was not as obstinate as he, and his stubbornness in refusing to listen to Langton rather grated on me. It was the stubbornness of your deep-sea captain who is accustomed to regulating everything himself, whose word is law, and whose mind simply cannot see another man's way of looking at anything.

"I don't understand," I said, "what he was meaning when he spoke of the crew. Maybe he could tell us something after all."

But Wilson shook his head and cut me short.

"I've got no time to fool away with his affairs," he growled. "Bad enough to be mixed up with the whole dirty mess. Boxes!" He swore. "Honduras!" He ripped out another oath. "Mr. Dolan, do ye take my advice and give this passenger of ours

a good, wide berth. He has too many secrets, and he has moved about too much in the night to be safe company. And now"—he changed his tone—"I'd suggest ye have that fellow Lewis go along with ye —him and the cook—and see what ye can do to build a beacon on the hill that lies at the landward end of that cape. I'd say take Ross; but that would leave us with the odds against us here; so make the sea lawyer one of your party—if," he added grimly, "he'll see fit to go."

There was no trouble on that point. When I bade the lathy leader to accompany me, he nodded at once, and, after a brisk "Aye, aye, sir," he walked aside with his three fellow mutineers; they drew off toward the beach and stood there in a tight little group, with the sea fog swirling in around them like smoke, while Lewis talked. I could see plainly enough that he was laying out some course of action or other, and they were listening to his plans.

There was in their heavy faces an eagerness which made me resolve to keep my wits about me during our expedition. The fellow who had been hurt had managed to wash the blood from his cheeks, and he had bound up his head with a bandanna handkerchief, which gave him more of a cutthroat appearance than ever. To look at them down there between the sand

dunes and the line of surf with the wisps of mists drifting past them, you would have taken them for four pirates—and not been so far wrong either, for mutiny and piracy come very close to being the same thing.

There were two hand axes among our stores, and we had naturally taken good care to keep these formidable tools in our own portion of the camp. I took one and handed the other to the cook, bidding him hang to it as he valued his life.

The three of us set off along the beach, and before we had gone two hundred yards we were completely out of sight of the camp. The fog was growing denser, and within a short time it became difficult to distinguish the shapes of the dunes while the landscape before us was all a hidden mystery. I kept the round-eyed cook close by me, and Lewis trudged ahead. It was evident that he had some fears of treachery on my part, for every now and then he glanced over his shoulder, and when one of us two behind made a sudden move, he jumped like a scared horse.

The cape was nothing but a nest of rocks, and the surf was making a terrific roaring all about the place. There was not a particle of growth excepting the curious little plant which is called "Hen and Her

Chickens;" but a goodly quantity of driftwood had lodged among the boulders where high tides had cast it up. At my bidding the pair set about gathering bundles of this flotsam, and when each had a fair-sized pack we climbed the hill at the landward end of the promontory.

This mound was perhaps three hundred feet in height, and save for a little brush, for the most part of the sage variety, there was no more growth here than on the cape itself. We heaped the driftwood on its summit and set off again for more loads. We brought a second pack, and then a third, and the pile was rising to goodly proportions; I bade the cook stand by, and sent Lewis down for another bundle. While the cook was cutting fagots and piling them, I withdrew down the slope a little way. I was not certain, but I thought that I had heard some one moving near us in the fog.

For a long time I listened to the thudding of the ax which the cook was wielding, and the roaring of the surf from the rocks below. I could catch no other sound now, and I was beginning to think that I must have been mistaken, when here it was again.

Just then Lewis appeared, climbing the knoll. I gave over my vigil and followed him closely enough to watch him as he dumped his burden. He halted a

moment to wipe the sweat from his forehead, spoke a word to the cook and started down the slope once more. When he was out of sight I withdrew and hearkened for the footsteps which had alarmed me a moment before.

The barren knoll fronted the sea with a low cliff not more than twelve or fifteen feet in height. This shelf fell away from the very summit, and I fixed the position for the beacon fire at its brink. The path to this point was like a fishhook whose long shank extended upward, and its curve looped along the knob-like top to the edge of the little precipice.

The footsteps which I had heard came from a point inshore from the trail which Lewis was using, and somewhere about half the distance down the slope. I felt sure if this newcomer were any of our party he would have been more open in his movements. If he were one of the mutineers, that meant —his life or mine. I had, beyond my natural regard for keeping a whole skin, the knowledge that my loss would sorely cripple our faction; it was no time for taking any chances.

I slipped down the hill as steadily as a thief in the night, creeping on hands and knees, with the broad-bladed hand ax in my fist. The fog closed in around me. I moved on downward, enwrapped by a gray

mantle, which traveled with me, shutting out all the world. Now I caught the footfall for the third time.

Apparently it was coming up the slope and straight toward me. I halted, but I could see nothing. The climber had paused also, for now I could hear only the roaring of the surf. The cook must have paused in his work, and Lewis was apparently beyond earshot.

The prowler must have caught some sign of my presence, for the silence continued for some moments. I was beginning to feel an almost overpowering desire to make the next move. If it had not been for the gravity of the situation I would have hazarded everything in a rush. But while I was fighting this impulse, my ear caught the tinkle of several little rock fragments right below me.

I half rose, and because the fog thinned toward the summit, leaving me in more tenuous mists than the one whom I was stalking, I came—as it turned out—within that one's sight. There followed another cascade of rubble, and after it swift footsteps. They were descending the slope.

The period of inaction had passed. I did not dare call out lest Lewis hear and the sound of my voice bring odds upon me. Without a word I straightened up and ran down the hill; and now I saw the figure

of the other before me—a vague shape of gray a little darker than the enveloping fog. I was upon it in half a dozen leaping strides, and I was in the very act of taking the last one, my hand ax lifted to strike, when I realized the truth.

Before I could halt I had closed in and dropped my brandished weapon to catch the girl in my arms as she collapsed. It was Miss Langton, and the sight of me bearing down upon her with that hatchet in my hand had so terrified her that she was as near to fainting as a woman ever came without going into an actual swoon. If I had not reached out and grasped her she would have fallen to the earth.

She gave a little inarticulate gasp, and her widened eyes met mine. Then, even as I was about to speak, she mustered up her waning faculties sufficiently to place her finger on her lips.

CHAPTER XVII

LOVE IN A MIST

I HELD her in my arms and she leaned all her slight weight upon me. Breathless from running and the shock of a great fear, she was quite done out. Little drops of moisture had gathered in her hair, and they gleamed among her dark locks like a myriad of jewels. Her eyes, upturned to mine, were glowing with fierce excitement; but already a faint color came stealing back into her cheeks. While I waited for her to recover strength and the faculty of speech, I discovered a sweetness which I had never known. For my days for the most part had been spent following the sea, and the ways of love had been hidden from me.

The thing had come all in an instant, with the rapture of her clinging arms and the sight of her upturned face. Life moved to a different tune from the moment I realized my pulses were beating as they had never beaten before. I believe that the poignancy of that sweetness was the greater because of the

very presence of the dangers which surrounded us. We two were here together on this barren hillside, enwrapped by swirling wreaths of the gray fog, and death was in the offing. I did not even try to put aside the flood of emotion which her presence brought; rather I drank more deeply of that emotion.

I know now that she saw this in my eyes, but there remained a perceptible space of time before she made any effort to support herself.

"You're safe," she whispered. "I came in time!"

"What's wrong?" I was assailed with a score of different dreads as I asked the question, but none of them were near the truth.

"Soon after you were gone," she told me in the same hushed sibilance, "the others left—those three. They slipped away. No one saw them going, but Captain Wilson came to me when he found they were not there. He did not dare send a man for fear——"

"I understand," I interrupted swiftly. I saw the skipper's point, and he was right. That departure meant open war, and it was better to let me take my own chances along with the cook than to jeopardize the safety of the others by further depleting our forces at the camp which was bound to be the point

of attack sooner or later. "So you came. Where are they now? Have you seen——"

She shook her head before I finished the question. "I neither saw nor heard," she whispered, "until I reached this place. And then——" she shivered at the memory of the fear which had come over her.

I picked up the hand ax which I had dropped when I was closing in upon her. "We must get up the hill before they find that poor fellow." I told her how I had left the cook when I heard her approaching. As I spoke, we began the ascent.

I held her arm, supporting her as best I could. It was slow traveling, for we dared not make the least noise, and we were in constant danger of running on our enemies at any moment in the dense fog. When we halted for breath I listened for some sound which would betray the presence of others on the hillside.

The roaring of the surf was the only noise until we made a stop at the base of some big boulders about three quarters of the distance to the summit. Then a horrible uproar burst upon us as suddenly as an explosion. Out of the mantling grayness it came, drawing nearer rapidly. I seized the girl in my arms, thrusting her between two of the great rocks, and faced about, with the ax in my hand.

Clamor descended upon us. Voices of men as savage as the cries of hunted animals, racing feet, fearful oaths came to us through the fog and the hoarse breathing of one who ran before.

He came shooting out of the mists in the instant, bent almost double, racing headlong down the steep slope, and passed within twenty feet of me. There was a desperation in his posture, as if he were literally flinging himself onward regardless of what might be in his path, thinking only of the death that came speeding behind him. I could not see his face in the dimness of the mists, but when I recall the picture of his huddled form pitching down the declivity, I always see his round bird's eyes filled with horror of the murder that was swooping upon him as he fled.

Then, as the fog was swallowing him, he tripped on something and went somersaulting out of sight, with a scrape and a rattle of rocks and a thudding of his body that was pitiful to hear. Out of the upper layers of the mist, Lewis burst upon my vision, his right arm uplifted, and in that hand the hatchet which his victim must have dropped when first they set upon him at his work.

The mutineer was taking it at great bounds with his upflung arm. I heard the other three behind him

and I forgot, for one little instant, the presence that had stayed my feet thus far. The surge of rage that mastered me at sight of the murderer was heightened as I heard his cry of savage joy. And, if the life of her whom I loved had hung in the balance I could not have restrained my hand any longer. He was six paces from me, perhaps seven. I hurled that hand ax with all the force I owned, and saw him crumple into a heap.

As he fell the other three came plunging forward, so recklessly that one of them trod the body of their stricken leader under foot, and, as suddenly as they had appeared, vanished again. From the midst of the fog, by whose mercy we were spared the sight, came sounds of a struggle; followed by the thud of blows. A voice emerged from the grayness.

"Well, we got that one." And then another.

"Who knocked Whitey over the head?"

I gripped the girl's arm and as I closed my fingers: "Come," I whispered. She made no sound, but came forth before I had fairly uttered the command, and we stole away.

"Up the hill," I bade her and cursed my folly for having got rid of my best weapon. I had cherished a fleeting hope that the blow might have killed the sea lawyer, but now that hope was banished by their

voices upraised in a clamor of inquiry as they reached his side. Men of their ilk do not apostrophize the dead.

We climbed on a long slant, drawing off inland from the part of the hill where they were. We dared not go swiftly, even had we been able. I knew that one misstep on the part of either of us would bring them racing upward after us as eagerly as they had rushed downward to do that murder a moment before.

Lewis was talking now. I halted as I caught his voice; the words came plainly through the mists: "Over there at them rocks, I tell ye." He cursed me roundly. "'Twas there he hove it from." Silence followed, and then while we were resuming our flight: "Spread out and look fer tracks."

The girl drew a little closer to my side and I could feel her trembling. I had traded that precious hand ax for the worthless privilege of stunning our most dangerous enemy. Now those four were better armed than our party, and it looked as if we were divided without hope of our reuniting. Lewis had played his game more shrewdly than the skipper or I.

I had hoped to pull off inland and then descend the slope, thus reaching the sand dunes, where we would have a fair chance of regaining the rest of our

company. But that hope was dashed within me by a shout.

One of the searching party was announcing the discovery of our tracks. Now Lewis' voice floated upward. "Line out along the side hill. Line out!" And then we could hear them running in obedience to his command. In a minute they were climbing toward us utterly regardless of what noise they made.

"First one claps eyes on him, sing out," the sea lawyer called: "Easy now. Take yer time. Don't leave him a chanct to slip by."

I groaned aloud, thinking of the folly which had led me to hurl the ax away. "If I had only kept it!" I did not realize that I had spoken aloud until the girl answered in a whisper, placing her hand on my arm.

"I would not have had you do otherwise than as you did." Her words held a well of meaning. As I glanced down into her face, I saw the flush that had leaped into her cheeks. But I dared not recognize her emotion, for love had made me diffident.

There was no chance for drawing farther inland; the only course open for us was upward and toward the coastline. We took the new tack as fast as we were able without making too much noise; and now, as they came mounting the hillside, we crossed their front at a distance of not more than thirty yards. I

prayed that our feet might leave no further traces to betray us. Inside of two minutes they were on a level with us and off to our left; a minute later we could hear them scuffling among the rocks at the very summit. I saw something dark looming before me and recognized it for the low cliff of which I have spoken.

A new dilemma confronted us at this point. For the base of the declivity was strewn with sharp fragments worn off from its face, and one could not move for any distance in this talus without making a racket which would be audible for a much longer distance than that which separated us from the mutineers. We halted with our backs right against the precipice.

And it was well we did so for they were nearer than I had thought. We were not in this place a minute before one of them came walking right up to the half-finished beacon where the luckless little cook had been working when they first fell upon him. I believe I could have seen the fellow if it had not been for the cliff whose height shut him off from my eyes. He stood there for a few moments, then whistled, and presently there came another.

"Well?" the newcomer called as he approached. "Any sign of him?"

"Sign!" The first man swore and I recognized that asthmatic catch in his voice. "Now," he went on aggressively, "what I want to know is how long does Whitey mean to have us playin' goats out here, when we might's well be gettin' our fists in them boxes. Hey?"

"Stow that noise." There was no mistaking that clear tenor and I heard the rattle of little stones as the leader came striding up to the two of them. "Why ain't ye doin' as I told ye? D'ye want him to get back there to the others?"

"If youse'll take my say-so for it, he's on his way back there now," the asthmatic voice made answer. "One thing's dead sure, he ain't around here any-w'eres."

"Yes," the third man took the speaker up, "and anyhow, what are we after? Cuttin' the mate's t'roat, or gettin' a grip on them boxes? I say the boxes if you're askin' me."

A little shower of rock particles cascaded down upon my head, and I knew that one of the men must be standing right above me. I slipped the sheath knife into my hand and held my breath. But the man was probably peering out toward the sea.

Presently Lewis said: "Fog's thinnin'. All right, mates, that settles it. We'll get back to camp." His

voice receded, and we heard them arguing as they went back along the summit. I felt the girl's hand on my arm. Her face was pale and her lips were pressed tightly together. I knew she would be thinking of her father then.

"We'll do the best we can," I whispered. "Perhaps we'll be able to reach camp ahead of them."

CHAPTER XVIII

BOATS AND BOXES

LEWIS had been correct when he said the fog was thinning. As we struck out down the hill the difference was apparent, and by the time we reached the foot we were able to distinguish objects thirty yards away. Our chances for safety were slimmer; our only hope lay in gaining the sand dunes and keeping under cover of their first ridges.

We ran for it, and now my wound began to give me trouble. What with the exertions of the day and the lack of attention, inflammation had set in, and while we raced through shifting sands, I felt a terrible hot throbbing which dragged me down as if some one were pulling at the hurt. I had all that I could do to keep pace with my companion before we saw the pallid dunes ahead of us. We mustered all our strength for the last burst of speed, climbed the slope and plunged down the landward side; and none too soon; as we were crossing the crest I was able to distinguish four forms up the beach, perhaps one

hundred yards nearer the camp. The mutineers were hurrying toward their goal at a dogtrot.

The girl had seen them, too; but as she turned to whisper the news to me, I got a catch in my side which made me wince.

"You're hurt!" she exclaimed.

I assured her it was not serious beyond the hindrance it brought to our efforts. We made what speed we could among the dunes; now climbing over an intervening ridge, again throwing ourselves prone and creeping to the downward slope. Now and again I would feel her hand under my elbow as she strove to support my ebbing strength.

"I want to ask you something," she said abruptly, as one who has had the question on her mind for a considerable time, "about my father and those boxes."

I was not able to reply, for when we crossed a new summit I could see the mutineers quite plainly. They were not making as good time as we were, for all my handicap. We had drawn almost alongside them, and the camp was perhaps a quarter of a mile ahead. When we reached the shelter of the next depression, I came back to her question.

"There's no need for you to speak about your father or the boxes to me. I'm sure your father is an honest man."

I had convinced myself because I loved Langton's daughter—not from any innate conviction of Langton's honesty at all. I was, moreover, entirely satisfied with my conviction. I didn't care if Langton were the thief that circumstances proclaimed. I was with him all the way, if it led inside prison bars, because I could not be otherwise than loyal to her. I never did regret that feeling on my part, and I do not regret it now, although when I look back on it, I realize it was entirely lawless.

She heard me say this, and she made no verbal comment; but her eyes, which had been fixed on mine during the last few moments, became very bright, and that made me forget the throbbing of my wound.

Up to this time I think my motives in helping those two were plain enough. From now on emotion and not reason was in the ascendant. There had been the two passengers and the rest of us before. Now there were three of us and the ship's company; that is as nearly as I can express it. And all because I knew, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that she believed her father to be honorable.

We had slipped along by a zigzag course, keeping to lower levels for some distance; now we came to a place where we must cross another ridge. We crept up cautiously, and as we gained the summit the four

mutineers were not more than a hundred yards to the left of us, hurrying along the beach; and camp lay twice that distance ahead. They caught sight of us just as I saw them.

One of them was pointing at me, and I heard his cry; and all four of them started straight toward us on a run. I did not waste time with further looking, but leaped to my feet, and the girl was up beside me in the instant. We rushed down the next slope, and I could hear their voices more plainly as we climbed the ridge beyond. There did not seem to be a living chance for us. For we raced with death behind us.

Now their hoarse breathing was audible. With my sheath knife in my hand, I turned to meet their onslaught. Then my ears were startled by a loud cry, and next I saw Captain Wilson's head topping a lofty dune. The race was won. If those four had not been craven cowards they would have had us in another second or two; but fighting face to face with their enemies was not to their fancy, even though they were the better armed. Ross appeared beside the skipper on the instant. And the two of us staggered on, to drop all but exhausted into their arms. When I got my breath and glanced round, still expecting to face our pursuers, those over-prudent enemies were drawing off down toward the beach.

Ross was holding me up, and I saw Larson coming on a run. The skipper released the girl in the same moment, as she asked: "My father?"

He pointed toward the camp.

We took our stations along the summit of the first dune—we four men who had survived the other honest members of the ship's roster—and while we watched our enemies I recounted what had happened. What to do now was the question, and that in a good measure depended on what our enemies would attempt. But they seemed content to abide down there on the beach.

"They've something up their sleeve for to-night," the skipper asserted as dusk began to deepen. "Stand by and do the best we can when they start in; that's all the plan I'm able to propose."

I was assigned guard duty for one of the early watches, and before the night descended Miss Langton had dressed my wound.

I stood my turn at guard, keeping to the seaward dune, which was quite lofty, and gave me a good vantage point from which to look and listen for movement from the mutineers. I could hear them plainly enough down there on the beach by the two yawls. They were talking quietly among themselves, but were making no attempt to conceal their pres-

ence there. What they intended would come later, and when I went to my blankets it was with a sense of impending disaster which I could not shake off for the life of me.

Anxiety and the tugging pains in that inflamed knife wound kept me wakeful. I lay there, staring upward at the great yellow stars, hearing all manner of fanciful sounds, until sleep became impossible. I arose and crept to the summit of the seaward dune and found the skipper lying flat. He whispered to me that there had been no sign of trouble.

"Still down there on the beach," he told me. "I can hear 'em every now and then."

As he said it, I caught the sound of their voices where he had indicated. I lay there beside him for a little while and tried to pierce the darkness, but my eyes were not equal to the task. I could barely make out the great heap of the ship's stores which overshadowed the pile of leaden boxes so completely that the latter were merged with it. Not a minute passed but I fancied I could see some one stealing along. I told Wilson as much.

"Aye," he answered with his lips close to my ear, "I've seen a matter o' fifty men more or less down there to-night, only to know it wasn't so. Better

ye go back to your blankets. Ye'll need all the rest ye can get before we're through."

I took his advice and crawled down into the trough, and in the course of an hour or so I saw Ross go up to the summit of the dune and relieve the skipper on sentry. Some time afterward I awoke from a troubled sleep with a start to feel a hand upon my face.

"Steady." It was the captain whispering as I leaped up. "Ross sneaked down and give me word they're movin' toward us."

I drew my knife and the two of us went on hands and knees to the crest where the sailor was waiting. Larson was there before us.

"They've crep' up clost," the engineer whispered. "Now!" I felt his fingers gripping my arm.

They could not have been forty feet away when he gave the warning, and I thought I could distinguish a moving shape close to the sand. A moment later I was sure that there were several of them.

There followed an interval during which there was no sound save our own breathing and the dull undertone of the slumbering surf. Occasionally the slight backwash hissed along the sands.

Then something stirred in the dark where the great heap of ship's stores enshadowed everything.

Just a little scraping sound, after which the silence resumed. Later on it was followed by a clump as if some one had dropped a weight on the sands.

"Stand by for a rush. They'll be on us in another minute," the skipper whispered. But he was wrong. They did not come. I saw some signs of movement down on the sands, but the figures which were close to the earth vanished presently; and then we caught several faint noises by the two yawls.

All of this was maddening, and I would have given a great deal had we only been in a position where no one's life but his own depended on the outcome. We dared take no such risks and had to bide here.

While we waited the shadows of moving forms approached from the direction of the beach. The little hushed sounds came again by the heap of ship's stores; then the vague forms reappeared to melt into the night down toward the water line.

The truth was beginning to come over me, and I was about to speak my suspicions when a new sound smote my ears. A gurgle of water. It had been growing on my senses slowly for some time.

Captain Wilson was creeping down the slope toward the heap of stores by the time he had whispered the command for the rest of us to follow. He was the first to reach the water cask. And as he mut-

tered the oath which the horror of his discovery brought from his lips, the waterside became alive with sounds.

There was no mistaking those mingled noises. The mutineers were launching the two yawls.

"They've tapped the water cask," the skipper shouted.

So cleverly had they hidden the sounds of leakage after withdrawing the plug, by heaping sand before the vent, that the precious fluid had been pouring out for all of the last half hour, while they were busy as their stealthy task between the casks and the yawls. And now the thump of the rowlocks came to tell us how they were rowing away.

Ross was the one to announce the consummation of the moment's news. "Them boxes!" he cried. The whole heap had vanished.

CHAPTER XIX

LEWIS GRINS

I HAVE tried my best in this tale to avoid all those technicalities of my trade, which still is following the sea, although my ventures are of a different nature now than they were at the time when these things took place; but there are some matters pertaining to the deep water and the ships which sail beyond sight of land, which no landsman would readily understand unless they were explained to him. Here I must pause to recall the character of our foremast hands. These fellows were the dregs of San Francisco's city front, whom drink and hard usage had debased to the lowest level.

The skipper struck a light, and that in itself brought a feeling of huge relief. We paid dearly for it, but the sneaking about in the darkness and the holding of our breaths was done away with. We appraised the extent of the catastrophe, and as we appraised, we made our reckoning on how it had been brought about.

While we were lying there guarding the lives of ourselves and our passengers, Lewis had improved his opportunity. He had led his three companions from the beach to the cache, two round trips in all, and they had managed to carry away all ten of the leaden boxes. Some one must have done a good deal of sweating for a single box was a goodly load, and the thieves had been obliged to bear them off on hands and knees. The height of the heap of ship's stores had helped to conceal their movements and had covered the depletion of the smaller pile. It had been simple enough, now that we knew what had happened.

They had not taken any food. At first this puzzled me, but the skipper reminded me that plenty of provisions were left aboard the wreck and the sea was calm. As he spoke we harkened; the thump-thump of the rowlocks came across the water in the direction of the reef where the *Dora* was stranded.

"Easier to go aboard and take on what canned goods they need than to risk fightin' for 'em on land," he said grimly.

The pulling of the plug in the cask was pure wantonness of course; cold-blooded murder was the motive; and we knew that no one but the leader could have been capable of that. He had taken this means

boxes being dragged about. Evidently they were provisioning the two yawls.

When that wild outcry had come across the hidden waters I had seen the girl grip her father's arm and he nodded as if in confirmation of some unspoken comment. They stood a little way off to one side from us, watching the darkness as if they looked for some unknown redemption.

The dawn came on. By imperceptible degrees the shore line emerged from the thinning shadows. The schooner grew visible, a blot at first against the surface of the gently heaving swells, and then took shape until the tilted masts were outlined. Of a sudden, as briskly as an expected guest who has managed to make his appearance during the moment when the attention of those awaiting him has lapsed, the sun shot forth.

Instantly the placid bay turned deep blue, the crescent beach gleamed like burnished gold; the dots of moving men upon the *Dora's* deck were distinguishable. We strained our eyes to watch them.

The skipper and I stood there on the sands striving to make out what was going forward, but Ross shouted the big news while the rest of us were still uncertain. "A boat," he cried, "and coming ashore."

One of the yawls was drawing off in the direction of the beach.

"Now," the skipper said to me, "that's main strange. What d'ye make of it, Mr. Dolan?" I shook my head. It was beyond my conjecture. Then came a fresh riddle. There was only one man in the yawl. The second yawl was putting off to sea.

It shot out from under the schooner's uptilted bows and we caught the flash of the oar blades as they came up dripping water. The rowers were pulling hard as men who want to get away from something. Now we stared at the outgoing boat, and it grew smaller every time it rose to the crest of one of the low swells. A little speck of brownish black, it dropped into a shallow trough and we turned our eyes again to the other boat.

This one had barely moved. And as we looked we saw now that there was no sign of flashing oar, no movement on the part of any one. And only one man was aboard.

"By the livin' man!" the captain muttered. "He's adrift!" Then with a queer catch of his breath and a smothered oath: "No. Not that. I see the oars. But why——" The question trailed off with a quick indrawn breath.

To my mind there was something peculiarly

strange about that boat. Larson, Ross and the skipper all stood peering at it, their faces set. Miss Langton and her father had turned their backs as if they could not endure the suspense longer. The girl was helping him up the slope of the first dune and presently they vanished over the crest.

"Drawing off," the captain told me some moments afterward, "toward the cape. Now why does he leave her drift?" The current was carrying the small boat over in the direction of the point where we had started that beacon on the afternoon before. In another hour she would drift on the rocks. And we needed that yawl; it might mean all our lives. We must get her at any risk.

One of us must swim out to her, and the task fell to me. I stripped to my waist, kicked off my shoes, and took my sheath knife in my teeth.

One could not tell what might happen when I came to place my hand on that gunwale. I made up my mind that if there was to be trouble, I would go prepared.

I waded through the breakers and struck out, with the bite of the salt water on that wound like hot vinegar. But the swells were low and even; the water pleasantly warm, and the distance not more than three hundred yards. I had only that current to look

out for; the set of the tide was carrying me over toward the point and the yawl was almost straight out toward the sea from where I had started. So every time I came to the summit of a swell I took a look to get my bearings, then plunged onward with lowered head.

Every time I looked, the yawl and the man were plainer. But he was sitting a little askew, and his head was bowed so that I could not see his face. I recognized him at last. It was Lewis.

My heart slowed up a little at that, and I think I faltered in my stroke. The man was up to any sort of game, capable of any manner of ambuscade, and I had plenty of evidence that he was more than anxious to add my life to those which he and his fellows had taken. Now when I lowered my head and buffeted the water I had an uncanny feeling that his eyes were upon me; that he only turned his head away when I took a look in his direction, and spent the intervals in watching me.

For that very reason I made myself keep to my swimming longer this time than I had before. I did not want to yield to the almost overpowering desire to get my eyes on him, lest, yielding, I should grow cowardly. And I made a greater distance than I was aware.

I came to the crest of a swell and slackened my stroke to look. The yawl was in the trough below me, and I was staring down into the mutineer's eyes. Their reddened rims were terrible; but more terrible was the grin which revealed both rows of his discolored teeth. In the same instant the surge passed on under me and I shot down upon the boat.

I flung another glance upward as I swept alongside, and I gripped the gunwale with my left hand to save myself from being run down. We were rising to the crest of the next swell. My knife was in my other fist already. And my eyes met the eyes of the man who had sought to kill us all.

The pallor of those eyes which had struck me when I had seen them a few moments ago was the first discovery in that meeting. They were sightless, glazed.

And the grin—it was a fearful thing to see, for it was born itself of fear which must have come over him in his last moments—was fixed by death.

He sat there, huddled, his body askew, propped up by leaden boxes, and a leaden box upon his lap. The hilt of a knife protruded between his shoulder blades.

He swayed a little with the heaving of the sea, and, swaying toward me, he seemed to leer. It was as if, having learned the secret of the contents of

that box, whose broken iron straps showed plainly there on his lap, he was gloating over the knowledge which had turned the rage of his mates against him and brought him to his death. I hung there by the gunwale for some moments. I was a little sick. Finally I managed to climb on board.

CHAPTER XX

A WISP OF SMOKE

THE leaden boxes held the dead mutineer upright; but I knew there was more than that purpose in the manner of their stowing. There was a grim, sardonic jest played on the helpless remnant of mortality, and to make the point plainer the three slayers had laid the opened packet in his lap. It was as if they had said: "You wanted them so badly; well, here they are; keep them."

But that was not all. Those fellows knew the set of the tide at this hour, and that the yawl, when cast adrift, would float inshore; they must have reckoned on its coming back to us. And the joke was meant for us as well as for the dead man who had led them into this affair. I marveled at the depth of hatred, the extent of the malevolence which had prompted this bit of devilish ingenuity.

No doubt about it. Disappointment had roused that feeling. Bursting open the box, in the full expectation of looking on gold, they had found—what?

What *had* they found? What had they sent back to us with the dead man? Now it looked as if disappointment was not alone, as if some other strong emotion—perhaps repugnance—had led them to the murder and what followed. Indeed, the disillusionment must have been powerful and sudden to bring that sequel.

Facing the stern, I faced the dead man. It seemed as if he were mocking me, as if he knew what was still to come to all of us; and, knowing, grinned because he had won. It was the fancy of a sick man. The sun was coming down hot already on my bared head; my wound was throbbing terribly. I felt the fever leaping through my veins as I rowed on.

And when I beached the yawl at last, leaping out into the sleepy wash, I reeled uncertainly; I was about to fall when Wilson caught me.

He was the first to reach the boat, but Larson and Ross were hard at his heels. I do not think that what they saw surprised them at all; they had been watching me all the way in, and the knowledge must have begun to dawn on them when I climbed on board.

They unloaded the leaden boxes, piling them in a heap above the high-water line. They did not so much as make a move to open the one with the broken fastenings, but placed it on the pile.

I did not help them. Not that day, nor the next, nor the next after. The wound which Lewis had dealt me had laid me out completely. And if I could tell you just what passed, I would not; for my few memories are such as I do not care to recall: utter helplessness and the crawling presence of the fever in my body.

There was just one picture on which I like to look back. I often see it to this day: the girl's face looking down into mine, very close to mine; her eyes filled with solicitude; her lips moving as she spoke softly, and her little hand holding a pannikin of water to my lips. It must have happened more than once —many times, I dare say—but I have only the one vision in my memory.

On the fourth day I awoke with my head ringing like a bell, but my mind clear enough. I got to my feet before that morning was over, only to make a fresh discovery. Our ship's company was again divided.

The division was as sharply marked as it had been during the days of the mutiny, and although there was no deadliness of intent, there was something which was very close to out-and-out hatred. Ross, Larson, and the skipper were arrayed against Langton and his daughter as unmistakably as Lewis and

his followers had been arrayed against the rest of us. Just how it had crystallized I do not know, for I have not spoken of the matter to any of them since that day of my recovery. But you will remember how it had been engendered aboard the *Dora,* and how it had grown during our first day ashore, when Langton tried to speak to the captain about those leaden boxes. I have an idea that after I brought the yawl ashore the two groups simply pulled apart.

The pile of boxes down there near the high-water line was the thing that kept the feud alive. I do not think that any of the three seafaring men ever passed them without a scowl or a muttered oath; and it was plain enough on such occasions that they were thinking of Langton—Langton, Honduras, and our flight from San Francisco Bay.

The captain, the engineer, and the sailor had done their duty as they saw it by their ship and its passengers—aye, and by that hated cargo—and they felt that in doing so, in suffering what they had suffered, they were helping a thief. They felt that the girl was suffering in her turn for her father's sins.

And knowing that they felt thus, she despised them for it. There was no dodging the issue. I had my choice of factions, and I took it. Even if I had owned no love for Dorothy Langton, I could not have

turned away from her after she had ministered to me. My declaration came when we castaways gathered for our noontime meal. The three seafarers filled their plates at the little fire and withdrew to one side; Langton and his daughter did the same. And now the fire was between the two parties. I had scant appetite; I poured out a cup of coffee, took a ship's biscuit, and—I joined the two passengers.

The girl said nothing, but gave me a look which made me thankful I had done what I did. Her father smiled faintly, diffidently; he was a long ways from being well yet. And then the meal went on in silence.

No words passed between me and the skipper on the subject, but beginning with that afternoon he treated me with a marked punctiliousness, and when he had anything to say to me his words came cold and formal. As for Larson and Ross, they simply withdrew from me from that time on. Such things seem childish under ordinary circumstances, but they are common enough when people are thrown together in the wilderness.

Our situation was an ugly one. The water was low. There was next to no hope of our being picked up. It looked as if we must be taking to the boat and running our chances of capsizing offshore. The nearest port was something like one hundred and fifty

miles to the northward. It was a toss-up whether we would be able to make it, even with fair weather holding on.

Life passed in a dreadful routine during those days. But thirst was always with us. Noontime we ate our second meal; with dusk came the third gathering by the camp fire, a separate group on either side. Every morning one of us took his turn at watching on the hill where that beacon was now built. Every noon he was relieved by another who stayed there until the coming of dusk. And that was all there was to do.

On the fourth noon I was going to the knoll as usual, wondering whether there would be any hope of the overladen yawl weathering those high seas off the capes when we set out the next day for Ensenada. I passed the mound in the sand dunes which marked the grave of Lewis. My mind turned, in spite of my efforts to keep off the subject, to that heap of boxes. And that brought up the question of Langton.

It is hard to hold yourself loyal to a man in whom you do not believe, to whose honor you cannot pin your faith, no matter how much you would like to do so. Yet I could not dislike him, either; there was something about him that appealed to my sympathies; and that in itself would have made me less uncom-

promising than the skipper and his companions, even if I had not been pulled by my new love for the girl.

I was trying to reënforce my belief in Langton's honesty. I reviewed the whole affair from the beginning; but there was no use trying to bolster up a case for him. And I loved his daughter. As I thought of her my heart leaped within me and my head went back. I did not care what her father was; if she were standing by him, well, then, I would continue to do so. And that was all there was to it.

While I was thinking on these things I had traveled from the grave of the mutineer to another grave. I halted beside the mound where Wilson, Larson, and Ross had buried our little cook. My mind reverted to that afternoon in the fog, and the things that had taken place then.

Some one was coming up behind me. I turned at the sound of the footsteps and faced Dorothy Langton. Neither of us said anything for some moments, but the two of us stood there side by side, looking at the grave of the cook, whose fate we two had come so close to sharing, and I remembered how love had come to my knowledge when death passed so near to me on that other afternoon.

In silence we started to climb the hill, and Ross, whose turn on watch had expired, came down past

PAGE NOT AVAILABLE

And when they strayed into the south, apprehension showed like a shadow beneath her long lashes.

But as for me, I kept my eyes roving first one way and then the other. It was my duty to look out for a sail, and, when one came, to kindle the beacon in the hope that the smoke might attract attention. Then to raise the white flag which had been fashioned from a bit of sailcloth and two lashed oars. Yet I hoped with her that the sail might come from the north—if it should come at all, which seemed beyond all likelihood now. Luck was not with us.

Well, luck is a strange thing; it comes when you least expect it, and it often comes in a manner that you would not reckon on. I was the one who owned the sharpest eyes. And I was the one who looked most often—as I have said—to the southward. But Dorothy Langton was the one who first caught sight of the little wisp of smoke coming over the horizon where it curved in to meet the coast line.

She uttered what sounded like a sob. And when I had seen what she saw—the mark of the advancing vessel—I glanced down at her and read the grief that the discovery had brought.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRAILER

HOPE dies hard in all of us. When I saw that thread of smoke crawling up from the southward I began to plan to cheat unkind fate. Here we had striven all along this road from the pink house on the marsh to the coast of Baja California, fleeing, fighting, enduring; we had put our enemies behind us, to encounter new ones, and battled against these only to run afoul of grimmer perils than murderous men; and, facing the dangers of thirst and starvation, we had come to this.

For rescue meant return to San Francisco. Only the coastwise steamers, bound to and from that port, passed close enough to this place to be discernible.

How could we get around this ending to our cruise? How avoid being brought back to the port from which we had fled with those leaden boxes?

Well, here we were, we two, alone on the hilltop. And the camp behind the crescent beach was beyond the sight of the oncoming vessel. As I stood staring

at the darkening thread of smoke from her funnels, I realized how the issue could be avoided.

I needed only to refrain from kindling that beacon and lifting the signal, and she would pass on northward up the coast. I confess that I wrestled with that temptation for some minutes. The sight of Dorothy Langton's stricken face made me forget the things that I owed to the other members of our company during that time. It seemed better that we should face the dangers toward which we were looking—the likelihood of death in an overladen open boat—than to be carried back to San Francisco now.

So I gazed southward at the smoke line, and I did not move; and she stood beside me in silence. Once I glanced down at her face, and saw the pallor in her cheeks, the lips pressed tightly together, the tears gathering in her eyes.

Then there came back to me the knowledge of the duty which I could not shirk. There are some things which are greater than love, and fair dealing with one's fellow men is one of these. I knew now that, if I were to refrain from lighting that heap of wood, love would itself turn to bitterness.

So I struck the match and touched it to the whittled shavings at the base of the pile, and in silence I watched the little flame climb, growing as it ascended

until it was roaring among the fagots. The smoke column shot upward, a straight line of dense black, against the cloudless sky.

"It is the only way," I said.

She nodded, and in silence she smiled bravely up at me. And then she pointed to the lashed oars with the white cloth; and I raised the signal.

We waited, watching the distant vessel's smoke.

And while we bided there, holding our eyes on the oncoming ship as the two masts crept up over the sky line and the hull slowly revealed itself, it struck me that she was keeping unusually close to the coast; that she was really off her course. The possibility that she had picked up some news of the departing mutineers occurred to me; that would account for her creeping shoreward where she could search for further signs of the schooner or ourselves.

Now she had caught our signal. For she was coming straight on, and the sudden blackening of the cloud which poured from her funnels showed that she was putting on speed. We had done all that there was for us to do.

"We may as well be heading back for camp," I said.

She sighed, and I wondered, as she turned to go with me, whether she was taking it amiss that I had

done the only thing there was to do. But when we had gotten about halfway down the slope she answered my unspoken thought.

"I'm glad it was you," she said simply, "for I would not have been brave enough to make that signal."

I did not make any reply to this, for I was thinking that perhaps there was, after all, a chance for us. It was one in a hundred—I knew that, for I knew the ways of coastwise vessels—but the fact remained that sometimes northbound steamers did touch at Ensenada; and if this one would not be making that obscure little port of its own accord, there was still the possibility of inducing her skipper to do so.

"You're thinking that perhaps we've some hope yet?" she asked me, and the question startled me, hitting as it did the truth.

I nodded, and I told her what was in my mind. Her eyes brightened at once and the color came back into her face.

"I'll tell my father," she said, "and—if we can do that——" She smiled up at me. "We owe so much to you already," she ended with a little catching of her breath.

As we returned to camp Captain Wilson, Ross, and Larson were on their way to meet us, and walked

back the better portion of the distance in our company.

For the first time since we had been together, we talked to one another without constraint. The feud was done with for the time.

I will pass by the final ordeal of our waiting; when the steamer showed standing by outside the little bay, until the two boats which put off from her, visible now on a tossing crest, vanishing now in the trough of the sea, reached our gleaming beach. We men ran out in the wash, grasped the gunwales, and dragged them up inshore.

The steamship came with news of the mutineers. She had picked up the yawl early in the day, some distance down the coast, bottom side up. Discovery of the tragedy which had overtaken the trio while they were fleeing from the scene of the murder had caused the vessel to change her course and search along shore for some signs of shipwreck. In any event they must have sighted the *Dora*, now breaking to pieces on the reef, and come to take us on board.

A blocky second officer with a weather-beaten face and pig's eyes were in charge of the two boats. I noticed when he stepped ashore how those small eyes of his went straight to the heap of leaden boxes, and

although he never said a word about them, it was quite plain that the sight of them had set him to thinking hard. A certain stiffness in his manner also struck me as unpleasant. But these impressions were blotted out by the stirring incidents of our departure.

All of us talked back and forth like old and tried companions; there was a pleasantness in this new intimacy which warmed one's heart. Even Langton and Captain Wilson interchanged something like good-natured congratulations.

And Dorothy Langton, who had taken her father to one side promptly on our arrival from the hill, to tell him of my plan of being set ashore at Ensenada, seemed to have forgotten enough of her dislike of the skipper to part with some of her iciness toward him. It was a warming interlude. But when we came on board the steamer—or soon afterward, at any rate—the old conditions returned.

There were, of course, the inevitable questions to be asked and answered. Captain Wilson faced the liner's skipper in the latter's stateroom and told his story; and when he came out he almost ran against me, talking with Dorothy Langton. His eyes rested on us for a moment with something like disfavor, and then traveled to her father, who was seated in a steamer chair near by.

Soon afterward the girl and her father had an interview with the captain. When they left his stateroom Dorothy rejoined me.

"He says," she told me quietly, and I could see the worry in her eyes, "that the steamer is going to Ensenada; but there is something about him—I do not know what it is—something in his way of talking—that makes me afraid."

I tried to reassure her, but for the life of me I could put no ring of conviction in my voice. Something was coming, something unpleasant. I was morally certain of it. The manner in which that second officer had looked at the leaden boxes and then at us; the manner of Captain Wilson; and, later on, the manner of the ship's captain when he had me in for a talk—all were disquieting. Some one had cards up his sleeve.

As for my story—I kept strictly to the facts. And as I recited the tale I realized how it must sound. There was only one construction to be placed on Langton's conduct and the presence of those boxes.

Still, Ensenada was in Mexican territory, and there was no formal charge against either of the *Dora's* passengers. I could not see what the skipper could do, save to allow the two to go ashore if they so chose. It was his business to report the entire

matter when he came to San Francisco, and that was all there was to it.

Evening had come when something happened which aroused all my apprehensions anew. It began with the steamer changing her course abruptly. And it terminated with several loud blasts of the whistle. As soon as I could do so without display of suspicious haste, I excused myself and went out on deck.

Sure enough, there lay another vessel's lights off our port bow. And she was lying to. We had signaled her. I went to the rail.

The rattle of blocks and the whine of tackle followed the stopping of our engines. A boat went overside, carrying that same second officer with the pig's eyes.

A quarter of a mile away the lights of the biding steamship cast particolored streaks upon the ocean.

While I lingered at the rail I became conscious of some one beside me. Langton was standing close by, gripping the rail with his two waxen hands; beyond him I got sight of the girl. We looked across her father and into each other's eyes. But neither of us said anything. Both of us were dreading something—and what that thing was we did not know. Which made the dread all the more terrible,

which made the interval of waiting for the return of the boat all the harder to endure.

The pin point of lantern light showed at the crest of a lofty swell. It hovered there for a moment, then it vanished as the boat descended into the trough. Some seconds passed, and then it reappeared, to disappear again. And at every fresh appearance it became plainer, larger. Now we could distinguish the forms of men, and soon we heard their voices from the shadows under us.

"Now. Look out, there! Hold on a second!"

There was an interval of silence. Some one had chosen the wrong moment to leave the small boat and grip the ladder which hung down the vessel's steep flank. The voices rose again: "Easy there. Now you make it."

And this time he did. Some one was climbing up. Out of the darkness he came slowly toward the light, revealing himself as long and lank and dark, his face a blur of whiteness which in turn resolved itself into lines and lineaments when the light shone fairly upon it. I knew the man who was boarding us. It was the man with the spoiled eye.

CHAPTER XXII

INTO THE GOLDEN GATE

IF you can get the idea of a lean, black spider, ill-favored even as spiders go, and yet bearing an air of sneaking and apologetic good fellowship—as if he would crack a joke and clap the flies which had so long eluded him on the back before delivering the final bite—you will have the man with the spoiled eye as he appeared to me when he had thrown his legs over the rail and stood on the deck.

For our three eyes—my two and his one—met in that instant; his single usable orb wandered to my two companions; after which he bestowed upon us all a smile, which was in part propitiating, in part triumphant, in part an attempt at good fellowship; and altogether self-satisfied. With that he waved his hand quite airily and turned away, but not before he had greeted us with an:

"Evenin' folks," which was audible half the length of the deck.

As he hurried forward toward the officers' state-

rooms, I repressed a strong desire to run after him and knock him down. I set my mind to work instead. For I hated to acknowledge defeat almost as much as I hated the consequences of that same defeat. Langton and his daughter were already on their way to the after saloon when I caught up with them. His head was bowed, his shoulders sagged as they had sagged that first evening when I saw him in the pink house on the marsh; the girl was dry-eyed, but grief was written on her pale face.

"In another hour," I said, "we'll be at Ensenada. Before that fellow can send to San Francisco and get requisition papers, to start extradition proceedings—if you were to use money on those crooked Mexican officials—there's still a chance of slipping down the coast to Honduras."

It was a wild project, but Langton's head went back, and the color returned to the girl's cheeks. Then, while we were discussing it in the after saloon the door opened from the deck. We glanced up, and there was the man with the spoiled eye. He came across the room and stood in front of us.

"No hard feelin's," he said with the utmost cheerfulness and a composure as absolute as if the two incidents of William Jaspro's office and the country road house had never taken place at all. "And I'm

going to give you folks a little advice without chargin' for it, either." He fumbled in his breast pocket and brought out several folded papers which any one would know at first sight for legal documents.

"Now," he went on, "before I left San Francisco, my people talked this business over with me; and one of the things I tell 'em's this: " 'Never figger on a party makin' Honduras jest because he's headed for there,' I says. 'They's always chances he may not make it. And so, my way of doin' this would be to go all prepared for Lower California and Sonora, too.' " My heart slowed up as he uttered those words.

"My people saw it the same way I did and so," he waved the papers at us, "it wouldn't do you one bit of good to go ashore at Ensenada. Fact is 'twould only put you into a Mexican jail and cost my people quite a bit of coin before they greased the wheels to land you back in San Francisco." He indicated the papers again.

"These requisition papers would lay you all by the heels all right, but the governor would want to hang onto you, once he got an eye on them there boxes. And I'd rather, if I was you, take chances most anywheres than with a greaser governor—in a Mex jail."

With this he turned to go, but Langton halted him. It was the first time the fugitive had taken the initiative for so long that I had all but forgotten his position in the affair.

"And if we stay aboard?" Langton asked.

"In that there case," the man with the spoiled eye answered cheerfully, "they ain't goin' to be a single particle of trouble nor nothin' unpleasant. The arrest'll be made when you set foot on the dock at San Francisco."

This time he took his departure without any further attempt on our part at detention.

When he had gone: "Is there anything I can do?" I asked Langton.

He shook his head slowly.

"Nothing, except to hear me say that I am thankful for what you have done. We'll stay aboard."

Indeed that was the only course; and I left the two of them there, for I knew there was nothing that I could say to comfort them. Captain Wilson met me an hour or so later while I was pacing back and forth on deck looking at the shore lights of Ensenada. He stopped me with a gesture.

"Mr. Dolan," he said stiffly, "I only want to say that, so far as your duty aboard the *Dora* goes, you

have done it better than most men would have done it in your place."

There was that in his manner which told me he was handing me a tribute—for any praise from him was a tribute indeed since he was one of those men to whom compliments come very hard—as a solace for something which I was still to undergo. It was as if he said: "No matter how big a fool you were in other things which are now coming back upon you, the fact remains I've nothing against you in your conduct as an officer."

But I did not need that to make me know that I was in for a great deal of trouble—quite possibly for prison itself—when the steamer docked at San Francisco's city front.

And so the northward voyage was a long and dreary interval. I was coming back to face the music. I was reconciled to that fact—as much as a young fellow can be reconciled to it—but I did wish the music would begin, so that I could have it over with as soon as possible.

And there was the girl. What was awaiting her? It seemed monstrous beyond conception that she should be made a prisoner. Yet there was no doubt that the man with the spoiled eye had included the three of us in his advice. To think of her going be-

hind steel bars was one of those terrible ordeals which sometimes load themselves upon a man, making his days dark and his nights sleepless.

From that evening I saw but little of her. She kept to her stateroom during the days, and when she came out on deck after dark she seemed to avoid me. Always she hung to her father's arm on these occasions, comforting him—I could see it whenever I encountered them—by her talk. And, although she greeted me with a greater intimacy in her look and tone than she had bestowed upon me heretofore, I felt that she was rather glad than otherwise when I withdrew.

At last I could stand this no longer and, chance favoring me with a meeting when Langton was absent from her side, I broached that subject.

"Is there anything," I asked her awkwardly, "that I've done?"

She smiled up into my face and her eyes were moist.

"There is," she said softly, "much. Too much."

"I don't understand," I was beginning, but she interrupted me.

"One of the things which makes this hard for me," she told me, "is the knowledge that you will have to share what is to come to us when we reach

port. You were"—she hesitated and then went on swiftly—"so generous, so unquestioning. I cannot forget that."

"It was not generosity," I answered her quickly; "I could not have done otherwise than try to help you after I first saw you. It was——"

She anticipated what I was about to say and she halted me as I was about to tell her my love with a hand upon my arm.

"Please don't," she bade me.

I hastened to apologize, but she checked me once more.

"No," she whispered, "I am the one to ask for pardon. If I have been the means of drawing you into this, I am sorrier than I can tell you." She paused and looked off into the night. "Perhaps, some time things may not be as bad as they are now and then——"

I could only guess at what she was going to say, and hope that my guess was right, for Langton came up to us, and she slipped her arm in his.

"Good night," she bade me softly. And that was the last I saw of her until the morning when we came to the dock in San Francisco, a few days later.

But before that landing something else took place,

and it was between myself and the man with the spoiled eye.

We were off the Farallones and I had risen early. The gray fog was rolling away before us, revealing the gray swells; and as it thinned a gleam of sunshine shot down between its rifts. The dawn had come, the dawn of what I was sure would be my last day as a free man. I was thinking of how the news would go northward and reach my father's ears; and I was striving to formulate some plan by which he might be spared that blow, cursing my folly for not having insisted on taking that dubious job which William Jaspro had offered me, under another name than my own. Then the man with the spoiled eye stepped beside me.

"Have a cigar?" He proffered me one of those Mexican ones all wrapped in tinfoil.

I declined it stiffly and told him I never smoked before breakfast.

"Me," he said, "I smoke any old time." He unwrapped the foil and bit the end, then lighted the cigar.

"Well," he said with a persistent geniality which made me want to knock him overboard, "we'll be ashore in another hour."

I made no answer. He looked sharply at me with his one serviceable eye.

"Your people," he went on abruptly, "are able to do a whole lot of things, but you know, neighbor, they can't raise a hand against our crowd when we get to old San Francisco. Money talks—and—well—we've got the coin. Got the coin—*and* got the old United States gov'ment behind us, which is a whole lot, I'm tellin' you.

"Now listen to me." He came closer and dropped his voice. "Just to show you where you get off at when you come to buckin' against the United States gov'ment *and* such parties as I am representing in this here case. We'll name no names, o' course.

"Before Langton—we'll call him Langton s'long as he wants to keep that name—before Langton makes his get-away with the help of you and other parties, this here boat we're on sails south. Three days before, it was. And when she goes, her skipper has got word to look out for a man of his description and a girl and ten lead boxes; to keep his eye open for 'em and to ask questions in every port he touches at. All the time o' course, we're pretty sure it's goin' to be Honduras. But they's a chance of some way port; and so he gets that word.

"That ain't all. When I go south after you folks

has left, I'm hooked up with requisitions which is good in Mexico; but also, neighbor, I'm fixed so that when I get to Honduras, if you should be there, I'm going to be able to take you back with me. Mebbe you don't believe that, but it's a fact. I'd o' got you folks if I had to start a revolution to do it—and I had the stuff." He slapped his pocket meaningly.

"Now that wasn't the gov'ment of course. It was some one else that was spendin' more money than the United States spends, and you know who I'm talking about, I guess. So you can see just where you are at. No use tryin' to buck people like these clients o' mine, now is there?

"Well, then." He laid his hand on my arm which I drew away, but that in nowise abashed him. "Nobody's anxious to make you any trouble. You're small people like myself. They ain't after *you*. And you can't help your friends any more, now can you? What I say is, under them circumstances, if you're a sensible man, you're goin' to help yourself. You could make it easy for the prosecution by tellin' some things, and the prosecution can make it easy——"

I stopped him then and there. And I know he was lucky when I did not lay violent hands on him for that proposal. But when he had walked away with a complete understanding of the fact that I did not

want to hear any more from him, I set to puzzling out some things he had said.

It was clear enough that the "my people" to whom he was alluding, must be some one with a deal of power and money. Probably some great corporation. And his talk of the government was certainly disquieting. Of whom had Langton run afoul when he started to steal out of the country with those leaden boxes? And who was Langton? For it was plain—as I had suspected—that this was not his name.

I was pondering over these things long after breakfast and still trying to make something out of them, when the steamship slipped into the Golden Gate.

There came the usual bustle which prefaces landing. And when we were drawing alongside the wharf, I stood at the rail. As the gangplank went out I saw two bulky men in dark overcoats and the customary derby hats, whom any one would have known at once for police detectives. The plank touched the dock. They were on it now and climbing to the deck.

CHAPTER XXIII

JASPRO'S STORY

NOW, when the steamer had stopped at San Diego on the way north, the man with the spoiled eye had gone ashore, and I knew, of course, that he would be sending a telegram to San Francisco to notify those "people" of his what had taken place. So I waited here by the rail for our arrest.

Langton and Dorothy were in the after saloon. The one-eyed private detective who had been our Nemesis was standing by the door. The two officers in plain clothes headed for him. I turned and watched them greet him—pleasantly enough. I saw his smile, and I saw it die as suddenly as it had come.

They talked there for some moments and I held my eyes on them. For which reason I saw nothing that was taking place on the dock, although I heard the tramp of horses' feet and the rumble of carriage wheels, and after that a voice, which somehow or other sounded familiar, coming from the wharf. I

was too busy trying to understand the delay there at the door of the after saloon to heed these other things.

For the two officers in plain clothes, after the brief talk with the man with the bad eye, never entered the saloon at all. Instead, here they came back along the deck, and my old enemy was accompanying them. His head was hanging now; all the cocksureness which had been his during the northward voyage had departed; he was a sorry-looking spider, and then——

While it was slowly dawning on me that something unexpected had taken place, that there had been a change in affairs which might bode ill for him who had so relentlessly followed us, William Jaspro called me by my name.

It was his voice that I had heard on the gangplank. He stood close by me on the deck, and he was puffing a little from the climb on board. His huge mouth was twisting away back of his ears in a smile which was altogether comic, for it held no furtive suggestion of fear, as it had when first I saw him. As he reached me, the two officers and the man with the spoiled eye came opposite him, and because the gangway was narrow he stood aside to let them pass. He turned his head to nod to the burly pair.

"All right," he said, "I'll see you later." They

departed with their prisoner, and William Jaspro, without heeding my own bewilderment or offering in any way to satisfy me of my status in this world—whether as a freeman or an accused criminal—demanded to know where my companions were.

"You'll find two hacks down there on the dock," he told me when I had given him the information. "Cap'n Wilson is in one of 'em by this time. Join 'em, and if any reporters come prowling round, say nothing. Mind. I'll have these two down directly."

I went ashore in a daze and in a daze I boarded the hack wherein the skipper, Larson, and Ross were biding my coming. Wilson was biting the ends of his mustache according to that habit of his when he was puzzled.

"Can you tell me——" I was beginning, but he interrupted.

"No more'n you can tell me," he said. "Stand by and we'll find out. But"—he leaned toward me and touched me on the knee—"the cat has jumped, and it looks to me as if some folks had figured which way the jump was going to be."

With this enigmatic comment he sank back in the seat and lighted his pipe. A moment later the door of the other closed carriage banged shut; our driver

whipped up the horses and we were rumbling back through San Francisco's streets.

In William Jaspro's office, I sat for a good long half hour at the conclusion of that ride, while the attorney consulted across the wide table with Langton, and because their talk was all in undertones I had to content myself with waiting—the one thing above all others which I cannot endure.

Dorothy Langton sat beside her father and she had slipped one of her little hands into his, as I had seen her do so many times before. But now her eyes were very bright. Her head was thrown back as she looked up into his face with a pride that she had not shown in all these days and nights of dread and danger. And once or twice she stole a glance at me, and smiled with a gladness and a gratitude which made my head swim with joy for her, and made my pulses beat hard with love of her; but which I could not understand at all.

Captain Wilson, Larson, and Ross had already departed, after a brief conference with the lawyer in which I was not included. I was alone, off to one side, waiting with an impatience at which I can but hint. One thing was certain—I needed no telling to make it so—we were not going to jail. I used that

knowledge to solace myself for the chafing which I was doing.

Langton arose and Dorothy came over to me. She held out her hand. I rose and took it, not knowing what to say. She held it for a moment.

"I need not tell you," she said, "that I know how much we owe of this to you." William Jaspro laughed at my bewilderment.

"I'll have to tell him first what's happened," he interrupted. "And while I'm doing it, you and your father had best be going. There's a hack waiting outside for you. I've no doubt there's shopping and all that sort of thing you'll want to do to-day. This evening"—his smile widened terrifically—"we'll have a better chance to talk things over, as you're to be my guests at dinner." He opened the door for them. "I'll phone you later," he told them as they departed.

And then he confronted me.

"All's well that ends well," he said. I could not help wishing he would get down to facts and leave timeworn Shakespeare for some occasion when I could appreciate it more fully. But I remained silent.

"Come over to the table, Mr. Dolan," he bade me, and I took the chair which Langton had occupied a moment before. Beside me was the empty one which Dorothy had been seated in; I was wondering

if I would ever see her again. The dinner invitation might not have been meant for me after all. But that speculation died away before my curiosity. I looked across the table at the lawyer.

"I take it for granted," he was saying, "you don't know very much of this whole affair?"

I assured him he was entirely correct.

"In that case," he went on, "it's just as well perhaps to start at the beginning." With which, lawyer-like, he proceeded to complicate matters by promptly plunging ahead of his narrative and shoved toward me a copy of a San Francisco morning paper, whose black headlines proclaimed:

UNITED STATES RECEIVERSHIP DISSOLVED—JUDGE UNDER ARREST—RADIUM SCANDAL BEING INVESTIGATED

"That," I told him, pointing to the headlines, "is all Greek to me." My eyes fell on the last words. "What on earth is radium?" I asked. You will remember this was back in the days before the strange metal was known as well as it is now. "And what has a receivership to do with me?"

"Well," William Jaspro answered quietly, "you had

a whole lot to do with a receivership, even if you didn't know it. But I'm ahead of my story, am I not?" He leaned back in his chair and placed his fat hands, palms toward each other and the ends of the fingers touching.

"It's really an unusual story," he assured me. "In the first place, Langton is—William Brewer. Perhaps you remember the name?"

I did not; I had been up in Bering Sea when the papers were printing it, as it turned out. And I proclaimed my ignorance.

"William Brewer," Jaspro told me, "owned what was supposed to be a worthless silver mine in the old mother-lode country. But one day, less than a year ago it was, he came upon a pitchblende deposit. By good luck he happens to be something of a mineralogist and knew a bit about this new metal, radium. To make a long story short, he learned that this apparently good-for-nothing pitchblende was fairly soaked with the stuff. And that's what is in those lead boxes.

"Well now, Brewer allowed the news to leak out. And the big Norton interests"—Norton was not the name he used; it was another which has been a household word in this country for several decades—"were trying to get hold of radium at the time. With the

usual consequence in such cases—lawsuit, injunctions, and receivership. The idea being that the receiver's people would take the mine.

"Brewer had seen what was coming in time to get out the most of that precious mineral and to store it in leaden boxes—lead being the one metal that will keep this radium from losing its virtue by what seems to be something like evaporation. The Norton crowd learned he had done this and tried to get their hands on the stuff. I knew Brewer would never have a living chance in court as long as that crowd were controlling things, and it was by my advice he stayed in hiding. You know of course how I was trying to get him out of the country to Honduras, where there couldn't be any extradition, and where he could stay with his lead boxes until things were adjusted up here."

Now I began to understand.

"Those people who were after us then were officers after all," I said.

"Deputy United States marshals, sworn in by the Norton crowd under Judge Isham, who was in on the crooked deal and had a promise of part of the loot," said William Jaspro. "They were really private detectives when you get down to the actual facts."

Which in its turn cast light on the conversation that

I had had that same morning with our Nemesis with the spoiled eye. I recounted it to the lawyer. He smiled, if it were possible, wider than ever before.

"Things changed while that fellow was down in Lower California," he said. "Changed remarkably. They got so hot for Judge Isham—as you see by the headlines there—that the Norton crowd tried their best to pull out of the deal and so did the bunch of crooked politicians who were engineering the affair for them. But it was too late. Their names are mixed up in it and they'll have a hard time, and have to spend a lot of money, to dodge prosecution themselves.

"You see," he went on, "I had been working on the case for weeks before I ran across you. And I was getting the evidence of conspiracy then. By good fortune there was a quarrel among the looters when Brewer escaped, and that helped me a good deal when it came to the final showdown. But in the meantime I had enough testimony, signed and sworn to before witnesses, to overthrow the receivership. I only needed my day in court, which I got while you were on the high seas."

"I understand now," I told him, and I rose. After all, I was not feeling as happy as a man might be ex-

CHAPTER XXIV

GOOD NEWS

LOVE has its own peculiar selfishness. Here I was genuinely cast down; the world looked gray to me; hope had departed; and all because Dorothy Brewer was no longer Dorothy Langton; because she had come to her own when her father had gained his rights. When she was needing my help, then I could give it; I could look upon her as a man would look upon the woman who has his heart; then she was in a position where I might have dared to disclose my feelings.

Now everything was changed. A man who has his master's papers to show for progress and who can look forward to a berth in the cabin of some outgoing vessel is in no position to tell a rich man's daughter how much he loves her. I had done all this planning and fighting and striving in her behalf only to help bring her to a place where she was away beyond the possibility of such intimacies as had passed between us.

That was what was ailing me when I left the office of William Jaspro. And for that reason I did not expect to attend the dinner party of which he had spoken. In my present frame of mind the idea which most appealed to me was to get to one side somewhere, out of reach; to find, if possible, a ship and go forth again.

I know that a young fellow does not reason such matters out with much logic. And I was never one to look at things coolly, anyway. I had my pride and I was headstrong; and I was determined that the whole affair, so far as I was concerned, was a thing of the past. It was done and over; and the best thing I could do was to try and forget it.

So I walked down the corridor and around the corner into the Clay Street side of the building and found my way to my room, which I had left on that rainy night to fare forth, whither I knew not. I unlocked the door and entered the dingy little apartment.

Everything was just as I had left it, except that the landlady had tidied the place up a bit after my departure. There was the table where I had written the letter to my father—which I had all but forgotten during the wild adventures which had intervened

—and that table was in the same disorder as it had been when I got up from it to mail the missive.

Nothing was new except for one piece of mail which had come in during my absence. The landlady had placed it in the center of the table with an inkwell on its corner to hold it down. I glanced at it and recognized my father's handwriting in the address. I took it up and sat there with the envelope in my hands while my mind went back to him. I wondered how he would be getting on and the old wave of homesickness—not for home itself so much as it was for a sight of his face—recurred to me, making me bluer than ever. And then I opened the envelope.

It was not a long letter, and the date was old. It must have been waiting for me during the greater part of the journey southward. And, because my father was one of those men who cannot set down their feelings, but must resort to the writing of more tangible facts, he had confined himself to the bare request that I return and take up the reins of his business.

I could read the feeling between the lines all right. I could read the joy which my letter had brought him; the wave of affection for me; the knowledge that age was getting the best of him; the longing for

my help. It offered me *carte blanche* management. I was, he said, young; and I seemed, he said, to have proved myself entirely capable; and—the one sign of open acknowledgment—perhaps I had done better by making my own way thus far in my own fashion, for he had learned that I was showing myself a chip of the old block when it came to handling men. Would I answer soon?

And I had been away all these days and this had been awaiting me. And my father had been wondering—no doubt about that—why I failed to reply.

In the beginning my feeling was of dismay because of this last fact. And as I hurried forth from the room with the letter in my hand my first idea in seeking out William Jaspro was to get the means—for, during the wild days of shipwreck and adventure, I had managed to lose what money was on my person—to reply by telegram; to notify my father that I had just read his offer and that I was coming home again.

But as I hurried through the hallways it flashed over me that this development materially changed the aspect of affairs. Here I was, as good as a rich man, established in life, the head of a large business. And now I could tell my love, where the peculiar diffidence of lovers had sealed my lips five minutes

before. And with this realization my whole demeanor changed.

So that when I opened the lawyer's door he saw the joy on my face and, glancing at the letter which I was still holding in my hand, he smiled, one of those terrific smiles of his which can be compared to nothing save the expression one sees on a clown's mask.

"Well?" he asked. "What's up?"

I explained in the first place that I was clean out of funds and needed ready money.

"You've money coming to you as far as that goes," he told me. "And I'll be glad to advance what you want."

I waved the offer aside with impatience. I didn't want wages for what I had done. I couldn't have thought of it, even had my fortunes been different. I went on to say that it was something in the nature of a loan; that I was in a position to ask for one; and then I came to the point and recounted briefly the change in my affairs.

"I'm glad," he said heartily, "to be the first to congratulate you. Always did seem to me you'd be doing wiser to be getting into business, ever since I knew you were your father's son. As for advances"—he rose and picked up his old-fashioned hat

—"if you'll step down to the bank with me, I can arrange that all right."

He did it without any trouble at all. We left the bank on Montgomery Street together, and I had a check book in my pocket. I got off a telegram to my father and—then I headed for a clothing store.

"You'll lunch with me?" William Jaspro said when I left him.

I accepted the invitation, but I was nearly a half hour late. Although I am one of those lucky men who is so easy to fit that a ready-made suit takes the set of tailored garments, there were some little alterations to be made in the one I purchased. And then there was a lot of stuff to buy in the way of haberdashery. When I joined the lawyer in the quiet French restaurant on Bush Street, I was, for the first time since I had left home years before, garbed in the manner to which I had been brought up; and if it had not been for my sunburn, together with the walk which a seafaring man can never disguise, I doubt if any one would have taken me for anything but the conventional city dweller.

The lunch was excellent and William Jaspro was an admirable host. He turned out to be one of those confirmed epicureans who used to be more frequent in San Francisco than they are to-day; and he had

some prolonged conferences with the proprietor of the place over certain of the dishes. All of which made the meal somewhat of a ceremony and prolonged it tremendously. Moreover, there were other conferences regarding to-night's dinner which was to be given in this same establishment.

These delays drove me almost wild. For I did not fancy wasting time with an old fellow, no matter how delicious the food, when I might be hunting up Dorothy. He saw me fidgeting at last and, when I tried tactfully and unostentatiously to introduce the subject with the object of learning at what hotel she might be stopping, William Jaspro twined the corners of his enormous mouth back of his ears as he announced that he would go down to the Palace with me.

"She's there with her father," he told me, "and I want to see him."

It was one of those things which a man must accept, and I had to use all the politeness I could muster to refrain from showing my disgust. And yet the presence of the lawyer proved to be a blessing in disguise, for when we came into the lobby of the Palace Hotel here was Brewer—Langton as I thought of him then and it took me a long time to get rid of that abiding impression as to his name—with Dor-

othy. They had just come in. And, very nicely to my way of thinking, Jaspro took his client aside to talk over their business. I was left alone with Dorothy.

We found a quiet nook where the branches of palms shut us off from the passing procession of people from all the world and sat down there, and we had hardly done so before she asked me what my plans were. She had been, she said prettily, so taken away with the change in her own fortunes that she had utterly ignored what possibilities there might be for seeing more of me. And now, would I tell her?

It gave me my opportunity for setting forth the position into which I had fallen, which opportunity would have been hard to bring about by my own conversation, as I am not good at steering around corners when it comes to such things. I had finished and we were sitting there, trying each to view the other in the light of new developments, and for some reason this brought a little of constraint between us.

At which juncture a boy came past calling her name. She raised her little hand and he brought her one of those diminutive trays whereon bellboys serve cards.

"It's Captain Wilson," she said; frowned, then, brightening a little, bade the boy bring him hither.

And in a few moments the skipper came, with Ross and Larson. A sun-browned, hard-faced trio, with the tang of the sea accompanying them, they stood there for a moment awkwardly after the first greeting. Then, as one who dives into cold water, Wilson took a full breath and plunged into his business.

I wish that I could exactly recall his words, for there was in them the dignity of utter simplicity. He went straight to the point and made his apology for what had come and gone, and he never lost his self-respect in doing it. A man, he said, can only judge from what he sees and hears; and appearances were bad when it came to her father. He was—and the other two were—deeply sorry at an injustice. They had told her father as much just now.

She met them halfway. Without a reservation and without a sign of the reluctance which must have tugged at her somewhat—for those had been unpleasant days and nights aboard the *Dora,* even if it had not been for the doings of the mutineers, just as the days on the beach had been dreary with misunderstandings—she told them that the whole bad business was done and over.

What was more she reminded them that she could never forget their own brave conduct. They departed, hats in their hands. And we two sat down together by ourselves.

The call had brought back a multitude of memories. And those memories crowded out the semi-embarrassment which we had felt at trying to appraise our new positions. She told me of the days when she had been in school on the eastern shore of the bay, waiting for her father to come down from the mines where he was working and planning toward their better fortunes; of the joy which had accompanied their first meeting in years, and the pain which went with that joy when she saw how he had sickened; and the dread that followed with the knowledge that they were no better than fugitives.

Well, all of that was past now. And then we talked of the days which we had passed together, but that was not a pleasant subject. We wanted to forget that period in spite of the love that had come to us.

I told her of that love. And as I spoke she looked up into my face.

"I said," she answered softly, "the time might come—do you remember?" I did remember that

evening on the deck of the northcoming steamer and——

It was a sequestered spot. I was able to kiss her for the first time there behind the palm branches. Soon afterward her father came with William Jaspro and I left them.

Captain Wilson met me in the lobby. He had been waiting for me. We walked out into Market Street together.

"A fine girl," he said. "They don't make many like her." And that was all the allusion he made to my sweetheart.

We talked of men and ships, and I asked him of his plans. Then I told him of my own. The long and short of our conference being that I was able to offer him a better berth than he had ever held before. We ran across Ross as we were parting. The sailor was emerging from an uptown saloon, wiping his lips with the back of his hand; and when last I saw him he was headed down Market Street, eastward toward the city front, where he would find surroundings more to his taste and where—as he informed me—they gave a man a decent-sized beer for his nickel.

Our dinner in the French restaurant was, to us adventurers, an enchanted affair. It does not take

many days and nights of hardships to cast a glamour over such a function as this; and William Jaspro had ordered well. When we departed from the place it was raining. The hour was late. The lights gleamed on the damp cobblestones.

The city was all hissing with the downpour. It brought back to my mind that other rainy evening which had followed my first glimpse of the pink house on the marsh.

That house I will always remember. It was a dismal building. The gloomy surroundings made it more so. A strange setting in which to find the girl whom one loves, whose love in turn makes life so well worth the living.

THE END

TO THE READER

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