# IS A SHIP BURNING ?

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BY RICHARD SALE

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# For Arline Again

*The characters and situations in this work are wholly fictional and imaginative: they do not portray and are not intended to portray any actual persons or parties. The S.S.* San Marino *is not the model of any ship which suffered similar disaster.*

THE S.S. "SAN MARINO" BURNED ON THE NIGHT OF January 29th, 19— and she sank in the delayed dawn of the 30th after the white-hot heat had split her plates and let the omnivorous Caribbean into her empty bowels. That was the end. The beginning I place four days earlier, January 25th, the night after we cleared Colon, Panama, for Port of Spain, Trinidad. That was the night I met the dwarf who was to slay the giant. He was a mild little man, who fanned the fire into the *San Marino,* cultured, brilliant and mad.

On this night, I had gone off duty at four o'clock in the afternoon, and I went down to my cabin, number twenty-five on C deck, in order to shave myself and dress for dinner. The blade in my razor was dull, so I put in a new one and

shaved. But when I had finished, I saw the old blade lying there on the basin, and I picked it up and flung it through my open porthole. Somehow I must have touched one of the twin edges, and although I felt no pain at all, the next thing I knew my thumb was bleeding furiously.

I washed it a couple of times but it didn't seem to do any good. There was a deep thin gash right across the cushion of the last knuckle and the blood made a gory mess of my wash basin, frightening me a little. Finally I wrapped my hand up in a Turkish towel and climbed up to B deck, where the doctor's consulting room was located, directly opposite the purser's office.

The ship's surgeon was named Dr. Joseph Cardena, and he was a sandy-haired Italian, if you can imagine the combination. He was ageless; that is, his light sandy hair lent him a youthful aspect which he did not really possess. He had told me once that he was sixty-seven and I hadn't believed him. When he was reminiscent, however, you could see that he had been alive a long time. We had been good friends aboard ship for two years, principally because I was casually interested in medicine and he appreciated a good listener. His most startling declamation—usually delivered before strangers in order that he might sound some-

what sensational—was that he had no faith whatsoever in *materia medica,* that medicine was a bastard science at best since it tried to solve human ills by studying the flesh instead of the serene motivation of the flesh. It pleased him when the strangers would gasp. He read Nietzsche, Carlyle, Schopenhauer, and tomes on Greek Humanism quite a bit. He sincerely liked the latter, I think; but he read the others so that he could dig up a good quotation in the heat of an argument. Afterwards he would smile benignly and murmur: "I'm a faker, of course. You see me in my true colours now."

To him, the most beautifully written sentence in the English tongue was: *"It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath."* He once told me: "I don't give a damn, really, what it means, John. I don't know, in fact, who wrote it. Shakespeare, I think. But it has beauty, the sound of it is exquisite. Lean back in a chair some time and repeat it in a whisper to yourself. Before you know it, you'll be hypnotized. I'm serious, my good aunt, I *am!* I prescribe it as a tonic for any form of fatigue."

His aim was to garner enough courage to retire to his home in Darien, Connecticut, and devote his declining years to playing with his hobby—

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model-railways. He was in it deeply, owning a system which he valued at fifteen thousand dollars. Each time we sailed from New York, he would bring along the necessary materials for the construction of another engine to add to the system. . . . Gentle, soft-spoken, he had amused dark eyes and a magnificent smile which reached up high into his cheeks.

I knocked on the consulting-room door that night and went right in. The room was empty, but he poked his head out from his adjoining cabin, and said: "What the continental are you dying of, John?" Then he laughed and motioned for me to come in.

I sat down, feeling a trifle giddy. "It may be funny to you," I said, "but it scared me. You should have seen it all over the basin. I thought I'd cut an artery or a vein at least."

"Pshaw!" he said, chiding, his eyes smiling at me provocatively. "The bigger they are, the more adolescent they become. I'm quite sure my most fearsome patient, were he ten years old or octogenarian, could get no more pale than you are. How did you do it?"

"Throwing away an old blade. I don't see how myself. I picked it up—"

"Never mind, never mind," he said, examining

the cut.

"The blood scared me," I said, "I'll admit it."

"You can't help admitting it. You're in no condition to deny it."

"You've got me there."

He glanced up at me and pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Now answer me this truthfully, John," he said. "Would it have bothered you if it had been my blood? What I mean is this: did the blood bother you? Or did your own blood bother you?"

"Hell, your blood wouldn't have bothered me. You can bleed yourself to death. Go right ahead. I don't mind. But this was *my* blood, Doc. That makes a difference to me."

"Hmmm," he said. "Yes, of course, that would be it."

"What is this? Some moral for me?" I asked.

He chuckled. "My good aunt, not . . . I'll have to stitch this, John. It's bone-deep."

"Sure. Go ahead."

He stitched it three times and it hurt, but I didn't mind the solid effect of pain so much, and it took away the sick feeling high in my stomach which I had had at the sight of the basin. When he had finished the job and had bandaged up my thumb, he was quickly serious, his eyes troubled,

his brow sulcated. "I've been considering this terror one feels when casual things we have accepted are suddenly translated into one's own experience. . . . You just caught me in. I was going down to see a patient. He came aboard at Colon. His name is Ramon Duga. *Dr.* Ramon Duga."

"Another medico?" I asked, grimacing.

"No," Dr. Cardena said without humour. "Not a medico. A herpetologist—and a very sick man."

I said: "What's the matter with him?"

"Do you know anything about nervous breakdowns?"

"No. Not a thing."

"Well, he has one."

"He has?" I shrugged. "I always thought it was a rich man's excuse for a holiday. You know. You read in the papers that Mr. So-and-so is suffering from a nervous breakdown and will have to spend six months in Hollywood, the West Indies, Hawaii, and other playgrounds."

He stared at me in amazement. "My aunt, but you *are* misinformed, John!"

"I am?"

"I can mend cuts and bruises and broken bones. I can deliver babies, remove cranky appendixes, clean out sluggish livers. But God help me when I have to heal a mind. . . ."

"Well," I said, "all I know is what I read in the papers."

He shook his shoulders, as though casting off an invisible centipede. "Most macabre thing that can happen to a man," he said quietly. "I'm dead serious. I think a look would do you good. Make you count your blessings."

"You want me to come along?"

"If you will."

"All right."

He stood up, then paused. "The name Duga means nothing to you and never will. You're such a complete ignoramus, I feel compelled to explain. In herpetology one day soon when a certain report is published, Duga will be up with the highest—Calmette, Bertrand, Physalix. This man is brilliant. He's been engaged in the study of snakes for the last twenty years. No fol-de-rol, John. Just plain old-fashioned hard work, hard study and monotonous experimentation. Trying to detoxify venoms by ultra-violet ray. Bleeding snakes of venom for use in making antivenin—every conceivable thing. Several months ago, he proved that hemophilia—"

"What's that?"

"No coagulant in the blood. Get a scratch and you bleed to death. It was the dreaded malady of

the Bourbons. Your late Russian Czar—"

"I remember."

"Duga proved that hemophilia could be treated by injections of sterile solutions of *Brothrops atrox* venom—jararaca, that is. The report is unpublished as yet. He was chief of the Universal Antivenin Institute at Gualan, Panama."

"Nice going," I said.

"And now he's finished."

"Finished—retired you mean?"

"Mad," said Dr. Cardena. "Quiet and timidly mad. . . . I think he'll come out of it. I hope so. Rest, a change of scene and whatnot. But here he is, all those twenty years gone up in smoke. You know why?"

"Why?"

"Last week he realized for the first time that the snakes which he had been handling for so long could actually kill him."

"Oh, no," I said, scoffing. "That's tall, Doctor. He must have known that before. Every time you pick up a poisonous snake and drain venom from its fangs you must get the idea that if you slip it's curtains."

"True, quite true," Dr. Cardena said. "But it is all impersonal until you translate the actual experience into terms of you yourself. In this case,

fatigue, strain and overwork hit him, mired his mind in a rut of remembrance. A rut that leads him round by the nose in a constant, terrible recollection of rigorous snake-bite cases which he has treated in the past. The terror of his patients is in him now. He's infected with a pathetic fear of his own inability to cope with his work."

"Too deep for me," I said.

"Oh, my aunt," he said. "You're hopeless. Let's go down, John."

. . . But it isn't too deep for me now, for here, after all, is my own rut of remembrance. I am retelling this all to you as I have retold it to myself so many—*too* many—times.

. . . . . .

Cabin D sixty-four was forward of the dining-saloon on D deck, port side of the ship. You reached it by going down the port corridor until the wall of the dining-saloon stopped you. Then you turned right, walked across the narrow alleyway and there it was, the last door. We didn't knock. We opened and went right in.

Dr. Ramon Duga was lying in his bed. For a moment, I could hardly see him. It was dark in there. The lights were off. But outside, the night was translucent as a trout stream, and the tropical moon painted the sea with a cold serene coat.

The reflection on the waters lent the ceiling of the room, by way of the closed porthole, a dimly luminous aspect, radium-like, which gradually brought Dr. Duga into sight. His body was stiff; his eyes were open; they stared sightlessly at the ceiling. His left hand reposed at his side, tightly clenched. His right held a burning cigarette from which, sporadically, he would puff, carelessly shaking small bursts of sparks to the carpeted floor beside the bed. He did not move, except to raise his right arm from the elbow down, in order to lift the stub of the cigarette to his lips. His mouth twitched as though he were speaking. I could hear no sound at all.

Dr. Cardena leaned towards me and whispered: "He is remembering. Get your ear close to his lips and you'll hear what he's saying."

"No," I said, feeling the repugnance of the scene.

"Yes. Go ahead. See what you hear."

I approached the bed and stooped down. There were faint, ghostly words, quite audible when I got close enough. ". . . Madam, a scientist feels no fear. A scientist cannot afford to feel fear. He must have only a sense of extreme caution. . . ." Then a long pause. The lips rested for an instant, and when he began again, his voice was brimming

with profound agony. ". . . *Es mudo! La mordedura es mortal! Ah, ah, moribundo, moribundo.* . . ." Again a wait. And now, coolly professional: "Yes, of course. Local oedema and marked discolouration. Oozing from punctures. Haematuria, probably gangrenous. I would suggest another half vial anti-Brothropic injected intravenously . . ." And dropping off into a gruesome reverie, his tones suddenly and completely wearied of life: "Monday, Monday, so long ago and under my knife the pregnant woman with her leg all swollen—the little black foetus murdered in her womb by the fangs which never touched it. But where am I now, *Dios mio,* where am I now?"

He was silent then. The lips fell still. The eyes drooped, tiredly, then closed.

"That's the end," Dr. Cardena said. "That is the point where he collapsed. He was working on an Indian woman who'd been struck by a bushmaster. He'll lie still like this and then he'll start remembering the whole thing again, starting way back in life. He'll repeat it word for word if you listen sharply."

I said in horror: "Good God—this is—this is a kind of sadism." And I swallowed.

"Unconsciously, yes. The awesome thing is the power of the illusion. It's slowly killing him.

Were he allowed to remain in this rut, the exacting finity of his own thought would finish him . . . I think we'll bring him out of it though. Watch him now."

Since D deck was close to the water-line of the ship, the twin portholes of the cabin were always closed. Fresh air came in by way of three Punkah louvre ventilators directly to the left of the bed, above Duga's emaciated face. They washed it with the draught from the funnels above. An electric fan on the stool at his feet also stirred up the air. As I stood there, I saw that the cigarette in his right hand had burned down. He felt the heat of its tip close to his fingers and he transplanted it with another instantly, resuming the rhythmical inhaling, exhaling without moving anything but his right arm from the elbow down. It was astonishing, that facility. That was the only active light, that red bead of the cigarette, glowing in the darkness like the eye of Polyphemus. When he puffed hard on it, the flare would show his hand. It was a small hand, shiny and cracked like parchment. Once, when he held the cigarette close to his face and puffed, I saw his face. I have never forgotten it. A pinched, piqued thing, æsthetically chiselled, a white-gold pince-nez on the bridge of the thin short nose. In the rigours of his breakdown, it

caught something of the ominous appearance of a death's head—high long forehead, eyes way back in black, deep-set hollows, the mouth hanging open slightly, baring his white, set teeth, the nostrils too prominent, like black holes.

I noticed the waste-paper basket at the side of the bed when he dropped the burnt-out cigarette into it. He didn't look to see whether or not the butt had fallen inside. He took it for granted that it was in—and not on the carpeted floor. As a matter of fact, the butt struck the side of the metal basket, sent off a shower of sparks, then fell safely inside. But even then, I thought, how damned dangerous that was.

Dr. Cardena nudged me. "Go on up to dinner, John," he said. "And thank your God that your mind is your own. I've got to call a steward and feed this fellow. How do you like nervous breakdowns now?"

"I don't like them," I said.

"It rather minimizes your own wound, doesn't it?"

"My own wound is real at least," I said. "What I saw was blood and ruptured flesh. That was no illusion."

Dr. Cardena raised his brows. "Well, now, John," he murmured, "that's problematical too.

I'm not so sure that I agree with you. I'm certain that Mary Baker Eddy wouldn't. And as for Jesus Christ—" he smiled and shook his head, "I'm afraid his rebuke to you would be fearful. . . . Go on along, John, and always be the stolid ignoramus you are. It'll be a comfort if you can keep the protection. But I'm afraid you can't."

I said, annoyed: "What are you talking about?"

He said: "Bring your thumb down to see me to-morrow some time and we'll talk again. Good night."

"Good night," I said.

. . . . . .

Four days passed and I forgot the little man in D sixty-four. On the morning of the twenty-sixth we cleared Port of Spain for St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. The weather had been perfect. And on the twenty-ninth, in the eleventh day of her eighteen-day cruise among the Greater and Lesser Antilles, the *San Marino* found herself no more than a hundred and fifty miles west of St. John, Antigua. She must have been a pretty sight in that run from Port of Spain, for she floated west-north-west upon a sea of glass. And her hull —painted a spotless white—made her reflection in the ocean look as crisp and clean and sterilized as a hospital nurse. No ordinary cruise ship—the

kind which is decked in ribbons and plied with luxuries—the *San Marino* was put on cruise runs only during the months of January and February. Her real berth was the annual six month round-the-world trek which embarked early in March and sailed against the sun round the Cape of Good Hope, thence to India, Japan, Hawaii, the Panama Canal, and New York again. She was trim and taut, her gross tonnage slightly over twenty-thousand tons, her length stem to stern six hundred and twenty-four feet, her beam seventy-three feet. She had been in the service for eight years, her only mishap the ramming of a Chinese junk in the South China Sea during the monsoon, an incident hardly major, since it cost three Chinese lives.

Steadily, lithely, and with a certain emanation of pride in her own prowess, she had crossed the eastern Caribbean Sea, holding obdurately to her twenty knots. Her white wake was stencilled with white swirls and fancy curlecues from her revolving screws. Her ladylike bow broke twin coxcombs against itself, shining white and clean in the unbroken swell. To the west were the ports of call never to be revisited: Havana, Port au Prince, Kingston, Christobal, Barranquilla, Port of Spain. North of her lay the landfalls she would

never hail: St. Croix, St. Thomas. To the east, Montserrat, Basse-Terre, and Martinique settled themselves for the night which was dropping down on them out of Africa. And all around her, the empty, interminable ocean, its infinitude of wet flesh marred only by the sparse rashes of land. . . .

. . . . . .

On January 29th, young Samuels relieved me and I stood outside the wireless-room for a few minutes after I had gone off duty, and I watched the brief garish twilight with its dying fireball of a sun. That was the first time in four days that I remembered Dr. Ramon Duga. The sun made me think of fire, and of the cigarette which had perched precariously on the rim of the waste-paper basket.

I stood there, gripping the rail and I stared into the west. The sun was a sore magenta. Around the fireball a thick grey mist adhered. From behind the mist, precise red-purple rays struck out into space and down into the slowly-stirring sea like the bold design of the Japanese flag. I wondered at the sun breathlessly, and as it dropped I fancied that I might time its break-neck pace and that, if I kept looking, I might see the monstrous geyser of its splash when it plum-

meted into the ocean off Jamaica, a thousand miles away. The mist thickened in consistency like a cooking soup. Up above, the puffy white cirro-stratus clouds were out before the wind, scooting for the north in a wary retreat. If the sun had survived another hour, the swift opacity of the fog would have blotted it out.

South-west—from where the veil before the vanishing sun had come, a forerunner of more troublesome veils—I now saw the sullen greenish-brown nimbus clouds coming north-east with grim speed and spirit. They closed in on the horizon, shutting out the evening sky of the south, and they created there a low-hanging, three-walled room—a kind of atmospheric dungeon—whose deep grey ceiling steadily dropped. Converging to meet the *San Marino's* port bow, the storm-clouds were impenitently overtaking her sterile wake, whiter now in the fading day. North-east the blue-black night had been absorbed by the sky and myriad constellations had begun to twinkle; but I knew that the squall would smother out the stars when it passed us and swept on furiously in its tantrum. Running before the squall, the swells gained height and depth, white-crested and smooth-troughed. They began to reach the port-side, striking hard, jostling the *San Marino* an-

grily for a moment, then surging up in a foamy burst of spray against the bow's stern rebuff. Through the balls of my feet I could feel each punch of the combers, the impact running through the ship with a cadence not unlike a human heart-beat. The ship staggered slightly with each blow, poised for an instant, and then, at last, rolled off her centre with utterly infinite deliberation. In another five minutes, the sun was a corpse. I sighed once, reminded myself to take a couple of Mothersills, and went below to my quarters.

By seven o'clock the night was prematurely complete. It began to rain in long slanting sheets, thick and unbroken like a gigantic window of milky glass. Sometimes the darkness would burst wide open and I could see the fog blow out in front of the wind like smoke from a smouldering blaze. I closed up my porthole instantly and watched the rolling sea through it, catching split-second glimpses of the white boils atop the crests. At times, there were imperfections in the window of solid rain, caused by lulls in the gusts which peppered the porthole with squashy grape-sized drops. The wind was moderate and despite the fact that the *San Marino* had entirely abandoned her fore-and-aft motion, the transverse roll was not

decidedly discomforting.

When I had finished shaving and had dressed for dinner, I put on my mackintosh and climbed up to the bridge to read and initial the night orders. It was wet up there. The wind beat the mackintosh between my legs. Through the gloom forward I could see that the going was rough. The ship took the heavy seas abaft the bow, which was down most of the time under the weight of violent ocean, rising only briefly to spit the load out through the scuppers in anticipation of the next breaking swell. I ducked into the chart-room behind the pilot house and slammed the door hard.

"My, my," some one said. "Isn't it kind of a wet night for the American Marconi Company to be abroad?"

I shook the rain off my shoulders and turned. It was Mr. Flaherty, the senior second officer in charge of navigation, sitting at the table in the chart-room and rubbing his nose with a pencil. It was snug and warm in there, and it made you feel as though the night outside could never touch you.

"Do you run this boat?" I said.

"We do our best," Flaherty said.

"Stop shaking her all up then," I said. "I can't

play with my ping-pong set when you shake her like this. And it just seems a pity to me when I can't play ping-pong."

"Very sorry, sir," Flaherty said, grinning. "We forgot to mention it in the ads. You know—gentle throbbing romance-filled nights in the velvety tropics under a Miami moon where the flying fishes play. . . . This is just something we forgot to mention. A little *mal-de-mer* thrown in free of charge. It's guaranteed either to clear you out or make you a sailor."

"You know, Mike," I said, "I really think you have talent. I know a good booking-agent in the big city. If you're ever interested—"

"You go to hell," he said good-naturedly. "What's new?"

"I was going to ask you that. How bad is this thing going to be?"

"Oh, probably blow out in four or five hours. Your number three boy, Samuels, picked up the *Nichiyo Maru* about ten minutes ago, New York for Kobe. They reported clear weather south-west, so you're probably seeing the worst of this right now."

"The worst is none too good. Who's on?"

"It's Philips's watch. But Davidson is with him just in case."

I frowned. "What's the matter with the old man?"

"Sick as a dog."

"No!"

"Uh-huh. Stomach. I'll swear he's got ulcers. But you try and tell him. He looks God-awful. He was up here when this thing first started and I thought he was going to pass out."

"Why the hell doesn't he have Cardena look him over?" I said.

"Ha-ha," Flaherty said sadly. "A fat chance. He'd have Cardena's neck before you could say goody-goody. Listen, Jack; Davidson just told him to-night to get himself patched up. 'By God, sir,' he roared back, 'you'll mind your own damn business, sir. I'll not be told my own affairs by my officers, so mind your manners, sir, and remember this is no tramp.' Now what can you do with a guy like that?"

"He'll probably die of old age," I said. "Here's Davidson now."

Mr. Davidson came in from the navigation bridge, nodded soberly to me, and went to the communication telephone. Chief officer of the *San Marino,* he was a real sailor, born on a wind-jammer off Hawaii thirty-seven years before. I happen to know that, because he used to refer to the

trip which apparently had been told to him by his parents. The schooner had had to go nearly all the way to Japan, close-hauled, in order to come about and reach Hilo. Davidson was a tense man. Painfully thin, his face was always strained, despite the leathery hide of it. His left cheek had a habit of tightening so that a line like a sabre-cut ran across it. He had light blue gimlet eyes and he squinted furiously. Drawn like a parabola, his mouth was small, thin, bloodless. A deep crescent cleft in his chin emphasized its pointedness. His whole appearance was so utterly gaunt, it made the low-hanging lobes of his ears look ridiculous. . . . He called the captain's quarters on the telephone. "This is the navigating bridge, sir. Davidson speaking. . . . Permission to change course? Dirty going forward. . . . Thank you, sir." All of the words clipped out smartly, and then he hung up.

I left Flaherty and followed Davidson on to the navigating bridge. Mr. Philips, the second officer, was standing by the engine-room telegraph with his arms folded on his chest and his feet spread apart to balance himself. The quartermaster at the helm stood aside and Mr. Davidson took it over. "Mr. Philips!" Davidson said.

"Yes, sir."

"Half speed, Mr. Philips!"

"Half speed, sir," Mr. Philips said.

When the engine-room telegraph had registered, Davidson turned the helm, hand over hand on the spokes, his squinty eyes fixed upon the rudder indicator. The *San Marino* braced herself in that moment, then came over, the white water falling clear of her bow as she rose up across the thundering water. In the sea there were strange staccato bursts, dull and vibrant. Finally, as the ship gained steerageway, the boiling water vanished and the punch-drunk stagger of the bow disappeared entirely. She did not take the seas over her any more; there was only the thin flying spray—when the bow nosed down into the hissing troughs—whipping up from the impact, then whistling off starboard in the wind. The seas rolled at and under the stern and then on now, for the *San Marino* no longer received the full broadside of their buffeting.

"Full ahead, Mr. Philips!"

"Full ahead, sir."

"Helm!" Davidson snapped; and as the helmsman stood on again, he added, less tersely: "The course is due north-east. Look alive, sir, nothing off!"

"Going by the wireless-room?" Davidson asked

me a few moments later. "You might tell your number three boy to give me a report. Ask him where the *Santa Cecilia* is."

"Sure," I said. "Nice bit of wangling there."

He smiled, looking less stern. You could see he felt a lot better with the change in course. He said: "Elementary, my dear Watson, elementary."

"I'll tell Samuels," I said. "The *Santa Cecilia.* Do you want them for anything?"

"No. Just position. And by the way—if you should run into Cardena, tell him to look in on the captain."

"Look in? Why, the old man'll throw him out before he gets his foot in the door."

"I know," Davidson said, looking worried. "But he ought to see the doctor. I was down a few minutes after seven. He was sick to his stomach and in pain."

"What do you think it is?"

He shrugged, and said nothing.

"Flaherty thinks maybe ulcers," I said.

Davidson sniffed. "Flaherty is a good navigation officer. . . . Do you remember the anchor watch off Barranquilla? Captain Ewing called me down to his cabin that night. He was in great pain. First round the stomach, then over to the right side. He swore me to silence, but asked for some ice.

I always understood appendicitis started that way. You tell Cardena to take the risk, Banion. It's serious enough to buck Ewing's stubbornness."

"You don't think there'll be an operation aboard ship?"

"Listen, Banion," Davidson said. "When I was mate of the *Mary Packard*—that was twelve years ago—one of the men took sick with appendicitis eight hundred miles off Capetown. The *Mary Packard* was a tramp with a cargo of tea for New York and we didn't boast a doctor aboard. There was only one thing to do and we did it. We operated ourselves, and the master—Donaldson his name was, he's dead now—did as fine a job as you'll ever see and what's more, he did it with a razor-edged paring knife. . . . So you tell Cardena to look in, and don't forget that report."

"I'll tell him," I said. "I'll tell Samuels," and I went out, waving good-bye to Flaherty on the way.

Young Samuels was alone in the wireless-room, sitting in front of the main transmitter, his earphones cocked crazily on one side of his head in Scully's manner. Scully was chief radio operator, and a paradox at the key. Samuels flattered him for it by sincerest imitation. The kid was twenty-four, and this was his third passage on the *San*

*Marino,* his berth: third radio operator. His full name was Simon Samuels and he was an orthodox Jew. I liked him, liked his short, dark, inconspicuousness. His buck teeth made him homely and the nose upon which his hideous tortoise-shell glasses rested was as long and crooked as any in history. But he was a good operator, anxious to please; and he worked awfully hard at being pleasant, so that you could overlook his puerility. Scully liked to tease him with dirty stories, because Samuels got embarrassed easily. But then, Scully enjoyed his dirty stories better than any one else, anyhow.

When I slammed the door, he jerked round, peering at me through his thick lenses, and exclaimed: "Gosh—you scared me!"

I said: "Hello, kiddo. What's new?"

"Hooked a message five minutes ago through New York Radio," he said. Then, pausing, he smiled at me toothily. "Hello, Mr. Banion. How is it out?"

"Dirty," I said. "Gale from the south-west. High sea, *Mucho llueve.* That's spigotty for rain."

"I thought it was kind of thick," he said.

"You did, heh?"

"Yeah. We were rolling a lot before."

"The music goes round and round—feel sick?"

"Not yet," he said, grinning.

I said: "We'll lose most of it now. We've changed course."

"Gee Moses, but your stomach sure does things when she hangs there a minute before she comes back."

"I think you've got the heart of a landlubber."

"Not me," he said soberly. "No, sir, not me, Mr. Banion. I like it. I just haven't got my sea legs yet."

"You're a seafarer, eh? You like it."

"I don't know whether I like the sea so much or whether it's because I'm sort of a misfit on the land. There's one thing, though, how I feel about the sea."

"How do you feel?"

"Well, I kind of feel like the sea is the only clean thing."

I laughed. "You ought to take a look outside. It's plenty dirty to-night."

"I don't mean like that. I mean, water just seems to be clean, compared to land. The whole earth started in water and it sure was a mistake when land poked its head up because then the world got into trouble. Didn't you ever read Genesis? It took a flood to clean up the world, didn't it? That's what I mean. That's sort of the

spirit of the sea, cleanliness. . . . Here's that message I told you about."

"Where?"

"Right here. It's for Bertha Leeds. Know her?"

"Not with a name like that. Let's see it." I took it from him and read it. It was just a single sentence that went: "UNCLE GEORGE DIED TO-NIGHT." It was signed "FRED." "Too bad. You'd better skip it, kid."

"Skip it?"

"Sure. Let it go until to-morrow. Bad news can always wait."

"If you think so—" he began.

"I think so. No sense hitting some one over the heart on a night like this. She's probably seasick right now, anyhow."

"Well, all right."

"Might spoil her whole evening. File it for to-morrow."

"OK," he said. "I'll file it."

"Davidson wants a report. Tell him where the *Santa Cecilia* is."

Samuels nodded. "I just got the report together. I was fixing it for the watch officer."

"You got her?"

"Yes," he said. "She's north-west of us, Santo Domingo for Rio. She'll come abreast of us early

to-morrow morning. Your watch, I guess. Gosh, sometimes her signals sound a million miles away."

"I'm going down to dinner," I said. "See you later."

"OK. See you later."

"Don't forget that report."

"I won't."

. . . . . .

My watches were called at noon and midnight. These—with the infrequent emergency and anchor watches—gave me a perfect schedule aboard ship. Samuels had both the four o'clock shifts, the least desirable, and Scully held the best, eight in the morning and eight in the evening. Regardless of the fact that it was sometimes a rigorous job to keep awake from three to four A.M., I liked having my mornings free, and I liked dining with ship's company in the evening. Dinner was a pleasant incident, especially during this voyage. I had drawn good companions at my table, number eleven, a six-place.

The dining-saloon was located amidships on D deck, and its fan-top dome extended all the way up to C deck above, its glass curving over gracefully, allowing a passenger on C deck to look down upon the diners. It was a spacious room

and it bred an emanation of sparkling cleanliness: white table-cloths pressed into glossy stiffness, banked by the glittering silverware and the glasses with their diamond-blue and amber highlights. There were seventy-three tables in the main saloon, ranging from three places to eight places.

My company consisted of two men and three women. There were the Kilgores, Waller and Ann, honeymooning. They had been married in Greenwich the day before the *San Marino* sailed from New York and they were naively in love. They made no bones about it either. Their appetites were poor; they held hands; they spent most of their time together in their cabin. Ragged about their numerous afternoon "naps" they would both go scarlet. Ann Kilgore was a rather plain girl, a bit too plump in the hips and pendulous in the breasts. Good family, moneyed, she was a graduate of Mount Holyoke. Her face was round and apple-checked, her hair long, waveless, and ending in a neat bun. Kilgore was slightly older, about twenty-seven I should say, with dark eyes, dark hair and a tragic mouth. His face was a shade too sallow to be handsome, and his voice was very firm and serious. A graduate of Middlebury College, he was—presumably—a young man going somewhere.

What a contrast was hare-brained Richard Dill, the young man who had been to plenty of places! His was a hard-boiled cynical charm, and he was clever. Coupled with his casual good looks was an emotional unstability which led him a merry chase of a life over the world. He was politely requested to resign from three different universities, and then he managed to procure a job with the United Press in Washington as a wire-man. He soon tired of this, struck out for New York. He became a leg-man on one of the evening dailies and free-lanced for the magazines on the side. When the Italo-Ethiopian conflict began, he persuaded a national weekly to give him an expense account, and off he went to Addis Ababa to cover the war. He remained in Ethiopia for three months, tiring of it, and he finally migrated to Germany.

"Hell," he said casually to us, "there wasn't anything to do in Addis except shoot hyenas at night. Sure, there was a war. But where? No one could find it! I got out of there before Charlie lost his grip on the hill people."

"Who's Charlie?"

"The Emperor, King of Kings, Defender of the Faith, Conquering Lion of Judah *ad infinitum*." He paused for breath. "My God, Banion, you

can't like a man and call him all that, can you? So we boys just called him Charlie—

"You never heard the choicest story of the war. Charlie had flown up to Desseye on war business and he came back with the entire Ethiopian air fleet as an escort. You know—about fifteen planes from sport two-seaters to tri-motored Fokkers. Now all the anti-aircraft batteries on the route had been warned that the emperor was coming —except one. That was located near Dire Dawa by that famous railroad trestle you've heard so much about."

"What happened?"

Dill slapped his leg. "They came over there like a bunch of eagles, looking pretty formidable (there were no Italian planes around to disprove that) and this battery saw them coming, never stopped to think that any one but Italy owned planes, and opened up with everything that gun could handle. They fired four hundred rounds faster than those crates were flying."

"Good God—did they hurt him?"

"Hurt Charlie?" He roared with laughter. "They never even hit one of the planes! But that's not the joke—as soon as the battery commander found out his mistake, he headed for Addis Ababa as quickly as possible. He got there and saw the

emperor and he begged forgiveness for having fired upon the fleet and the royal chassis. And I'll be damned if this isn't the honest truth, neither the emperor or any other pilot in the Ethiopian Air Corps ever knew that he had been fired upon at all!"

In Germany, Dill wrote an article in which der Fuehrer was supposed to have told him that the savage persecution of the Jew was merely guile to divert the minds of the masses from their own bad internal condition, the psychology being that if some one was worse off than you yourself, it minimized your own difficulties. Whether or not Hitler actually confided this, I do not know. But regardless, Dill was arrested shortly thereafter and politely eased out of the country. "This time," the authorities told him, "we are keeping you out of Germany. Next time—if there ever is a next time—we'll keep you *in* Germany."

Back in the United States, he joined the staff of a weekly news magazine, which job he planned to start on February 15th. He was on the cruise for a short rest before going into harness, as he put it. A rabid camera addict, he always carried a small Leica with him, strapped under his left shoulder where he could easily reach it. Garnering photos was a serious game with him and you were

always running into him aboard ship catching some passenger in the lens. He had, he told us, pictures of celebrities which any caricaturist would have given money to own. Some of the poses he described were so ludicrous as to make me doubt him. But there was one which wasn't humorous. "I picked it up in a parade in Addis Ababa one afternoon," he said. "The home guard soldiers were marching down the street and I was going to grab a shot of the parade, just ordinary stuff, when a little black boy ran out and got in the way of one of the soldiers. Without even stopping in his stride, the soldier grabbed the boy's wrist, laid it across his own arm, and hit it sharply with his gun butt. The result was a nasty compound fracture and I caught the thing squarely with the Leica. Wolfe, who was with me, wanted to kill the black man, but the mater of the injured piccaninny only scolded her son for getting in the soldier's way—ah, it's a mad country at best, hot, syphilitic, and blood-thirsty. I think Mussolini can do it a lot of good and I wish him luck." You can see how a man like Dill was bound to be good company in spite of anything.

Miss Joanna Niles, an over-fifty travel writer, heavily cosmetized, heavily girdled so that her figure resembled something remotely svelt, sat oppo-

site him. She always wore a rapt vacant smile, which puzzled me somewhat until Dill informed me that she was a first-class dipsomaniac. She lived in Detroit and had made a lot of money from her books. You know the kind: A woman alone through Devil's Island, searching for the white goddess of the Matto Grasso, quest of the elephants' graveyard, and similar veneer. I say veneer because she was a literary faker. Dill used to insult her about it. He said: "I suppose when this sissy trip is over, you'll write one about roughing it in Columbus's footsteps and tell all about your hairbreadth escapes from the barracuda. . . ." But he could never get a rise out of her because she was plainly taken by him, and admitted the duplicity.

The last member of our conclave was Sydney Wells.

Sydney Wells was not pretty. Prettiness carries with it a sullen egocentrism. She had none of that. She was not pretty, but intense. That was it. You could feel the intensity which lay behind her eyes like a dormant volcano. She had a face like a boy's, ovular, thin-chinned, with high sharp cheekbones; all these were accentuated by her hair, cut in a boyish bob. But she was never masculine. Light did amazing things with her hair.

Sometimes it was earth-brown, but when a ray of light struck it, it would suddenly be transformed into rich copper, gleaming with highlights. No hips at all, no breasts to speak of, her body was tall, painfully slim and supple, and when she walked, her footsteps caught the intensity of her eyes. She sat opposite me at the table and she didn't say much. I know now it wasn't shyness but I didn't then. When I first saw her, I was attracted to her, but after I had spoken with her a few times, I knew I was hopelessly gone on her. I didn't say so, for after all, our acquaintance was damnably casual, and according to the run of things, the cruise should have gone off as planned, and I should never have seen her again. But she could have been a rank mystic and still felt the uncanny, sometimes turbulent feeling I had for her. Once I contemplated telling her; but the moment passed and I felt foolish afterwards. Often when our eyes would meet, I could feel her inside me, deep down, and she'd stay there, the whole spirit of her, sometimes hurting me and tightening my throat. That was a recurring painful pleasure. I'd get it often during the midnight watch, sitting at the key, listening to the weather reports and the news bulletins. Suddenly, it would well up inside me, transplanting the remote trembling

of the *San Marino* into my own body, and I would feel as though I had permanently lost my breath.

. . . . . .

"Doctor Cardena!"

"Yes? Who is it?"

"John Banion."

"Oh—come in, John. What's bothering you?"

"Nothing's bothering me. Mr. Davidson asked me to drop in and persuade you."

"My aunt, you sound mysterious! Persuade me to do what?"

"Risk your life."

"Aha. Captain Ewing is having pains in his belly again."

"Yes. Davidson says he's sick as a dog. Davidson wants you to look in on him. Oh, he knows it's taking a chance of dodging shoes, but Ewing's a stubborn old fool and he's got to do something about this thing before it kills him. Davidson is afraid it's appendicitis."

"Afraid it is?—I know very well it is."

"Really? Good God—will you have a look?"

"Of course, John. But Ewing won't listen to me or any one else, including Hippocrates and points south. He'll probably be taking an enema all by himself. Now that's no treatment for an appendix."

"What's the matter with him, then? Why doesn't he have it out?"

"You just said why. He's an obstinate old fool."

"No faith in medicos."

"It's not a case of faith in medicos, John. He's always been his own ship's surgeon. He got his ticket aboard the square-riggers where captain was usually any rank the emergency demanded."

"But appendicitis! He can't operate on himself, Doctor!"

"My dear John—there are two ways to save Captain Ewing's life. One is by surgery. The other is by God. I'm afraid the captain's conception of both mediums is much too narrow. Neither God nor myself will get a chance."

"But he might die."

"*Might!* My precious aunt—he *will!* If not tomorrow, the next day. If not the next day, the next week. And I can prophesy that the cause won't be *anno domini*. I'll see what I can do, John. Good night."

"Good night, Doctor."

. . . . . .

After the dinner-gong sounded, I lingered in the main vestibule of C deck for several minutes, feeling like a love-sick youth with his first bouquet of flowers. As time went on, I thought that I had

missed her, but I saw her appear down the starboard corridor shortly, so I estimated her walking speed and appeared to meet her at the top of the staircase.

"Hello, Banion," she said quietly, glancing at my face once, then dropping her eyes, and before I could say my piece, fumbling the thought on my tongue, she took hold of my arm and half-smiled. "Be a good chap and take me down to dinner?"

"Surely," I said lamely, the wind taken out of my sails. "As a matter of fact—"

"Oh, no," she said, in meek protest. "Not as a matter of fact. That makes it sound so perfunctory. As a matter of fact, Miss Wells, I was just hoping we'd run into each other."

I said: "Are you a mind-reader?"

"Then you were going to say that."

"I'll have to admit I was. But I didn't want it to sound perfunctory."

"No?"

My face felt all hot. "Let's just skip it."

"As you say," she said, smiling slyly.

She held the bannister as we went down, for the *San Marino* had quite a roll and you had to be careful navigating those stairs. She wore a soft print dress with a warm brown background, cut daringly low in the back and sedately high in the

neckline. It seemed to fit her perfectly.

The dining-saloon was only sparsely inhabited, and I could see the first signal effects of the night's squall. *Mal-de-mer* had caused some desertions; I saw, however, that our own table was intact. When we reached it, Richard Dill and Waller Kilgore rose and said "Hello," then Miss Niles and Ann Kilgore echoed it.

When we had all seated ourselves again Dill stared at me in mock gloominess which was admirably shammed, and he said dolefully: "It's quite all right, Banion, old boy. You don't have to hide it from us."

"Hide what from you?" I said, frowning at him.

"Come on now," he said, pleading. "Don't put me off. I'm made of sterner stuff than you think. I am sure we all are. Chin up, chest out, a tear in the eye, but we can stand to hear the worst."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, feeling stupid. "You sound like Horatio Alger's little man."

"The ship," Dill said.

Sydney Wells laughed.

"What about the ship?" I said.

"Doomed, I can see it in your face. It's an emergency. We're going to founder after dinner."

"Oh," I said, sighing.

"Had you going? Listen here, Banion. I'm serious. This is no joking matter. Life and death with me. Tell me the worst. What are our chances? I just want to be prepared."

"Prepared for what?"

Dill ran his hand through his wild hair. "My God, friend, haven't I told you? If we sink, I go to work. It's up to Richard Dill of all the newshawks in the world, to gather together the most dramatic photo of the century. Why—the only reason I came on this jaunt was to cut rosebuds when the crate sank!"

I shook my head at him and started to eat. "They'll use this hull for shrapnel some day. It'll live that long."

"Are you serious?"

"Sure."

He shrugged and sipped his cocktail. "Ah, well. It's a great disappointment. Life is full of great disappointments. Take the Abyssinian dinkey, for instance. I rode on it twice. The only two times in my life. Would Mussolini bomb it when I was on it so that I could get some good shots? Hell, no. Was I a passenger the day Laurence Stallings in his Fox plane was mistaken for ravaging Italy, making Charlie's whole damn army jump off at sixty miles an hour just to take a couple of pot-

shots at him? Hell, no. Some day I'm going to write a great book on all the things which happened when I was in Paducah, Kaintuck. It'll put Duranty to shame."

"You're the emotional type," Miss Niles said. "You really are, Dicky."

"That sounds like an insult, J.N.," Dill said warily. "Me and Stalin—hearts of steel. My guard is always up, lady. If you fainted, I'd shoot it first and catch you afterwards."

"Just a complex," Miss Niles said. "I know *your* type. Underneath you have the heart of a little child. You'd really like to weep at sad scenes in the movies, but you're afraid some one would think you effeminate, so you sneer instead."

"J.N.," Dill said grimly, "I don't go to the movies. I consider the cinema a dire plot to undermine the last remaining vestige of aristocracy in America."

"Now, Dicky, confess. Your favourite dramatic critic wrote that, and you keep repeating it to feel superior."

"Good God!" Dill said, ogling at her. "I hope you don't really believe that."

"Of course I do."

"This is fair warning. Then don't ever look for succour when I'm around. I'm hard-boiled

Harry from New Orleans. Business first, last, and always. That's the stuff fame is built from."

"Fame," Sydney Wells said, "but not homage."

"Look here," Dill said wildly, "let's get off me. The human guinea-pig. What *is* this? Where was I, Banion—oh, yes, sinking ships. Now you take the *Vestris*. You remember the lovely shot that chap caught of her before she went down. Made him famous. If he never takes another shot, he'll never be forgotten."

Kilgore asked in sincere curiosity: "Who was he?"

Dill gasped, then grinned. "That's beside the point. Remember the shot—you know the one—the decks all *thataway*"—he made an expansive sweep with his hands—"almost forty-five degrees—"

"I remember," Kilgore said, nodding.

"And right in the foreground, four guys pulling on a rope. The look on their faces. Drama, sheer drama! And back against a cabin, there was another guy with a lifebelt on. His head is on his chest and his hands are clasped and he's praying as he goes to meet his Maker. You can't beat that for life. Praying while the whole damn shebang is going over her side."

He paused, thinking it over, so I interrupted

and said: "You see that man over at number fifteen opposite us there?"

"Eh?" Dill said, then looked. "Which one?"

"There—the officer who just turned his head."

Dill scowled as he peered. "Oh, hairy ears and jumpy moustache?"

"Yes. That's Dan McGilley, the engineer's assistant. He was aboard the *Vestris* when she foundered. If you'd like to hear him spin some yarns on it, drop below some time and wind him up. He's got some good ones, and a few extra that never happened. He likes to tell them. I've heard most of them too many times as it is."

Dill looked pleased; he rubbed his hands. "Fine! I'll do that . . . Say—" He turned and stared at me. "Are you insulting me? I thought you looked bored."

It was a pleasant dinner. While coffee was being served, the Kilgores excused themselves and hurriedly left. She was sea-sick, her face going green at the aroma. I couldn't help laughing.

We talked for some time and finally Sydney Wells rose and stood there a moment. An embarrassing pause followed before she said: "Are you still squiring me, Banion?"

"A pleasure," I said, rising hurriedly.

"You're very trying on a lady," she said.

"Imagine my status now, pursuing you before witnesses."

She sounded very serious.

"Don't mind him," Dill said. "He's a back country boy."

"He's not very genteel," she said. "Is he?"

"Absolutely not. Imagine a ship's personnel not being genteel. That's the kind of fellow our lives depend upon. Makes a man's blood run cold."

The difference was that Dill was being funny. Anyway, she took my arm and we got out of there. In the auxiliary saloon on the other side of the staircase, the music of the orchestra drifted out and she asked me if I danced, and I said no.

Then she said: "I don't suppose we can walk the deck on a night like this?"

"No," I said.

"You don't sound as if you wanted to."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I really do. And that's a fact."

She shook her head slowly, her lips shining as the hall lights gleamed on them. We stood there in the hall a few seconds.

"Well?" she said.

I didn't know what to do. I felt like an ass. My throat closed up and my mind went blank and I acted like a hayseed. There were so many things

I wanted to say to her and I couldn't think of a single one.

Finally she laughed forcedly. "Well," she said, "I suppose you realize that you're being very rude to a lady who admits throwing herself at you. Perhaps that's the difficulty. Sorry, my fault. Thank you for the gesture anyhow."

I said miserably: "The gesture?"

"Yes," she said, falsely spright. "Politeness. I hope it hasn't been too trying." She bit her lip and her eyes looked troubled. "I think some one wants you—good night."

"Wait a minute," I said, reaching out and grasping her arm. "You've got this whole thing wrong."

But she only smiled thinly over her shoulder as she pulled away and ran up the main staircase. And before I could make up my mind whether or not to follow her, Dr. Cardena tugged at my shoulder and anchored me there. "Come along, John," he said nervously, his voice low. "I didn't mean to be taken up so quickly on my prophecy and it's rather shaken me."

"What prophecy?" I asked vaguely, still staring up the staircase.

"No matter," he replied. "That's the way things go, I suppose. It was a turmoil at best. You know,

John, the way he was lying, his face seemed to look at the porthole covered with rain, as though he were trying to search out a belated peace within his own pain. I wonder if he could have thought of the lines—but of course he did not—how do they go? Oh, yes:

> *"For rain it hath a friendly sound*
> *To one who's six feet underground;*
> *And scarce the friendly voice or face:*
> *A grave is such a quiet place."* *

"What are you saying?" I asked quickly.

"Mr. Davidson," he said with gravity, "is master of the *San Marino.*"

"What?" I cried. "That can't be!"

"It is. I took a look in on Captain Ewing as you requested."

"Not dead!"

"Yes."

* *Renascence: Edna St. Vincent Millay.*

THE SILENCE HAD BEEN HATCHING FOR SEVERAL minutes and it soon became an electrical tension. It was a surging relief to hear eight bells for the change of watches; it gauzed the sharpness of the scene. Here, after all, was the ship, strong, steady, and obedient. Here, after all, was her master, Mr. Davidson, his gaunt face still jerking spasmodically from the shock, his tanned hands trembling very slightly at the realization of his new responsibility. He was a seaman, not a mourner. You could see him thinking that, steeling himself against his emotions.

"When I came up, I couldn't see any one at first," Dr. Cardena explained in a low voice. "Then when the ship rolled, the bathroom door banged and I thought it was Ewing—thought he

had knocked something over. I knocked again and called to him and went in, but when he didn't come out of the bathroom, I investigated myself. He was pretty much as you see him now, except that I had to turn him slightly to examine him. His left arm was hanging over into the bath there, and he was face down on the tiles. That bruise on his cheek came from the fall. I think he was dead when he fell."

"What's that on his left hand?" I asked.

"That's an impression," Dr. Cardena said, "from the glass door-knob. That's why I think he was dead when he hit. He must have gripped that door-knob in a spasm. It was strong enough to stay in his flesh this long. You can see the diagonals of the knob."

Mr. Davidson swallowed a few times. "A nasty business," he said. "I can't say I'm surprised—"

"Do you know what happened?" I asked.

Dr. Cardena pushed up his lower lip. "I think his appendix burst. I don't know really. I'll have to perform an autopsy."

"He looks grey," Davidson said. "He looks awfully grey."

"It's just the light," I said.

"Yes, he's waxy like any other," Dr. Cardena said. "It's just the light."

"Nasty."

"I'll want him removed to my office as soon as possible."

Davidson nodded. "I'll detail the men immediately," and he took a deep breath and started for the door. I called after him and he stopped.

I said: "You're master, sir. I want to be first to wish you good luck. I know you'll bring her in safely."

His thin mouth held a ghost of a smile. "That's nice of you. Thanks, Sparks."

"And I too," Dr. Cardena added.

"Thank you, Doctor."

We shook hands with him. His hand was cold and his fingers were clammy but his grip was like iron. "You'd better put it on the air," he said tersely. "Ask for any instructions."

"I'll tell Scully. It's his watch."

Dr. Cardena went back to the bathroom door and glanced sadly at the body on the floor. "Ah, well," he murmured. "Poor devil. He's got to go back to land to be buried. He can't even have the sea."

Davidson started. "The sea? He didn't want the sea, Doctor! Not Captain Ewing!"

"No?" Dr. Cardena said, puzzled.

"Not by a long shot. I was telling Sparks about

the night of the anchor watch off Barranquilla. He said to me that night, 'Davidson,' he said, 'you're just waiting around for me to die so's you'll get this ship.' And when I said I probably wouldn't get the ship anyhow, he said: 'Davidson,' he said, 'promise me one thing, sir. Don't let 'em slide me off the beam. The sea has had me all my life and it won't have me when I'm gone. By God, sir, I want to burn!' 'Burn, sir?' I said. 'Aye, sir,' he said. 'I want a royal cremation, that's what. By God, Davidson, a royal cremation, you understand?' " There was a dead calm while Davidson sighed. "It's a nasty business at best, dying."

"I'll tell Scully," I said.

"You do that. See if the marine office has anything to offer."

Outside, the night was filled with the wind and the ocean; the rain had slackened perceptibly, which was a relief, since I had left my oils below. But the wind hauled south-west with force five and it nearly blew my teeth into my throat. I gripped the rail and went forward, catching a glimpse of the *San Marino's* lonely funnel staggering overhead in the dark. Forward, I was barely able to discern the bridge wing-tips with their glassed weatherbreaks. The high howl of the wind on the boat-deck smothered the deep thun-

der of the racing seas alongside as they swept by, white, mad, rapacious. The yellow patch of light in the wireless-room was a welcome sight to see in that gloom. I went in, shutting the door behind me hard, the curtains flying all awry in the gusts which entered with me. In the light, I could see the glazed spots of rain on my uniform.

Scully was on duty. "*Hel*lo, admiral," he said lazily, grinning.

"Hello," I said. "Where's Samuels?"

"He went below," Scully said.

"Well, I've got bad news."

"Yeah?"

"The old man is dead."

"Well, for God's sake!" he exclaimed. "Dead?"

"Dr. Cardena found him a few minutes ago."

"Well, for God's sake, what do you know about that?"

"You knew he'd been sick."

"Sure, sure, bad gut."

"Dr. Cardena thinks his appendix burst."

Scully shook his head in mild surprise. The grin never left his face. "Well, well, the old man's kicked in. So what do we do?"

"Davidson is master now," I said.

"Now?" Scully jeered. "That's a hot one. You're a card, Jack, just a card. Why, Davidson's been

master of this ship a long time. If Ewing was a sailor then I'm the swan in Pavlova's dance. . . . Honest to God, Jack, you aren't going to fall for all that stuff about Ewing's sterling seamanship, are you?"

"You didn't like him."

"Why, Jack," Scully said, "that grizzled old bastard didn't know port from starboard!"

"Cut it out."

"The hell you say. You know it as well as I do. It was taking your life in your hands just to sail with him. I've only felt like a free man since Davidson signed on."

"Cut it out," I said again.

"Boy, I'm telling you. He's safer dead. You and me and lots of passengers are a lot better off. It makes seafaring safer all round."

I said: "He's dead now. It's easy to talk about a man after he's dead."

"Oh, my God," Scully said, groaning. "You're going scrupulous on me."

"Maybe I am. You didn't like Ewing because he didn't like you."

"Now, Jack—"

"I kind of agree with him. I guess you know it. So cut it out when I'm round."

"Isn't that awful?" Scully sighed. "Now he's

sore at me. Don't be sore at me, Jack."

"Never mind that stuff," I said. "Davidson wants a report. You're to get in touch with the marine office and give them the dope and ask for instructions. Then pick up the weather and ships."

"Hey, I sent a report to the watch officer five minutes ago!"

"Well, send up another. Those are Davidson's orders, not mine."

"Judas," Scully said. "Heaven help the Morsemen on a night like this." And he went to work on the key.

I sat down for a few minutes, vaguely aware of the chatter of the contacts. The quiet cat-like whine of the main transmitter made me relax. I sat behind Scully and stared at the broad nape of his hairless neck.

His full name was James Scully and he was built like a hog. You've seen a hog standing by its bin, blunt-nosed, with a full-cheeked grin, the mouth shining with the wetness of the bin-slops, the eyes dull, the body short-legged, barrel-like, flabby. That was Scully all over. His cheeks were heavily jowled and they shook like jelly when his moon face fell into its casual grin. His lips were always wet. He hardly had a nose. It was button-

small, babyish. His sparse hair was brick-red. He was overweight for his short height, two hundred and fifty pounds, so that the slightest exertion drenched him in his own perspiration. He disgusted me; I didn't like him at all.

Bathed in the xanthic glow of the bulbs over his head, he seemed to crouch towards the transmitter as though he were famished for a piece of it, his eyes half-closed while he hummed the strains of *Home, Sweet Home* above the burping voice of the contacts. . . . This went on for several minutes, the tune changing to *Swanee*. His singing voice was not unpleasant, a trifle falsetto and nasal, but capable of carrying the melody.

"Hey, Jack!"

"Yes?"

"What has Jolson got that I haven't got?"

"You really want me to tell you?"

He grinned. "Never mind, never mind. I'm not shopping for insults. You're still sore at me, Jack."

"I'm sore at you."

"You see? In the grip of this emotion, you couldn't give an unbiased opinion."

"You go to hell."

"Will you listen to the guy," Scully laughed. "You're just a card, Jack, no kidding."

I didn't say anything.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," he said without warning. "What've we got here?" And his fat hands began to beat out a clacking tattoo on the typewriter which sat in front of him. I asked once: "What is it?" but he didn't hear me because he had his earphones on tightly now and the sound of the machine drowned my voice out. When he finally finished, he yanked the paper out of the carriage roller and threw up his hands. "There we are. Davidson's the bona-fide master. We're carting Ewing's stiff all the way to New York, arriving on regular schedule."

"I'll take this up," I said. "Where's the other report?"

"Right here."

"Who's close?"

"*Santa Cecilia,*" he said. "She'll come abreast to-morrow morning. Your watch, admiral."

"Who else?"

"*Nichiyo Maru,* far south. The *Inverra* southwest for the Canal. Weather's cleared down there but there's wind and high sea. The *Tivia's* sixty east twenty north and she's catching it too."

"OK," I said. "That's that."

Scully smiled at me. "Sure, admiral. Now take care of your own appendix. I'd hate like hell to have to stand your watch to-night with me so

sleepy."

"I can understand that," I said acidly and went out.

. . . . . .

I wasn't sure at first, because the flying scud was down round us now thick as snow and almost as cold; but I thought I saw a figure standing on the boat-deck opposite the wireless-room, hanging there in a moist, wraithlike unreality while the *San Marino* persisted in pitching. I was on my way back from the navigating bridge, having left the data with Mr. Davidson, and I was going below to get a little rest before my own watch. As I came closer the turbid muck around her vanished and I saw that it was Sydney Wells standing there, hatless, her face turned directly into the wind. An eerie luminescence from the bursting seas alongside made her face stand out in the mists which shot by towards the bow, and it looked fragilely white. I picked my steps carefully against the studied deliberate roll of the ship and worked aft until I reached her. She must have heard my heels on the deck boards because she turned just as I touched her and for an instant she smiled, her long perfect teeth sharp against the softer image of her face.

I said, sharp: "You shouldn't be up here!"

"Hello, Banion," she said. She turned towards me, looking amused. Her back was against the sea and she hooked her elbows round the rail, her thin legs spread wide apart to hold her steady, her swagger coat flying open and out in the wind.

It was hard to hear above the intermingling sounds; I cupped my hand and said: "What are you doing up here?"

"Pursuing you!" she replied. "I'm very brazen!"

"You shouldn't be here!"

"Is it against the law?"

"It's dangerous!"

"Nonsense!" she cried.

"Too much roll!"

"But there's no sea up here, not even spray! Look—you can see it shipped off the bow before it even comes up!"

"It's the roll," I said vehemently. "Suppose you slipped—"

"All right, all right," she said. "I'll go down. You're such a stolid chap, Banion. Don't look so alarmed for heaven's sake!" She shook her head. "Aren't you getting wet?"

"A little, yes."

"Let's go, then. Give me your arm."

I gave her my arm and we went aft, stumbling

like inebriates. It was rather funny and we both began to laugh. "Really, Banion," Sydney Wells said, "your ship is much too rambunctious. There's no decorum to be had with it whirligigging like this."

"The ship is a sedate young lady," I said. "Your elements are the rambunctious ones. They're mad because they can't make any headway with her."

"Why, Banion!" She glanced at me soberly. "You're a potential Æsop."

"Here's the companionway," I said. "Go ahead. You first."

"No. Come down with me. It looks slippery."

I said: "Pretty narrow going."

"But slippery with this pitching. Oh, Lord, Banion, don't be such a stubborn chap. You're Irish, not Teuton, so let's both go down and hang on to me."

"All right."

I took her arm this time and we descended into the companionway down the steep narrow steps. It was electrically lighted, of course, and we could see where we were going plainly, but it was awkward, the two of us and the ship tumbling together. Once we fell against each other and Sydney grabbed my lapel; she was close up against me then, her scattered hair below my mouth

against my chin. I could smell her, clean and fresh like the rain, and it made me shiver.

"Sorry," she said, straightening up.

"That's all right."

We had reached the promenade deck and here we stopped. "What's your first name?" Sydney asked me suddenly.

"John," I said.

"John?" She didn't like it. "No. I'll keep calling you Banion, I think."

"By all means."

"Are you amused?" she asked.

I shrugged my shoulders, smiling.

"Why are you amused?"

"I don't know exactly. You come at me too fast. That's it. You're kind of unexpected. When you left me after dinner, I figured you'd never speak to me again."

She looked serious. "And now I'm having a clandestine meeting with you in the shade of the old boat-deck companionway."

I laughed. "Well, you'll have to admit—"

"You mustn't mind me, Banion," she said quickly, cutting me off. "I told you I was pursuing you and I don't think you quite believe it. Or else you don't fancy it. I give you fair warning, I'm in deadly earnest. I've cause to be."

"I can't tell now whether you're pulling my leg or not," I said.

"I'm not pulling your leg. Oh, it's fantastic enough, I know. Why any one should pursue a phlegmatic lout like you, I don't know. Perhaps it's your uniform."

"Then why did you fly off the handle before?"

"I?" She dropped her shoulders. "When the people I like don't like me, they can hurt me. Very much. I'm really afraid of them then. I'm afraid of you right now. That's an idiot's philosophy, but I mean it. I'm afraid of people I like." She pushed back the fringe of hair which had flung down across her eyes. "You're not."

"No, you're right there."

We stepped into the main hall of the promenade deck. It was brightly lighted and I could see her face was all shiny from the wetness, and her hair had been blown wildly askew. Her eyes looked tired.

"Banion."

"Yes?"

"Take me down to my cabin please?"

"Sure. Elevator or walk?"

"Let's walk."

"You've said the word."

We spiralled down with the main staircase to

C deck. The ship appeared astonishingly empty. Two men passed us on their way up to the smoking-lounge, and there were stewards about now and then, but the decks were like ghost towns: they glared with light; they were filled with the distant melodies of an orchestra and the quiet rumbling of the *San Marino's* engines; but they were uninhabited. "There's nothing wrong, is there?" she asked on the way down.

"Do I look as though something is wrong?" I said.

She nodded. "Rather taut, yes."

I said: "You're pretty good. Something is wrong." But I didn't tell her what and I was glad she didn't ask, because I didn't want to discuss Ewing's death.

Her cabin was on the starboard side abaft the main staircase, number C forty-one. My own was almost directly across the ship on the port side. I told her so; she didn't seem surprised and she didn't say anything, just handed me her key.

I opened the door and swung it back, snapping on the light. It was a single and outrageously small; a bed against the right wall; a wardrobe closet and a green settee along the left wall; between them, opposite the door, a white enamelled wash basin. "It isn't much," Sydney Wells said,

wistfully, "but I call it home on the bounding main. . . ." And when I didn't say anything she took a deep breath. Smiling brokenly, and attempting to be utterly casual, she said: "Come in for a few minutes if you want, Banion," taking off her coat and throwing it on the settee. After a pause she turned and I was still in the alleyway.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Oh!"

"It's just—"

"Don't you want to come in?"

"It's just that there's—"

"Banion," she said, alarmed, "you don't think I'm trying to—"

"No, no, there's a law—"

"Oh . . . Yes, the law. There *is* a law, isn't there! I'd forgotten. Well—thanks, Banion. You're a good chap. Thanks for squiring me again. And good night."

"Wait a minute," I said, putting my hand on the door.

She paused, watching my face.

"I'll come in," I said.

. . . . . .

Inside, her eyes were troubled, her tongue played across her lips nervously, and her mouth would knot in one corner suddenly as she gnawed

there. I took off my cap and stood for a moment, until she said: "Sit over there and make yourself comfortable." Then she turned her back as though she were ashamed of herself, and she picked up her swagger coat and hung it in the wardrobe closet. After that, she went to the wash basin and glanced at herself in the mirror. She gasped and seemed to relax, laughing softly. "Oh, Lord, I'm such a mess. Look at my hair. Banion, you're a lowdown cad. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Your hair looks fine," I said. I meant it. It never looked better. It was all tangled from the wind but it seemed to fit her perfectly.

"It's like a fish net," she said.

"I like it."

"It's terrible!"

"I like it fine," I said. "You wouldn't change it if you knew how it looked."

"How?"

"Clean and free, sort of."

"You sound like a tonsorial sage."

"I don't like slicked hair," I said. "Reminds me of a greasy sea. The first time I ever was seasick was on a greasy sea, humped with a greasy ground swell."

"You don't make it sound pretty."

"It wasn't pretty," I said, making a face.

"All right, I'll leave it like this then. Just for you."

"Thanks."

She sat down opposite me on her bed and she glanced down at the floor, stretching out her legs and pointing her pumps down. I realized for the first time that she'd changed clothes. The print was gone and she was wearing a yellow and brown sport dress. It was very cheerful. Behind her and over her head, there was a porthole. The wind rippled the wet film on it each time the troughs came down. There was a strange remoteness in the room. If you've ever stepped from the platform of a car in a rolling train into the interior of the car, you know what I mean. The roar of friction, steel on steel, and the clicking of the wheels on the rail-breaks are reality until you step inside. There after, they are hypnotically remote, a group of soft sounds, quite unreal, seemingly a part of existence on the outside of your car. It was like that in the cabin. Outside the night and the wind and the rain and the sea took on unreality.

After a long time, Sydney looked up from the floor. She didn't say anything, and we just sat there, steadily watching each other's eyes. My wind began to come up and it was harder to breathe. I stirred uncertainly at length and started

to say something. I only made a funny croak. I cleared my throat quickly as she raised her brows, furrowing her forehead.

"Did you say something, Banion?" she asked.

"No. Yes—"

"No—yes—which is it?"

"I wanted to come in," I said. "You must have known that."

She nodded. "I thought you did and I wanted you to."

"There's a law, you see."

"Oh, of course!" She smiled sardonically. "The good old law. Section 280 of the Revised Statutes."

"How did you find that out?" I asked, surprised.

" 'Any officer who, during the duration of the voyage under promise of marriage or by threats of the exercise of authority or solicitation or the making of gifts or presents, seduces and has illicit connection with a female passenger shall be fined not more than one thousand dollars or imprisoned for not more than one year or both.' "

"I'll be *damned!*" I said. "How did you find that out?"

"It's right, isn't it? You see what the Sydney Wells Gay-pay-ooo can unearth when it has to?"

"You've got a good memory," I said. "Where did you read it?"

"I didn't read it. I asked about it."

"Asked about it?"

"Certainly, it seemed the best strategy at the moment. One of your comrades seemed obsessed with the idea of entering herewith, kissing me, and making himself comfortable. He was no mean Thespian, Banion, you have to hand it to him. He was positively famished for the love and affection of an innocent woman—and so adamant! . . . I didn't know what to do with the chap. So I asked him if there wasn't some sort of law."

"Who was he?" I asked.

"I thought the ruse would completely discourage him," she said, "but it didn't. He proceeded to give me a full quotation of Section 280, all the time trying to impress upon me the fact that he was risking life, honour, lucre and the gaol just through his naive quest for my company. What conceit?"

"Who was he?"

"Mr. Crawford, the purser."

"Oh," I said slowly, "Crawford."

She stared at me in wonderment. "You don't like him," she cried. "You don't like him at all!"

"You're pretty good," I said.

"But you don't try to hide it. It shows in your face."

"I can't help that."

"You can't help it?" Her voice dropped. "But, Banion, you've no talent for concealing your thoughts! What can you do? It leaves you tactless and unarmed."

"It leaves you honest, doesn't it? You can take the tact and the weapons. I'll take the honesty. It saves time and trouble and words and misunderstanding in the long run, even if it makes enemies."

There was a long silence and in it, I twisted round on the settee clenching my hands together and feeling all out of shape internally. Sydney Wells's eyes roved all over my face without once meeting my gaze. At last she said timidly: "Do you really believe that?"

"I believe it."

"All right." She jumped to her feet and faced me like a child. "I believe it too. I was never much of a Fabian. . . ." She knotted her hands into fists. "You probably want to know exactly what's going on here. I'll tell you. I thought I was blessed when I ran into you before dinner. I'd thought about running into you like that when I dropped off to sleep at nights. It all went off so perfectly then. It would, I suppose. I went up to the boat-deck to-night because I saw you go up there, I

followed you because I thought you might talk to me again and bring me down here just as you did. That's why I went up. I think I'm in love with you. That would seem to follow. And all along I've had the feeling that you're in love with me. I'm brazen, Banion, I know it. But I've had it with you sitting there at the table and I haven't been able to lose it. That's why I've been up to your wireless-room in the afternoons so much. I don't care about the people I've been radioing. Listen to me, listen to me, I'm shameless, but I mean it! Oh, Banion, please go away now. I'm going—I'm going to cry if you don't—I'm so ashamed—"

I said, trembling: "Listen, Sydney—"

"Please, go, please, please!"

I turned and went to the door but when I put my hand on the knob, I stopped, feeling once, then letting go of it as though it were a snake. When I looked at her again, her cheeks were glazed.

"I can't do it," I said with finality.

She didn't hesitate then. She ran across the room to me and suddenly she was close against me, mashing her supple hips against mine as she strained to get closer. I put my arms around her hard and kissed her on the mouth until it hurt. She broke away in a few seconds staring up at me

pallid, breathless, then kissed me harder, her lips hot as they went swiftly over my face with the eccentric bobbing motion of a night miller. I gasped once and tried to speak but she interrupted me by clinging to my mouth.

At that moment of our fusion, the *San Marino* took a recalcitrant sea to port and rolled heavily. Losing our balance, we half-broke, still hanging onto each other's arms, and we stumbled across the cabin towards the settee. But then when the ship came back, it caught us unawares, and we ran backwards across the room, falling into the bed, our legs hanging over the side. Panting, I looked down into her face. Her mouth shook violently, light brown from its own bloodlessness, and her eyes were filled with tears. "Oh, God, Banion!"

"Listen, Sydney," I said, gasping, "listen to me."

"Oh, God, Banion," she cried, "what's happening to us?"

"Sydney, for God's sake—you've got to listen to me. You're into me. You're deep into me."

"Sweet—"

"You hurt. My God, darling, you can't know how you hurt—"

"Yes, yes, I do know—"

"Deep."

"I do know because that's the way it's been with you across from me at the table. That's the way it's been every night and every day since I saw you. . . ." And she was kissing me again, lying on her side and arching herself against me.

We must have lain there like that for ten minutes without another word, until she said: "Do you love me, Banion?"

"That's it, I guess," I said.

"Say it. Say it to me."

I could breathe again and my voice didn't croak this time. The words came much easier than I expected they would. I said: "I love you."

She seemed to sigh, rolling on to her back, her arms lying immobile at her sides, her eyes closing. "I love you, I love you, what lovely words. . . ." Then a thought crossed her mind; it seemed to mar her face. She sat erect, thinking, then buried her face in her hands, her knees pulled close against each other.

"Take it easy," I said, putting my arm round her.

"I'm not crying," she said brightly. "Really I'm not. Please take your arm away."

"You're coming at me too fast, Sydney," I said. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing really. I'm just silly."

"Look at me."

"NO."

"Come on," I said. I took her chin and turned her face around and kissed her lightly.

She was scarlet.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Oh, sweet," she said tremulously, "when I think how I ran after you—"

"Cut it out," I said, laughing at her.

"—I was so afraid we would lose it—I thought we might just pass through each other's lives—"

"I know how you feel."

"But you don't, you can't. I ran after you. You didn't run after me."

"I wanted to. I didn't have the nerve."

She put her hand to her mouth. "I feel like such a harlot," she said.

"Don't say things like that," I said.

"Banion, I want to think it over. Do you mind going away for a while? Please go away and let me alone."

"No."

"Yes."

"All right," I shrugged. "If that's the way you feel."

"You're not angry with me, darling?"

"No," I said, acting as though I were.

She smiled at me and slowly shook her head. "You look a wreck. You're all lopsided like the ship. Oh, dear, you'd better fix yourself before you go or every one will look at you and say you've been visiting with the fast lady in C forty-one."

"They will like hell," I said, feeling my own weight.

She laughed lightly. "You're a dear chap. I love you very much."

"Thanks. I'll go along then."

"Yes. Kiss me first."

I took her and kissed her gently and held her head against my chest a long time. She whispered: "I just want to think, darling. That's all. Come back in half an hour."

I said: "All right, Sydney."

"See you later, sweet."

And I went out.

. . . . . .

I rearranged myself in my own cabin on the other side of the ship and when I was finished, I figured I'd go up and kill time with Dr. Cardena and see what had happened to Captain Ewing. When I reached C deck's main hall at the staircase, Frank Crawford, ship's purser, came down and passed me with a passenger, a tall elderly man who wore glasses and had a steely-haired dignity.

I looked after them, frowning, and when I reached B deck I found young Samuels waiting there for me, having seen me coming up. His head was hanging forward on his neck at a forty-five degree angle and he looked excited. "Gosh, Mr. Banion!" he said. "You sure missed it!"

"Missed what?" I asked, curious.

"Everything's been happening," he said. "Did you hear about Captain Ewing?"

A pair of passengers passed us at that moment so I glared at him and said: "Keep it low, kiddo, keep it low. I heard."

"Isn't it awful?"

"Yes."

"And then that man with Mr. Crawford. Is he in a jam?"

"What about him?"

Samuels shook his head. "I saw the whole thing. I was standing in the smoking-lounge when it all happened."

"Well—what happened?"

"Mr. Crawford's putting that man in the brig. He's a passenger. His name's Horace Thompson."

Just then, Mr. Philips, second officer, strolled up and hit me on the back, then clasping his hands behind him said, "I see you've heard the gossip."

"I haven't heard a damn thing," I said. "Try-

ing to pull it out of this kid is like borrowing money. What happened—did Thompson kill somebody?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Philips said. "They caught the poor devil cheating in a poker game."

"Oh, for God's sake," I said.

"Mr. Crawford caught him," Samuels said. "I saw the whole thing."

Mr. Philips looked interested. "Did you see it? How did it happen?"

"They were playing cards, four of them. I don't know who one was but there were Thompson and Mr. Bradley who's always asking for the market reports—and Mr. Harrington."

"C. Emery Harrington?" I said. "He's just as bad. They would be together. Honestly, Philips, you ought to see this chap. He comes up regular as clockwork every day, fawns a little and then says: 'Well, my boy, what was the closing price of Harrington Aircraft—that's *my* stock, you know, ahem, ahem!' "

"Go on, Sparks," Mr. Philips nodded to Samuels.

"Well, they were playing a card game there and Mr. Crawford stood off, watching. And just when Mr. Thompson was going to rake in the pot—for plenty too, let me tell you—Mr. Crawford stopped

him and asked if he could examine the cards. You know what I think? I think Bradley and Harrington arranged the whole thing. They didn't look surprised at all, pleased in fact, and they told him to go ahead. Mr. Crawford looked the cards over then but he couldn't find a thing. So he said to Mr. Thompson, 'Would you mind lending me your spectacles for a moment?' And—"

"Good Lord!" Mr. Philips said mildly. "Don't tell me the scholarly old boy was using the luminous reader?"

"That's it!" Samuels said. "That's what they called it. When you had his glasses on you could see writing on the back of the card that told what card it was."

Mr. Philips smiled, shook his head and glanced at me. "A gambler of the old school, poor devil. I haven't met with one quite so trusting for years."

"Years?" I said. "Decades, Philips. Every honky-tonk has used the luminous reader. They can't even ring it in now on mere tyros."

Samuels was looking down the staircase. "He was awfully nice about it. He didn't make any fuss at all. He just looked kind of resigned to fate."

"I wonder why the brig," I said. "Ewing picked up two sharps on the Nassau cruise and didn't do

any more than confine them to their cabins."

"The brig it is," Samuels said.

"You know how it is," Mr. Philips said. "Davidson's first command. Wants everything to be shipshape. He's a little nervous about it."

"Oh."

"I could see it when the watch changed. Just got his wind up a trifle."

"That's nice," I said laconically. "So old Horace Thompson goes in the brig."

Samuels sighed. "Gosh, I saw the whole thing."

. . . . . .

I went into Dr. Cardena's office. It gave me quite a turn to run up against Captain Ewing's body lying on the settee under a white sheet which was moulded gruesomely to the form. The doctor was in the connecting cabin, and when he heard the door close, he poked out his head, saw me, then came in, murmuring: "Hello, John," tiredly.

I said: "Good God!" and stared at him.

"I was just washing up."

"You look terrible."

"That's the way it is. I finished with it as quickly as possible." He was wearing a surgical apron and it was covered with brown stains as though he had stuck a pig.

"Take it off," I said. "I don't like the look of that."

"It is nasty. Wait a minute." And he returned to his own room.

I called after him: "Did you find out what really happened to him?"

"Appendix," he called back.

"It did burst then."

"Burst! It detonated! His liver was bad too. Just a question of time."

"I can't hear you."

"I said—just a question of time. Never mind. You can come in now if you want."

I got up and went in; he was washing his face and his hands. The surgical apron had disappeared. I handed him the towel he was groping for and then took a seat on his settee. He had good-sized quarters, furnished in landsman fashion, with red-dotted white curtains—very frilly things—over his ports. The feminine touch was incongruous since he was a confirmed but unostentatious misogynist. I glanced at the locomotive model on his desk. I said: "It looks as though it might be finished."

"It is," he said. "Just needs a paint job now. It gave me trouble. I had to put the motor in the tender. No room in the firebox. It looks sweet

though."

"Yes."

"It's a sweet little loco. I'm anxious to see it roll."

"Yes," I said, strained. I didn't feel like talking about his damned engine, and I was sorry I started it.

When he had dried himself, he stretched out on his bed, lighted a cigarette, and exhaled mournfully. "My good aunt, but I'm tired. And what's bothering you?"

"I'm in love," I said.

Dr. Cardena chuckled openly and threw up his hands. "Incurable disease, but it seems to do a lot of good to most people. Are you serious?"

"Too serious," I said. "I don't know whether I like it or not. I don't understand her."

"Of course you don't. *Varium et mutabile semper femina.* Where would Eros be to-day without this device of perplexity? I wouldn't let it bother you, John. You're bound to like *and* dislike the idea, if you're sincere about it. What monotony it would be otherwise!"

"I don't see where you get off to talk. You've never been married."

"As bad as that!" He scowled at me. "And you're quite right. Pay no attention to me. My

ideas are all emulgent at best. Who is the girl?"

"You don't know her. Sydney Wells."

"Mmm. I *do* know her—"

"What did you think?"

"An interesting girl. Paranoic, I'd say. Leaning towards monomania. Sensitive on the idea of herself."

"Oh, my God," I said, "must you talk like a diagnosis?"

"Oh, come now, John. I'm quite serious. You must realize it, if you've talked with her at all. It's quite apparent from her conduct."

"What do you mean exactly?"

"The girl is very confused. She's trying to do the impossible. . . ."

"Meaning? Go on."

"My aunt, John, I don't know her well so I can't be detailed. My impression is that she attemps to treat her mundane problems in terms of intellectualism, but the tangle comes when she fails."

"Fails? How does she fail?"

"Why, it's so obvious! The true intellectual is heartless. And your Miss Wells certainly feels the need—whether she admits it or not—of the proverbial milk of human kindness. I should think that would account for her uncertainty in the face

of realities."

"You're too deep for me. Let's skip it."

"Oh, well, as you say. It's been a mad night at best." He leaned back, then stopped himself and laughed right out loud. "You should have been here earlier! My aunt, what a treat! Two patients interrupted me at different times during my post-mortem on Ewing. They just walked in."

"With all that gore on you?"

"It was worse then!" He laughed again. "I should have locked the door."

I shook my head. "Just a practical joker at heart. I bet it scared hell out of them."

"One of them, yes," he said, smoking. "A woman—Mrs. Bradley. I never did find out the cause of her visit. Seasick, no doubt. She took one look—good Lord, her face was a sight—and she retreated with—I must say—as much dexterity as a Mr. Lee once showed . . . I really can't say I blame her; I must have looked like something out of Poe. But her expression! Really, John, she couldn't have closed the door when I had the temerity to burst out laughing! My word!" He took a breath to ease himself. "Do you know whom I mean?"

"Sure," I said. "I know her."

"The woman who's been gadding with Craw-

ford."

"That's she. If you want to lose money, you bet me that she hasn't been sleeping with Crawford ever since they passed Sandy Hook."

Dr. Cardena didn't say anything for a moment. He rose up in his bed, exhaling a long grey-blue stream of smoke. Then he put out his cigarette. "Her husband is with her, John."

"That makes a lot of difference," I said. "I'll draw you a map. The Bradleys have a suite aft on this deck. Two connecting cabins and baths. All she has to do at night is lock the connecting door between and then let Crawford in through her own regular door."

"That makes the pathetic lock the only means of suspension for the sword of Damocles which hangs over Mrs. B.'s *lit d'amour*. It's such a precarious method of pleasure."

"They're spontaneous enough, I daresay," I replied jeeringly. "They've got a slight edge. If the old boy knocks, it gives Crawford time to take it on the run before Mrs. B. unlocks. Nice people, Doctor. All very nice people. Only the best people inhabit the *San Marino*. It says so in the ads. After all, didn't Mrs. B. endorse a toothpaste for the poor commoners? Her word means something, Doctor."

"I see," Dr. Cardena said, amused.

"Mrs. B. is a social leader, a woman of culture, a woman of refinement, respected in her community, president of the Wednesday Weekly Women's Club, no doubt. So you see, it really doesn't make any difference if she's over-fond of sexual embraces with the ship's purser."

Dr. Cardena kept looking amused. "The time is come (in the words of the Walrus) to speak of other things, John. Cynicism does not become you. You must remember that *I* am the cynic, you the sentimentalist. Really, I'm serious. You'd never make a go of it. You're young enough (and ignorant enough too) to be capable of self-righteousness."

"Don't be asinine," I said, annoyed. "You pretend to be everything—optimist, cynic, pessimist, agnostic, medico, metaphysician—I'm beginning to think you're hydra-headed, and lightly at that!"

He laughed, and he kept laughing for several seconds. "Very good," he said between his guffaws, "very, very good—but wrong, John. For I, my dear boy, am a rare genus—the self-confessed hypocrite. I learned my state of being from your austere pussy-cat. Ah, the joy of seasoned hypocrisy, I hope you know it some day, John! It brings such a complacent life with it; you realize that you

are fooling every one but yourself. For I am old enough to evade responsibility, and I am wise enough to backslide with diplomacy, and I am mild enough to be tolerant and moderate in all my ways, and daring enough to become a species of faker, sincere in my faking. When I am dead, I shall have lived all creeds, all ways, and I shall be forgotten before I am cold. But, John," he sighed exotically, "I shall have really lived . . ." He looked at me as though startled. "Why, you're inconsistent and you'd never know it! You believe in your thumb, your gashed thumb. The flesh is admittedly your Rock of Ages. And yet, you condemn Mrs. B. for her pleasure in its more erotic state. Why?"

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe because it's a kind of decay."

"Decay!" He shook his head, smiling broadly. "And now the faker in me springs to life. Decay, I repeat! Have you ever read Nietzsche?"

"No."

"He's definitely your antipode. (And mine too, in a moment's honesty.) He contended that ascetic ideals trumpeted decay inasmuch as they sprang from prophylactic and self-preservative instincts."

"The hell with Nietzsche," I said listlessly. "I say this is a dull kind of talk. I came down here to

kill some time and you wrap me up in a lot of folde-rol. As a matter of fact, I don't give a damn who Mrs. B. sleeps with. When it happens to be Frank Crawford, it's decay to me."

"Now," Dr. Cardena said, nodding, "we're getting somewhere. The basic cause of Mrs. B.'s ruination and harlotry doesn't lie with herself at all. It lies with her husband."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes and no. That is: I've never seen him, but I can describe him to you."

"Go on."

"You think not? He's all wrapped up in himself and his business. He reads *Time* because of its authoritative financial section. He probes the section weekly, fondles the word 'tycoon' on his pompous tongue, prays that by some act of God his own name may appear in print there. Why? Because he is intensely impressed with people who are openly more important than himself. He annoys you to death most likely asking for market reports because he is—in his own opinion—the wolf of Wall Street. His meter of success, the money a man is making; the method of making is unimportant really. He smokes expensive cigars, drinks expensive Scotch with the proper water to keep him on the alkaline side. And then—oh, my

aunt—when he retires for the night, out come pencil and paper, down go the expenditures, and tsk-tsk-tsk, he realizes that he is over his personal budget and it won't do. For after all, John, he isn't a tycoon at all. He makes ten thousand a year and that fact always raises its ugly head to remind him that he is only fooling himself. He might be a dexterous impostor if he would recognize this ugly head, but he doesn't. And that ultimately will stamp him."

"Doctor," I breathed admiringly, "you're a seer!"

"There is, of course, no cultural nor æsthetic side of him. Why would there be? Those are only substitute batters for poor souls who cannot talk business. He loves his wife in a passionately impassive way and he would sooner cut off his right hand—the words would be his—than prove unfaithful to her. . . ." Dr. Cardena paused and shuddered with mock violence. "Now tell me, John, which of them is in decay—tell me that?"

"You win," I said, grinning. "How did we get on this in the first place?"

Dr. Cardena yawned openly. "Mrs. B. walked in and saw the corpse."

"That's so. I'd almost forgotten. Well"—I rose —"it's a quarter to ten and I've got to go along.

But there's one more question you're perishing to have me ask. All right. Who was your second visitor during the autopsy?"

"I think, when you show these latent evidences of perspicacity," Dr. Cardena replied, "that there is hope for you after all. The second visitor was Mr. Faroni, the ship's gangster no less. I don't suppose it will surprise you that he wasn't at all disturbed. He just said: 'Sorry, Doc, didn't know you were having a party. Somebody croak? Tough.' And he departed without another word. Which goes to show that the day of the giants is obsolete, and the day of the homunculus is here! Faroni, so tiny that even I—Lord forbid—could mangle him with my hands, is made a giant on his own by a semi-intricate piece of wood-stocked steel which he carries against his left side. . . . And now get along, John, and let a poor wretch sleep. I've enjoyed our chat no end and I wish you all good fortune in your *affaire du cœur.*"

"Right, thanks," I said. "Good night."

I didn't look at the lumpy white sheet when I went through the consulting-room.

. . . . . .

Just as I reached the base of the staircase on C deck on my return to Sydney Wells's cabin, Daniel McGilley, the engineer's assistant, accosted me

with a hoarse but definitely arresting: "Sparks! Hey, Sparks!"

I turned half round and said: "Hello, Mac, I'm in a hurry," because I knew he would chew my ear off if I gave him a chance. It didn't put him off.

"Glory be to God, Sparks," he said loudly, "have you heard the news?"

"What now?"

"The old man's gone to his Maker!"

I groaned.

"It's the truth, Sparks," McGilley said. "So help me it is!"

"I know it is," I said. "But it's the old truth. I knew it two hours ago."

He frowned at me, his bedraggled moustache jumping up and down like a yellow grasshopper. "*You* heard it two hours ago!"

"Sure I did."

"And me—I just picked 'er up. By Cain and Abel, if that ain't a sorry state of affairs! It's probably known to the whole deck department as soon as it happens, but my department picks up that kind o' news two hours late!"

"I don't see what difference it makes," I said, hedging away from him.

"Oh, you can't!" he replied, blubbering heat-

edly. "Well, and maybe you can't see what difference it makes if we find out we're runnin' a ship without no master at all!"

"Come off it, Mac."

"It's possible, by God! There's somethin' wrong aboard this ship. There's discrimination goin' on and I won't be told different. Them big-wigs in New York have got somethin' to do with it, and you can mark that down in your logbook!"

"Maybe so," I said. "But look, Mac. I relieve Scully at midnight. I'm tired. I've got to catch forty winks."

"All right," he said. He stared at me a second, then sniffed loudly, jerking up his moustache. "Discrimination ain't the word. I reckon I know when I ain't wanted around." And he disappeared downstairs in a huff.

. . . . . .

Sydney ran across the room; I could hear her footsteps make dull, creaky throbs upon the carpet. The door opened, tentatively at first, then wider when she saw it was I. "I'm so glad," she whispered.

I stepped in and closed the door behind me.

"Lock it," she said.

"Said and done," I said, dropping the key into my pocket and looking at her face. It was pale.

"What's the matter?"

"I didn't think you were coming."

"For heaven's sake, Sydney!"

"It wasn't funny," she said, closing her eyes tightly. "I just lay there in bed and I said to myself, 'It's all over, it's all over, he won't come back, he's daunted' . . . I'm such a fool."

"No, you're not."

"I felt terribly sorry for myself. If you hadn't come by ten o'clock, I was going to have hysterics."

"Sydney—you're a child!" I said.

She held my eyes, slowly moving her head from side to side. "No, darling, not a child. An old, old woman. I've lived ages in this last hour. You can't possibly know."

"I didn't mean to be late. I wanted to give you plenty of time. I always thought that when a lady asked for time out, she meant a real intermission. And I got talking with some one."

"And forgot me?"

"No. You know better than that. I can't forget you." Isaiah Banion didn't know his own prophetic ability.

She said, catching her breath: "That's the truth. Please say it's the truth."

"That's the truth. You know that."

"But it's so much nicer for you to say it instead of me," she replied, brightening. "You haven't any flair for saying nice things, you know."

"Haven't I?"

"Oh!" She threw up her hands. "No flair at all!"

"Maybe so, but I love you, Sydney."

She swept across the room towards me effortlessly and gently kissed me. "Ah, darling, you are sweet." She came close and laid herself against me and we stood there quietly for a few minutes without saying a word until: "But you are just a clod after all."

"A clod?"

"No delicacy at all. You're not *très gentil.* I'll have to make you over."

"You're insulting me."

"Of course I am. But I'm in love with you. I wouldn't insult you if I weren't in love with you. If I didn't love you, I'd flatter you. Only your dearest friends insult you, Banion, always remember that."

"What book did you read that in?"

She laughed, colouring. "I forget. It wasn't a book though. I heard it on the radio."

"Voice of Experience?"

"Very possibly. . . ."

I frowned at her. I said: "Stand away."

She obediently stepped back and faced me, a trifle flushed. For the first time, I realized that she was wearing a nightgown covered by a negligée. I suppose I saw the dress when I came in but it made no impression on me then. I thought, What the hell. You could see through the nightgown, it was that sheer; and she made no attempt to pull the negligée around her. While the nightgown flattered her with sheerness which it will almost any woman, it emphasized her woeful inadequacy of breast and hip and made her look very young and immature. "I'm not really brazen," Sydney said suddenly. "I'm embarrassed to death, so please don't stare, Banion." And when my eyes didn't soften, she pleaded: "For you, only for you, darling—"

I asked: "Why did you do that?"

"Don't act grand with me, Banion. I couldn't stand that."

"Don't talk rot. I'm not acting grand."

"You're thinking I'm cheap, because I'm undressed—"

"No, I'm not—but why did you?"

She pulled the negligée round her tightly and she spoke hesitantly: "I'm sorry."

"But why?"

"I was going to bed. That's all. I didn't think you were coming back. It all happened so fast—I thought you were afraid."

I walked over to her and pulled her against me. "Afraid? I never wanted anything more on earth. Everything has happened pretty quick—but you'll last. I want you to last."

She shivered in my arms. "I see I've underestimated you." Then, after a pause: "I can tell what you're thinking, Banion. You're thinking that this is getting to be damned odd. You're thinking—"

"No, I'm not."

"—that here's a girl you didn't really know before to-night, that she's run all over the ship after you and now she's waiting for you to go to bed with her. You can't help yourself thinking that—"

"Wait a minute."

"—because you're a self-righteous chap at heart and you know it. You're wondering whether or not I'm really a fast lady and whether or not I've had a lot of experience at this sort of thing—"

"That's not so," I said.

"You can't lie, Banion. I told you that you couldn't lie. You haven't the face for it."

I didn't say anything.

"I'm right, am I not?"

Then I smiled. "Sure. You're right. But I'll tell you something else. It wouldn't make any difference to me if you owned the whole damn road to Buenos Aires. And that's the truth."

"Let me see," she said, pulling my face down and scrutinizing it keenly. "Yes, that's the truth. We've cleared that up then." Suddenly she laughed and slipped away from me and climbed into bed, pulling the covers up over her. "Come over here, mister. I'm going to tell you all about my affairs."

"Say," I said, sitting down next to her. "I don't want to hear anything like that."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I think I'd want to go out and kill every one of them.

"Oh, Lord, what a naive *bête!*"

"There's nothing naive about my not wanting to hear all the details, is there?"

"I'm teasing you, darling. I've never slept with any one. You really don't appreciate what a nice girl I am."

I felt better then. "Oh, you're nothing to rave about."

"Banion! I have a gorgeous figure!"

"It's terrible."

"It's lovely—I know it isn't really, darling, but you say it is, please!"

"Under duress, it's lovely."

She sat up, propping a pillow behind her and knitting her forehead tightly together as she rested her chin on her knees and folded her arms around her legs. "Banion—what's going to happen to us —seriously?"

I said evenly: "We're going to get married."

Looking swiftly perturbed, she reached out her hand and touched me. "Would you really want me?"

"Yes."

"A wife you know?"

"Yes."

"Then it's all right."

I said: "But not for a month after we reach New York again."

"What's that?" she asked. "Some sort of gestation period for the thing to fertilize?"

"This is a ship. It's a little world all by itself and lasting eighteen days."

"You mean you want to be sure."

"No," I said, "I want you to be sure."

"Banion, you sound dangerously plebeian," she said, looking wary.

"I've seen it all before. A ship, a uniform, a

lonely girl. That's what makes life worth living for Mr. Crawford."

"Oh. . . . Like that. All right then. A month elapses. We get married and then what? Where do we honeymoon?"

"West Indian cruise," I said, grinning.

"Will we elope? I've always wanted to elope."

"We'll elope, if it's all right with your family."

"My father won't mind. He's my family, and we'll have babies, won't we?"

"Well—how many?"

"Three. Two boys and one girl. I've got it all planned. I spoke to God about it when I was very young."

"Three!" I said. "I don't know. You're coming at me pretty fast now. I know a fellow who fainted dead away when he had a baby. I'd hate to do that."

She laughed prettily and leaned forward and kissed me. "I don't think they ever lost a father," she said. "I'm sure you'll be all right."

"How about you?"

"A drop in the bucket," she replied expansively. "Three months upchuck. Three months very gay. Three months gargantuan. Presto—I'm a mater. . . ." She sighed and leaned back on her pillow, closing her eyes. "Do you have to go yet, Banion?"

"No. Not until midnight."

"Lie here beside me then."

"All right."

I stretched out on the covers and put my arm under her head. Her hair was against my cheeks and her face against my mouth. She sighed again and said very sincerely: "Darling, I sometimes talk like a fool and act like one too. But to-night I'm glad I did. It's been fun, exquisite fun, and all quite fantastic too, and I'll pray to-night that it lasts for ever, but I'm sure that it won't. You're not the type of man who credits premonitions or mystic intuitions, so I shan't risk your derision by explaining any further. Now if our bubble endures, I won't ever think of it again—"

"What are you talking about?"

"—but if it bursts, please remember, darling, that I felt it might, because that's why I made no bones about wanting you, sweet, this funny little voice inside which keeps saying my destiny is not to return home. No, don't ask me questions about it now. I'm too comfortable, and I'd like to sleep on your chest if you wouldn't mind."

"You may as well get used to the idea."

"Then kiss my eyes."

I kissed her closed eyes.

"When you leave at midnight," she said, "try

not to wake me. Then I'll think you're still here and I won't be frightened."

"All right."

Pretty soon she fell asleep in the crook of my arm and it was so quiet, I nearly fell asleep myself. She had a faint scent about her like gardenias and it fitted her for she was amazingly fresh and so many-sided that you could never be sure of her, and so much of an introvert that a heavy touch would make her crumble, like the contact of a human hand will bruise a caducous petal. Then I had to jeer at myself. What the hell, I thought, Lord Byron Banion.

At midnight eight bells sounded for the change of watches. Sydney was dead asleep. I got up without disturbing her and picked up my cap and went out quietly, leaving the key on the inside of her door. I didn't even look back because I was afraid she might awaken. If I had known that that was the last time I'd see her aboard the *San Marino,* I'd have stayed with her through hell and high-water, but how could I have foreseen that?

ABOUT THREE BELLS—1:30 A.M.—THE DOOR OF THE wireless-room opened and young Samuels came in, yawning. His tie was half-knotted and he looked tired and only half-thrown together, his dark hair sticking out every way. He took off his mackintosh and hung it in the closet and he said: "It's stopped raining. I thought I'd keep you company, Mr. Banion."

"What's biting you?" I asked, pulling my earphones up on my head and swinging round in my chair.

"I don't know." He looked disconsolate. "I've been trying to sleep for the last hour and I don't make any headway at all. I guess I've still got some of this residue excitement in me."

"Residue excitement, hell. You've probably got

some coffee working on you."

"I didn't have any," he said. "Honest, I just can't sleep—and I'm tired. That's the worst part. My legs keep twitching every time I start to drop off. And my stomach doesn't feel tickled to death either."

"Maybe that's it," I said. "Maybe you're a little seasick and don't know it."

"I don't feel like vomiting. But my ears are ringing."

"There you are. Tell you what you do. Hit the couch over there and maybe you'll drop off."

"Not me."

"Well, suit yourself. But you ought to get some sleep before your watch."

"That's all right. If I fall asleep during my watch, I'll listen with my ears open." His buck teeth jumped out as he smiled broadly.

I shrugged. "You're the doctor. If you feel that way, how about taking over for a couple of seconds? I want a breath of fresh air."

"Sure," he said.

I went outside. The wind had dropped to strong moderate and the rain had ceased entirely to fall. My hair whipped over my eyes in the wind and when I pushed it back, I could see the great gaping craters in the fleeing scud and the stars

shining way out in black inter-galactic space beyond. There was white water along the weather side still and hollow thumps against the bow where the spray still geysered, but the sea had dropped perceptibly and I could feel the *San Marino* biting in, feeling the security of her own adamant steerage-way. No lurch, only a slight rolling; gone too was the mute cadence of her previous pitching and 'scending. The violent shuddery trembling of the twin screws, so evident during the buffeting when they neared the surface of the waters, had disappeared, and the far-away throb of the engines, familiar and friendly, took audible voice again. Most of the other sounds had vanished, the music and the voices. It was early for such quietude, but the storm had sent most passengers to bed and the cinema show of that night had been cancelled. I stayed out there for about five minutes, breathing deep in the wind. I felt pretty good. There was life in the elements like that, the wind, the running sea, the heavy scent of salt. I thought about Sydney Wells.

The door of the wireless-shack opened then; Samuels stood framed in the doorway against the blatant backdrop of electric light, leaning towards me, his hands cupped. "Mr. Banion! Mr.

Banion!"

"Wait a second," I said, and went in again. "Now what is this?"

"The bridge just called," Samuels said excitedly. "You're to stand by—we're acting under emergency. Mr. Flaherty said—"

The bridge communications phone interrupted him by ringing again. I went over to it and answered. "Hello. Banion speaking."

"Navigating bridge. This is Flaherty. And where in hell were you—stargazing? Get me the *Santa Cecilia* and keep her when you have her."

"What do you want her for?"

"Just get her."

"Right."

I hung up and as I did so, the door opened and Mr. Nardo, the fourth officer, came in. I said to Samuels: "Your key. Get the *Santa Cecilia,* true position and full report. Tell her to hang on for a while. Hello, Nardo," this to the fourth officer, "what's up?"

Nardo looked agog but his voice was cool enough. "Emergency watches. Mr. Davidson's orders. You'd better call up Scully. Keep in touch with the navigating bridge no matter what."

"What's the matter?"

"We've got a fire aboard."

"A fire!" I said. "For God's sake—where?"

"D deck. No alarm. It's not that serious. Davidson is below with the fire watch right now. They'll handle it all right."

"Gee Moses!" Samuels said, having heard.

"You're sure it's not bad, Nardo."

"Positively. Mind your orders. Mr. Philips is standing by."

"Right." He went out.

"I'll get Mr. Scully," Samuels said, anxious to be off for a squint. "I don't mind."

"Stick to the key," I said. "You get the *Santa Cecilia* or it's your neck."

"I'll raise her in a minute."

"Get it up to Flaherty when you do. I'll go down for Scully."

"Yes, sir."

There was smoke somewhere on C deck and I knew there shouldn't have been. I couldn't see it but I could smell it. It bit acridly, making my nostrils oscillate. Suddenly I realized that I was sweating. I took the port corridor until I reached the alleyway to Scully's cabin, then ducked off it and down to his door where I rapped sharply with my knuckles.

No answer.

"Scully!" I said, rapping again harder. "Scully!"

There was no sign of life. On the end of my nose, a drop of perspiration tickled me. I wiped it off. He's asleep all right, I thought.

I tried the knob and found it unlocked. I opened it and entered. It was hotter inside. Both the portholes were closed and he had the ventilators off. The smoke smell was everywhere and the buds on my tongue were beginning to taste it.

Scully was in bed, asleep. His head was thrown back and his mouth was wide open; every time he inhaled he would make a cacophonous gasp, then choke, gurgling, as he exhaled, finally working into a reverberating snore. I stared at him in repugnance, at the irregular rolls and ravines and plateaus of the pseudo-relief map which his ponderous stomach fashioned beneath the single sheet which covered it; the sheet was all awry from his turnings. He didn't have any pyjama top on and his chest was huge and abnormally flabby. His face was flushed and his jowls hung down dismally. He looked a scoundrel, every square inch of him.

I said: "Come out of it, come out of it, Scully!" and shook him roughly.

He stirred uneasily but that was all.

"Wake up!" I said, jabbing him hard in the ribs with my fists. "Wake up!" The jabs made

him grunt.

He closed his mouth abruptly and rolled towards me at the edge of the bed, his eyes flicking glassily open. I kept right on shaking him to and fro, snapping his neck back and forth until he finally said in a sleepy whimper: "Leggo, leggo, for crysake. I'm awake!" and sat up rubbing the sand out of his eyes and wetting his lips. He gulped: "Whassamatter?" and blinked stupidly.

"Emergency watches," I said. "Davidson's orders. You're wanted up."

"Well, for God's sake!" he said, making a face and stifling a yawn.

"Those are the orders."

"Well, Davidson's got a nerve," Scully said, sighing and working his jaws as though there were a bad taste in his mouth. "Gosh. . . ." He shook his head sadly, then glanced at me with a funny glow in his eyes and he began to grin and I knew what was coming. "Gosh, Jack, I mean to sit here and tell you that I was having a dream guys would pay good money to have—"

"I'll bet you were."

"—if you want me to tell you—"

"It's a little out of my line," I said. "How about it? How about getting up and making a pretence of taking charge of radio?"

"Plenty of time, plenty of time," he said petulantly, his lower lip dropping. He got out of bed grumbling unintelligibly, "What's wrong anyhow?"

"Fire," I said. "Nardo said it wasn't bad."

"Oh, rot!" Scully said, let down. "I figured the bottom had dropped out on us at least! A fire! Probably some black devil in the fireroom's dropped a cigarette in one of the coal bunkers. Did you leave Sammy at the key?"

"Yes."

"Good old Sammy," Scully said exuberantly. "God's chosen people, God's innocent man. . . . All right, all right, I'm coming. Don't look like such a sour apple tree."

"I've got other business," I said.

"The hell you say. You just don't want to wait for me. . . . Ah, I get it now. You're still sore at me. You're sore at me because I'm the dry-eyed funeral guest who doesn't see Ewing as the patron saint of the *San Marino*. Well, I still say that that grizzled old broken-down sextant didn't know what colour light to hang on the starboard end of the bridge!" By that time I had backed out of his cabin, controlling myself with admirable restraint, and I could hear his raucous laugh behind me as I reached the port corridor. I crossed

to the starboard corridor then and went to Sydney's door and tried it. But it was locked. I knocked a couple of times and called her but there was no answer. I had the feeling that she wasn't there because I had left her door unlocked, with her asleep. Finally I gave up and went up the main staircase.

On B deck, I stopped by the consulting-room to tell Dr. Cardena the news, feeling perhaps that he would rather be up and about in any sort of fire should it be necessary for him to treat any burns. I went through the consulting-room to his cabin, saw him, opened my mouth to speak, and then shut it again with a clicking snap. There was some one else in the room with him, a mild little man, Dr. Ramon Duga, the neurotic herpetologist, a black-ribboned pince-nez hanging from his coat lapel. The sight of him was an alacritous revelation and I instantly cried: "It's *he!* D deck, D deck, of course! He's the one who started it!"

Dr. Cardena got up quickly, holding out his hand. "Shh. Careful, John!"

But the mild little man with the death's head for a face never even noticed me. He watched Dr. Cardena in a pathetic hypnosis, folding and unfolding his glisteny-skinned hands, and he said in a droning, listless monotone: "There seems to

be a fire in my cabin. I dropped a cigarette accidentally, and there seems to be a fire in my cabin. . . ."

"Careful, John," Dr. Cardena said. "Don't distract him now."

"Did *you* report this to the bridge?"

"Yes, I did. He wandered in here half an hour ago. I reported it to the watch officer."

"It isn't bad, is it?"

"My good aunt, how do I know? I think it was just his room, and they've extinguished it now certainly."

"I knew it the instant I saw him," I said, wiping my face with my hand. "My God, that first day when he was dropping those butts into the basket—"

"There seems to be a fire . . ." Dr. Duga said. "I dropped a cigarette accidentally—"

"For God's sake!"

Dr. Cardena said: "Don't bother him. Just don't pay any attention to him."

"There was smoke on C deck just now," I said.

"There was?"

"Yes, how did it get up there?"

"I don't know. Did you see it?"

"I smelled it," I said. "I guess I can smell smoke."

"I don't understand that," Dr. Cardena said, scowling.

". . ." Dr. Duga continued.

"You'd better report it," Dr. Cardena said.

"I'll report it all right. I've got to go up now."

"Perhaps I'll see you later. Come down after all's well."

"All right."

*"There seems to be a fire . . ."*

"Oh, my God!" I said, leaving. "He's all yours and you can have him!"

. . . . . .

When I reached the leeward side of the boat-deck ten minutes later, I became acutely aware of two things. One was that the vibration of the *San Marino's* revolving shafts had ceased. The other was that the stink of smoke had followed at my heels with all the tenacity of a friendly mongrel. I stood stockstill up there in the wind, feeling estranged somehow from the sea itself. There was no steerage-way at all now. The ship took up the slow dogmatic rolling in the washboard ocean. The funnel swayed against the stars, its measured stagger lost. The beat of the *San Marino's* heart was dead; the pulse of her pistons was stilled; no blood ran through her oil-line veins; no draught broke through her ventilator intakes abaft the

smokestack. Dully I stared down into the prune-skin face of the waters and wished I was back in New York. Smoke stung my nose again and I sneezed openly, grimacing. I thought, What the hell is this? For I could see no smoke starboard at all, yet the pernicious bite of it haunted my nostrils.

The chart-room behind the navigating bridge was still and outrageously solemn, like a mortuary room, when I entered it. Flaherty was at the chart-room table, reports strewn haphazardly upon the table in front of him, along with litters of maps and charts. I saw the U. S. Hydrographic Office chart of the area under his pencil. He didn't look so jocundly self-sufficient now; he looked harassed. On the bridge I could see the watch officers peering out ahead through the glass weatherbreak. They were only dimly visible, for the lights of the bridge were miserly things, reluctant to illumine anything but the compass cards and the few instrument dials in hooded, guarded reflection. The delitescence of the bridge served a purpose none the less. It made the night and sea ahead and abeam much the more penetrable since they—with the new starlight—were faintly brighter than the bridge itself.

"Hello," Flaherty said, speaking in low tones

as though the resonance of ordinary voice would crash the finite stillness of the place. "What is it?"

"I got Scully," I said, imitating his sheltered half-whisper. "And there's smoke on C deck."

He dropped his head. "No—D deck. Some fellow dropped a cigarette in his cabin—"

"I know that. I'm talking about C deck."

"Did you see smoke?"

"I smelled it. I even smelled it up here on the leeward in the wind. It's damned strong."

Flaherty looked annoyed. "Go ahead. You've got a guess coming."

"Look. If D sixty-four is right next to the dining-saloon and the fire got through that wall—"

His telephone rang and he picked it up and answered it, speaking in staccato monosyllables. When he put it down, his face was stiff. "All right. You hit it."

"She's broken through?"

"That's it. The smoke is going up to the dome. That's why you got it on C deck."

"Fire alarm sounded?"

"Not yet. I don't think we'll need it. You tell Scully to hang on to the *Santa Cecilia* just in case. We'll handle this all right, but you hang on to them just the same."

"Want to tell them what's wrong?"

"No. Better wait on Davidson. It might be a false alarm for them, bring them off their course for nothing. Wait a bit. You'll hear."

"Why'd we stop? You must have had an idea this was in the open—"

"Oh, for God's sake," Flaherty said, exasperated. Then he eased back. "Yes, we thought there might be a wind to fan it if it came in the open. Better not to take chances."

"Sure. Don't get sore, Mike."

"Sorry. Get the hell along, heh?"

"Sure."

I heard him call for star shots to determine longitude and latitude as I went out, but even then I felt pretty much as he did—that we wouldn't have serious trouble.

Samuels was sitting at the key with the headphones adjusted and he jerked round at the sound of the door, startled at first, then looking relieved. "Gee, I'm glad to see you. I've got the *Santa Cecilia* but I don't know what to tell them. Their operator is getting touchy."

"Never mind him," I said. "Let him get touchy. But hang on to him. Anything else?"

"Deadheads," Samuels replied, scratching his nose nervously. "How is it outside, Mr. Banion?"

"All right."

"Hot from the fire?"

"Don't be an ass. There's no fire up here. It's all below. Keep your shirt on."

"My shirt's on. I just thought it was hot. You're all sweaty."

"Oh," I *was* sweating. "I hadn't noticed."

"Boy, you sure are!" Samuels said, nodding. "Where's Mr. Scully?"

"I got him. He's just taking his good time." I went over and sat down behind Samuels and closed my eyes, drumming my fingers on my legs.

"Hey," Samuels exclaimed. "I nearly forgot."

"What now?"

"There was a girl here to see you. She came in and asked for you and I told her you'd gone below and that she couldn't stay here. She said her name was Miss Wells and to tell you she'd called."

"When was this?" I asked eagerly.

"About ten minutes ago."

"Was she all right?"

"Sure, oh, sure. She was nice to me. She's a darn nice girl."

"I mean was she all dressed or frightened?"

"No, she wasn't scared. She had a long coat on. I guess she was dressed all right. She said there was smoke on her deck and that she thought she ought to tell some one. I told her thanks and it

was all okay."

"I'm glad she's up from there," I said, leaning back against the wall.

Samuels said: "This guy certainly is hopping. You'd think he had a date or something." He meant the operator on the *Santa Cecilia.* You couldn't blame the fellow for getting peeved. "There he goes. Signed off again."

"Let up for awhile. Too much wolf wolf may make him careless. You can trip over him if you send a general call."

"I was wondering about that," Samuels said. "Seems like maybe we ought to have a general call just in case. We've stopped, you know, and there's a whiff of smoke here every now and then."

"All right," I said. "Cut out the hero stuff. You're playing shipwreck."

Samuels looked abashed and said nothing.

Presently there was a knock at the door and then it opened coyly and Scully poked his fat face around the edge of it looking like a gnome. "Peek-a-boo, admiral," he said; "still mad at me?"

I said: "Don't be a fool and shut that door."

He came in, buttoning his trousers and Samuels got up, said hello, and looked glad that the chief operator was here and that the responsibility was fixed in the right place.

Scully waved at him. "Keep it, Sammy my boy."

Samuels looked shocked; he gaped. "But it's your watch, sir?"

"Mine? Uh-uh, Banion's!"

"I mean—emergency—"

"Listen," I said, "I didn't run downstairs for nothing. You take over. They're not my orders."

"All right, *all* right," Scully said sorrowfully. "Anything for a little peace round here. I don't see why I always got to draw one of these efficient geezers for a shipmate."

"You know how I feel," I said, staring at him.

He shook his shoulders in a rumbling chuckle and went to the chair and sat down. His broad backside seemed to swell like lava when it hit. The chair became a giant blotter, taking up his flesh as if by capillary action until the two appeared to fuse into one mass. It was a fascinating sight. He accepted the head-phones from Samuels casually, placing them on his head in his inimitably cock-eyed manner, and lighting a cigarette at the same time with graceful facility, incongruous with his bulk. Fingering the log-book, he said at last: "Call the bridge and see what's new, one of you guys."

While Samuels went over to the bridge communication phone, I said: "Flaherty said to keep the

*Santa Cecilia* on a string."

"I see so. Listen, Jack—"

"Yeah?"

"What are they doing about this? I'm not kidding now—there was a lot of smoke on C deck when I came up. From the dining-dome."

"Don't ask me."

"How about a fire alarm?"

"I don't think they need one. Flaherty seems to think it'll be under control all right."

" 'Ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die—' " Scully was grinning.

"All right," I said. "I'm just saying. They don't need any alarm unless—"

"In a pig's eye," Scully said. His face looked sober. "You can carry this keep-it-quiet-and-avoid-a-panic stuff too far. I tell you, there was smoke and if I were a passenger, by God, I'd like to be upstairs just in case!" He shook his head vigorously. "What in hell happened anyway?"

"Fellow dropped a cigarette," I said.

"By the saloon?"

"Right in the cabin next to it. Burned through the wall."

Scully looked startled. "Well, by—" he stopped, spluttering. "All I can say is, if she hits that dining-room right you've got a little blaze here! She'll

shoot up right through that dome to B deck and if that isn't the open, come round some other time!"

"Gosh," Samuels exclaimed then, "I can't raise the bridge! They don't answer. I think this phone—"

"The speaking-tube, nit-wit," Scully said sarcastically. "Try the speaking-tube."

That didn't work either and Samuels said so falteringly. I got up and took a try at it, barking: "Hellohellohello!" into it. But it didn't do any good.

"There must be some one up there," Samuels said, frightened.

"Oh, sure," said Scully, winking. "A blonde, maybe. They just can't keep their minds on their work with that blonde up there."

"Cut the kidding," I said.

"There he goes again."

"I'm serious," I said. "I figure it this way. The fire's reached the main emergency housing."

"You think so, Jack?" Scully asked, rubbing his mouth.

"Sure I do! That's why we can't raise them! That puts the whole damn communication system out."

Scully nodded. "All right, Sammy, my boy, now

get this. You're the message to Garcia. You go up to the bridge and find yourself a comfortable chair and sit in it until one of those stuffed shirts gets an idea for an order. Then come pronto."

"Yes, sir," Samuels said doubtfully, and he went out.

I forgot about him as I leaned back. I sat like that a long time. Scully played with the key. I listened to it absently. I could smell smoke, feel the tickling run of sweat on my neck, hear the high whine of the transmitter. And I could thank God that Sydney Wells was safely out of her cabin, for I was becoming more and more aware that the *San Marino* was still on the short end of her fight against the fever below decks.

. . . . . .

When I opened my eyes again, I realized that I'd dozed and that the hand of the chronometer had moved round amazingly. It read two-eighteen. There was a pungent stench of smoke that made me cough dryly twice.

"Here's a hot one," Scully said. Then he raised his voice. "Jack, you awake?"

"I'm awake," I said. "I must have dropped off. I'm sorry."

"This sure is a hot one," he replied. He leaned across the table towards the transmitter, his eyes

fixed on the ceiling.

"What is it?"

"Somebody once tell you this fire was under control?"

"No. Flaherty said he—"

"God," Scully said, listening through his earphones.

"Flaherty said he thought they'd caught it, but after it broke through the wall—what is this, Scully?"

"Somebody," Scully said, "is a lying bastard." He laughed lightly a moment. "Now there's a word, Jack. It don't always mean what you think it does. For instance if I asked you for a drink of bastard, you'd think I was crazy. But take a look at your dictionary. It'll kill you. It's a Spanish wine."

"All right," I said, biting my lip. "So it's a Spanish wine. What's coming over the air there, that's what I want to know."

"Jack, we've got a fire aboard. An honest to Judas fire, understand. I've got the *Santa Cecilia* here."

"Where is she?"

"About forty miles north-west." He glanced at me and shook his head. "There ought to be a law against having cards as operators. This guy

takes the cake."

"What does she say?"

"Listen to this," Scully said with grim humour. "She's asking me is a ship burning down this way? She says she can see a fire glow against the sky."

*"What?"*

Scully turned fully round, grinning broadly.. "You don't see any green in my eye, do you, Jack?" And added placidly: "We're ablaze."

"That's impossible!" I said, leaping to my feet. "You're crazy! Why, there hasn't even been an alarm. There hasn't even been a general call. There hasn't been enough time for any fire to spread like—"

"No? It's been going an hour and a half. How much time you want? Don't argue with *me,* Jack, for God's sake. All I know is you can't spot a fire glow against the horizon forty miles off unless it's in the superstructure. Gee, you'd think I was making it up or something. Get wise, admiral, get wise. We're up the creek. You'd better start admitting it, and those babies up on the bridge had better start admitting it too. Go on out and give yourself a look. Don't argue with *me,* I've got a little business to clean up here." His fingers danced lithely on the sending key and I listened to the strident contacts and translated as he tapped

off: *Just a little thing for marshmallow toasting.* I had to smile.

"Go on and take a look," he said again.

"All right, I will."

I went to the door and opened it to step out. Thick pall-black smoke, cluttered with sparks and floating hot dead ash, struck me in the face and my body felt the *epée* thrust of new intense heat as suffocating and oppressive as noon of an Indian summer's day. I gasped and fell back into the room, the smoke following and billowing round us voraciously. Scully vanished in the opaque cloud round his chair, coughing and wheezing and rattling in a low snarl.

"Shut that door!" he cried tearfully, and I slammed it hard so that the hinges groaned. Coughing hard myself, I returned to the table where Scully gaped up at me owl-eyed, stunned by his own prophecy as he kept repeating: "I told you so, I told you so. . . ."

"The passengers—" I started to croak. "But I didn't see flames. Smoke too thick. Where's Samuels?"

"Where's Samuels?" Scully echoed.

"Maybe he—"

"Wait a minute."

"We're moving!"

*"Holy—"*

Under our feet, the *San Marino* felt a mounting wave of vibration; her vitalizing engines took up their functions, murdering the slow roll of the ship as the screws chewed into the sea, steadying her length in the troughs.

"Somebody's crazy," Scully said glumly. "Are we making a run? Goddam fools. They'll fan it all over the ship. Take a look, Jack. Run out and take a look but don't go too far. I'm going to need you."

"I'll be back in a minute."

"Hurry up."

The world outside was smoke and heat and cinder and wind and sea and sound. It was mostly sound. The grotesque crackling of the flames' fury below deck intermingled with a furnace roar, composed of a quintet of agents: the hum of hot metal, the slashing thuds of the sea against the weather side, the falling wail of the south-west wind, the voices of passengers and crew, and the *San Marino's* own vital engines. I groped my way forward through a wall of sparks as dense as water, coughing *karoon! karoon!* every inch of the way until I thought my stomach and lungs would burst from the paroxysms.

I could finally see what was happening. No

rash run was being attempted. The navigating bridge had only swung the *San Marino* round abeam the wind so that the smoke and flames would be pulled clear off the leeward, allowing the bow and stern and weatherside to keep free of fire. Oh, it was a brilliant bit of life-saving, that manœuvre, and yet I saw its futility at once. The weather side, feeling the force of wave and wind, began to skid—slowly dropping the stern north-east so that the bow headed directly into the blow, the fire pressing astern and leaving only the deserted bow unscathed. Davidson might have held the portside to windward by the steadying emphasis of the starboard screw. I believe he meant to do this, for I sensed the inordinate shiver of the starboard shaft under my feet. But a man stumbled through the smoke towards me suddenly and I recognized Mr. Ashley, the fifth officer. He looked like a madman, his eyes popping, his cheeks seared and vitrified, his mouth quivering poignantly. "The bridge?" he screamed at me. "The bridge?" "Just keep going, Ashley," I said. "They've got to stop, stop!" he screamed back. "That screw—making mincemeat—they're jumping—stern into the screw—" And he was gone like the wind, his cries of anguish diminishing demoniacally in the cacophony of flames. The black-

grey smoke which filled the gaping hole he created in his plunge through the smoke-wall, fascinated me, fashioning itself into an illusive figure, which took shape magically, a mild little man. In the confusion, his voice, idiotically complacent, came back to my consciousness: ". . . *There seems to be a fire . . .*"

I shuddered and felt an icy needlepoint terror prick me in a thousand different places. I cried out, hoarse and terrified: "Sydney! Sydney! Dear God—" But the omnipresent smoke cut into my throat, and I coughed until I was so weak I could hardly stand. Under me, the *San Marino's* life ebbed away; Ashley had reached the bridge. The cinders stung my face. I didn't have to look again to realize that the bow was dead in the wind and that the raging holocaust was flying madly astern.

Coughing and crying, I felt a deep pathetic regret. For surely now the *San Marino* was a dying ship. There was her last mortal gesture, the hollow musical trilling of the great chains as her anchors let go. The thundering roar shut out the sound of the suck-splash when they hit. A dying ship; and I knew that those aboard were doomed to fight those tumultuous crests which battered the beams and fell away, deep down ditchlike

under the painted warning of the stern coaming: BEWARE OF THE PROPELLERS.

. . . . . .

Scully gasped at me in sheer dismay when I fell into a chair, pasty-white and gagging. "Jack!" he exclaimed sharply.

"It's all over, dear God, it's all over," I said, babbling. "They're jumping off the stern—"

"Crazy to jump," Scully said earnestly. "This is the Caribbean."

"I met Ashley. He said—the screws—" and I was coughing again.

"Damn fools," Scully said. "Better to burn. If they miss the screws, they got the sharks. Judas, this smoke! Where's Samuels? Where's my orders? How long does Davidson think we can last? Nothing, not a damn thing—well, the hell with them! Here goes general call, Mr. Davidson, and if you don't like it you can play Absalom!"

He meant it. He went to work on that key and he raised up the *Santa Cecilia.* It wasn't any trouble because the *Santa Cecilia* operator was all set to be a hero anyhow. They'd seen the glow and they were on the way just in case radio had failed. That was a thrilling moment. EVERYBODY LISTEN! our invisible thin plea in space, clearing the air for the more tragic message, the obituary

of the *San Marino*. Scully talked with the other chap, but I didn't listen then because I was a sick man. There were daggers in my chest and rocks in my stomach and sweat and tears on my face and hands.

"Take it easy, Jack. That's that. I sent it, did you hear me? Take it easy, Jack. Stop that gagging. You look like you're in labour or something. Smoke, that's it"—he coughed—"coming in there." He meant beneath the door. It seethed through the crack, rising like flood water, heavy, strong, terrible. The chronometer read three o'clock when the lights went. For several seconds we were in complete darkness, then the auxiliary system functioned perfectly and automatically. "How you feel, Jack?"

"Sick to my stomach—listen—"

"Listen, Jack," Scully said. "Can you hear me? You've got to get this."

"Hear you."

"Hit the deck. Get to the bridge. See Davidson. Tell him you want an S O S. Tell him he's getting one in five minutes whether he asks for it or not. Tell him the auxiliary isn't worth a red cent. Tell him the heat's melting the solder on my connecting wires and that we won't be spikking English much longer. Now beat it and *tell*

*him!*"

"All right."

"Remember I'm sending in five minutes and he can kiss my big toe!"

"You can't do that. You know the law!" Sure he knew the law. Federal felony. Superseding command of superior officers. Five thousand dollars fine or five years' imprisonment or both.

"What the hell, Jack, what the hell." He waved at me, and grinned. "We only live once. Go ahead. I'll have the sausages ready for toasting when you get back."

"Wait a second," I said, pausing. "It's tough outside. Maybe I won't make it. I want to talk."

"I know, I know, Jack. Skip it, for God's sake. You never liked me. You want to tell me what a louse I am. OK, so you've told me and it's all right and we can die happy." He grinned. "You're a good guy, Jack. Picayune and efficient, but you're all right. Now beat it while you can breathe."

The whole night burned. The voice of the fire was as breath-taking as a close bolt during a furious summer's thunder shower. Up from A deck I could see the licking sensual feelers of flame, like satyrs in revelry. I never saw flames like those before. Shrieks rose up from the stern, muffled and

smothered in the wind and roar. The pall was down round the ship like snow and hid the sea completely on the starboard side. I clutched my way forward, looking for some one to hail. No one materialized. Seconds later, I hit something with my foot and fell on my face, ripping my trouser knee open on the deck. I'd fallen on a prone man. I turned him over—Samuels. No matter. Couldn't wait now. I got up and went on to the pilot house. The chart-room was empty. I went through it to the navigating bridge. Empty, billowing with smoke. The engine-room telegraph was set at dead stop. It looked stark. I couldn't see any one. I shrieked: "Davidson! Davidson!" and stumbled forward towards the weatherbreak.

Something hit my shoulder and I turned round and Davidson stood behind me, tears streaming down his face. He looked wildly insane and his body was all out of shape in the smoke and when he spoke his face did horrible contortions. "Banion—!"

"We want orders! Scully wants an S O S! Scully says he's going to—"

Davidson's expression then was that of a dead man. "S O S?" he yelled shrilly. "My God—haven't you called yet?—I sent Samuels back long ago, long ago—"

"You did—"

"Orders are to abandon ship! The boats are all going off! All officers and crew at boat stations!"

"Samuels passed out! I saw him—I'll go back —tell Scully—"

"Look alive, sir! Look alive!"

Back I went, faltering all the way. The fire was climbing over the promenade deck now, eating wood and steel and flesh in rapacious abandonment. Sometimes it'd even start shooting up to the boat deck. When I reached Samuels, his trousers were all smoking. I caught him under the shoulders and dragged him along because he would have burned to death there and I wasn't sure whether or not he was dead. The inferno had a hum now like the spinning tensity of a whirling turbine, an infinitude of mechanical power in the sound; yet weirdly enough, my own racking cough seemed to smash an impressive silence deep in my ears. The restless ocean had completely disappeared behind the impenetrable shrouds of smoke, as had the flames' glow beneath us. I kept going and I thought, It's dark, dear God, but it's dark. In a few seconds more, my knees felt the pain of a hard blow and I found that I had brought up against the rail *aft* on the boat deck. Somewhere I'd overshot the wireless-

room. I stared down through the smoke but I could not see the promenade deck just below. There was the crescendo of crashing glass and hysterical voices. An old woman, high-pitched: "Billy! Billy!" A young girl, frenzied: "Don't jump yet, not yet!" An old man, cracked: "Round the other side! No lifebelts here!" A young man, desperate: "Get the hell out of my way!"

. . . Wearily I turned and retraced my steps, leaving Samuels there because I no longer had the strength to drag him. Everything was dark up here now, and Scully was alone in this. I found the knob of the door after an interminable search and I went in, dragging my feet. The auxiliary lights were gone, but the curtains on the windows were burning and they plastered a rich orange glow upon the walls. At varied strata in the room, almost like layers of sandstone, the lines of curved and graceful smoke fashioned a fantastic arabesque. Scully was there, still in his chair. I heard the *dit-dit-da* of his sending-key before I actually saw him. A Turkish towel was wrapped around his nose and mouth. I pounded him on the back and croaked Davidson's orders at him but I knew that I was late because I could hear his distress signal lancing out into space. Scully's eyes peered at me over the towel and his voice was far away.

"Leggo of me, Jack."

I cried: "You've done it, you've done it, now let's get out of here or you'll burn!" and I tried to drag him from the chair.

"I sent it all right," Scully said happily. "I've got to verify when he calls back. Leggo of me, Jack! Will you let go—"

The curtains blew across the room and landed close to his chair, burning brightly. I tried to stamp them out, but they were angrily obdurate and it was no use. I fell against Scully savagely now and yanked and strained against him, coughing and crying all the time. But he weighed too much for me and I was sick and soon the strain hit me and I let go.

Then, quickly and easily, Scully was next to me with his arm around me. "Solder's melted on the auxiliary transmitter," he said as though in confidence. "Main one pooped while you were outside. Cut me off from confirmation but they'll be here. They'd better be here or the sharks'll eat roast pig for breakfast. . . . Take it easy, Jack, take it easy. You're straining too hard like that, and it's just retching. Let's get the hell out of here."

"Don't forget the log."

"I have it." He laughed. "You're consistent,

anyway, Jack. Efficient to the last gasp!"

But it didn't annoy me now. It sounded good. I smiled wanly at him and said: "Sure, Fatty. Me all over."

"Let's go, Jack, let's go!"

We had to break through a solid wall of flame to get aft and we did it, singeing our hair and our hands but covering our faces with our coats. But on the other side of it, we found smoke and no fire and we started the coughing all over again, the ugly *karoon!* which shook every tissue in us. Few seconds later we found Samuels. He was alive but he looked dead. We picked him up and carried him under the arms but we couldn't find the staircase to the promenade deck.

"Holy smoke!" Scully said. "This is a jam. What do we do?"

"Jump."

"How about Sammy?"

"Drop him."

We swung him over the rail and let him go. He disappeared into the smoky void. Then we followed without any waiting. We landed on the promenade deck unhurt and found Samuels again and kept going aft. This time we found the staircase to A deck and we fell down it recklessly. We kept going until we brought up against the rail

there and we couldn't locate the last staircase. We had to jump again to B deck which was the stern deck. "Here goes a ton of bricks," Scully said before we all leaped.

That jump was a unique experience. It was like diving into a cloud from a plane, travelling miles through the cloud, then bursting into broad daylight so that you could see your earth a split second before you struck it. There seemed to be a last layer of smoke in between the last decks, for when we sprawled on the stern it was lighter than the day, reflecting the pyre amidships, and it was hotter than hell ever could be. We landed five feet apart, clutching the deck, and when we got to our feet, my hand stung and I lifted it and gaped at it. It was raw with quick blisters. Scully danced gingerly. "This deck is a griddle. I never felt anything so hot," he said.

"Are you all right?"

"All right. Where's Sammy?"

"There he is. Right over there."

We went over. "Now this is a jam. What are we going to do with him? He's dead to the world. Leave him here and he'll burn. Toss him over and he drowns."

"Get a lifebelt for him. We can strap it on him and toss him and it'll keep him afloat."

"There's a guy with two belts!" Scully said. "Let's get that swine!"

We got him. I'd never seen the man before and he cried like a baby when we took one of the preservers. Scully got so disgusted he hit the man and threatened to take away the other preserver, too, but we didn't. The man jumped off the stern in fear of us.

After we had wrapped Samuels in the preserver, we lifted him and dropped him off the stern. It was a forty-foot drop and I prayed that he hit right. He did apparently because he was conscious when the *Santa Cecilia* picked him up next morning.

The radiation of heat on the stern was terrific. You couldn't describe it. Just calling it heat is an empty description. You might get an idea of it by heating an oven as hot as possible, then opening the door and putting your hand inside for a few seconds. You'll feel a terrific broiling sting of pain from the heat cooking your skin, and that's how the heat reacted on us there. There were few passengers on the stern now. Mostly women. The heat had driven them into the sea. Those remaining huddled against the stern railing trying to bury themselves under the remnants of clothes which had been left behind, and they warded off

the rays somewhat that way. I looked round for a sign of some one I knew. I even hoped to see Sydney Wells, feeling that she might have waited for me back there. I cried. It was easy to let everything go because in that tumult repressions had broken wide open.

"Listen, Jack," Scully said presently, wiping the tears from his eyes. "These people have got to get off here. They'll burn. That fire's coming astern like a bill collector. They're just afraid to jump."

"What do you mean?"

"They've all got belts. Let's make 'em jump. You got a gun?"

"No."

"Then cajole, Jack, just cajole 'em into it. They'll roast here if they don't go."

We cajoled them. They didn't object. They just wanted a little moral support and we gave them that. We told them how it was the best thing to do. We told them the *Santa Cecilia* was right there to pick them up even if they couldn't make her out. Hell no, lady, there are no sharks round here! Of course you're safe and sound. You wouldn't sink in those lifebelts. No, not a thing can happen. Not a thing, madam. (Except break a leg or fracture a skull from the impact of hit-

ting the sea.) There you go, madam. Au reservoir! You're next, lady. Why, I'm ashamed of you being afraid. Just take a deep breath and relax. Wait a minute, madam, is that belt on right? You wouldn't want to jump out of it, you know. It's a long swim to St. Thomas. Easy does it. Easy, easy. . . .

Past the starboard quarter, there were white blobs against the background of the sea. They stood out but dimly for the ocean resembled the reddish-yellow rind of an orange, flecked with white-crested combers like mould bacilli. I counted eleven of the blobs; they were open boats. Some were studded with black heads and others were shamefully empty. They plied awkwardly in the troughs pulling in the stray swimmers. They had fallen away to the port beam of the *San Marino*. One of them not far off the stern had a concave dent in its side where it had stove against the side of the ship in launching. It didn't bother the seaworthiness apparently. It was a steel boat and it had air tanks under the floor. Close to the ship, their arms flailing above the waters, there were pasty faces of those who had not reached their boat stations.

Scully tapped my shoulder. "Look at this, Jack. Get a load of this."

Under the shadow of the coaming, just abaft the rudder blade, two girls were swimming. They had no life preservers and they were both nude. We could see that when their backsides broke through the surface as they swam. They neared a man who appeared to be sitting in the water quite comfortably, clear out from the chest up. They stopped swimming and he called to them. "I've got two preservers here, girls. You come and lean on me and you'll be all right." The girls, treading water, hesitated. Then one said: "I haven't any clothes on." And the other said: "Neither have I." "Don't be foolish," the man said sternly. "This is no time for modesty." So they swam over to him and hung on to his straps, floating safely with him.

"Now what do you know . . ." Scully said, watching. "Now if I could swim and I was that guy—"

I jerked round startled. "You can't swim?"

"I can't swim."

"You crazy fool," I said, shaking him. "What are you going to do? Why didn't you say something? You can't stay here. We've got to go over like the rest. It's too hot. I'm burned through now. My feet are burning up. We've got to go over."

"Not me," he said, shaking his head and pointing at himself. "I'd just as soon burn. There's something about drowning I never could get resigned to."

"You could have gone with Samuels if you'd said something."

"Never mind, never mind, Jack."

"Wait now," I said. "Let's have a look and see who's close."

We went to the rail and looked down. The open boats were too far away for a non-swimmer to reach possibly, but there were passengers floating over the immobile screws and they all had preservers and could take a man and hold him up until some help arrived.

I said this to Scully. "It's your only chance. You've got to hang on to some one else."

"I weigh a ton."

"You've *got* to do it!"

He thought it over and he didn't like it at all but he said suddenly: "All right, Jack. You're the doctor. I'll take a Brodie."

I pointed down. "You see that man there?"

"The bald one?"

"That's the one. All right. He floats high. Jump towards him and when you come up grab him and hang on. He doesn't weigh much. That preserver

will hold both of you."

"Suppose I miss him? Give me a hint, Jack. I've never been in over my head."

"Climb over here. When you jump take a deep breath and hold it. Maybe you'd better hold your nose. When you come up get some air and keep moving your hands and feet. Keep your head low, don't be afraid to wet it. If you stick it up you're a goner."

"I don't like this, Jack," Scully said nervously. Then he smiled. "Me—the man of Sparta!"

"Go ahead, just don't get panicky. When you come up, I'll go in after you and I'll ferry you across to the bald man. I'll be right with you."

"Thanks."

"Jump then. Don't waste time."

He took a deep breath. "Here goes nothing!"

He jumped.

He went down stiff-legged, one hand at right angles with his body, the other clenching the end of his button-nose. He fell rapidly, looking absurdly fat in the flight. When he struck the sea, I watched the outflung splash and climbed over the rail myself, hurriedly discarding my shoes and coat. I waited a few seconds, leaning out arm's length from the stern railing. (Come on, Scully, where are you?) The splash subsided. Back of me,

I could feel the blistering heat against my neck and hands. Soon the running swells brushed up the ripples of the landing place beneath me. (Scully, come up. Where are you?) I couldn't hang on any more. It was too hot and I couldn't stand it. I let go and jumped.

That was the longest jump Scully ever made in his life. He never did come up. . . .

. . . . . .

This was ecstasy, this first deep plunge. The coolness of the water in contrast with the heat of the ship, robbed me of breath. I went down far, not resisting the sinking in the slightest, until the pressure on my ears made them feel as though they were turning inside out. Only then did I begin to kick my way back to the surface. After a ridiculously short distance, I broke through, amazed at the placidity of the water. But the muttering undertone of a curling comber warned me; and I realized that I had come up in the glassy basin of a valley and that a wall of water was bearing down on me from under the ship's keel.

Holding my breath, I went into it, swimming furiously against the pull. I didn't want to be sucked against the ship. Too many swimmers had undoubtedly had their heads cracked that way. So I swam, covered with the summit of the crest,

until I came through the other side of the mountain, gasping for air but safely away from the ship.

Now the pain began. Slowly at first, but steadily, it enveloped me, the scratchy, pervading sting of salt on my hands and face and legs and arms, then all of me, an agony too dully remote to remember. I ground my teeth against the subcutaneous horror of it and in defence I struck out in a violent crawl, feeling that if I moved I should think about it less. It seemed to work. Shortly, the pain receded from me. Only the first few minutes were unbearable. There was left only the unconscionable rawness to let me know that my body owned its share of seared abrasions. I stopped swimming then and took some bearings.

To the south, no more than a hundred yards away, a white lifeboat tossed. To see it was to be dumbfounded. One moment, the Caribbean appeared to swallow it whole; the next it leaped out of the sea and raised up high above me, then I above it, as though we two were sitting atop skyscrapers, popping up and down like jack-in-the-boxes. Often when we were both in the troughs, I would have to stop swimming and wait to get my bearings again. Here in the water, the heat of the *San Marino* did not dissipate. I could feel it through the film of water which covered my face.

The sounds were more distinct there, more clarified. After I had swum a bit, I turned round and saw the ship whole for the first time since I had left her decks. I had to gasp. The glare was momentarily blinding, but when my pupils finally focused, I saw the whole stupefying picture—the eye-witnessed murder of a ship. Trim as a hospital nurse? Yes, she had been that. But now her immaculate white hull was charred and streaked with singed paint and looked disreputable. Her superstructure with its labyrinth of doors and windows and weatherbreaks and portholes and boat-falls, lay hidden beneath the clot of smoke. Sometimes, when a blast of fire shot out from B deck like the explosion of a projectile, ignominiously thrusting the pall aside, I could make out the twisted ironwork which had stood so many seas and which now contorted like some piece of baroque work under the omnipotent weight of heat. What a spectacle! Six hundred and twenty-four feet of furnace; an eighth of a mile of destruction floating upon a painted-fiery ocean! Each of the portholes was brightly lighted from the fire within. Up on the promenade deck, the long raking tongues probed skyward to a height of eighty feet. The forward mast stuck up nakedly, but the aft mast was alive with fire and looked like a

frozen bolt of lightning. All halyards and stays were gone; the shrouds to the crow's nest forward had fallen afire. The lone funnel rolled in hiding behind the blazing wall. I could not see the wireless-room, but that was surely gone up. The wing-tips of the navigating bridge looked like twin torches. The stern was the only spot, beside the extreme point of the bow, which remained uneaten, and I could see the grey smoke rising up from the deckboards there. It was incredible and impossible too; three hours to transform a beautiful vessel into a filthy hulk. It was the most impersonally tragic event in the life of every soul who watched it. Here indeed was a monument to Mors; it seemed as though the *San Marino's* homicidal fever would leave its seared scar upon the sky forever.

After that, I swam. Faced with death, I became aware of the potentialities which a man possesses in the determination to live. My own strength surprised me. I was burned, tired, sick, yet I stroked my crawl even and coolly, getting my second wind nicely and not feeling the fatigue which really gripped me. The sea lost its harrowing mien in the long intimacy; it became a kind of friendly rival who indulged in trickery but not buffeting.

I don't know how long I was in the water. It

seemed a short time but it couldn't have been. I remember striking the side of the lifeboat I had aimed for. It skinned my knuckles raw but what a glorious pleasure that was! Hands groped down, pulling at my arms and hands and hair.

"Banion! Look up here, Banion!"

I raised my head but I was sightless with exhaustion now and could discern no one. I felt myself lifted up through the air, then plumped down solidly upon the boards which covered the air tanks of the boat. The water streamed from me, leaving my clothes clinging to my body. White faces pulled and patted me. I recognized no one. Then that voice again, so familiar and ebullient: "Take it easy, Banion. You're fit as a fiddle! By Charlie's black beard, my boy, wait until you see the shot I got of you! It'll turn your hair white!" It was Richard Dill, newshawk and photographer, and late Ethiopian correspondent.

. . . . . .

I came back fast. In fifteen minutes I felt good again. I felt as though I could have done it all over, if I had had to. Dill wouldn't let me up, however. He knelt down beside me between the thwarts, half-smiling—not solicitously—as though he wouldn't have missed this thing for the Pulitzer Prize. "How do you feel, Banion?" he asked, pat-

ting my head. "You look pretty good."

"Fine," I said hoarsely. I tried to grin at him. "Fancy meeting you here."

"Isn't it amazing?" he said.

"Whose boat is this?"

He pointed and I saw Mr. Philips, second officer, in charge. The boat was nearly full. There were many women in it. I saw Mrs. Anthony Faroni and her two children, boy and girl. The children were crying and she kept beating her breasts and rocking back and forth. For rowers, the boat had six negro stokers. In the great glare, their skins were rich brown chocolate, rinsed with sweat. They used the oars to keep the bow of the boat into the swells and not abeam them. It took hearty pulling. They grunted: "Uh-HUH!" each time they drew in the oars.

"Let me up," I said.

"You take it easy," Dill said. "I'll tell you things. Listen. Did we get a call out? That's what I want to know. Did we let go a distress signal?"

"Yes. The *Santa Cecilia* 'll be here before dawn."

"Thank God for that!" he said fervently.

It didn't sound like him at all and I had to stare at him momentarily. He caught the look and shook his head violently. "No, no, not what you

think! These pictures—that's what I mean! If anything happened to them now—"

"Pictures?" I said.

"So help me, Banion," he said, "I think the shot of you will top them all. Drama, sheer drama in it. You looked like a dead man when we pulled you out."

I just looked at him.

"Pictures, Banion, pictures! Don't you get it?"

He held up his diminutive Leica. It was strapped round his shoulder securely so that it could never fall off, even if he had to swim. He handled it as though it were a baby. "Do you realize what's happened?" he babbled. "Oh, I used to kid about it but here—it's the real thing! Don't you see, it's the biggest story of the year—everything you can say about it—and I'm on the spot *with a camera!* . . . Banion, listen to me. I've got shots here that'll blow off the lid. Addis was never like this. I've got two loads in here already—seventy-two shots. You should see what I've caught. I got murder and looting and cowardice and fire and death and—"

I shuddered. He seized my arm.

"Banion—you remember the little gangster—Faroni? That's his wife up there—his kids. I caught that shot when he left them. He went kind

of crazy, ran round waving a gun in his hand. She and the kids hung on to him howling like banshees. You see the cut on her face over the eye. He gave her that. He kept screaming at her to let go of him, and when she didn't he let her have the stock with all his might. He went overboard. I saw him. He's probably dead right now!"

Mrs. Faroni's voice came back to us: ". . ." she wailed, beating her chest and swaying.

Dill went on: "You remember Crawford. I caught him. I caught him so pretty, he'll hang for it if he lives and if I live. He killed a man in cold blood. You remember the Bradley woman he was sweet on—he came running towards the stern from B deck staircase with her after him and he had a gun in his hand. And then suddenly I saw Bradley himself—the pompous ass, remember?—and he was chasing the two of them and he had a cane in his hand and was brandishing it. He looked insipid waving that cane in his pyjamas, but right off, I caught the idea. Crawford had been in with Mrs. Bradley and when the alarm sounded, he came in and found them together and chased them, because she was in a nightdress. Well, by George, I ducked into a doorway and waited and when they reached me, Crawford turned round and fired his gun at Bradley and hit him too! Killed him! I

caught the thing with the camera—Crawford couldn't see me. Then Mrs. Bradley screamed and pointed at Crawford and said he was a murderer and that he'd killed her husband. I never saw any one look as scared as Crawford did then. He must have realized that if she lived, she'd be there to talk, so he fired at her too and then ran. But he didn't hit her, I know that. I don't know what became of her finally. But Crawford reached the boat station because I saw him go off in the boat ahead of me. That was the one that spilled—"

"Did you see Sydney Wells?" I asked. "Did you see anything of her?"

"Sydney Wells! Good God, yes! She was in this boat that Crawford commanded. The one that got off ahead of me and spilled."

"Spilled!"

"Let me tell you—it was the fifth boat that got away and there were only about eight people in it altogether. I know because I was in the sixth. I reached the station when they lowered number five. Now Crawford was in charge and there were three women—Sydney Wells and two others—and a great big nigger, and a steward, and two men passengers. That was it. One of the men was crying—but never mind that. Well, this boat had patent gear, see? It's a kind of device that released

the trip of the fall the instant the boat touched the sea. But it didn't go right. A wave hit one end of the boat when it was only half-way down and that wave released the trip on one end. Boy—that end dropped down like a rock and the boat just dangled there for a minute! It was hanging up on the other end! I thought they'd all spilled out but they hadn't. When another wave came along and hit the other end, floating the entire boat properly, there were three of them left in it—Crawford, the nigger, and Sydney Wells. The others were gone and I didn't see them again."

"I suppose you got a shot of that too," I said in a steely voice, because I was hating him now for his callousness.

"You bet I did!"

I sat up on my elbows and stared at him. "I'd like to kill you," I said. "I never felt like killing a man before, but I'd like to kill you."

"For God's sake, Banion!"

"I've got half a mind—"

"What's biting you? What's the matter with you?"

"You saw a lot of sights and you took a lot of pictures. Hard-boiled Harry from New Orleans. That's you all over. Business before pleasure, wasn't it? Why, you cold-blooded son-of-a-bitch,

haven't you got a heart? How many people did you help? Would Bradley have died if you'd interfered? What could you have done if you'd interfered? What could you have done without that camera—"

"What the hell," Dill said nervously. "Don't go soft on me, Banion. I'm a newspaperman. I've got a story here. It's my beat. I'm covering. I've got to be hard-boiled. Where the hell would the story be if I got soft? Do you know how much these shots'll be worth when we reach port?"

"You can have the money."

"It's not the money, damn you," he cried. "Can't you understand? It's the story—the scoop, not the money. Can't you see that?"

"I can't see it."

"You fool, you fool," he said frantically. "You aren't trying to understand! I've got the only ones, they're mine, I took them! Don't you understand? It's the feeling—not the money! Look at Cardena down there! His whole face is burned! How did he get that way? He was safe and sound but he ran back to pick up a locomotive model. He risked his life for that model. He couldn't leave it behind. He risked everything for it—like me, don't you see?"

I stared forward, wilting now and not caring

one way or another, and I saw Dr. Cardena's feet up in the bow beneath the thwarts. He was unconscious. He didn't move at all.

"Banion, listen, you can't feel that way about me. You've got to understand—"

Some one in the boat cut him off. "The dog! See the dog there! Here, lad! Here, boy! Here, Rover!"

I came up on to a thwart. Across the swell about twenty feet off, a collie was swimming towards us. His head was the only part of him visible. The sea had slicked the hair of it down flat, so that the long, æsthetic snout of the animal looked fastidious. He was a strong swimmer. His head jerked with each stroke forward and he did not mind the crests and troughs at all. He finally rose up on a wave, poised a moment, then skidded down towards the stern of the boat. Eager hands reached out, gripping the hair of his back and his collar and lifted him inside. His nails scratched the side as we brought him over; he instinctively dug them in for a hold; and we laid him on the boards where he fell down, panting laboriously. He was thoroughly done in; he must have come a long way. The water had pressed his thick red coat against his body so that the line from chest to belly sloped up in a facile *S* curve, not unlike the

shape of a greyhound. What expressive eyes he had! They told his tragedy more lucidly than a voice could have. Orange-brown irises in the firelight, his eyeball whites red-veined with weariness, they looked up at us, the thought indubitably chained in them: Are you he?—no . . . Are *you* he?—no. And with each pathetic inspection, the hopeful effulgence dulled until at least, he knew his search was still in vain; his head dropped to its left side and he lay there while his wet, red tongue jerked back and forth in his mouth like a glittering piston.

Dill caught the pleading look of those eyes with the camera and when I turned, he recoiled from me quickly as though he were afraid I might pluck the camera from him and hurl it overboard. But I was too listless to be angry now. "Don't look like that," Dill begged me. "You're a thick-headed Mick, that's all. You don't want to understand. You aren't even trying to understand." I realized then that he was feeling some contempt for himself.

The collie was a lovely animal. When he had recovered his strength, he sat up on his haunches, whimpering sadly. I squatted beside him and cradled his head in my hands and talked to him, but it didn't do any good. He buried his wet nose

in the palm of my hand and licked my face once or twice, but he never removed his gaze from the floating inferno north of us. I said to Dill: "We'll have to watch this dog. He's looking for some one and he can't find him or her. He'd just as soon go overboard again for another look."

"We'll hold him," Dill said. "He couldn't reach another boat. He hasn't the strength left."

"He'll keep trying hard. He's straining now," I said. "But he isn't quite ready yet."

Dill peered at him. "What about that collar?" He pointed. "Has it got a name plate?"

"Yes," I said, seeing the snack of brass fixed into the leather. "I can't make out the name though. Not light enough here."

"He's certainly a nice dog," Dill said.

"He's a thoroughbred," an elderly woman said. She was sitting one thwart away and she smiled. "I know he is."

"Do you know who owns him?" Dill asked.

"Oh, no," she said. "I never saw him before. But he's a thoroughbred. I know that because I raise them myself."

"Take it easy, boy," I said, patting the dog.

He stopped straining at the collar but he kept on whimpering.

"Relax, boy, relax," I said. I rubbed his neck

under the collar. "He's probably safe and sound the same as you. No sense going into the swim again. You'll only get yourself drowned."

"Hey!" Dill exclaimed, standing up. "I think—" and he didn't finish.

"What is it?"

"I thought I saw Crawford's boat. You asked about Sydney Wells and I thought for a minute—I *did!* There it is!" He pointed off the stern with his right arm. "Right there—about twenty-five yards—"

"I'm watching," I said tensely.

"There they come up on the swell!"

I saw the white lifeboat emerge out of the distant valley and balance crazily atop a crest. There were three people in it. It dropped down again out of sight.

"That's Crawford's boat all right," Dill said. "The big nigger—he's standing up in the stern. There it comes again. Watch it!"

I saw it again. Then I knew how the collie felt; I knew why his eyes were like that, why he wanted to go overboard again. "Hold this dog, Dill."

"Sure."

"Hold him tight. He'll try to break. Hang on to him. Bring him back alive."

"I'll hang on to him all right." Dill took the

dog and watched me. Suddenly he said: "Hey—what are you going to do?"

I didn't say anything. I got up on the last thwart and waited. When I sighted the white bluff sides of the other lifeboat over the intervening yards of furrowed sea, I got direction, then dived off.

It was a shallow dive and I seemed to bounce off the pinnacle of a swell and slide into the hollow like a surf-board. I heard Dill behind me, high and tinny. Then I began to swim as hard and as fast as I could. Twice I stopped to see if I could sight Crawford's boat again, but there was no sign of it. I kept on in the general direction for a long time. Still no sign of the lifeboat. Certainly I'd covered the twenty-five yards. I got panicky. I trod water and waited and looked all around me but I couldn't see it nor any other. I was the only one left in the world except the flaring *San Marino* far north. She was still visible, her flames in sight above the turbulent chops; over her—smelling the heavens up to and over China—the atmosphere was made of fumes and geysers of white clouds, and twinkling short-lived sparks which flattered the stars by imitation. I swam some more, tiring rapidly. A tiny seed of doubt began to sprout in me, eating up my last hopes. But the loneliness was too real, too hurtful; I lost my head. In genu-

ine terror, I began to cry: "Sydney! Sydney!" The sea cut me off, invading my throat and gagging me. I vomited, tried to swim, and vomited again. Everything broke. I began the last wild flailing of a man who will soon drown. I could not cry at all now. The words were suffocated in birth; yet in my mind as I struggled so vainly, the same pitiful cry resounded: "Sydney! Sydney!" as though by some miracle the small, thin plea could reach across the waters and bring her to me.

. . . In a distorted underworld of half-light and half-dimension, I became faintly aware of four white heads seated astride a gargoylish, flat-backed whale high over my head; slowly they rode down towards me, dissipating swiftly. Oblivion encompassed me; a sanctum sanctorum within the scrotum of death where, paradoxically, even the heat of the *San Marino* could not penetrate.

WHEN I COULD SEE AND HEAR AND SMELL AND think again, I was alive in another day. Slate dawn, long delayed, was tiptoeing cautiously across the footbridge of the east, dirty, pock-marked, sunless. The sky looked moist; the sea, leaden. My world, I found, was a raft, eight feet square. It was contrived from stout, smooth deck-boards on top of six empty airtanks. Stencilled in black on the white paint of the boards was the name of a memory—S.S. *San Marino*. Five of us—all men—clung perilously to the raft as it braved the frowsy, wind-whipped summit of each rumbling comber. We were drenched. We huddled prone against each other, abject and looking microscopic in the expanse of aggravated ocean. Sometimes the wash would slash up into our anx-

ious faces, pale now in the new light without the cosmetized touch of the ship's flames. The wind had changed; it hauled north-east in a fresh breeze, sending the roiling chops westward with the sparse wreckage which swirled with us. Once a ghastly grey face broke from beneath the surface close to us. It turned limply, then sank again, and its two dangling legs were thrust into the air as they followed the torso. After a while bubbles from a crest spit at my eyes when they burst, making me stir uneasily. I sat up, repressing a groan, for I was stiff and sore and movement let me know it boldly. The first man I saw was Daniel McGilley, engineer's assistant.

"Good mornin', Sparks," he said, cheerily. "I'm glad to see you in the land of the livin' again. I was that sure last night you was a dead man!"

I tried to speak but my throat was like sandpaper and the result was an uncouth sound deep down. He seemed to understand and smiled indulgently. I saw then that we were utterly alone. By that I mean, the lifeboats with their crews had vanished completely as had the *San Marino* herself. The sensation was one of sheer vacuity as though the earth had dissolved beneath your feet, leaving you standing in space. I finally said: "Mac—"

"Sure, Sparks, what is it?"

"—where's the ship?"

McGilley frowned heavily and shook his head. "There weren't a cockroach left in the firerooms when I seen her last," he said ingenuously. "And there ain't a pinch o' smoke where she ought to be. Now it's just my theory that she's gone to the locker. That heat was enough to split her plates long before it done so."

I fell back, sighing heavily.

"Here, here," McGilley admonished. "Don't be makin' a sound like that! Now we're goin' to come through all right. I made it when the *Vestris* took the jump, didn't I, boy? A little powerful prayin' and givin' the glory to God and we'll make it easy. There ain't a sea can drown a sailor with St. Anthony behind him, and you can mark that down in your logbook!"

It was braggadocio, of course, yet his voice was cheerful and assured. Not so his appearance. His coarse-pored face was grimy, his clothes black with grease and oil. His bedraggled moustache which jerked out convulsively as he pursed his lips, looked sick, stained with the yellow-brown hue of nicotine. He shifted presently to look upon the other three. There was a young man with shellacked eyes—Waller Kilgore. His body breathed

but he had died; that was evident. He stared, nothing more. McGilley openly nudged me and muttered: "You see that, Sparks? I've seen that look, I have." I told him not to advertise the fact, and he held his mouth in a silly gesture and continued his inspection. On the other side of Kilgore, a rotund man with steely-grey hair sat. His florid cheeks, rutted subcutaneously with tiny red canal-like veins, were bulbous. He kept blowing them out in his extreme annoyance. They'd expand like a small toy balloon, then burst as he let them drop. It was an amusing sight. He couldn't lie face down on the raft because his stomach was much too big. He smiled bleakly when he caught McGilley's glance and appeared to await a greeting, as though he were sure it would come. But he had the wrong man in McGilley who wheeled away, nudged me again and said to me: "Capitalist bastud over there. Wants me to ask him if he's all right."

"Why don't you?"

"Why should I? He ain't a mite better than me. Why don't he ask me if *I'm* all right. Hell with him." He turned and spit into the sea. Finally he squinted at the last man on the raft. "Who in pete is that? Looks Eyetalian kind of . . ."

The last man was thin, small, wiry. His dark

skin was pallidly olive from the dread which possessed him. His nails clawed furtively at the boards of the raft. The skin of his hands was lividly purple from the cold of the sea, and under it his knuckles gleamed ivory-white. The precise, pencilled-black moustachio over his upper lip quivered with his mouth while his watery eyes studied each wave. McGilley beside me shuddered and turned and whispered: "We'll have trouble with him, Sparks. He's just as liable to go off his head and he might tip the raft."

"He can't tip the raft," I said. "This raft can't tip."

"A lot you know!" McGilley exclaimed. "It can go over like a flapjack when it's hit right."

"I'll keep an eye on him," I said.

As if to corroborate McGilley, the raft suddenly reared up on one side, twisted awkwardly round, then swiftly settled with a splosh of sound. The sensation was dismaying to say the least. I gasped at the yawing and glanced over to see that the rotund man had caused it. He had assumed a more comfortable position.

"Careful, you!" McGilley roared angrily. "You'll spill us all in!"

The rotund man apologized reluctantly. "You don't have to yell at me," he said in an after-

thought.

McGilley glared furiously at him for a moment, grunted in disgust, and turned away with a sneer on his lips. The rotund man was promptly insulted. He gnawed his lips a second and said: "See here, you. I'm C. Emery Harrington. I guess you know who I am."

"Naw," McGilley replied. "Naw, Mister C. Emery Harrington, I don't know who you are. I never heard of you. My name is Mister Daniel McGilley. You never heard of me either and that makes us even-Stephen."

The rotund man became tactful. "I was only trying to get acquainted. After all, we *are* shipmates, aren't we?"

Humphing disdainfully, McGilley avoided Harrington and watched Kilgore who had changed neither his position on the raft nor his fixed stare into the sea. Myself disturbed, I raised up on my elbows—I was lying on my back—and I called to him. "Kilgore—hey—hello there!"

He turned his head very slowly and found my face. There was no hint of recognition at all, but his mouth jumped. "Hello. Is that you, Banion?"

"How are you?"

"I'm fine, Banion," he said listlessly, and turned back to the sea without another word.

McGilley regarded him compassionately. "Now see here, laddy," he said in kindly tones, "you can't be lookin' so worried. Saay! We'll come through this all right. You remember the *Vestris*? In '28 that was, and a proper sinkin' too. I was on that tub when she foundered, Glory be to God! Bodies in the sea like peas in a pod. I had me a hatch cover to float on—and, laddy, that hatch-cover weren't no more seaworthy than the *Vestris* herself." He laughed.

Kilgore didn't even look at him.

"You over there!" Mr. Harrington said suddenly, and I realized he meant me. "Aren't you the radio man?"

"Yes."

"Why, then," he said, "you must remember me. C. Emery Harrington. I sent a lot of messages to my factory out in California."

"In Burbank," I said. I felt sorry for him. It wasn't inane egotism which made him mention his name so much; it was a desire for recognition so that the transition—so sudden and terrible—from the *San Marino* to this raft in an unbounded sea would seem so much the less formidable. "Sure, Mr. Harrington. I remember you all right. You make aeroplanes."

Mr. Harrington beamed. "There, you see? He

knows me, he remembers me. That's very nice of you, young man, I'll remember that."

"Capitalist bastud," McGilley said aloud. And while Mr. Harrington flushed, his florid face deepening a shade darker, McGilley asked the last man: "What's your handle, matey?"

The last man's "handle" was Anthony Faroni but McGilley did not know that. Nor could Richard Dill—somewhere north-east in an open boat—know that his hazard (*He's probably dead right now*) was wrong. For Faroni was alive: inhaling, exhaling, feeling dread and fear, smelling the sea, tasting the gall of uncertainty after a career of gun-enforced egoism. He watched each swell as it towered over us, curled down under and passed away. He was panting and afraid to speak. I could see he felt it would shatter the concentration of his futile grip on the boards.

"Come on now, matey," McGilley said in joshing tones. "You're goin' to be all right. She's calmer now. It's the oil from the ship." Which was a downright lie since we were nowhere near the ship. "If you just lay quiet-like she won't tip. And if she does all your holdin' ain't goin' to help none."

"Faroni," the last man gasped. "Anthony Faroni."

"Now, then, Mister Faroni," McGilley said, "you're all right. You can let go o' the raft. Just try it once't and see."

"I don't want to die," Faroni said passionately. "I don't want to die at all. Jesus Christ save me!"

"Now, now," McGilley said, clucking his tongue in admonition. "That ain't a nice kind o' talk. Nobody ain't goin' to die, Mister Faroni. Not aboard this raft, nobody ain't."

Slowly, infinitesimally, Faroni relaxed his taut grip. He did not remove his gaze from the sloping sea chops but his body gradually lost its stiffness. He said faintly: "My first trip."

"Sure."

"Don't know much about it."

"Sure, we know how it is."

"It's kind of—"

"Sure. But you're all right now."

I said: "Careful. Here comes a big one."

We all plumped down like monstrous frogs while the wave zoomed us up, then deposited us abruptly in the ensuing hollow. But the raft balanced steadily on the crest and fell off in a shipshape, confident manner. The ground swell was running west very fast, it seemed. There was no sign of a sun. McGilley shook his head once. I said: "I don't like it either. The sea is too fast."

"It'll pull us away," he said soberly.

Faroni's fear lent him perspicacity. "What's wrong?" he cried sharply. "What's wrong?"

"Why, matey," McGilley said reproachfully, smiling a dead smile, "I'm ashamed o' you. There ain't nothin' wrong a-tall."

"There is—you said so!"

"Naw, naw, we're just sort o' driftin' with the current, that's all."

"What does that mean?"

McGilley shrugged and decided to let Faroni have it. "Now don't be gettin' nervy, matey. It only means we're pullin' away from the open boats. The *San Marino* sent out her distress calls from that position, you understand? It'll bring the rescue ships to that spot where she took the jump."

Faroni whimpered: "And we won't be there?"

"We—won't—be—there," McGilley said, gagging on his own words.

"Oh, poppycock!" Mr. Harrington said briskly, cocking his head to one side and blowing out his cheeks. "They'll find us all right. We can't be more than half a mile away. And perhaps they are the ones who're drifting. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir, frightening the man this way." His voice grew sterner. "They must find us. They'll

be sending out the planes to look for me—"

"Listen, mister," McGilley said heatedly. "I ain't tryin' to frighten nobody. You'd think my own skin was safe and sound to hear you talkin'. We're driftin' and we've been driftin' since early mornin' and all the time we drift, all the time we lessen our chance o' bein' sighted, see?"

"Take it easy, Mac," I said.

"You heard him, Sparks," McGilley replied. "He's got a gall to talk to me that way."

"Let's have a little peace," I said tiredly.

"I'm all for it," McGilley said. "But you can't have peace when you got capitalists aboard your craft—" He stopped when he realized none of us were listening to him. We watched the new arrival. Even Kilgore stirred from his lethargy, for we were suddenly a sextet, not a quintet. Five on the raft, one in the Caribbean. The dorsal fin, black, wet and shiny, rose up through the surface like a lateen sail, ostentatiously commencing a grim slow paddling of the zone about the raft. Like a faint green flicker, the sinister outline of the body took form beneath the fin. I licked my mouth, feeling a strange new coldness under my skin. McGilley grunted knowingly. "Blue shark," he said laconically.

"A—a shark?" Mr. Harrington said, awed.

Faroni broke. He buried his face in his hands and sobbed openly. "Oh, God, oh, my God—"

"Anyway," McGilley said evasively, "there's the sun again. It sure looks good to Dan McGilley. There was a time last night when I figured I'd never get another look at it."

He was right, the sun had plunged through a wound in the overcast sky, but no one appeared to hear him. We all watched the fin, fascinated. After a long silence, Mr. Harrington remarked: "Now that is preposterous, because there aren't any sharks in these waters, are there?"

The observation looks more insipid now than it did then. None of us laughed at it. It was said sincerely, as though Mr. Harrington were attempting (however ludicrously) to deny the reality of the shark and thereby see it dissipate into sea water. It did not dissipate, unfortunately, and McGilley, moved to acidulous sarcasm, said: "Oh, yes, mister, oh, yes. I can guarantee you it's a bona-fide shark all right. Just stick your foot in the water and see for yourself. Mister, you're in the Caribbean Sea. They breed sharks in these waters like sardines. I figure maybe there's more sharks in these waters than anywhere else except maybe the Red Sea or the Indian Ocean, and I've sailed 'em all and I know—and you can mark that down

in your logbook!"

"Jesus save me," Faroni cried like a beggar.

"Steady," I said.

"Jesus Christ have mercy on me," he said, clasping his hands. "St. Rita have mercy. I don't want to die."

"Now, now," Mr. Harrington said uneasily.

But Faroni went on and on, completely unnerved and we spoke to him, trying to stop him, without doing any good, until the mixture of voices sounded like a polyphony.

"Stow that!" McGilley thundered at last. "Glory be to God, you got a spine, ain't you? You ain't goin' to die—we'll come through this! One shark out there and you start bawlin' like a baby! By Cain and Abel, I wisht you'd been aboard the *Vestris!* There was *sharks!* Six deep they came and had as big a dinner as they'll ever have from ships' food scraps, and here you bawl on account of one measly shark! Now listen to me, all of you! Let's have a little peace and quiet aboard this craft or I'm liable to get mad and chuck you overboard!"

Seeing McGilley mad was apparently enough for both Faroni and Mr. Harrington. Neither said a further word. Kilgore remained still. The silence irked me. Presupposing that McGilley might exaggerate his own importance, I turned to

him and said loudly:

"Wouldn't a nice hot cup of coffee go good now, Mac?"

He wheeled and glowered at me and opened his mouth to raise a fuss, but I stared him down until —with a faint smile—he replied gently: "It would, Sparks, it would at that . . ."

When you are in the temperate zones after a severe winter, the sun is a friendly thing to be courted for health's sake. When you are on a small raft in a tropical sea, hatless, partly clothed, having all around you the most gigantic of reflectors, the sun becomes a machine of the Inquisition. Certainly the tortures of Toledo must have been more merciful. When the sun went up in earnest that first uneventful day, it became too hot to move or talk, almost too hot to breathe; we stretched out on the raft, inanimate, our faces down away from the intolerable rays which thronged us, and we covered the backs of our heads with our hands. Except Mr. Harrington. His corpulence prevented his lying face down. He had to repose on his back, shielding his face as best he could. He had nothing to remove from himself in the way of a screen; he wore the silk maroon pyjamas which he had had on when the alarm sounded aboard ship. That was an uneventful day,

yet of all it will be long remembered. Behind it is the symbol of the sun broiling us alive. Even the sea, grown placid and rippleless throughout the day, seemed to simmer under the rays and steam.

McGilley had been so pleased to see the sun that morning. When it deleted the smudged sky, he said to me: "It'll be clear as crystal before noon, Sparks. They'll sight us to-day for sure."

But now the deep purple shadows were dancing on the ocean's floor and no one had sighted us nor we them. Eastward the sea vanished into the vague border of the night sky. Westward the waters stretched still and beautiful like liquid amethyst, unmarred by even perceptible swells. Sometimes a sprightly gust would ripple the surface with goose-pimples. But gusts were rare, and when they did come, they were too sopped with the heat to be Gilead balm. As the twilight was broken down into night, the pastel shades were exquisite. No brush could have captured the ephemeral fragility of the fading clay-lavender. From north to south in a tremendous arc, four times the diameter of a rainbow, colour saturated the sky, gradually darkening with graceful dignity as the night fell over and the stars took up their stations.

No sooner had the first coolness spread out across the sea than Faroni raised himself from his

stomach and sat down, folding his hands crosswise in his lap. He said: "I'm thirsty," and made noisy sucking sounds in his mouth.

"Now, matey," McGilley said regretfully, "you know we ain't got no water."

"I'm thirsty," Faroni said.

The tension could be felt instantly. I tried to break it and I said: "As for me, I'll have turkey and the fixings."

"Ha-ha," McGilley laughed forcedly. "That's a good one, Sparks."

But it had fallen flat.

"I'm thirsty," Faroni said.

"You'd better watch him, Mac," I said.

"I was thinkin' so myself."

Kilgore was still lying flat on his stomach, his head cradled sideways against his right arm. Now —as Faroni persisted—Kilgore raised himself and turned to watch Faroni whose face and hands began an uncontrollable quivering. In a gruesome whisper, he said: "I can't stand this. Jesus save me, save me . . ."

"Shh," Mr. Harrington said.

"Just one drop of water—"

"Shh, be quiet!"

"Hail Mary full of grace—"

"You'd think he was the only one," Mr. Har-

rington said at random, his voice hoarse. "Shoddy, pure shoddy." He restrained himself and drew back his shoulders in a gesture which must have thrust agony through him, for his neck and shoulders were terribly sunburned. "But where are the planes? Surely they have sent planes to look for me. Why—ridiculous, ridiculous!" He laughed in a way that made my whole back prickly.

"Mac," I said quickly.

"Sure, Sparks?"

"There's another one. Watch that boy there."

"Say," McGilley grunted, "let him watch himself. I ain't no nursemaid for no capitalist bastud. He wouldn't raise his little pinky to save me. Hell with him."

"That's no way to talk."

"I'm talkin'. I've got my own skin to watch." He gasped sharply as the raft wallowed. "*Care*ful, you!" he bellowed at Faroni. "You'll spill us all in!"

Faroni looked very vague. "The shark's gone away, hasn't it?" he said, and fell on to his back, as though he were instantaneously asleep.

McGilley sighed wearily. "The shark. Gone away. Now ain't that a funny one? . . . Look at the line o' them. They're surroundin' us. See, Sparks—you see the big one that comes in close

here? That's a hammer-head."

"That's unusual, isn't it, Mac?"

"Well, yes and no. They stick to warmer water usually, but it's warm enough here. I think maybe we're in the Stream."

"We've been drifting due west all day," I said.

"Yes, sir," McGilley said, squinting, "it might be the Stream." He took deep breaths and was quiet for awhile until he glanced at Kilgore. "Laddy, you ain't been right all day. What's troublin' you, anyhow?"

Kilgore's face froze. "There's nothing wrong with me. I'm perfectly all right."

"I'm thirsty," Faroni said.

We all stared at him intently.

Minutes later, the sun was surely gone. McGilley rubbed the rough stubble of his unshaven chin. The scratchy sound of it was audible. Grinning, he said: "Well, mates, another day another dollar." But it didn't sound very funny.

"But how can the planes find me in the dark?" Mr. Harrington asked.

"There ain't no planes, mister."

"Of course there are! Don't talk poppycock! They're out looking for me right now."

"Will you listen to him!" McGilley said.

I said: "Just let him talk."

"Planes! Humph!"

"It'll do him good if you just let him talk."

"He can talk all he wants, but it's my theory he's crazier 'n a loon! Planes way out here lookin' for him . . ."

Faroni cut him off. With a suddenness which startled every one of us, he catapulted to his knees and the raft spun wildly and went awash at the corners. Sea water splashed on to the back of Faroni's hands. He felt its cool touch in demoniacal wonderment, stopping his wild scrambling to stare at it in a vacuous stupefaction. "Water!" he cried, astonished. "Water! Look here, look at it—thanks to St. Rita, here's water!" He dipped his hand into the sea and lifted it out, sticking it into his mouth. He sucked on it loudly. "There, you see!" he said sharply. The raft wallowed, one end digging into the surface, the opposite end rising up in an arc that made my blood run cold. Faroni hung over the submerged end, struggling madly to get his mouth down far enough so that he could drink. I heard Kilgore shout: "No, no good, heavens, don't drink!" And I cried: "Don't let him drink that salt stuff, it'll kill him!" But McGilley had no mind for this. All he saw was the raft going over. He bent his left leg at the knee and shot it out like a ram. His foot struck

Faroni in the small of the back, the dull thump of the blow sounding simultaneously with Faroni's surprised grunt. The impact hurled Faroni into the black sea silently. There was no sound at all except the gurgling of the water when the fins whipped it up. The raft careened harrowingly for seconds and finally—without Faroni's weight—steadied, floating higher than before.

Mr. Harrington, shocked, stared at the greenish lines in the sea around the hole where Faroni had disappeared. There was no outcry at all.

We drifted west. . . .

I watched McGilley who, in turn, watched the sea behind us. He had bitten hard into one of his hands; he didn't seem to feel it at all. Later, Mr. Harrington's accusatory stare moved McGilley to words. "I had to do it," he said, raspy. "I had to do it, glory be to God! You couldn't've yanked him back in time and the raft was goin' over. We'd all've gone with it. You saw it. It was set to capsize."

Mr. Harrington muttered something inaudible which sounded like: "Murderer!"

"No! It weren't *that,* mister," McGilley said fervently. "You couldn't've—"

"Steady," I said. "Drop the whole thing."

"Sure," Kilgore said bitterly. "What difference

does it make anyhow? We've no chance."

"Why, laddy," said McGilley, "it was the same on the *Vestris*. I floated two days and two nights before they picked me up then. Why, the rescue ships had given up and it was a coast-guard cutter got me. All I had was a hatch cover to float on and you should have seen the sharks. Six deep they swum like in an army, just waitin' for Dan McGilley to let go. . . . Say, laddy, to-morrow a ship'll sight us sure!"

"Or the planes," Mr. Harrington said, sounding far away.

Kilgore said: "At any rate there'll be no rescue to-night, so let's sleep and stop haggling."

McGilley pondered. "Well, now, here's somethin' else again. Sleepin' is goin' to be mighty ticklish."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"You know how a man rolls in his sleep. You might roll off in the night."

"Might be the best thing for all of us," Kilgore said morosely.

"Glory be to God!" McGilley exclaimed. "You don't mean that, laddy. You don't understand about sharks, that's it. If it was a matter of drownin', it wouldn't be so bad. I nearly drowned once when I fell off a pier and couldn't swim. It

weren't so bad. But sharks"—he grimaced—"they tear you, they're devils."

With such unpleasant food for thought, the problem of sleep was put off silently. After awhile, Kilgore found some cigarettes in his coat and pulled them out. "If we only had a match," he said. "They're all dry."

"Maybe I got one," McGilley said. "No—worse luck," after he had searched his clothes. "And I could go a snipe at that. How about you, Sparks?"

"I had some in my coat," I said. "It was on the stern when I saw it last."

McGilley pulled Mr. Harrington's coat. "You got a match, mister?"

"What is it?"

"Have you got a match? You ought to have one. You capitalists are always supposed to be smokin' them fifty-cent stogies, ain't you?"

"I've some dry cigarettes," Kilgore explained. "I just found them."

"Oh. . . . Why, yes. Here are some." Mr. Harrington found a clip of matches in the only pocket of his pyjama top. They were thoroughly dried from the heat of the day. He handed them over to Kilgore. They functioned perfectly. The cigarette glowed in the dark. After he had inhaled deeply on it, Kilgore passed the other cigarettes

round with it. "Light yours from mine," he said. "We'll save the matches."

"Save the matches, yes," Mr. Harrington said quickly. His voice was unnaturally strong. "You save those matches, hear me? We'll need them when the planes come. We'll burn a flare—my pyjamas—anything—but we'll need the matches. Give them back to me."

"I'll hold them for us," Kilgore said respectfully. "My clothes are dry."

"Mine are too. Give them back to me."

Nobody said anything. Kilgore kept the matches.

"Oh, I see it all now. You want to keep them for yourself. You want to waste them smoking while my life is at stake."

"There are lots of them," Kilgore said.

"Give me back my matches!"

The raft shivered as Mr. Harrington moved.

"Sit still!" McGilley roared. "You sit still, do you hear?"

"I want my matches!"

"Keep quiet and sit still!"

"You go to hell, I want my matches!"

"Glory be to God!" McGilley thundered. "Give the bastud his matches and let's have some peace!"

Kilgore gave Mr. Harrington the matches.

There was no sound then but the staccato slap of the sea against the ballast tanks below us. We settled and floated steadily. But the silence deepened until it began to roar in my ears.

"He's crackin'," McGilley said confidentially. "I hate to see a man crack like that. That's an awful way to go."

I said: "He just wants to live."

"No, Sparks, I've seen this before, I have. I know when a man is crackin'. It was the same on the *Vestris.*"

"He'll be all right."

"Sure he will," said Kilgore. "I wasn't trying to steal his matches. I thought they'd be safer with me."

"I'm going to sleep," Mr. Harrington said, interrupting. "Wake me when you hear the planes. They'll be looking for me."

"You'd better not sleep, mister," McGilley said ominously.

"Leave me alone, you!"

"All right, *all* right," McGilley said. "Go ahead if you're goin' to. But lie flat on your back and don't turn at all."

"I'll have no advice from you!"

McGilley sighed. "Ah, well, mates, it's his own

funeral. I told him, you're witnesses. Now let him be."

. . . . . .

It was very late when I fell asleep. The moon came up, three-quartered, coloured a tepid ecru which coated the Caribbean restfully. Flat on my stomach, my arms and legs spread-eagled to prevent rolling, I dropped off.

I awakened with a start—it seemed only moments later—and I found my face was soaking wet and that McGilley was pounding my back and yelling.

I said: "I'm awake, I'm awake, what is it?"

"Glory be to God!" McGilley cried. "He's gone, by God, he's gone!"

My skin felt prickly and I jerked bolt upright, feeling chilly. "Who's gone?"

"Harrington!" Kilgore said.

"He rolled right off," McGilley said.

"Sound asleep!"

"He was on his back, he was, and he started to turn," McGilley said. "And then the raft shot up and off he went like a rollin' stone! Your face is wet from the splash, Sparks."

"Dear God!" I gasped in horror.

"Look there," Kilgore said, pointing. "Look what he left."

It was the clip of matches.

Kilgore retrieved them. We talked about it for a long time, more excited than sorrowful, I confess. Finally, dog-tired, we began to drop off. As I reposed there, I became very drowsy and just at the moment when I was about to doze off, I said: "C. Emery Harrington—I wonder what the C stood for . . . ?"

I had no reason for saying it, and I certainly didn't expect a reply. But McGilley sat up and spit lustily into the ocean and said: "It probably stood for Capitalist!" and then he dropped his head back again for the night.

. . . . . .

The next day broke with alarming eagerness, and the young sun, yellow and blinding, threatened to be troublesome. Already the insinuation of heat upon the burns of the previous day was painful. All around us the ocean stretched itself, clear and bright blue, reflecting the cerulean of the sky and the egg-white cirrus clouds which hung puffily in space above us. There was no other life; not even the sharks were about. And the raft, like a solemn gnat, continued its tireless trek down the boneless sea-spine.

Kilgore passed the cigarettes round and we all had one.

"Thanks, laddy," McGilley said, fingering his. "Say, tell you what we do. Let's call this here snipe breakfast. Then we won't be feelin' so hungry."

"All right," Kilgore said, smiling.

"Mac," I said wryly, "would you mind lighting my cigarette so's I can have my orange juice?"

"As for me," McGilley replied, "I'd prefer grapefruit with a cherry atop it, I would."

We all laughed and smoked. Presently, when the cigarettes were floating in the water, bobbing white bugs, Kilgore said: "You watched me last night, Banion. I want to thank you."

I said: "That's all right. You rolled twice. I caught you, but you'd have gone over surely."

"I wish I had."

"Glory be to God, laddy!" McGilley exclaimed. "That ain't a thing to be sayin'. That's temptin' the devil."

Kilgore said soberly: "Oh, no. The devil's had his due." He shivered. "More than his due—were you awake when Harrington rolled off?"

"Aye," McGilley said, ill at ease.

"I wasn't," I said. "The splash woke me, I guess."

"And a healthy nightmare you was havin', too, Sparks. You was talkin' about some fella named

Sidney most o' the time. And then you kept repeatin': *'There seems to be a fire.'* "

"Did I?"

"Aye."

"I'm sorry for Harrington," said Kilgore. "He really wanted to live."

"I ain't so sure I feel the same way," McGilley said evenly, fingering his thick moustache. "An act o' God if you ask me. Someday God's goin' to take all them blood-suckin' capitalists up on a mountain and blast the hide and hair off every livin' one of them. And the world'll be a better place for it too."

"Are you a communist, Mac?" I asked.

"Glory be to God, I am that!"

"You can't glory-be-to-God in communism, can you?" I said.

"Oh, I ain't one of them Russians," McGilley said, straightening. "Me, I'm an American communist and there's a mite o' difference."

"You're Marxian?"

"Heh?"

"Marxian."

"I don't get you, Sparks."

"You never heard of Karl Marx?"

"Naw, he ain't the one. Fella named George Billin's. Met him at the Seamen's Institute last

month. Glory what a man! He told me and you can't stop it, Sparks, it's comin' as sure as you're born."

"The revolution?"

"That's it, *Der Tag,* he calls it. Why, listen, Sparks, did you know that Jesus Christ was the first communist? He told you why the rich wouldn't get into heaven. Blood-suckers, bleedin' the poor—"

"Ah, no, Mac. Their materialism was their stumbling block. It wasn't their wealth. It was their love of wealth in preference to God."

"That ain't my outlook on the subject," he said vehemently, "and if you knew your Bible better—"

"Oh, see here—"

"That's the whole trouble. It's people like you who ain't aroused. The masses is stupid. It takes them a long time to get aroused and do somethin' about it. But some day they'll begin wonderin' and then you'll see it!" He took a breath. "By Cain and Abel, you'll see a revolution and they'll throw out these blood-suckin' bastuds and split up the money even-Stephen!"

"It won't work, Mac. It's a good theory but it's only a theory. The reason your distasteful capitalism is an institution is because man himself is

egoistic, not altruistic. I'm sure the same thing would happen in communism. Man himself is the stumbling block. Look at yourself. You call Harrington a swine because he had money and because he had position accumulated at the expense of the masses—you. But look at yourself! You're alive and breathing and seeing—at whose expense? Faroni's. You blood-sucked him as much as Harrington ever blood-sucked you, and you can't see it, you never will see it as long as you live! That's the way man is. You can't change it."

McGilley dropped his face. "An unkind cut, Sparks." And Kilgore said: "Harrington was so positive that his planes would be searching for him, that other people held his existence as vital as their own. And yet the world will go right on without him—or us, for that matter."

"Well," McGilley said, not believing it, "that's the way it goes."

"He's probably better off than we'll be when this sun gets going," I said.

"Aye." McGilley tugged at his shirt collar. " 'Tis gettin' a mite warmer, ain't it?"

"That's putting it mildly," I said.

"It'll be another scorcher." He waved his hand expansively. "Look at 'em!"

He meant the sharks. They were back, clusters

of the grim fins. We watched them carefully. The sun had stolen the grimness from the fins. We drifted a long time and we lay immobile until the rays began their lingering penetration into our bodies and forced us to turn in self-defence. The glare on the waters was brilliantly blinding and we had to close our eyes most of the time. When we moved, after a long quietude, Kilgore asked me: "Are you married, Banion?"

"No," I said.

"I am," McGilley said. "I got four kids."

"Gee," Kilgore said boyishly. "That's swell!"

"Are *you,* laddy?"

Kilgore hesitated. Then I saw it all, why he had been so morbid, so silent. I had forgotten that these two were on their honeymoon. I said: "It's your wife, Kilgore. What's wrong? Is she all right or do you know?"

He waited a long time before he answered but then it poured out and I saw that he had wanted desperately to get it out of him. "She isn't all right," he blurted, his eyes filling. "She wouldn't leave me to go to her boat station. We went to the stern and we stayed there, but after a while it got so hot, we couldn't stand it. We had to jump."

"Yes, I went off there myself."

"Did you? . . . We tried to hang together, but

when we went off, she was thrown clear of me. I saw her once after that, just her face all white and helpless. I couldn't do anything. I tried to reach her but I lost her in the swells."

"Well, now," McGilley said cheerfully, "she's probably safe and sound. She had only to swim to the boats and they was right by, no more than a stone's throw."

Kilgore shook his head. "She couldn't swim a stroke," he said.

"Did she have a life preserver?" I asked.

"No."

". . . I'm dreadful sorry, laddy," McGilley said. I didn't say anything. McGilley had covered it.

I watched Kilgore sharply now, as the day grew blistering and we kept drifting westward. There was an inhibited plot in his eyes which I had seen growing all along. Despite the melodramatic puerility which prompted it, I couldn't help but admire his complete humility. Plainly, he discarded himself as a nonentity and his love for Ann, immature and unseasoned though it might be, was the only important thing to be considered. I could see him reasoning: it can't be considered with me here and her there.

Not long past noon—when the blazing sun was over head—his face went taut, became as lifeless as

granite, and he relinquished his constant staring at the sea. His nerve was up; and here the thing came. Drawing back his shoulders, and wincing at the bite of the sunburn there, he took a long breath, a final cast around the horizon, and sat up purposefully. He was obviously sincere about it. That was why I sat up too, measuring the distance to him. "Well," he remarked with finality, "I'm quitting you both," and he avoided our faces.

It was no surprise to me, naturally, but poor McGilley nearly left his skin. He came up from his back as though sprung, his moustache doing a jig as he cried: "What's that, laddy? What did you say?"

"I'm quitting you."

"I don't get you! I don't understand you!"

"Banion does, don't you, Banion?" Kilgore extended his hand to McGilley, who grasped it automatically. "Lots of luck, sir. I hope you make it."

"What are you goin' to do?"

Kilgore shrugged and glanced at the sea.

"Glory be to God!" McGilley gasped, a terrible look dawning in his eyes. "No, laddy, not that way, that's not the way! God Almighty, that's an awful way to go!"

"I've thought about it."

"Don't talk like that. You're crackin', laddy,

you're out of your head. You got to get hold of yourself—"

"*I'm* not cracking, Mr. McGilley." Kilgore turned and scraped across the raft towards the far end.

"Wait a minute," I said.

He stopped. "You can't dissuade me."

"I know that," I said.

"And you'd better not try to stop me. I might tip the raft in getting away. I wouldn't want to do that."

"No! No! You wouldn't want to do that, laddy!" McGilley said, alarmed. "Leave him alone, Sparks. You wouldn't want that to happen!"

I said: "I just wanted to shake hands with him before he went, that's all."

"Oh," Kilgore murmured, abashed. "Oh, I'm sorry, Banion. I didn't mean to be rude." He extended his hand.

I was closer to him now and I gripped his right hand—with my left—and shook it vigorously. He didn't note the deception at once. It struck him when it was too late. He managed to get out: "*Don't—*" just before I drove my fist against the point of his chin, trying hard to slam the jaw back into its socket. It was a good blow and I surprised myself with it. He grunted loudly once,

then collapsed, sagging forward on his face. McGilley panted hotly with excitement beside me. I could hear him without looking at him. We stretched Kilgore out and we cupped sea water in our hands and threw it on his face.

"He'll come around," McGilley said. "He'll be all right, Sparks. But don't do that again. That was a near thing, that was, so don't try it again."

"What are you talking about?" I said.

"Why," he said, "you nearly tipped the raft. It was all I could do to stay aboard."

. . . . . .

Late in the afternoon—about four or five I would estimate—we were lying there saying nothing at all and drifting. Kilgore had regained consciousness and then I told him one thing. "You're a fool," I said. "I don't give a damn whether you jump off or not" (which was a lie) "but if you had any grain of decency, you'd wait until you knew for sure whether or not your wife is alive. It would be rather ironic for you to go in and for us to find her safe aboard some ship. If you persist in this idiocy, all right. But you can kill yourself as well on dry land later on when you know the facts." The logic must have appealed to him. He didn't try it again, and he could have, too, for I didn't watch him after that. . . . The

world around us was a bed of embers which burnt the energy out of our blood. There was nothing to do or say and that's the way it was. But presently—through force of habit really—McGilley raised his head and made a sweeping survey of the horizon on all sides with the usual prayer in his eyes that he might sight a smudge of smoke against the sky.

And—as usual—there was nothing.

But wait a minute.

He sat up and peered eastward. He stared so long and steadily that I sat up too for a look. At first I could see nothing, but in another moment, I caught a sparkling diamond-flash where the sun had struck, and in an instant, I made it out—the white bluff sides of a lifeboat manned by a single figure in the stern. The figure stood there, tall against the flatness of sea, and a single oar thrust out into the sea behind him beside the tiller of the boat; he was paddling the oar in the fashion of a gondolier. It was this wet oar which had caught the sun and made the flash.

McGilley shot up to his knees, shading his eyes from the sun. "Sparks," he said urgently, "Sparks, do you see it?"

"I see it!"

"It's a boat," he said. "By Cain and Abel, it's

one of the *San Marino's* lifeboats!"

"That's what it is, all right!" I said fervently.

"Do you suppose he's seen us? He must've seen us, don't you think?"

"I don't know," I said.

"He's got to see us! Why he's got a keg o' water and a box o' hardtack and regular stock aboard there! Oh, blather, but hardtack would taste like steak to me right now, and water—he's seen us, don't you think he's seen us?"

"I don't know, I told you! We've got to wait and see, that's all!"

"Wait and see?" McGilley grunted deeply in his throat. "Now I say the hell with that! Wait and see and take the chancet of him sailin' right under us! Why he's got a craft there could take him clear to Trinidad with sixty souls aboard. Wait and see nuthin', Sparks! I'm going to be aboard her, by God!"

McGilley rose unsteadily to his feet; the raft began an unbalanced rocking with the loss of its centre of gravity.

I said with concern: "You damned fool. Don't be in such a hurry. Those sharks are still hungry."

"Hell with 'em," he said. "They can wait this time. They can wait forever for a piece of Dan McGilley's hide. St. Anthony has seen to that! I

told you, Sparks, I told you we'd come through! I made it when the *Vestris* took the jump and I've made it again!" He began to signal, waving his arms frantically to and fro, rocking the raft crazily. *"Ahoy!"* he bellowed. *"Ahoy, the boat!"* The raft slid in such a precarious manner that even Kilgore was moved to protest: "For heaven's sake, Mr. McGilley—"

But McGilley ignored him, persisted in the exuberant flailing.

"He's seen us!" I said sharply, peering. "He's waving back at us! Come down from there, Mac, the r—"

*"MATES!"*

A resounding, ominous plunge. The spray cascaded high into the air and splattered the raft. The water struck both Kilgore and me full in the face. We dived across the boards on our stomachs madly. When McGilley came to the surface his flinging arms reached out. We each caught one, yanked hard, lifting him half out of the water. Then the fins cut in, all converging towards him. We yanked again against his back-breaking weight and we pulled him clear, but just as we did so, he emitted a shriek of pain. We fell back, dragging him across the boards after us, and we stretched him out on his back.

His left foot was bleeding a little—a trifle actually, considering its malady. The three largest toes of the foot were shorn off as neatly as though the razor-edged blade of *La Veuve* had done the job.

McGilley was gasping as he lay there, the water dripping from him, his face dirty-green from shock. "I can't feel it," he rasped. "I can't feel a thing yet. . . . Oh, blather, I should have listened, I should've known. I've got to have me a look, mates, so boost me up so as I can see."

We didn't boost him. He raised himself on his elbows and stared down at his foot. It was not rawer than the sunburn on the instep, and it bled very little. He looked at it for ten silent seconds before he uttered a word.

"Glory be to God!" he exclaimed presently. "Glory be to God on high!"

What now? I thought.

"Thanks be to God," he said. "Glory to God!"

"Can't you see?" I asked. "You've lost three toes."

"Glory to God," he replied fervently. "It might've been my whole leg, praise God!"

THE MAN WHO STOOD IN THE STERN OF THE OPEN boat was a giant. He hit your eye like a lone redwood on a prairie and his arms were so long, they hung down to his knees. He was negro, black as a chunk of coal, his body glistening in the sunlight, covered with the dew of sweat. His shirt was half-gone, exposing a broad, thick chest, hairless and smooth; his pants were in tatters, caked with stoke-hold dirt which was blacker than his skin. This man had been a stoker on the *San Marino*. His bullet head with its kinkly hair sat atop a long, graceful neck. His nose was squat and his eyes looked watery white and very solemn.

When the open boat was about fifteen feet away from us, he stopped paddling, lifting the long oar out of the sea and cradling it under his

arm as though it were a baseball bat. He inspected us carefully, squinting his eyes, and at last he said in a reverberating bass voice: "Yawl better hear me!"

"We hear you," McGilley said impatiently. "Glory be to God, boy, hurry up here. We're roasted nigh to death and we're thirsty and we're hungry and this foot o' mine is beginnin' to make itself felt."

"First you jest listen," the negro said boomingly. "My name is John Christopher and I got somethin' to tawk about."

"Then talk, by Cain and Abel!" McGilley said. "Because I'm a man who's in a hurry to come aboard."

"Dere's a white gal in dis yere boat," John Christopher said, fondling the oar. "Last night dere was a white man yere too. He ain't around to-day. You see de blood on my pants? Dat's hisn blood. You see de blood on dis yere oar? Dat's hisn blood too. Dis white man, he try to make love to dis white gal last night and whar is he to-day? He's daid. He ain't gonter meddle with no more white gals 'cause he's daid."

We stared at him speechlessly.

"So efn you gonter come aboard hyar," he said, "yawl better sit quietlike and have no cuttin' up.

I swing a killin' oar and I don't stand for no foolishment."

"Where is the girl?" I asked suspiciously, for I couldn't see any one besides himself.

"She's hyar," John Christopher said. "She's lyin' down hyar outa de sun and she ailin' bad. She ain't been well all night and I'm sick myself about hit. Dat ole sun burnt her bad yesterday. When I kilt de white man, I kep his clothes and I made a tent to keep away dat sun. She lyin' under de tent right hyar. But before yo' come aboard, yawl better hear me. Keep away from dat white gal or I'll swing dis yere killin' oar, you hear me?"

"We hear you," McGilley said. "Glory be to God, boy, stop this palaverin' and let us aboard. My foot is about to kill me. Look here, boy, I've lost three toes. It ain't the humane thing to do to keep me waitin' this way."

"Jest bide you' time," John Christopher said, and he started paddling once more off the stern of the boat. The action seemed fruitless since the boat was a big, blunt thing, heavy and with bulwarks which were elbow high to the rowers' thwarts, yet it moved with a snail-steadiness until the bow bumped into the raft, sending a dull shiver through the boards.

"By Cain and Abel!" McGilley exclaimed breathlessly, staring at the bow close to him. "That's the prettiest sight I ever did see! Help me here, Sparks, for I'm treadin' water on my left foot."

"Take it easy, Mac," I said, helping him. "I'll take this side of you and Kilgore'll take the other."

"I have him," Kilgore said. "We'll have to slide him across by pulling him."

I said: "That's it. Just relax, Mac, and don't use your foot. We'll slide you to the boat's beam."

"Oh, mercy!" McGilley moaned. "That hurts! Oh, blather, take them needles out o' my foot!"

"You've got to do it that way. We can't stand up. We'll tip the raft if we do."

"Glory be to God, look at that foot! Ain't it the queerest sight you ever did see without no toes like that? How'll my socks ever fit proper again? But it might've been my leg, praise God. Aoow, take it easy, mates, take it easy on me!"

In the stern, peering forward, beetle-browed, John Christopher shook his head. "Lawd, lawd," he murmured sympathetically. "You shore got you a foot dere, white man. You shore has. Ain't you gonter feel foolish at de pearly gates widout dem toes?"

"It might've been my leg," McGilley answered.

"How'd you come dat way, white man?"

"I fell into the briny wavin' at you, that's how," McGilley said, annoyed. "It's a livin' miracle you see before you. Why, them devils nearly made a meal of Dan McGilley!"

"You was born unlucky," John Christopher said, "you got trouble shore enough."

We finally got McGilley in, pushing him over the beam of the boat. Kilgore stepped in then. I followed, last, pushing the raft away with my right foot as I clung to the bow. As I stepped over the first narrow thwart, resting my feet on the boards over the bilge, John Christopher suddenly bristled. "Care whar you step, white man! Dere's a white gal right dere under dem clothes and you's gonter step on her efn you ain't careful!"

I glanced down. Over the thwarts, the negro had spread out the remnants of a man's clothes. There was the coat of a blue uniform and a ripped, bloody white shirt. When I saw the chevron on the left arm of the coat, I knew who the girl beneath the coat was.

Dropping to my knees, I glanced in, crying: "Sydney! Oh, my God, darling!"

She was lying on her back in the bilge, under the shade of the coat and shirt. But the welcome shade had come a bit too late. Her arms and her

legs were badly burned. Also her neck; on the right side of the latter, a huge blister puffed itself up emptily. She wore only a short-sleeved sweater and a pair of scanty gabardine sport shorts which had afforded no protection at all. Other than the broiled lobster appearance of her legs, there were four ghastly rake scratches in the flesh. And the left side of her sweater just under the armpit was ripped wide open. When she heard my voice she opened her eyes. They held no recognition and they were tired and dull. But she whispered: "Ah, darling, I thought you would never come . . ."

Like a bear with a sore head, John Christopher roared: "I told you, white man! You got to keep shy of dat gal or I start a-swingin' dis yere oar! I'se warnin' you once dat I swung hit on de first man and I'se warnin' dat I'm gonter swing again if you don't shoo shy! I got somethin' to tawk about and I ain't standin' for no foolishment!"

"I know this girl!" I said. "I knew her aboard ship! Kilgore—for God's sake—tell him! This is Sydney Wells, you remember her, Sydney Wells!"

"That's a fact," Kilgore said earnestly. "He's telling you the truth, Christopher."

"I don't trust no one 'ceptin' me," John Christopher said angrily. "Dat first man he knowed her too, but he tried to get at her jest de same. You

shoo shy of dat gal, suh, and don't git me mad. 'Cause when I gits mad, I swing dis yere oar like a big wind!"

"Glory be to God!" McGilley said. "Listen to that nigger take on!"

"Ask her yourself!" I said with acerbity. "Ask her if I'm all right!"

John Christopher stopped bellowing and looked nonplussed. He peered at me and then stooped down in the stern and looked underneath the thwarts until he could see Sydney's face. "Lady," he called. "You hyar me?"

She heard him but she couldn't reply. She lifted her head with an effort and nodded. I was shocked to see the strength it sucked from her.

"Is dat man all right, lady? You want him dere wid you or is he jest a fat-mouf? You say de word, lady, and John Christopher'll start a-swingin' dis oar!"

"I want him here," Sydney said in a whisper.

I could hardly hear her myself.

"What you sayin'?"

She didn't try to speak again. She pulled my face down and kissed me lightly, then fell back prone.

"Ah, lawd," John Christopher sighed.

"You see?" I said.

"Yea, lawd," he said. "I see. You shore was born lucky, white man, and dat's a fack. You got what I'm tawkin' about, you shore has. What yo' name?"

"Banion."

"Marse Banion, you shore is de rooster 'round hyar."

"Oh, mercy," McGilley moaned, "let's have a spot o' water and a nibble of hardtack before Dan McGilley passes on. . . . The way this foot o' mine is achin' I swear I don't feel long for this world."

"You gonter live, you gonter live," John Christopher said sing-song. "Dere's water and dere's food and we got plenty, but we ain't gonter guzzle 'cause we may be a long time to land."

"Well, by Cain and Abel," replied McGilley with natural fire, "you'll be a longer time if you keep westward this way! Your course is east, boy, east. East we got landfalls. West we'll keep a-goin' until we bang up in Mexico, and glory be to God, that's a helluva ways off!"

"Yas, suh," John Christopher said with respect. "East she gonter be. Yo' de cap'n, suh."

"Banion," Kilgore called. "How is she? Is she all right?"

"I don't think so," I said. "I don't know."

I crawled down under the emergency tenting and got close to Sydney and looked at her. She was flushed and hot, but whether from sunburn or fever, I couldn't tell. I tried her pulse and it seemed much too fast. She breathed quickly, in short, shallow gasps. "Sydney," I said.

"Yes, darling." A whisper.

"Tell me exactly how you feel."

"Yes, darling. . . . All queer. . . . Hot. I—I can't seem—" She paused for several moments. "—I can't seem to breathe—"

That's what I'd been afraid of; and here it was.

"Just lie still, darling. Lie still and don't move. To-day a ship will surely sight us and we'll have a medico to take care of you."

"Thank you, darling." All in a whisper now. She couldn't raise her voice. "You're such a dear chap."

I said: "I love you, Sydney. I've been through hell thinking about you."

"I waited for you," she said. "But you didn't come. Why didn't you come?"

"I couldn't leave my post."

"Why didn't you come?"

"I just told you—"

"Banion!" She sounded terrified.

I grasped her hand and squeezed. "I'm right

here, darling, right beside you."

"Oh." She felt me. "Oh, yes. I couldn't—see you. I thought you were gone again."

"Shh. Take it easy. No talking. You've got to rest."

At once her shoulders shook, and she began to cry. "Banion—sweet—" she said faintly and sadly, "—why didn't you take me then—why couldn't we have had each other—I tried so hard and it's all gone forever, all lost, all gone—"

"Don't talk that way," I said, agonized. "I'll make it up to you later."

"Too late, sweet, much too late—I told you—the bubble to burst—and my destiny—it's all lost. . . ."

It went on like that until she fell asleep exhausted. The heat was terrific then; it was just as the sun began to wane. I left her, went out from under the tent, and stared wildly round the horizon, but there was nothing. "We've got to meet one, some one has to come soon!"

"Ah, Sparks," McGilley said feebly, "you're not the only man who'd like a sight o' smoke. This foot o' mine is burnin' hotter than that sun. Oh, blather, take them daggers out and wet me down, for I'm a dyin' man, praise God!"

"What is it?" Kilgore asked. "What's wrong

with her, Banion?"

I said, hushed: "Pneumonia."

Kilgore looked swiftly compassionate and rubbed his mouth, watching my eyes. ". . . Banion, you're in love with her. I *am* sorry."

"We've got to do something," I said. "We just can't sit and wait for a ship!"

McGilley called to the negro. "Ahoy there, boy!"

"What yo' wantin', cap'n, suh?"

"Cast your eye around for a ship, boy. I'm all but passin' away."

"Here ain't nothin', cap'n, 'ceptin' a lot of salt water dat ain't fit for drinkin' and de debbil's own sun."

"Don't give up hope, boy. Keep watchin', I came through when the *Vestris* took the jump and I'll come through again."

"Yassuh, cap'n," John Christopher said, flashing his teeth brightly. "But dis time you comin' through widout yo' three toes and dat's a shame and pity."

"Aye," McGilley rumbled, then fell silent.

Sydney stayed asleep, breathing in gaspy jerks that tore me up inside. I finally left her and went astern past Kilgore and McGilley to the thwarts where John Christopher squatted. I said evenly:

"Christopher, I want to know what happened aboard this boat and you're going to tell me."

John Christopher nodded. "Yo' askin' me and I'm tellin' you. So you better sit your sat 'cause hit's a long, sad tale and tree-top tall . . ."

. . . . . .

When de night was plumb passed away (*John Christopher said*) de mornin' came around and dere we was, de white gal, de white man Crawford, and me, John Christopher. Pretty soon dat debbil sun come out burnin' hot and de trouble started. Dat sun jest riz up like a rattlesnake and he got so hot de white gal said: "Oh, my laigs! Dey's burnin' like de turkey brush!"

Now as soon as she said about her laigs, de white man Crawford started lookin' at dem laigs like he never seen laigs before. I saw right away dere was coonjinin' goin' on so I looked at dem laigs too. Ah, lawd, dey was pretty and shiny and white 'cause de white gal she didn't have nothing to cover dem. So I say: "Lady, you take my pants and dey keep yo' laigs out'n de sun."

And she say: "What you wear den, boy?"

And I say: "I got me underwear, lady, indeed!"

"But den you git de sun," she say.

"Ah, lawd, no," I say. "I was born unlucky. My mammy was a nigger and my pappy was a

nigger and I was sunburnt de day I was born. De sun can't hurt me none cause I'm black to de day I dies."

Den she take my pants and she put 'em on and we jest drift and drift. It gits so hot, de ocean steams.

Now all de day long, de white man keep lookin' at dem laigs. Even ef'n dey's covered wid my pants, he keeps lookin' at dem and rememberin' dem. He got a funny look in hisn eye dat make me, John Christopher, think of Yella Sandy.

Yella Sandy was a nigger from Okalala and he was a handsome nigger with flappin' feet. And he had him a gal in Okalala and he had him a piccaninny too. But Yella Sandy was born unlucky and he didn't know it. And one night when de moon was full and shiny and sky-top tall, dis Yella Sandy come flappin' hisn feet to town and he met a white gal on de road. He grab dis white gal and he make love to her and den so she can't tawk he choke her 'til her tongue stick out like a snake-sting. But de white folks ketched him jest de same and dey strung him on de courthouse flagpole and dey shot him and stabbed him full er holes until he shore is a daid nigger.

Den my mammy say to me: "John Christopher, you was born unlucky and you got you a skin

as black as midnight so don't you have no truckin' wid no white gal or dey'll string you on de flagpole too. Hits easy to be like Yella Sandy, but you got to be like white folks. You got to have de white folks' honour and den you'se a big man and you'se halfways white at least."

So de sun go down and hit gits cool and we all eat somethin' and we all drink somethin', and den hits night right off and de ocean is black. All de time did white man Crawford watch dem laigs. And when de night come, de white gal give me back pants and she say: "You shore was kind to give me dese pants, John Christopher, and I appreciate it."

And I say: "Yo' welcome to dese pants to-morrer too, lady. And dat's a fack."

Den she lean over and she whisper: "I'se afraid, John Christopher."

"What you scared er?" I say.

"Dat man Crawford," she say. "He look funny at me all day. Maybe he gonter hurt me."

"He ain't gonter hurt you, lady," I say. "Not wid John Christopher around, he ain't. I swing a killin' oar, m'am, and you jest speak de word and I'll git mad. And when I git mad my feet don't tech de ground and my arms can't stop a-swingin' and I'll riz up and chuck dat white man

overboard efn you speak de word."

Den we all git sleepy and we all lie ourselves down. I watch de moon for awhile and den I falls asleep. Yea, lawd, but I is tired, but dere ain't no rest for de weary and I has me a dream.

. . . In dis yere dream I'se back in Okalala and it's de debbil's own night 'cause de moon is yella and full and sky-top tall. And I comes down de road totin' my burden of chaw sticks and what do I see but Old Man Cenebeck's barns and hisn hog-pens. Now Old Man Cenebeck was de biggest share-cropper in Okalala and I could hear dem fattenin' hogs of hisn gruntin' and a-feedin' in de pens. Yea, lawd, I says to me, now dere's what I'm tawkin' about and I'm gonter git me a hog. So I drops down my burden and I climbs inter de hog-pen and I grab me a fattenin' hog. Lawd God Jehovah, how dat hog begin to squeal. "Shut yo' fat-mouf," but hit's too late den. Old Man Cenebeck hears dat pig and he comes runnin' wid a shotgun in hisn hands. He say: "I'm coverin' you, John Christopher, so you stand still or I'm gonter blow you to glory." And I say: "I'se standin', suh, I'se standin', so don't you pull dat trigger or I is a daid nigger." Den he say: "Drop dat hog, black man, let go dat hog, let go, let go!"

Aller sudden, I is awake jest like lightnin' and

here I is in de boat. But I still can hear Old Man Cenebeck sayin': "Let go! Let go!" and I figger somethin' ain't right. Pretty soon I see dat it ain't Old Man Cenebeck at all. Hit's de white gal sayin': "Let go!" and de white man Crawford is grabbed her like Yella Sandy.

I git up and I say: "White man, you gonter die! De white gal spoke de word! She done what I'm tawkin' about and now I'm mad. And when I git mad my feet don't tech de ground and I swings a killin' oar. So speak a prayer, white man, speak a prayer for you 'cause you' gonter meet de Lawd God Jehovah and dat's a fack!"

Den I lift my oar like a hammer-swingin' man and I blow hit down like a big wind. De white man's haid is stickin' up dere and I keeps a-hittin' hit 'til hit ain't a haid no more. I keeps swingin' dat pole 'til I gits weary totin' hit and den I stop.

Dat white man is a daid white man shore enough and dat's a fack. So I take de clothes offn him and den I chuck him offn de boat like he was a sack er cornmeal and den I git myself some sleep again and dis time dere ain't no dreamin'.

. . . Now dat's the tale er John Christopher, lawd, lawd, and I told you de trouf, Marse Banion. So forgive a sinner, lawd, who's kilt a man daid, and say a prayer for dis white man Crawford,

'cause he crossed inter Jordan to-day and dat's a fack.

. . . . . .

In the late afternoon, the sky became overcast and sulky and hid the sun. Soon it began to rain in a fine, cooling mist, falling straight down on us windlessly. The sea rolled in a slow, mesmeric swell and the open boat felt its contact in a gentle rocking. In the stern, McGilley kept groaning, for his foot was really painful now. Kilgore eased him somewhat but he couldn't do much about the soreness which was biting in. John Christopher sang. His rich bass voice poured out sadly and sincerely: *Dey crucified my Lawd, and he never said a mumblin' word; dey crucified my Jesus Lamb and he never said a mumblin' word, not a word* . . . Under the improvised tent, I stretched out beside Sydney, washing her fevered face now and then with cold sea water and helping her drink fresh water when she called for it. She could hardly swallow and the change the hours had wrought was cruel and appalling. Even though the sun was gone, her heat stayed with her, and the fever had wrought havoc. Under her eyes, she was black. Her cheeks sagged in horridly and her mouth hung open all the time. She did not close her eyes any more. They remained open

when she slept, the pupils mere pinpoints. She couldn't see; often, she couldn't hear. When she spoke, she was barely able to muster a whisper.

"Darling—"

"Right here, Sydney."

"Where? . . . Touch me . . . Please God, touch me. . . . Oh, yes, yes, you're here. . . ."

"Don't try to talk."

"I can't see you. . . . I can't see anything. . . ."

"I know. Try and be still."

"I only know you're here when you touch me. . . ."

Sometimes while she slept, panting like a dog in her futile attempt to get some oxygen into her filling lungs, I'd go to pieces. I'd get up on the thwarts wildly and look for smoke and cry and curse when I couldn't see anything. McGilley ceased his groaning once to watch me with pity. "Nah, lad," he said quietly, "you can't be takin' on that way. Wailin' and weepin' don't cut no ice in the face o' death."

The night dropped down, rain-soaked, humid, and dreary. Again we found ourselves in the interval of pitch, inarticulated space where the time-sense falters and a minute is an hour, and an hour an eternity. It must have been late when

Sydney became delirious, her temperature steadily rising. She moaned and muffled words came out indistinctly, her tongue failing to co-ordinate with her thought. Once she said: "Let go! Let go! Christopher, save me! Oh, God, that man!"

John Christopher heard her and bowed his head sadly and clasped his hands. "Lawd God, we got misery."

When I washed her face in the darkness, she seemed to respond to the stimulus.

"Banion, sweet."

"Yes, Sydney?"

"That *is* you?"

"Yes."

"Put your face down. . . . Let me feel your face. . . ."

I put my face down and said: "I love you, Sydney."

"Ah, darling," she said, "your face is wet. Are you crying for me?"

"It's the rain," I said.

"Don't cry for me, darling. . . ."

"It's just the rain, Sydney. Please don't talk."

"Where is your hand?"

"Here."

She took it and held it with amazing strength. "I'm frightened, oh, God, I'm frightened!"

"I'm right here, there's nothing to be afraid of."

"I told you, I told you that night. . . . I felt it then; oh, Banion, Banion—"

"Don't—"

"I'm going to die," she whispered hollowly.

She was right. It took her a long time and she suffered every minute of the way. Most of the night she cried in delirium; she spoke of her father and some one named Harold; she remembered Crawford and John Christopher and the *San Marino*. Not once did she mention my name while delirious, which was odd. Only during the sporadic moments of true consciousness would she recognize me and cling to my hand with that brief, strange strength. The thing went on interminably until her face resembled a skull and her skin burned to the touch.

At last she said: "There's a light in my eyes, darling. . . . It's too bright. . . ."

"I'll shade your eyes," I said, without moving for the night was coal-black. "Is that better?"

"Yes," she said.

That was the last time she spoke. She clung to life throughout the night and long later, when the dreary daybreak was in the east, so faint as to be nearly indistinguishable, the rasping cad-

ence of her breath caught on an inhalation, then never exhaled.

I borrowed a match from Kilgore and struck it to see her. She was dead white despite the sunburn, her eyes still open, the distended black pupils as big as shoe-buttons. I blew out the match and got up quickly because I couldn't stand the look of them. Pulling Crawford's coat from the thwarts, I covered her with it, then crawled astern with the others. They had been asleep but they awakened when I got the match, feeling the end. I told them it was all over. They didn't say anything at first. Presently, McGilley asked in a hushed voice: "Don't you think we ought to be speakin' a prayer for the lass?"

I said dully: "I don't care what you do."

Kilgore didn't say anything.

"We ought to speak a prayer," McGilley said. "Or maybe sing a hymn to rest her soul, God bless her."

"Cap'n," John Christopher said then, "I got what yo' tawkin' about. So stand back, white men, and give me lots er room, 'cause John Christopher is got a song he gonter sing to ease his totin' load." And with that his resonant bass rose up into the dirty dawn: *"Dey nailed him dere and*

*he passed away. Go down! Go down! But he riz again on de great third day. Go down Egyptland!"*

. . . . . .

The S.S. *Santa Elena* of the Grace Line picked us up two days later.

# 6

THE RUT OF REMEMBRANCE ENDS THERE, BUT I FEEL this slight addenda would not be out of place since it concerns the fate of the others who passed out of my own immediate picture at the time.

First, there is Davidson. He remained bravely with his ship to the end and was picked up by one of the *Santa Cecilia's* rescuing lifeboats shortly thereafter. How he managed to evade the suction of the *San Marino* when she sank is a mystery. He was acquitted of any negligence—in the subsequent investigation—and was given a new command in token of his valour. He is, in fact, my present master, and though he is utterly capable, the memory of the disaster has made him as negative as an atheist.

I visited Dr. Cardena at his home in Darien

while he was still convalescent. He was badly burned about the face and hands and will carry the scars as long as he lives. He told me then that he was retiring, to play with his model trains and write a layman's medical column for a syndicate. He still had that same locomotive model and it looked little the worse for wear. As for his patient, Dr. Ramon Duga, no one has seen him to this day and I sometimes wonder whether or not he was real at all, though, of course, he was.

Miss Joanna Niles, the lady travel-writer, came through quite safely. She got off in the first boat which was the first to be picked up by the *Santa Cecilia.* She has since written a purportedly non-fiction account of the burning in which she plays an important part. If we are to believe her, she was responsible for the life-saving of at least twelve passengers, actually rescuing two (conveniently unnamed) by herself. The fact that she cannot swim twenty-five yards does not seem to bother her at all. And she says that it was only through the slimmest chance (the credulity of the reader most likely) that she escaped being stranded on the bridge with Mr. Davidson when the *San Marino* foundered. She made a lot of money from the book.

McGilley lost his left foot—streptococcus in-

fection made amputation necessary; but he had a wooden one put on and it worked quite well when I saw him.

Kilgore was reunited with his wife, Ann, in New York. A kindly gentleman, buoyed with a preserver, had found her struggling in the sea and had held her up until they both were saved by one of the lifeboats.

Neither Kilgore nor myself were unduly surprised by this good luck. Pleased, Lord, yes! But not surprised. . . . We had learned by then that anything in heaven or earth could have happened on that dreadful night.

. . . . . .

As for Richard Dill, I ran across him only last week at Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street in New York. He recoiled from me, stared at me hard for a moment, then exclaimed: "Banion, it's you! I'd never have recognized you in mufti!" I was wearing street clothes at the time.

Meeting him was a piece of luck for me as I had been contemplating writing to him concerning an article he had written for the *Atlantic,* an eye-witness account of the *San Marino's* demise. I'd considered it a superb stunt and I wanted to use the ending of it for my own tome, since I had not seen the actual sinking myself.

He was very friendly and immediately invited me for highballs, and off we went to the nearest haven where we swapped stories and recollections warily. Finally I said: "Look here, Dill. I never did see all those photos you were shooting so ardently that night. I understood from you that they'd be priceless. What happened to them—didn't they turn out?"

"It's partly your fault, you know," he replied. "I never developed them; but of course they would have turned out. I'm a good cameraman."

"You didn't develop them!" I said.

"No," he said. He put down his drink, sadly smiling. "You started the whole thing when you were in the boat. You looked—the way you looked at me, I felt diseased—"

"Oh, I'm sorry," I said truthfully. "I was excited—"

"Don't apologize," he said. "You were perfectly right. I understand now exactly how you felt. But the thing is—you were the one who brought down my guard. I was going fine until you looked at me. I didn't let myself get soft, I just took pictures. I was going just fine. I'd only taken seventy-two and I had enough film for three hundred. Then you brought my guard down. You gave me that dog to watch—remember?"

"The collie!" I said.

"Yes, the collie," he said softly. "He was a beautiful dog, Banion! . . . It was the most uncanny thing—at dawn, just before the ship sank, he took up a ghastly howling. You could feel the death in it, Banion, know what I mean? He kept it up for five minutes and then strained at me to go overboard. I hung on to his collar, but it didn't do any good. He was too smart for me. He *backed* out of the collar—it slipped over his ears—and," he shrugged emptily, "there he was in the sea."

"Oh."

"He swam off about fifteen feet out of possible reach, then stopped swimming and sank. It was absolutely bald, what he did; no doubt about it being intentional."

"Did you learn who owned him?" I asked.

"Yes," Dill said. "I still had the collar in my hand, you see. The owner's name was engraved upon the brass tag. I finally got a look at it by holding it up in the reflection of the flames of the ship. It read: *Sandy: Owner, Horace G. Thompson.*"

There was a silence while I thought back. "Horace Thompson," I said, a little hoarsely. "Wasn't he the old boy they put in the brig for cheating

at cards—"

"Uh-huh," Dill nodded. "And they left him in the brig, too, Banion. In all the excitement, no one ever thought to let him out."

We both fell silent and sipped our drinks.

"Well," he remarked, after awhile, "that's how it was. My guard was down. That dog went over. After that I wasn't much good for anything. That damn' dog made me choke all up—do you know what I did?"

"What?"

"I dropped the camera overboard. Films, everything."

"Purposely?"

"Sure. Now wasn't that a damn' fool trick for a grown man to pull off?"

He wanted me to say yes. "Sure," I said. "That was plain foolishness."

He said promptly: "But I'd do it the same way again, the same way exactly. You know, Banion, that dog taught me something. I'd forgotten how to cry, and I tell you when a man forgets how to cry, he forgets how to feel. You've got to be able to feel, not only think. This would be a hell of a world if we couldn't *feel*. I've thought it over a long time and I'll tell you what I've found. You can hear about this cruelty and that oppression

and this crime and that man-made horror, but if you look a little bit farther, you'll see this: somewhere in his soul, Man is a philosopher. He owns a metaphysical niche where all the strife of humanity perishes. This niche is more than conscience, more than mind, more than—oh, call it anything. Whatever it is, it's the base of man. And I tell you, Banion, once in his lifetime, each man finds this niche and crawls into it, however briefly. And that is why once in his lifetime each man becomes immortal. . . ."

We finished our drinks and made our goodbyes. "I'll send you the article," Dill said. "I'm surprised you want it at all. It's not bad writing, but—oh, hell, I'm flattered to death you really want it. So long, Banion, and forgive me if the hallelujahs and the hymn-singing bothered you much."

"So long," I said.

. . . . . .

. . . *The ship had been settling through the darkness of the morning,* (Dill wrote) *until we soon saw that the rolling waves were on a level with B deck. At first we thought that the sea had become higher, but Mr. Philips, the second officer of the ship, who was in charge of our lifeboat, set us right. "That heat is down inside of her now,"*

*he said. "Her plates are parting and letting in the ocean . . . She'll go very soon now, so watch sharp." We watched, bathed in the light of the fire, its colours flickering across our attentive faces like a myriad-coloured waterfall. We didn't have to wait long. Soon after the running lights of the S.S.* Santa Cecilia *broke from the horizon in the west, a violent tremor ran through the* San Marino's *entire length, and there was a dull explosion which sounded far distant. An unreal silence settled down. There was no sound in our boat at all, except for the first ecstatic: "Aciah!" and elsewhere in the sea, the cries of the distressed stilled. Then it began. The bow dropped first, quickly vanished under the surface, and her stern began a long, tireless climb into the dark sky, the twin screws looking like gigantic clovers with rain dripping from the metal petals. She hung that way breathtakingly for full moments. At last the slide started and the end came swiftly. Her funnel dipped down until it was horizontal with the sea. As it broke under, a geyser of white smoke or steam shot up. There was a raucous bubbling and hissing and boiling as the water began to wet the molten hull. And as she disappeared, leaving a white cauldron where she had been, the sea extinguished the glaring flames until we floated only*

*in the faint greyness of daybreak under the inquisitive beam of a searchlight on the* Santa Cecilia. *Some one in our boat cried sadly: "She's gone! She's gone!" To which, Mr. Philips replied in tones of profound finality: "Amen. . . ."*

THE END