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# **FIRE MOUNTAIN**

## ***A Thrilling Sea Story***

**BY**

**NORMAN SPRINGER**

**AUTHOR OF "THE BLOOD SHIP"**

**NEW YORK  
G. HOWARD WATT  
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# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

- I. [THE MISSION](#)
- II. [THE WEeping BOATSWAIN](#)
- III. [THE HAPPY HUNCHBACK](#)
- IV. [THE BLACK CRUISER](#)
- V. [WILD BOB CAREW](#)
- VI. [PRISONER](#)
- VII. [THE MATE OF THE BRIG "COHASSET"](#)
- VIII. [AROUND THE CABIN TABLE](#)
- IX. [THE MOUNTAIN IN THE SMOKY SEA](#)
- X. [THE WHALEMAN'S LOG](#)
- XI. [THE CODE](#)
- XII. [THE PASSAGE](#)
- XIII. [FIRE MOUNTAIN](#)
- XIV. [OUT OF THE FOG](#)
- XV. [IN THE LAZARET](#)
- XVI. [THREE GENTLEMEN CONVERSE](#)
- XVII. [TWO MEN AND A MAID](#)
- XVIII. [THROUGH THE ELEPHANT'S HEAD](#)
- XIX. [THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS](#)
- XX. [TREASURE CAVE](#)
- XXI. [DECOY](#)
- XXII. [TABLES TURNED](#)
- XXIII. [CONCLUSION](#)

## CHAPTER I

### THE MISSION

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years. Bright, aslant eyes, and a suave and ever-ready smile that broke immediately Martin met his gaze.

"You will be so good as to inform the honorable that Dr. Ichi is here?" he asked in precise and stilted voice.

Ever the same—the noiseless entry, the quietly spoken request for the lawyer. Martin repressed a flash of irritation; the little Japanese, with his uncanny soft-footedness and stereotyped address, got upon his nerves. However, his orders were explicit; Mr. Smatt would see Dr. Ichi without delay or preliminary, whenever Dr. Ichi favored the office with a visit. It was already the third visit that day, but orders were orders.

So, Martin inclined his head toward the door of Smatt's private office. The Japanese crossed the room. He bowed to Martin, as stately a bow as if Martin were also an "honorable," instead of a poor devil of a law clerk; then, noiselessly as he had entered the outer office, Dr. Ichi disappeared within Smatt's sanctum.

Martin turned to his window again. But his bright day dream was fled, and he could not conjure it back again. The view was without charm. His thoughts, despite himself, persisted in centering upon the dapper little figure now closeted with his employer. The dandified Jap

aroused Martin's interest.

What manner of client was this Dr. Ichi? Martin had not seen a single scrap of paper, nor had Smatt dropped a single hint, concerning the case. It was mysterious! Martin was not an overly curious chap, but he was human.

It was another of Smatt's secret cases, thought Martin. Another token of those hidden activities of the old vulture, which he sensed, but did not know about. For, though Martin attended to the routine work, though his duties were responsible—Smatt specialized and was prominent in maritime law—still Martin knew he did not enjoy his employer's complete confidence.

Much of Smatt's time was taken up with cases Martin knew nothing about, with clients who appeared to shun the daylight of the courts. The Nippon Trading Company, for instance! Martin knew Smatt was interested in a company of that name—a strange company, that apparently conducted business without using the mails. And there was business between Ichi and Smatt—money, or Smatt would have nothing to do with it. The mystery aroused Martin's dormant curiosity.

But all his speculation was pointless. Martin bethought himself of the marine affidavit lying uncompleted upon his desk. He turned from the window with the intention of applying himself to that task—and he discovered the office to have a second visitor. Another unusual figure who possessed the penchant for surreptitious entry. He observed the fellow in the very act of closing the office door.

"Say, you! Didn't you see the sign on the door, 'Please Knock'?" exclaimed Martin. "Can't you read English?"

"I'm no knocker, I'm a booster. Besides I don't believe in signs," was the surprising response.

The visitor faced about as he spoke, and Martin took stock of him. He was a hunchback. He was seedily clad in a shiny black suit, but a modish green velvet hat, several sizes too small, perched precariously atop his very large head and gave him an oddly rakish appearance. But his face was pleasing—a wide grin, a snub nose, a pair of twinkling eyes beneath a broad, intelligent forehead. Martin immediately commenced to thaw as the other smiled.

The hunchback carried a book under one arm, a formidable appearing volume. With a dexterous flirt, he bounced it into his hand and thrust it beneath Martin's very nose.

"The bargain of the century—cannot afford to miss it—wonderful opportunity first time offered," he began in a sing-song.

Martin stiffened with surprise. Not at the words; he was accustomed to book-agents of strange guise. But the voice! A rich, throaty tenor with not a squeak in it. The man's discourse was like a song.

"Cost you nothing. Wonderful Compendium of Universal Knowledge—compiled after years of labor—faculties of great universities. Cost you nothing; Absolutely free."

The golden voice sang on. Martin found his gaze upon the book, and then upon the hand that held the book. That hand! Surely, no book-agent ever possessed such a hand—brown-backed, big, and muscular, plainly the hand of an outdoors man. Where the sleeve fell away from the wrist Martin glimpsed the blue of a tattooed figure. A sailor's hand?

He raised his eyes to the hunchback's face, noting as he did the great length of arm, and the unnaturally square yet muscular shoulder. And the face! A book-agent might be expected to have tanned cheeks, his occupation not being a sedentary one. But surely, such a bronzed and weather-lined coating as this man's face wore was never gained by winning past janitors or tramping city streets.

"Possible to make offer only because of great advertising campaign—you reap advantage free of charge. Wonderful volume absolutely free. You merely subscribe to *Coleman's Weekly*—ten cents a week, fifty cents a month, price of magazine—wonderful Compendium of Universal Knowledge—cost you absolutely nothing—"

The hunchback pattered on. Book-agent or no, Martin conceded he had the technique of the craft at his tongue's tip. His eyes—suddenly, Martin was aware of the peculiar behavior of the other's eyes. They were roving about the office from point to point, as if the fellow were endeavoring to fix in his mind every feature of the room. But most often, Martin noticed, his gaze rested upon the door to Smatt's private office, through which came at intervals the hoarse murmur of Smatt's voice. Once, atop the murmur, came a few words in Dr. Ichi's clipped and even tones—

"Plan—good—have caution—proceed—"

The hunchback ceased talking. Martin attributed his satisfied smile to assurance of a sale; the chap evidently had confidence in his musical patter. Martin felt almost sorry as he declined

the greatest offer of the century. His brain was already overburdened, he kindly explained, and he dare not risk brain fog by delving into the matchless Compendium. Of course, some other day, when finances...

The purveyor of knowledge took the refusal easily. Martin had expected him to lose his smile, but it grew wider. So Martin braced himself to receive the assault of facts and figures he was sure was preparing. Instead, however, came a raucous command from the other room.

"Blake, come here!"

It was characteristic of Josiah Smatt that his offices had few of the modern business accoutrements. No conventional stenographer powdered her nose and received clients in an ante-room, no traditional office-boy harried the janitor or played in the corner upon a mouth-organ, no call-buzzers frazzled the nerves.

Smatt was a prominent legal light in shipping circles, and he was not parsimonious. But he was eccentric. He carried his secrets and most of his bookkeeping beneath his hat; Martin, his one employee, was admitted to only partial confidence. And whenever Mr. Smatt wished his clerk to attend upon him, he lifted up his voice and bellowed.

It was this bellow that checked the book agent's flow of words, and startled Martin into activity. Mr. Smatt did not like to be kept waiting.

"Sorry," Martin said to the hunchback, "but I'm called in there. You'll have to get out. Couldn't use your book anyway."

"Oh, that's all right," responded the other airily. "You will observe I do not depart downcast! It has really, sir, helped me a lot, just to visit you—helped me a very great deal. You are a pleasant chap!"

Martin entered the inner office, and he had a last glimpse of the queer, deformed little figure, book under arm, velvet hat cocked over one ear, in the act of negotiating the outer exit.

Martin, standing docilely before Smatt's desk, discovered himself to be the subject of a searching scrutiny from two pairs of eyes. Both Smatt and Dr. Ichi, the latter seated at the lawyer's right hand, were critically inspecting the tall, good-looking young fellow who faced them.

Martin was accustomed to the lawyer's boring glances. He returned Smatt's stare, and experienced more keenly than usual his sense of dislike for the man. Smatt's face was in keeping with his voice, which was rusty. It was bleak and lantern-jawed, with a gash for a mouth, and a great beak of a nose that thrust out between two cold gray eyes. He was quite bald. An impressive appearing old man, not one to inspire affection but fear. One year of service had endowed Martin with no sense of loyalty or liking for the man. Now, he returned Smatt's gaze with one of indifference, tinged with hostility.

"Blake, I wish you to execute a mission for me tonight," said Smatt.

Martin inclined his head in understanding. Executing missions at night-time for Mr. Smatt was a not uncommon experience. He rather liked these confidential errands, though he sometimes doubted the good faith of the man who inspired them. They took him into strange corners of the city, to interview strange characters. They were the one exciting feature of his drab employment.

The lawyer picked up from his desk a well-stuffed and tightly sealed legal-sized envelope. He turned to the Japanese, as if for approval or permission, and Dr. Ichi, without removing his bright, oblique eyes from Martin's face, inclined his head in agreement with that unspoken communication. The lawyer faced Martin again, but the latter had the feeling that, despite Smatt's heavy voice and forceful personality, it was the silent little Dr. Ichi who dominated the situation.

"You are to deliver this envelope to a man named Carew, Captain Robert Carew," commenced Smatt. "At ten o'clock tonight, exactly, you will enter a drinking saloon situated on the corner of Green Street and the Embarcadero. This resort is known as the Black Cruiser Saloon, and is conducted by a person named Spulvedo—you will find both names on a sign over the entrance."

The lawyer looked inquiringly toward Dr. Ichi, and the latter nodded confirmation of the instruction and description. Smatt continued.

"You will speak with this man, Spulvedo, taking care not to be overheard, and you will ask him to conduct you to Captain Carew."

Martin nodded his understanding as the lawyer paused, and extended his hand for the envelope. It was simple. This Carew was evidently lying doggo in this water-front saloon.

"One moment!" said Smatt. "Repeat your instructions."

Martin obeyed, and, being blessed with a memory, he repeated them verbatim.

"Very good," said Smatt. "Now, for the rest." He shot a quick glance to Dr. Ichi, and the Japanese bowed. "This person, Spulvedo, will lead you into Captain Carew's presence. Under no circumstances will you deliver this envelope to other than Carew, himself. You may identify him readily by his appearance. He is a large, blond man, with a deep voice. He speaks with an English accent, using the words of an educated man. A star is tattooed in red upon the back of his right hand."

Smatt paused again. Martin, parrot-like, repeated the other's words. Dr. Ichi inclined his head in approval. Smatt continued:

"To make your identification doubly sure, you will use this precaution: When you approach Carew you will say, 'I wish to see you on the Hakotdate business.' He will respond, 'It is time that business was settled. Did the Chief send you?' Then you will deliver the envelope to him. Now, repeat in full my instructions."

Martin complied correctly. Dr. Ichi silently signified his approval. Smatt handed the sealed envelope across the desk, and Martin straightway stowed it in his inside coat-pocket.

"Of course, Blake, you are to mention this matter to no one," was the lawyer's parting injunction as Martin withdrew from the room.

It seemed to Martin, as he reentered the outer office, that the room's air had the indefinable tinge of very recent occupancy. When he emerged from the private office, he seemed to be treading upon some one's heels, so to speak. He opened the door and looked out into the hall, but the hall was empty. Then he dismissed the matter from his mind as a fancy.

## CHAPTER II

### THE WEEPING BOATSWAIN

Martin lived at Mrs. Meagher's Select Board for Select People establishment, far out in the western addition. He was star boarder, and as such made free with Mrs. Meagher's little private parlor. A fire always burned there on cool evenings, and moreover, he escaped the ragtime that nightly filled the community room where the piano was, the interminable arguments anent the European war, and the coy advances of the manicure lady.

In that little room Martin spent his best hours. It was there he retreated to read his favorite fiction, red-blooded and exciting stories, without exception. It was there he lived a life apart, a life in a strange and desirable environment. For Martin always identified himself with the sprightly hero of the evening's tale. He, Martin Blake, suffered, despaired, triumphed, and galloped off with the heroine. And when the story's end was reached, he returned to the drab reality of his existence with revolt in his soul.

"You worm, you well-fed, white-faced office grub!" he told himself. "Why don't you do something? Why don't you get out of the rut? You have no responsibilities; you are foot loose! Then why don't you get out there, where adventure is, where things happen!"

But then would come the rub. Where was "out there," and how reached by a pen-driving clerk?

After supper, Martin carried his magazine into the private parlor and ensconced himself before the grate fire. He read a yarn of ships and mutinies and treasure trove—hot stuff!

But there was a fly in the ointment of Martin's content. Of late, his sanctuary was not always inviolate. On the occasion of the past Christmas, an absent and fiendish-minded nephew had presented Mrs. Meagher with a phonograph. This instrument of torture Mrs. Meagher installed in the little parlor, and at frequent intervals she sat herself down before it and indulged in a jamboree of musical noise.

But this night Martin hoped for quiet. Mrs. Meagher had seemed busily engaged recounting rheumatic symptoms to Mary, the cook, and Martin knew from bitter experience that the recital usually occupied an hour and a half. Then, there was a good chance the matron would betake her buxom person bedward without visiting the parlor.

Luck smiled. Martin planned to read until nine o'clock before leaving the house to carry out the mission of his employer. He had no mind to leave sooner, for a keen, April wind ruled outdoors San Francisco that night.

He did read until eight o'clock, and then a rustle heralded the approach of the storm and

diverted his attention from the printed page. Mrs. Meagher sailed into the room, her ample figure clothed in her best black silk house gown. Martin's spirits sank to zero—she always donned this funeral drapery before operating the infernal contraption in the corner.

Mrs. Meagher dropped into her rocking-chair and groaned tentatively. Martin read desperately. He knew as long as he kept his eyes upon his book she was much too considerate to disturb him, and between phonographic noise and rheumatic reminiscence, he chose the former as being escapable.

The good woman hitched her chair over to the machine. Martin writhed in spirit. It was not that he was insensible to harmony, even though canned. He was quite receptive while a booming basso rang the bell in the lighthouse, dingdong. He was even stoical when the sextette brayed forth the sorrows of Lucia. But the while a dread clutched him.

Mrs. Meagher had a favorite record. She played it regularly, and wept cheerfully at each performance. The piece was anathema to Martin.

He watched the old lady out of the corners of his eyes. She searched her record case and arose triumphant. The well-hated, jangling prelude filled the room. Martin dropped his book and accomplished a swift and silent exit.

In the hallway, the manicure lady bobbed her suspiciously yellow head and smiled provocatively. Martin fled to the cloak-rack near the door. Hurriedly he donned top-coat and hat. Until he finally closed the front door behind him, a tinny wail poured out of the little parlor and assailed his ears, a reedy soprano declaiming passionately that she had raised no son of hers to the profession of arms.

Martin sighed with profound relief as he slammed that door. He thus shut behind him such disagreeable facts as favorite ballads and peroxide blondes. It was like shunting a burden off his shoulders.

He stood a moment on the stoop, under the area light, drawing on his gloves and regarding the night. A night of bright stars, but no moon. A sharp, windy night, he shivered even beneath his overcoat, but the air tasted good and fresh. The darkness charitably covered the respectable ugliness of the neighborhood. Under the twinkling street-lamps the commonplace street assumed a foreign and even romantic air.

Martin's spirits mounted. Was he not setting forth on an errand of mystery? Why, something might happen to a fellow on such a night!

Something did happen, and at once, though Martin attached no importance to the event at the time. Standing there under the area light, Martin drew forth the envelope that was the occasion of his errand, to assure himself by evidence of eyesight that it was still in existence. He thrust it into the inside pocket of his overcoat, as being a safe and handy receptacle. As he did so, a suppressed sneeze made him aware he was not alone upon the stairway. Somebody was on the stoop before the house next door.

Mrs. Meagher's establishment was housed in the half of a three-story structure. All of the houses of the block were thus built in pairs. Only a balustrade separated their front steps.

Now Martin knew the house next door was vacant. Even in the darkness, he could discern the real estate agent's sign in the front window. Hence his surprise in beholding a man pressing the doorbell of the empty house—for that, he discerned, was what the person who sneezed was doing.

"For whom are you looking?" called Martin. "That house is empty. Don't you see the sign!"

Without a word, the man turned and ran lightly down the steps, and set off at a smart pace down the street. Martin noticed the fellow wore a long gray overcoat and cap, and that he seemed remarkably light upon his feet.

"Queer," thought Martin. "Didn't seem drunk. Maybe a tramp looking for lodgings. Didn't look like a tramp, though."

And then, as he set out for the corner and the street-car, the incident slipped from his mind.

No street-car was in sight, and Martin withdrew to the friendly lee of the House of Feiglebaum to await its coming. Here, pressed against the window, he was sheltered from the wind that swept around the corner.

The front of the House of Feiglebaum was at that hour dark, but a few yards distant a light blazed over the entrance to the other and more profitable part of Feiglebaum's business. Johnny Feiglebaum was part of an industry indigenous to San Francisco—he kept a combination grocery store and saloon, the latter a quiet place that was stranger to mixed drinks and hilarity. It was sort of a neighborhood rendezvous; most of the henpecked husbands of the district sought haven there, and surcease of care with cribbage and pale beer.

Martin debated whether or not to enter and join in a game with one of this subdued brotherhood; he had two hours, almost, to spend ere he was due at the Black Cruiser. He decided against it as being too mild a pastime for his mood. He felt fit for adventure, this night.

An extra keen gust of wind swept around the corner and invaded Martin's refuge. He shrank back into the dark doorway in search of a warmer retreat. He backed against something soft, something alive. He swung about with words of apology on his tongue for the prior occupant of the shelter.

His startled gaze encountered a broad back. A man stood there in the far corner of the doorway, his back to the street, his head seemingly bowed in his arms. A man of such huge proportions, that Martin, but two inches less than six feet, himself, felt like a pigmy in comparison. The man's outline was vague and enhanced by the gloom; Martin, a-tingle with the unexpected collision, had the first thought it was a preposterous apparition.

There came a rumble from the giant's corner. It was a noise as surprising as the other's appearance; it checked Martin's apology. It was a rumble of parts; it seemed to be compounded of a prodigious sigh, a strangled sob, and a sneeze. It bespoke misery.

"Sick?" asked Martin.

A groan. Then a series of well-formed sighs. Then the giant turned and loomed above Martin, snuffling.

"Ow, swiggle me!" rumbled a deep and husky voice. "Ow, I'm in a proper fix, I am. Ow, where 'as 'e got 'imself to! Ow, why didn't I die afore I was born, says I!"

"Why, what is the matter? Come, come!" exclaimed Martin, aghast at the stricken voice.

The big man teetered to and fro upon his feet. He was perhaps wrestled by sorrow. But Martin smelled whisky.

"Come, brace up!" he admonished.

"Ow, strike me, I'm in for it, I am!" came the plaintive growl. "I've gone an' lost 'im, I 'ave; I've gone an' lost Little Billy. Can't find 'im, can't find 'im in the bloomin' town. I've looked in a thousand bleedin' pubs, I 'ave, and I can't find Little Billy. Walked a blister on my foot, I 'ave. Ow, swiggle me, what a snorkin' day I've 'ad!"

The words tumbled forth heavy laden with alcohol. Martin could understand there had been a wet search. The other groaned and strangled.

"Ow, swiggle me stiff!" he ejaculated despairingly. "What am I goin' to say to the blessed, bleedin' little mate!"

"Oh, come now, don't be down-hearted," cheered Martin. The man and his words fell in with Martin's mood.

Both were unusual—this was better than listening to a phonograph's banal wail, or conversing with a giggling manicurist!

"Cheer up, there are many more than a thousand saloons in this city," assured Martin. "You have not yet tried them all. There is one in this building. Have you visited it?"

"In this building! A saloon in this building!" echoed the other. There was surprise, and much less sorrow in his voice. "Ow, swiggle me stiff, lad, let's go 'ave a wet!"

He placed a hand the size of a ham on Martin's shoulder, lurched out of the doorway and rolled down the street toward the entrance to Johnny Feiglebaum's. He had seemed to divine instantly this particular saloon's location.

Martin accompanied the other willingly; he wished to see more of this strange giant. The streetcar he had been awaiting passed by unregarded. Martin had the feeling, also, that he would have to accept the big man's invitation, whether or no—that huge hand gripped his shoulder like a vise. Feiglebaum's was empty of its usual custom; only old Johnny, himself, from his station behind the bar, witnessed with scandalized eyes their rather tempestuous entrance.

"Set 'em up for two, matey!" roared Martin's companion, or rather, abductor, as soon as they crossed the threshold.

The little German's answer was a wail of dismay.

"Ach, Himmel, you here again!" he cried at the big man. "Mein Gott! I thought at last you haf gone! Marty, mein poy, why haf you brought him back?"

Martin couldn't answer this obviously unfair question. He was helpless. The vise squeezed his shoulder cruelly, and only pride prevented him exclaiming in pain. Squirming increased the pressure. His captor half led, half dragged him up to the bar, and there released him. Martin

grunted with relief and nursed his misused flesh.

"I'll 'ave a pot o' beer, says I!" rumbled the big fellow, slapping his hand upon the wood with a force that made the glasses jingle in their racks. "And my friend 'ere—why, 'e'll 'ave a pot o' beer, too, says 'e," he concluded, interpreting Martin's nod.

Johnny filled the order with alacrity. He evidently stood in awe of this strange man. But he spluttered indignantly as he set the drinks upon the bar.

"Why haf you brought dot man back here?" he whispered to Martin reproachfully. "Ach, he is der deffil's own! All der evening he haf been in und oudt, und he drink und drink, und talk und talk and cry apout his trouble. He haf lost his Beely, his Leedle Beely, und he talk like I haf stolen him. *Schweinhunde!* Mein Gott, Marty, I would nod steal him—I would nod haf der *verdumpf* dog in der blace!"

"A dog! A dog! 'Oo says 'e's a dog?" The "*schweinhunde*" had sharp ears. He pounded the bar with his fist, and his voice boomed like distant artillery. "'E ain't no dog! Just let me meet the bloke what calls Little Billy a dog!" He ignored old Johnny, and glared at Martin belligerently. "'E's my mate, is Little Billy, and a proper lad 'e is, for all 'e ain't no bigger nor a Portagee man-o-war. A dog! Swiggle me stiff, that's a squarehead for you!"

He ended with a snort. Martin hastened to assure him that without doubt Little Billy was a most proper lad.

The big man received the amends with dignity. His warlike attitude forsook him. He drooped over his beer and mused darkly. He seemed oppressed by the denseness of "squarehead" stupidity; he appeared desolated by the absence of the beloved Little Billy. Martin observed two big tears roll out of the corners of the other's eyes, course down the sides of his nose and splash into the goblet of beer. The man exuded gloom.

Martin seized his first chance to take stock of the fellow. He gathered an impression of size and redness. Why, the man must stand six feet and a half in his boots! A son of Anak! And his head—no wonder the man had temper. He was afire. A red face, a red mustache that bristled, a thatch of brick-red hair that protruded from beneath a blue, peaked cap. His suit was of pilot cloth, and he wore a guernsey. He was unmistakably a sailor—both words and appearance bespoke the seaman. Martin was surprised to encounter such a specimen in this remote section of the city, miles distant from the waterfront.

The despondent one aroused himself. His mooning gaze appeared to encounter the glass of beer for the first time. He swept the goblet to his lips and drained it at a gulp. He seemed cheered and refreshed.

"Fill 'em up again," he rumbled at Johnny. "And set one afore my friend, 'ere," he added, with a wide sweep of arm toward Martin.

Martin was interested. He grasped the opportunity to re-open the conversation.

"Too bad you lost him," he ventured diplomatically. "But it is probable he will turn up all right, isn't it?"

The big man nodded gloomily.

"Ow, yes, 'e'll turn up all right tomorrow. Safe and sound, 'e'll sleep tonight—bleedin' safe and sound. 'E'll be in jail. That's the kind o' sport Little Billy is—can't 'ave a nice quiet time like me. In jail, 'e'll be. Ow, swiggle me, I'm in a proper fix!"

"Why, things are not so bad," said Martin. "If you know where he will be in the morning, you can bail him out."

"In the morning! Bail 'im out!" exclaimed the other. "We can't wait till no morning! We got to be aboard tonight, we 'ave! Ow, Lord, what'll I say to the blessed mate?"

"Oh, I see, you must return to your ship tonight," commented Martin. He was pleased with himself for having judged the man a sailor from the start.

The sailor nodded his head lugubriously. Two more tears tumbled his nose's length. Martin felt like laughing. It was ludicrous to connect tears and this huge husky with the fierce voice.

The man of the sea resumed his plaint.

"What'll I say to the mate? What'll the mate say to me? Aye, that's it, what'll the blessed, bleedin' little mate say to me? Swiggle me stiff, I'll be keelhauled—that's what'll 'appen to me! And it all begun so innercent, too!"

Martin murmured condolences.

"Come ashore on account of it being the mate's birthday," confided the other. "'Ad to sneak ashore—come this morning. Wanted to get a birthday present, we did. Swiggle me, could



anything 'ave begun more innercent!"

"Oh, a birthday present! You must like your officers," prompted Martin.

"Like! Like! Why, strike me, lad, we love the little mate! Ain't anybody on the 'Appy Ship as don't love the mate, from the Old Man down."

"Happy Ship?" said Martin, struck by the words' connotation. "Is that the name of your vessel?"

"What we call 'er," the sailor answered. "'Er name is *Cohasset*—brig *Cohasset*. I'm bosun, and Little Billy, 'e's steward, and a prime steward 'e is."

The bosun of the brig *Cohasset* paused and spat stringily.

Martin feared the font of his speech was dried up, and he hurriedly bade Johnny replenish the glasses. The bosun acknowledged the office with a lordly gesture. Then his grief overwhelmed him, and he bowed his head over his glass and sniffed audibly. He cultivated retrospection.

"I 'ad 'im all right at the Ferry Building," he told Martin tearfully. "I 'ad Little Billy right enough, there."

He spoke as if he had Little Billy safely tucked under an arm at the Ferry Building. He inspected Martin suspiciously, as if Martin might have the missing steward concealed somewhere about his person.

"We was walking up Market Street," he continued, "sober as judges, both. And Billy says a bokay was what we wanted for the little mate's birthday. Fine, says I. A bokay of lilies, says 'e, because lilies means purity. No, says I, they got to be roses, roses meanin' beauty. And so we stops into a place or two to talk it over. Swiggle me stiff, could anything 'ave begun more innercent? Just going to buy a bokay, that's what! And now——"

The bosun sighed. He was crushed by the fell consequences of a virtuous intent.

"Ow, swiggle me, lad, what'll I say to the bloomin' little mate, as trusted me so?" Tears came again to the bosun's eyes. "The little mate is goin' to feel terrible hurt—us sneaking ashore and all," he concluded miserably. "Ow, swiggle me, fill 'em up again!"

Martin gulped over his glass. He was astonished. His cherished and carefully nurtured conception of the iron-souled men of the sea was receiving knocks. Here was a sailor, a man with all the ear-marks of a pugilistic temperament, who wept because the tender feelings of the mate might have been bruised. He vowed he loved the mate, he and his shipmates! What a queer mate, thought Martin.

Martin knew all about mates. An ardent perusal of the literature of the sea, from Captain Marryatt to Captain Kettle, had familiarized him with their character. They were an iron-fisted, brazen-voiced race, who swanked and swaggered about the decks and knocked the sailormen galley-west.

The self-reliant and rather disdainful demeanor of the master-mariners who occasionally visited Smatt's office had confirmed this estimate—they had once been mates. Had the boatswain mentioned a fear of being met on his return to his ship, with a flailing capstan-bar, or a dish of belaying-pin soup, Martin would have understood. Mates were hasty men. He could have properly sympathized with the boatswain over such a prospective fate. He could have given him legal advice as to his rights. But this mate of the brig *Cohasset*; this mate who commanded nose-gays on natal occasions; this mate who inspired love, and brought bibulous tears to the eyes of this toping giant!

But another surprise was coming to Martin, one that touched him intimately. The boatswain slouched over the bar, deep descended into the slough of despond. Martin wished to renew the interesting conversation, but hesitated how to begin. Funny chap, this sailor, rather soft and chicken-hearted.

The boatswain muttered to himself. He was evidently delving into the clouded realm of memory. Martin caught disconnected words:

"Milly—so innercent. Swiggle me—brown devils——"

Suddenly the boatswain straightened up and exploded a tremendous oath.

"It was them blighted brown devils!" he swore. "What chance 'as a poor 'unchback against them blasted Japs? They get 'im in 'Onolulu, and, swiggle me stiff, they get 'im in 'Frisco. It was that blasted shark, Ichi! It was Ichi, says I, as took Little Billy!"

The boatswain thumped the bar. He was a man who sees a light and likes It not.

Japanese! Hunchback! Ichi! Martin seemed to see a light, also, a dim, uncertain light. Perhaps it was the association of words—Japanese, hunchback, Ichi.

Martin suddenly recalled the hunchback book agent of the afternoon. In his mind's eye, he beheld the quaint figure standing before him in Smatt's office, while Smatt and Dr. Ichi held conference behind closed doors. But it seemed preposterous to identify that friendly, glib little deformed man as the missing Little Billy, as the bosom friend of this lachrymose viking. And what could this rough seaman know of the exquisite Dr. Ichi?

The boatswain ceased his vituperation of the Nipponese Empire, and the men thereof, through sheer lack of breath. Martin grasped the opportunity.

"Say, what does Little Billy look like?" he queried. "Did you say he was a hunchback? How was he dressed?"

"'E had on his go-ashore togs," said the bosun. "'E's a proper toff, is Little Billy, when 'e's dressed up. Yes, 'e's a 'unchback, but you don't notice 'is 'ump after you know 'im. 'E's a lot straighter than some without a 'ump—'e's a white man, is Little Billy. And 'e's a proper toff—'e's eddicated. Swiggle me, 'ow 'e can chew the rag! And sing! Sings like a blessed angel!"

"Did he wear a black suit and a green velvet hat?" asked Martin.

"Yes, 'e did," answered the boatswain excitedly. "'Ave you seen him?"

"Yes, this afternoon," laughed Martin. "You need not worry about your Little Billy. Neither the police nor the Japs have captured him. He is improving his chance to pursue the avocation of book salesman."

Martin recounted his meeting with the purveyor of universal knowledge. The boatswain listened silently and his red-shot eyes glinted suspiciously. It seemed to Martin he was not so drunk as a moment since.

"But, say," finished Martin, "who is this Ichi you mentioned? Do you know Dr. Ichi?"

"Do I know Dr. Ichi?" echoed the boatswain. "Do I know——"

He glowered at Martin. The query seemed to inflame his temper.

"Do you know Ichi? Hey? Say, do you know Ichi? That's what I want to know!" His manner became threatening. "Why, swiggle me stiff, you must be one o' them, yourself!"

Assault seemed imminent. Martin backed hurriedly away.

"No, no, you are quite mistaken," he assured the boatswain. "You may be sure I am not one of them, whoever they are. I am your friend."

The boatswain subsided growlingly. He was plainly suspicious—of what, Martin could not guess. But it was evident that any mention of the name of Ichi peppered his temper.

If Martin had been a cautious young man he would have let well enough alone. The boatswain seemed a hasty and a heavy-fisted man. But Martin's interest was more than piqued. Here seemed a chance to learn something about that mysterious Japanese. This sailor appeared to know him. Some light might even be thrown upon his errand to the Black Cruiser. The papers in his inside pocket oppressed him with their secret.

"Perhaps Little Billy is down on the waterfront," he remarked casually. "He mentioned to me that he was going to look up a friend on the Embarcadero—a fellow named Carew. Do you know Captain Carew? At a place called the Black Cruiser?"

The boatswain received the remark in a most disconcerting manner. He stiffened and stared at Martin, mouth agape, for an appreciable instant. He seemed breathless. The semi-paralysis of drunkenness seemed to flee his face.

"Carew! Did you say Carew?" he at last exclaimed. "Strike me, 'e says Carew!"

It seemed that the boatswain had received some momentous morsel of information difficult to digest. Suddenly he smote the bar with his clenched fist. "Carew—'Wild Bob' Carew!" he cried. "And Wild Bob Carew takes a 'and in this!"

This was progressing!

"Oh, so you know Captain Carew?" prompted Martin.

The boatswain turned. He regarded Martin strangely. His face was set and stern. He seemed a man for whom the moment of badinage is past and the moment of action is come.

"You talk of Ichi, and then you talk of Wild Bob Carew!" he said to Martin. "Swiggle me stiff, young man, you *are* one o' them!"

His great hands reached toward Martin. There was annihilation in his eye. His attitude was a sudden and complete declaration of war.

Martin did not await that onslaught. He started for the door. Fortune favored him—uncounted potations, perhaps, had rendered the boatswain a bit unsteady on his pins, and, as he left the support of the bar rail and lurched for his victim, he lost his balance. He sat down on the floor with a crash that shook the building.

The boatswain swore, Johnny Feiglebaum emitted a wail as three glasses bounced off their rack, and Martin kept on going. As he passed through the door, the boatswain was scrambling agilely to his feet. Martin was a young man in a hurry.

He sprinted for, and boarded a passing street-car, just as the boatswain reached the curb. He paid his fare, passed inside the car, and sank thankfully into a seat. He was aglow with his adventure. Something to remember, that affair with the weeping boatswain! But what was the fellow so sudden about?

Thus did Martin consign the boatswain to the limbo of memory. He was inside the street-car, so he did not see the automobile, driven by a figure in a gray overcoat and cap, that drew up at the curb beside the boatswain. Nor did he observe that automobile's consequent strange behavior in persistently keeping half a block behind the slowly moving street-car the whole distance to the waterfront.

## CHAPTER III

### THE HAPPY HUNCHBACK

The clock on the tower of the ferry building showed fifteen minutes past nine when Martin dropped off the car at the foot of Market Street. He paused a moment on the corner, enjoying the never-ending bustle about the city's gateway. He had plenty of time—Green Street and the Black Cruiser, was but a quarter hour's leisurely walk distant, and it was then forty-five minutes till ten o'clock. He turned and walked slowly northward along the Embarcadero.

The wide street was swept by a keen wind, and Martin found the night even rawer than he had anticipated. But overcoated, he was protected, and the walk was anything but lonely and uninteresting. To his lively mind, this night stroll along the famous East Street was a fitting complement to his strange encounter with the red boatswain of the brig *Cohasset*, a fitting prelude to the secret business he was engaged upon.

The very breath of the street was invigorating—the salt tang of the breeze, the pungent, mingled smell of tar and cordage from the ship chandleries, the taste of the Orient from the great warehouses, even the gross smells of the grog-shops, and it set Martin's blood a-coursing. It conjured visions of tall ships, wide seas, far ports.

Across the way, at the wharves, great steamers were disgorging. The rattle of their winches filled the air. On his side of the street, the sidewalk was thronged with stevedores, stokers, sailors, what not. Each of the innumerable saloons he passed possessed its wassail group, and rough ditties boomed out through swinging doors. Great loaded trucks rumbled by. It was a world that worked and played both night and day.

But as Martin continued northward, the street's character changed. The kens and cheap eating-places gave way for the most part to the warehouses—great brick and concrete fortresses that turned a blank dark face to the night.

Pedestrians became few, mainly straggling seamen bound for their ships. Across the way, the steamers at the wharves were smaller, and here and there loomed the spars of a sailing vessel, a delicate tracery upon the blue-black starlit sky.

Martin speculated upon these last. The intricate, woofed masses of wood and cordage captured his fancy. He wondered if by any chance the boatswain's ship was over there. He wondered what the brig *Cohasset* was like. He wondered what the "blessed little mate" was like. He visioned that surprising person who had such influence over rough boatswains—a prim little man with mutton chop whiskers, he decided. Yes, the 'blessed little mate' of the brig *Cohasset* would be a little, white-crowned, bewhiskered old gentleman, perhaps somewhat senile and decrepit. It was inherent respect for old age that inspired the boatswain's affection.

So musing, Martin came to a by-street that divided two warehouses. He crossed the alleys, but lingered on the far curb.

The alley was dark, but he noticed some distance down it the outline of an automobile standing with its lights hooded. He had a passing wonder at the presence of an apparently deserted machine in such a location, but it was a subconscious interest.

The next street, he knew, was Green Street. Those lights that shone on the next corner must mark his destination, the Black Cruiser saloon. He pulled out his watch; still five and twenty moments before ten o'clock.

As he stood there under a dim street light consulting his timepiece, there came to his ears out of the darkness just ahead, a voice, a rich and throaty tenor, singing softly. The sweet sounds pierced his preoccupation. He looked, and some thirty or forty paces distant perceived a gnome-like figure perched atop a fire hydrant, at the edge of the sidewalk.

The figure was little better than a grotesque shadow in the gloom, but there was no need of light to give definite shape. That pure, musical voice once heard was not easily forgotten. Martin knew the missing steward of the brig *Cohasset* was there before him.

The voice rose and fell in a careless carol, an ancient, lilting, deep sea chantey.

A roving, a roving,  
Since roving's been my ru-u-in,  
I'll go no more a roving,  
With Thee, Fair Maid.

Martin stood entranced. The songster adventured on with the "Amsterdam Maid," another stanza and chorus. The soft bell-like tones, the salty words, the air, like all the chanteys, both sad and reckless, caressed Martin's ears like a siren charm. The boatswain's words, "'E sings like a blessed angel," crossed his mind. Rather, a blessed merman! To Martin, greedy for the oceans and beyond, the ditty seemed the very whisper of bright and beckoning distance—a whisper of tropic seas, of spice-scented nights, of blue isles. It heaped fuel on his sea-lust. His heels itched.

The song ended and was followed by a chuckle, a care-free clucking of subdued mirth. The singer was evidently in a jovial mood. A few softly spoken, laughter-tinged words reached Martin.

"The audience is requested to kindly move forward. No extra charge for box seats. Front row reserved for bald heads. Next show starts right away. Especially staged for young gentlemen of the law."

Martin came to himself with a start. The words were addressed to him. He was the sole audience in sight. And the facetious hunchback evidently recognized him, remembered him and the fact of his employment in a law office. Martin was standing beneath the dim glow of a street lamp, but Little Billy must have very sharp eyes to recognize features in that half-light.

Martin moved forward promptly. First the weeping boatswain, now the happy hunchback. It was a night of odd meetings! But Little Billy seemed not so downcast as the bosun.

"Ah, ha, my amiable acquaintance of the afternoon walks abroad!" chuckled the voice, as Martin came to a halt beside the hydrant. "Is it thus he cools a brow fevered of too much Trent and Blackstone?"

"Well, it is a good night for such a cooling," was Martin's good-natured retort.

"True," admitted the other. "And other things than the law fever the head—heavy ordnance of cruisers of accursed blackness, the fatal rum and gum, the devious workings of the Oriental mind, the slithering about of fat and greasy varlets. Yes, many things fever the brow, and 'tis a good night for a cooling. As witness!"

Martin stared at the other. No reek of alcohol met his nostrils, as with the boatswain, but, none the less Little Billy's cryptic jargon confirmed his suspicions. Also drunk, he reflected. The revered and gentle old mate of the brig *Cohasset* would have cause for grief when his two prodigals came roistering home.

Martin could not make out Little Billy's features very distinctly; the hydrant was beyond the street lamp's circle. But the hunchback's body was plain enough—the queer body squatted upon the hydrant, legs dangling, the ridiculous velvet hat rakishly aslant the large head. The hunchback's eyes were bright and alive.

"I can well believe your mind is care-ridden," bandied Martin, falling in with the other's mood. "It must be a wearisome and thankless task to scatter universal knowledge amidst the brainless. Have you still got your book? That thing you tried to sell to me?"

"Alas, I must confess I have it not," was the blithe response. "I ditched it, sir. It oppressed me to bear about such a store of wisdom. The marvel of the ages, the compendium of universal knowledge, reposes in the dust-bin. Mayhap some aspiring dust-man, in whose mind smolders untaught genius, will chance upon it. It may prepare some dim soul for future brilliancy—the arts, the crafts, the sciences, are all contained in that wonderful volume. Who knows, out of that black dust-bin may rise a radiant glow of light. The janitor, the collector of garbage, the industrious people who rake over the dumps—there are many chances of the right hands grasping that printed jewel.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear.

"'Tis a pleasant thought, my legal friend. Ah, I am happy in contemplation. I may not have lived in vain."

Martin grinned.

"You certainly are an optimist," he said. "But why did you cast such a wonderful gem aside?"

"Alas, the grossness of the commercial classes, the brutality of the tired business man! We Americans are a rude folk my friend; the courtesies are absent from our manners. Now, I am a young man with tender feelings, both mental and—er, physical. And these trousers I wear have already rendered long and faithful service; they have arrived at the stage where they require, let us say, humoring. The oft repeated impact of a number ten boot upon such delicate fabric could have naught but dire results. I discarded the book, sir, and resigned my membership in the peripatetic brotherhood, to avert a catastrophe. Both cloth and nerves were frayed. I am a cheerful youth, but sensitive, and I require considerate treatment to be happy. Ah, you are laughing! Never mind, I like people who laugh—like great Caesar, I would have them about me."

"Pardon me," gulped Martin. "I was just thinking how aptly the bosun described you. "Ow 'e can chew the rag!" he said. And you can."

"The bosun!" exclaimed the other. "Did I understand you to say 'the bosun'? Can it be you have met my heart's chum, my dear bosun?"

"You bet I did!" replied Martin emphatically. "And I was lucky to end the encounter with a whole skin. Hasty man, your dear bosun!"

"'Tis true," admitted Little Billy. "He requires coddling, does my bosun. Red hair always does. My bosun has a tender heart, and he is a creature of impulse. Beneath that rough exterior surges the artistic temperament. But tell me, was the bosun, by any chance, inquiring for one Little Billy?"

"He was," said Martin. "Not only inquiring for Little Billy, but weeping for him, fighting for him—and for the lacerated feelings of the dear mate of the brig *Cohasset*. Of course, I know you are Little Billy."

"Your perspicacity is remarkable," said Little Billy. "I am discovered. But your news is disturbing. Tears and temper are pregnant signs with my redheaded friend. You did not, by any chance, meet him in the city Bastille?"

Martin sketched for the other the scene at Johnny Feiglebaum's.

"But the bosun had the same misgivings of the police on your account," he finished.

"He stated positively you would sleep this night in jail. He gave you a turbulent character."

"Base libel," asserted Little Billy. "Bosun has imagination, but it functions within narrow limits. He is solely a son of experience. His idea of a pleasant and well spent evening ashore, is to introduce into the physical system an indefinite amount of variously tinted alcohol, and then to try a brave whirl of fisticuffs with the scorned minions of the law. To his understanding there is no other way of spending a holiday. Hence his solicitude for Little Billy. Of course, thinks he, Little Billy is off alone a-roistering. Why else should he have given his bosun the slip?"

"Did you give him the slip?" said Martin. "He thinks he mislaid you—that is a point in his distress. Did you run away from him to become a book agent?"

"You do not understand," stated the hunchback with dignity. "It was but a manifestation of the wanderlust, at once the curse and the blessing of my misshapen existence. Behold in me, sir, the rover, the argonaut, the adventurer!"

He straightened his slouched figure upon its slippery seat and attempted to strike an oratorical posture. He lost his balance and lurched sidewise towards Martin. He grasped Martin's overcoat.

Martin good-naturedly put an arm around the other to steady him. Little Billy, he guessed, was rendered dizzy by that rum and gum he had darkly hinted at. The hunchback teetered and clung to Martin's overcoat. Not for an instant did his tongue cease wagging.

"I am an explorer of strange lands, strange men, strange pursuits," he told Martin. "Behold in me a rollicking blade of the sea; one who has matched wits with all races, all colors, and sometimes, alas, come off second best; one who has followed many occupations. A sailor—yes. A book agent—yes. Also, sir, rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. A wooz, a wizard, a king of legerdemain. Student, actor—But why continue?"

He had regained his balance upon his precarious seat by this time, and he finished with a fine, sweeping gesture:

"In this crippled carcass doth abide a vagabond spirit whose wanderlust has no purely geographical basis. I wander the wide world over, yes! Also, I wander in and out of men's lives, in and out of men's affairs. To wander—'tis my excuse for living. A fascinating obsession, sir!"

Martin was charmed. Never had he encountered such a flow of words, such musical eloquence. What a lawyer this chap would make! But Martin was also oppressed by his consciousness of the flight of time. He wanted to linger with his quaint companion; but the time!

He reached for his watch and noted that Little Billy's clutch had opened his overcoat. He struck a match and discovered it was four minutes to ten—four minutes to reach the next corner. He could make it in two, still it was time he was moving.

"I must leave you," he said to Little Billy. "I've an errand to that saloon on the corner. Wait for me; I'll be back this way in a few moments, and we'll go get a bite together."

"Would that I could," said Little Billy. "But I, too, must depart. My ship awaits."

"Well, then, so long," said Martin. "You know where I work, Little Billy, look me up sometime. Be glad to see you. I won't forget this meeting."

"Good-by. No, you'll not forget this meeting," responded the hunchback. He slipped down from his perch and shook hands. "No," he repeated, "you'll remember me all right."

Martin strode for the corner, and the Black Cruiser. Little Billy ambled across the street towards the dark wharves, and as he went he whistled blithely.

The street was empty. Martin passed but one living being during the rest of his journey. This was a figure in a gray greatcoat and cap, who lounged against a telegraph pole across the street from Martin's destination. The gray figure stared steadily towards the wharves; Martin passed it by almost without notice.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BLACK CRUISER

Martin was disappointed. The Black Cruiser—delectable name, of which he had expected much—was, it appeared, housed in a commonplace and very ugly two-story wooden building, a building with many dark and shuttered windows on the upper floor.

From where he stood upon the corner, Martin could see that the building was of considerable depth, and that the saloon appeared to occupy only the front downstairs portion. The upstairs, with its many shuttered windows, had the aspect of a deserted rooming-house. Just before him, over the closed door to the saloon, was the inscription Smatt had spoken of, in plain black letters, "Black Cruiser Saloon, Diego Spulvedo, Prop." It was a sordid and unprepossessing exterior; Martin felt that the Black Cruiser would prove the anti-climax to his evening's adventures.

The second-hand of his watch climbed toward the hour. He knew old Smatt's passion for exact punctuality; not a second before the appointed time must he enter the place. The hand touched the required point. Martin felt of the paper in his pocket and opened the door.

He stepped into a low-ceilinged bare and dingy room. The place reeked of stale drink. A battered bar filled one side, and before it stood five men in a row, attended upon by a heavily paunched and aproned fellow. Martin accosted this last, as he approached the bar.

"Mr. Spulvedo?" asked Martin. "I wish to see Mr. Spulvedo."

The aproned man regarded him with a stare from heavy lidded and nearly closed eyes. He had a swarthy, greasy, fat face, this officer of the Black Cruiser, and moist, thick lips. Martin recalled Little Billy's reminiscence concerning the "slithering about of fat and greasy varlets." Was this the varlet? The name fitted.

"Spulvedo!" repeated Martin. "Are you Mr. Spulvedo?"

"Yais," drawled the man.

Martin dropped his voice to a whisper.

"I would like to speak with you alone," he commenced.

He shot a glance out of the corners of his eyes toward the five patrons. Smatt had said to take care not to be overheard. He caught his breath with surprise. The glance revealed five stolid, yellow-brown faces turned toward him, five pairs of black, oblique-set eyes regarding him intently. Five Japanese! They were interested in him, there was the thrill. Martin sensed some connection between himself and the five. That envelope in his inner pocket!

"You weesh to speak weeth me, yais?"

The drawling voice compelled his attention.

"Yes—alone," said Martin.

Spulvedo nodded. He turned and waddled fatly around the farther end of the bar, and Martin rejoined him at the other end of the room.

"You are the messenger we expect, yais?" purred Spulvedo.

"I wish to see Captain Carew," stated Martin. "I was told to see you and ask for him; told you would conduct me to him. Is he here?"

"Yais, you see heem," answered Spulvedo.

He turned to a door in the wall behind him and unlocked it. He opened it a crack and held whispered parley with some one within. Then he turned to Martin.

"Thees way—come!" he bade.

Martin brushed through the door, opened just wide enough to admit his body. He expected the greasy saloonkeeper to follow, but instead that worthy slammed the door upon him and turned the lock. Martin was left alone in pitch darkness.

He stood still, nonplused by that cavalier desertion and disturbed by the darkness. He stretched out both arms and touched two walls. He was in a hallway. Alone? The air about him seemed to be filled with rustlings. He fancied he heard breathing. He took a tentative step forward, arm outstretched. A cold, clammy hand grasped his wrist and drew from him a startled yelp.

"Have no afraid," soothed a soft voice. "I make show he way to he hon'ble."

There was, it seemed, more than one fashion in spoken English at the Sign of the Black Cruiser; this fellow did not talk like Spulvedo. Martin's eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness, and he made out the vague outlines of a short figure before him. The figure moved, and the clutch on his wrist urged him to follow.

They moved forward some twenty paces, passed through a door, and encountered a stairway leading upstairs at right angles to the passage they had just traversed. It was not so dark here; a gas light burned somewhere in the hall upstairs, and a moiety of its glow found its way below.

His conductor released his wrist, and commenced to ascend the stairs. Martin, as he started to follow, noticed there was a second door at the foot of the stairs. He guessed it let upon the street.

They gained the upstairs landing and paused. Martin saw before him a long hall with at least a dozen doors opening upon it. A gas light burned at the farther end. As he had suspected from without, this place was, or had been, a cheap lodging-house. Nothing save that light seemed to speak of occupancy now.

Martin took his first good look at his guide. He was, as he had noted on the stairs, a Japanese; a chunky little man with an apologetic manner, and a muscular and bow-legged figure. If he had been a white man, Martin would have listed him a sailor.

The Japanese smiled. His teeth flashed startlingly white in his dark face.

"He, hon'ble, catch it Captain down there," he stated.

He waved a hand toward the gas light at the other end of the hall. Then he opened the door of the room nearest to hand.

"He, hon'ble, stop by here," he invited. "I go make prepare."

Martin shrugged his shoulders. There seemed to be many preliminaries to an audience with this Captain Carew. Through the door the Jap held open he saw the outlines of a bed, and a rag of carpet. When he stepped through the door, the musty, sour air of the room smote his nostrils like a blow.

The Japanese closed the door, and the retreating echo of his footsteps sounded from the hall. Martin had not expected to be thus shut in darkness, but after all it was a small matter. He felt his way to the bed and sat down on its edge.

After a moment he struck a match. The flare revealed, as he expected, the meanly appointed bedroom of a tenth rate hostelry. The single window was shuttered.

He composed himself to patience. This business was getting on his nerves. This visit to the Black Cruiser was not proving the evening's anti-climax, as he had feared, but he was not enjoying himself. The loose face of the Cruiser's commander, the mysterious Japanese, the disturbing secrecy, the foul air—he would be glad when his errand was completed, and he was once again outdoors in the clean, fresh air.

There was an alien taint in that poisonous room. With the Japanese in mind he placed it—it was that indefinable odor the man of the Orient leaves about his abiding place, the smell one gets during a walk through Chinatown. Was this Spulvedo conducting this rookery as a Japanese lodging-house?

A strange place for a sea-captain to lodge. This Carew—this "Wild Bob" Carew, as the boatswain had termed him—must be a man very indifferent to his surroundings, or else mightily anxious to remain under cover. The captains Martin had met were particular men; one would not find them in such a noisome hole. This Carew must be some rough renegade. Perhaps he was not even white; perhaps he was a half-caste. That would explain his choice of lodgings. One would think from all the secret mummery with which he surrounded himself that he was the Mikado, himself. He certainly was not very popular with the boatswain.

Thus far had Martin got with his musings, when his attention was attracted by noises that suddenly disturbed the unearthly quiet of the house. They reached him quite plainly through the thin walls.

A door slammed, below stairs. He heard sounds of a scuffle. The sounds drew nearer—grunts, exclamations, footsteps. They were coming up the stairs. In the hall outside a door was noisily opened. Some one ran past his door, and sentences were, spoken in a harsh, clicking, alien tongue.

Martin sat tensely on the edge of the bed. What was about, there in the hall? The scuffling had reached the head of the stairs; now it was opposite his door. Several pairs of feet were making that noise. Martin heard a voice exclaim chokingly, and in English—

"Let go—let go of me!"

It was a strange voice, a rich and thrilling voice, and it carried an appeal. A man's voice?

Martin felt his way to the door. This affair without was none of his business, but he must see what was being done to the owner of that voice. He must confirm or dispel that vague suspicion.

He turned the knob and pulled, and the door came a few inches. There was an exclamation from some one who stood in front of the door. An arm shot through the opening, a clenched hand impacted against the pit of his stomach, and Martin went reeling backward. The door slammed shut and the lock clicked.

Martin fetched up against the bed and sat down heavily, experiencing that sharp agony that follows upon a plexus punch. In that brief instant he had held the door ajar, however, he had witnessed a sight that caused him to ignore the pain. He had seen what was transpiring in the hall. He had seen the group of little yellow men clustered about and urging along a single figure that slightly overtopped them; a figure clad in a gray overcoat.

At the very second Martin had looked, a gray cap had fallen from the head in the scuffle, and a wonderful mass of dark hair had tumbled down about the gray-clad shoulders. An excited, protesting face had turned toward him. It was a woman those chunky aliens were urging along the hallway, a woman clad in a man's gray overcoat. A white woman—a young and beautiful woman!

Martin crouched on the bed's edge and panted to recover his breath. The scuffling without grew faint, a door slammed, and the house was again quiet.

Martin's mind was awlirl, but uppermost in the confusing chaos was that startling picture, photographic in its clearness, of the squat outlanders surrounding the protesting figure. A woman—a white woman—in the hands of these yellow men!

Surely he had seen aright. It was an ill light in the hall, but he had looked from a dense darkness, and had seen clearly. And had he not heard her voice? And seen the feminine tresses tumble about the gray-clad shoulders as the cap came off? There was some faint stirring of memory in connection with the thought of that gray, mannish apparel, but Martin was too excited to notice it. He was possessed by the event. He had caught a glimpse of the angry, vivid face. Angry, that was it—not fear, but anger, in her bearing. They had not wanted him to observe the incident, the outrage. They had offered him violence. They had slammed and locked the door. He was prisoner.

By this time, Martin, a thoroughly aroused young man, was again at the door. He, Martin Blake, would not submit to maltreatment and imprisonment! He would find out what this yellow



crew was doing with that girl.

In the back of his excited mind danced grim shadows of the tales every San Franciscan knows; stories of white slaves, of white women being seen entering Oriental dens, and being lost forever to the world that knew them; of horrible relics of womanhood being discovered years after in some underground cave of Chinatown. Sickening thoughts!

Martin yanked at the door and pounded upon the panel. His blows echoed without, but brought no other response. He lifted his foot and drove his boot against the door. It shivered and splintered.

Before he could kick a second time, there came a cry from the hall, a hurried footfall, and the door was unlocked. Martin jerked it open. Confronting him was the Japanese who had been his guide, who had gone to "make prepare" Captain Carew.

"You come now," announced the little man, bowing courteously.

"What does all this mean?" demanded Martin angrily. "Who struck me through the door? How dare you lock me in? Who——"

"He Captain speak you come," said the other, smiling blandly. He shed Martin's rain of words as if he were some yellow oilskin. "I make him way—hon'ble fellow my show."

"What is going on in this house?" demanded Martin. "Who was that white woman? What was that gang doing with her?"

The other backed away before Martin's excited questioning. "No understand," he said. "No woman—no gang. No savvy."

"No savvy—big lie!" cried Martin, and he pounced down upon the gray cap which was lying on the hallway floor. He held it up for the other's inspection. "You savvy this?" he demanded.

The Jap shook his head. His smile was gone, and there was a hostile gleam in his eyes.

"That—no understand," he said crisply. "You come for he Captain—you catch business he Captain!"

Martin saw he could get nothing from this fellow. He was being told very plainly to mind his own business. Very well, this Captain Carew was perhaps a white man.

Without further words, Martin followed the Japanese. They went the length of the hall and paused before the last door, the one before which the light burned. The guide rapped. A deep voice rumbled orders within, chairs scraped, a door slammed, and the door before which they stood was opened.

## CHAPTER V

### WILD BOB CAREW

Martin lurched forward past the man who opened the door into a room that was brightly lighted by gas and kerosene lamps. It was a room bare of furniture save for a common kitchen table, littered with charts and papers, and several kitchen chairs.

It was a large room, much larger than the one he had just quitted, the full width of the house, and, it seemed, part of a suite, for two doors, besides the one he entered through, let upon it, from the rear wall. But these details only impressed themselves upon Martin's mind later, and gradually. At the instant of his tempestuous entrance, he was entirely engrossed with his obsession, and he had eyes only for the dominant figure that stood behind the paper-littered table in the center of the room. To this man Martin addressed himself without preliminary.

"That woman—didn't you hear?" he cried. "These Japs have a woman prisoner in this house—a white woman! See! This is her cap. I saw——"

"Are you the messenger who was to come to me tonight?" interrupted the man addressed. He spoke in a commanding and vibrant bass voice.

It was suddenly borne in upon Martin's consciousness that he was in the presence of a personality. They were immobile yellow gargoyles, those two Japs who stood against the farther wall, they did not count. But this man who stood across the table from him—the air of the room was electric with his presence. A commanding and forceful personality, but a hostile personality, there was a chill in that interruption. But the momentum of his feelings carried Martin on.

"In the hall—shoving her along—she was struggling! A white girl! Those yellow—"

"What is your business with me?" The heavy voice beat down Martin's words. It was as if he had not spoken. "I am Captain Carew. You have a message for me?"

Martin checked his splutter of words. The other's sentences were like a dash of cold water; they cleared his mind. There was menace in that heavy voice, in the other's attitude, in the frosty gleam of his eyes. That veiled threat sobered Martin. He stood still and played his eyes upon the other in appraisal.

And he was a picture to fill the eye, this man who bore himself so disdainfully, this Captain Wild Bob Carew. Went glimmering the graceless, blasphemous sea-renegade of Martin's fancy. Martin caught his breath with unforced admiration as he measured the other's form and face.

Captain Carew was big and blond, as Smatt had predicted. He was also quite the handsomest man Martin had ever seen. He stood at least six feet, and was leanly and finely built. He was, perhaps, thirty-five years old, but the springiness of youth was still in his carriage.

Martin gained from him the impression of great physical strength. The face was finely chiseled, virile, aristocratic, a face to compel men's admiration, to turn women's heads. But Martin divined the flaw in that fine mask. The full, curved lips were shaded by a short, blond mustache, but that hirsute covering did not conceal the cruel quirk at the lips' corners. The face was ruddy, even in that light, and unlined. The eyes, probably blue in daylight, were black and glittering; and they bore Martin's scrutiny without a flicker. But after a moment the cruel lips curled scornfully.

"Well, my good fellow, have you quite finished with your inspection?" said Carew. "I hope you have discovered nothing about my appearance that displeases you."

The cavalier tone brought Martin to himself with a start. He had been taken aback by the appearance of Captain Carew, the man so different from his preconceived picture. This was no rough bully of the seas; Carew's bearing and dandified apparel bespoke gentility. Martin had just observed one of the captain's hands, a slender, white, aristocratic hand, small for the man's size. On the back of the hand was a star, tattooed in red.

The tattooing recalled Smatt and Smatt's words; recalled to Martin his reason for being in that room; banished for the moment his knight-errant mood. He thrust his hand into his inside overcoat pocket and felt of the envelope. Smatt's formula came to his lips.

"I wish to see you on the Hakodate business," he said.

"It is time that business was settled. Did the Chief send you?" Carew responded promptly.

"That is correct," said Martin.

He half withdrew the envelope from his pocket and then hesitated. This Carew was a severe and superior person. The packet delivered, Martin foresaw instant dismissal. And that poor girl! Yet, Carew was a white man.

"But, Captain Carew, you could not have understood me aright!" he appealed. "I tell you, these Japanese have a young white woman—"

"Enough!" barked Carew. His tone made Martin jump. "Young man, you were sent here to deliver certain papers to me. Do so."

Silently, Martin handed over the envelope. He was baffled. He was angry.

"Now—get out!" commanded Carew, waving him toward the hall.

Martin turned toward the exit. Hot, edged words were on his tongue's tip, and he could not trust himself to further urge this cold-blooded wretch. He took a step toward the door and then stopped short, staring into the corner of the room. He saw a man's gray overcoat lying on the floor in the corner.

He wheeled upon Carew again and found the latter's eyes upon him in a threatening glare. "You—you—that coat!" stammered Martin.

"Enough!" exclaimed Carew. "You have finished your business with me, young man. You will find your guide in the hall; he will conduct you to the street. And a word of advice, my good fellow: If you value your skin and your employment, you will promptly forget everything and anything you may have seen in this house!"

Martin choked upon his rage. Within him surged a hot hatred of this insolent sailor; this captain of yellow bravos; this abductor of girls; this man who dared not face the daylight. He was a worm beneath the Captain's feet. He was—well, the worm could turn.

He moved toward the door. Yes, he would go, and quickly.

"If you value your skin and your employment!" So that was it—a threat! He would show this high-handed captain that Martin Blake would risk his skin as readily as the next man; and as for his employment—a fig for Smatt, and Dr. Ichi, and all their ilk! They were crooks; this Carew was a crook. They held that girl against her will. It was all a piece of some dirty, crooked work. Well, the police....

"God, what treachery is this!"

The booming sentence arrested Martin at the door. He lifted his hand from the knob and turned to the voice. Carew, his face convulsed with passion, was regarding him.

"What does this mean?" cried Carew. He shook a handful of papers at Martin. "Come back here, you! Explain this beastly trick!"

Martin went back. He noticed, as he drew close to the other, that the envelope he had given the captain lay empty and torn on the table.

"Well, what is it? What trick?" he demanded shortly.

"What trick!" mimicked Carew. "Look here. Is this what you were to deliver to me?"

He thrust the sheaf of papers beneath Martin's nose. They were sheets of blank, white paper, and they had been creased by folding.

"This is what that precious envelope contained," continued Carew. "Tell me, what — foolery is this? Where is that code translation? Where are my instructions? Where are my clearance papers? Hey—you staring fool!"

"Stop that!" flared Martin. "You moderate your tone when you speak to me! If you have any complaint to make about the contents of that envelope, make them to Josiah Smatt, and that Dr. Ichi. I know nothing about the contents. The envelope was given to me sealed, and I delivered it to you sealed."

"It has been tampered with," declared Carew.

"It has not," asserted Martin. "I have had it in my pocket, on my person, since Smatt gave it to me. I delivered it to you with the contents intact. If you found those blank sheets within, they were placed there before I received the envelope."

Carew favored Martin with a steely and searching stare; and Martin, ablaze with resentment, stared boldly back. Martin's bearing, and his positive statements, evidently impressed the captain.

"You had better take the matter up with the men who sent me here," said Martin. "I have finished with my part of the affair. I wish to go."

"You are jolly well right I'll take the matter up with the men who sent you here!" exclaimed Carew. "And I'll take the matter up at once. Meanwhile, you will remain here. I'll not lose track of you until I get to the bottom of this affair."

"Do you mean you intend to detain me here? Whether I will or no?" demanded the thoroughly angered Martin.

"I do," stated Carew.

He barked an order in a foreign tongue. The two gargoyles at the other end of the room sprang to life and started swiftly toward Martin.

Martin wheeled about and darted for the door to the hallway. He reached it, and was jerking it open, when the two Japs flung themselves upon him. He lifted one from his feet with a well-placed swing. The other flung his arms about Martin's neck and clung there.

Martin staggered into the hall, wrestling with that leech-like hug. He tore free from the fellow; and as he did he caught a glimpse of Captain Carew through the open door. The man had not moved from his station behind the table.

Then a mountain seemed to drop upon Martin's back. He was crushed face downward upon the floor, enveloped and smothered by a vast and sour-smelling bulk.

He struggled desperately and succeeded in partly rolling over on his back. He flailed his arm twice, and felt his fist strike against soft flesh. He saw hanging over him the unwholesome face of the saloonkeeper, Spulvedo.

Then a heavy blow smote his jaw-bone, and he went a-dancing through a world of bright, shooting stars, into darkness.

## CHAPTER VI

### PRISONER

The results of a forceful tap on the human jaw are various. One man lies inert, dead of body, blank of mind; a second writhes about and babbles; a third retains a modicum of control over locomotion, but the mind journeys afar into a phantasmagoric world.

Martin was the third man during this, his first, reaction to a knockout blow. He was not completely unconscious, but that terrific jolt seemed to divorce body and mind. So far as further resistance was concerned, he was helpless. He swam about in an opaque mist. There, afar off, on the floor, was stretched another Martin Blake, a shadow of Martin Blake; and he saw monstrous things surrounding this adumbration of himself, headless bodies, and bodiless heads, and detached arms and legs.

He saw these parts of men haul the unreal Martin Blake to his feet and bundle him through the door, back into the big, lighted room. He saw this other self, body sagging, head hanging, stand again before the paper-littered table and sway to and fro upon tottering legs. He heard, from a great distance, the deep rumble of Captain Carew's voice—but all he could see of Carew was a foot and a section of leg. He saw a wide expanse of bare floor, and the floor was moving.

He hung suspended before a door. Came Carew's voice—

"Not there—fools—next room."

More moving floor. Another door. The door receded and showed a black hole. Again the deep voice—

"Good place—safe—just quill-pusher—dump."

A headlong flight through darkness, falling, falling, into the bottomless pit. A crash. And Martin's mind and Martin's body became one again as he struck the floor.

He was lying face downward upon a bare floor. He sat up. His head was ringing, and he could feel that his cheek was swelling. His addled wits slowly settled themselves. He moved his head about and took stock, as well as he could, of his new surroundings.

He retained a vague memory of his passage through the big room, and of the two doors. So, he knew the place he had been so unceremoniously dumped into was one of the rooms that opened upon Carew's headquarters. The only light that entered the place crept under the door from the room without. He knew, without experiment, the door was locked upon him.

The room felt bare. He struck one of his few remaining matches. The room was bare, not a stick of furniture in it. The single window was closed, and he supposed it was shuttered as well, for he could not see through it. But he would make sure. He clambered to his feet, a bit dizzy yet but well able to control his movements. He moved softly toward the window, feeling his way.

In a second his hand touched the window-ledge. He felt along the sash and shoved upward. To his surprise, the window lifted easily. But the hand he shoved without met, as he expected it would, a heavy wooden shutter; and his investigating fingers disclosed, moreover, a padlock, that, by means of a staple sunk in the sill, locked the shutter fast. No hope of getting away through the window.

The certainty that he was imprisoned in this sealed box of a room was not soothing to Martin's temper. He was not frightened—he was angry. The haughty Carew had aroused in him resentment; now, he had been slugged semi-conscious and locked in this room. His anger reached the proportions of a rage, a hot, furious rage.

He left the window and crossed to the door. He did not try this time to soften his footfalls—he did not care who heard him.

He tried the door. Locked. He shook it, and rattled it. No response, but his straining ears caught the sound of light footfalls without.

He pounded upon the door, shouted threats, demands, challenges. He was in the mood to flog the whole vile brood of this Pension Spulvedo.

He resorted to the method that had brought him freedom once before that night—he lifted his foot and drove his boot against the door. And, as before, the response was immediate.

A peremptory voice was raised in the other room.

"Be quiet, you, een there! Eef you be not quiet, I feex you!"

A well-remembered voice! That greasy villain of a saloonkeeper was out there! It was Spulvedo who had smote him on the jaw. Martin redoubled his blows on the door.

"Stop! *Santa Maria*, eef you not stop, I shoot!"

Martin kicked away. The door, of flimsy enough construction, seemed on point of giving way. Then, there happened in such rapid sequence as to seem simultaneous, several things.

There was an ear-splitting crash, a splintering of wood, a hot streak passing so close to Martin's head it scorched, a tinkle of broken glass from the window behind him, a smell of burnt gunpowder.

Martin stood on one leg, like a stork, his free foot suspended for the kick he did not deliver. There was a queer sinking feeling in that inward organ that received his food. He stared at a little hole in the door panel, just above his head—a little bullet-hole that glowed yellow with the light from the other room. The man had shot through the door at him!

"Eef you not stop the keek, I shoot lower!" came the voice.

Martin sat down quickly upon the floor. Then, on second thought, he crawled into the nearest corner and crouched against the wall.

To be shot at, to have Death's hot breath scorch one's very hair, might very well daunt a person of more tumultuous antecedents than Martin Blake. To a young man whose chief occupation in life has been the warming of an office chair, such an experience is apt to prove unnerving. It spoke well of the stuff Martin was made of that he was not overly frightened. But Martin was certainly a bit shaken.

He suddenly discovered there was a vast difference between braving death in spirit in the pages of a book, and braving death in person in a locked upstairs room of a dubious and isolated boozing den. It was all very well for, say, Roger De Puyster, hero of that swanking tale "Death before Dishonor" to disregard such trifles as revolver shots and threats of death. But as for Martin Blake, law clerk, well, he squatted low and hugged close in his corner. No panic gripped him, but the instinct of self-preservation is a primal instinct. Martin's condition of mind, for the moment, was that bromidic state, "better imagined than described."

Chiefly, he was astonished. He, Martin Blake, had at last encountered a real adventure! He, the obscure law clerk and messenger, whose existence was a drab routine, whose every act must favor dull convention, had suddenly tumbled into the meshes of a dark intrigue, undoubtedly unlawful, where men's violent passions were given free rein.

In the short space of a half-hour, he had witnessed an abduction, been assaulted, imprisoned, murderously shot at! These things had happened to him, to Mrs. Meagher's star boarder, to Martin Blake, the despised quill-pusher! There was in Martin's mood, as he crouched there in the corner, that transcended his anger, his wonder, his fear, something that was close akin to exhilaration.

It was very still. His thumping heart seemed to him to be the only sound that reached his straining ears.

What was going on out there in the big room? He had not heard Carew's voice. Was the captain still there? Was Spulvedo crouching without the door, pistol raised, waiting for him to "keek"? Where were the mysterious Japanese? What were they—Carew's men or Dr. Ichi's?

Strange thing about that envelope. Martin had been as much surprised as Carew at the contents. What kind of a game were Smatt and Ichi playing, sending him with injunctions of secrecy to deliver sheets of blank paper? Carew declared the envelope had been tampered with, but Martin knew better. It had not left his possession. Had Smatt foreseen the reception that would be accorded his messenger? He did not doubt it. Smatt was a cold-blooded fish; he would not hesitate to risk his clerk's skin if a dollar profit were in sight. Did Smatt and Ichi know about the abduction—the imprisonment of that girl who masqueraded in the gray overcoat?

Aye, the girl—that was the important thing! Who was she? Where had she been taken? If he could only get word to the police! He had no fears for himself, at least, not many. When Carew had adjusted the matter of the envelope with Smatt and Ichi, why, of course, he would be turned loose. But the woman—those yellow men....

Martin's ears became suddenly aware of a faint, strange sound. It was a sound he had been endeavoring subconsciously to place during the period of his musing; he had almost identified it as his heart-beats. Now, alert and listening, he placed it. It was a tapping on the other side of the wall he leaned against, a light tap-tap-tap. It started, stopped, started.

Somebody was tapping on the wall in the next room. Another prisoner! It was the girl—of course, it was the girl.

Martin was instantly sure of the tapper's identity, with a sureness born of intuition and memory. He remembered the two doors opening from the big room, the gray overcoat lying in

the corner, Carew's words when the semi-conscious Martin Blake was held poised before the other door. "Not there—next room." Those were Carew's words. Why, of course, the Japs had brought the girl to Carew, and he had shut her in the next room.

*Tap-tap-tap, tap-tap.* There it came again. Martin rapped against the wall with his own knuckles, paused, rapped again. Instantly came the response from the other side, the same number of raps. A plain answer.

But Martin's elation was short lived. The unseen tapper immediately commenced again, *tap-tap, tap-tap-tap-tap, tap.*

Surely there was method in that irregular tapping. A signal, a talk in code! But he could not read it. Nor dare he lift his voice in shouted communication through the wall—Spulvedo, and bullets, hung over him. One experience of being shot at while unarmed and helpless was sufficient. It would not help the girl for him to get himself shot.

The unevenly tapped message came again. The best he could do was repeat the taps. But this, evidently, did not satisfy the sender. The tapping on the other side ceased. Though he rapped till his knuckles were sore, he could not induce the other to recommence.

The gloom of the room was less dense, Martin's accustomed eyes being now able to discern all four walls and the outline of the window. A fever with excitement as he was, the inactivity palled upon him, became unbearable. He must do something. Well, he would try the window again.

But first he crept to the door and endeavored to peer through the key-hole into the big room. He hoped to get a view of what was happening without, of Carew, of Spulvedo. But he was disappointed. The key, thrust in the lock on the outer side, completely barred any outlook. He pressed his ear against the door, but heard nothing.

A second later he was at the window, feeling of the padlocked shutter.

He drew his penknife from his pocket. It was a tiny, ridiculous blade, and it seemed futile to hope it would dig that stout staple out of the sill; still, thought Martin, any sort of attempt was better than no attempt.

He leaned over the sill and pecked away with his office tool. Of a sudden, a draft of cold, fresh air rushed up into his face. At the same instant, his other hand, which was leaning against the shutter, felt the shutter bulge slightly outward, and his ears caught a distinct, but not loud, scraping sound.

The sound increased, the bulge increased, the draft increased. Martin felt the staple that held the padlock bending, felt, also, the prying edge of a small steel bar between the sill edge and the shutter. Some one was outside, breaking entrance.

He drew to one side, shrinking against the wall, instinctively holding his breath. The prying of the shutter from without steadily continued. Conjectures and hopes surged through his mind—it was a burglar, it was the police, it was some unknown, unguessed friend. He didn't care who it was so long as the shutter was opened.

His heart beat a bass-drum solo against his ribs. There were distinct, rasping creaks from the window-sill—the staple was groaning at being hauled from its wooden bed. There was a sharp crack, and the shutter swung open. Martin heard a relieved grunt, felt the cool, fresh air enveloping him, and saw a square of black sky, lighted with a few stars.

A hand grasped the window-sill and slid along it. Martin stared at the hand, fascinated. It seemed no more than a writhing shadow.

Then a head abruptly bobbed into the square of uncertain light. It was a familiar head; even against that dark background Martin recognized it promptly; it was an unusually large head, surmounted by a ridiculously small hat. A well remembered voice reached Martin's ear in a guarded whisper:

"Miss Ruth, Miss Ruth! Are you there, Miss Ruth?"

It was the hunchback, Little Billy.

Martin's long-held breath exploded with a sudden pop. The hunchback stiffened at the sound and hung motionless, half over the sill. He peered into the dark room evidently endeavoring to locate the noise.

"Miss Ruth?" he hissed sharply.

Martin stepped from the wall towards the window.

"It is I," he commenced.

"Stop! Don't move, don't yell. I have you covered!" was Little Billy's sharp injunction; and

Martin caught the gleam of steel in the other's hand, saw the muzzle of a revolver pointed at his chest.

"No, no, don't shoot!" he exclaimed. "It is I, Martin Blake, the law clerk. Don't you remember—the fellow who was talking to you by the fire hydrant?"

"The law clerk! Good Lord! Have they shanghaied you?"

"Yes, I'm locked in this room," said Martin. "They are guarding the door. That fellow, Spulvedo, just took a shot at me because I tried to break out. Don't speak loudly—they'll overhear."

"I'm coming in," whispered Little Billy.

He wriggled his body further over the sill, swung about and dropped to the floor by Martin's side. Immediately, he turned and thrust his head out of the window and spoke a few words in an undertone to some one below.

Martin leaned over Little Billy's shoulder and peered out. He discovered the means by which the hunchback had reached that second story window—about nine feet below was the roof of a shed that abutted against the side of the building, and on the farther side of the shed was a dark space that looked like an alley, a freight entrance probably to the great brick warehouse that reared its blank, windowless side just opposite. He saw that his previous surmise had been correct—this room he had been confined in was a rear room, the shed below was doubtless an outhouse of the saloon, the street yonder was Green Street.

Martin grasped these details at a glance. What really interested him at the moment was a man's figure just below him on the roof of the shed. The upturned face was but a few feet distant; the man bulked huge in the shadow. It was the boatswain. Martin divined the method of the hunchback's assault upon the shutters—he had evidently stood upon the giant's shoulders.

"Stand by, Bos," called Little Billy softly. "I'm inside, all right."

"Aye, aye," came the answering rumble. "'Ave you found 'er, lad? 'Oo's that lookin' over your shoulder?"

"It is that clerk," said Little Billy. "'Wild Bob' locked him up. No, she isn't—"

He straightened up and clutched Martin's arm.

"You in here alone?" he demanded. "I am looking—"

"I know—a girl," interrupted Martin excitedly. "I think she is in the next room. A white girl. The japs caught her and turned her over to Carew. Had on a man's gray overcoat, and—"

"Did you see her? Is she safe?"

"Think so. They haven't had time to harm her. I think she is in the next room. Some one was rapping on the wall."

"Code talk!" supplemented the hunchback. "That is Ruth. She thinks I was caught, too. She has been trying to communicate with me. Must have heard them put you in here. Which wall?"

He darted to the side of the room Martin indicated, moving lightly and soundlessly. He started a light tapping on the wall, the same irregular tapping that had puzzled Martin a few moments before. Hardly had he begun when faint replies came from the next room.

Martin tiptoed to the door and pressed his ear against it. Events were crowding him swiftly. He had no time or data for cool reasoning. The boatswain, the hunchback, the imprisoned woman, Carew, the envelope, Ichi and Smatt—it was all a mysterious jumble that he had no time to bother with. His impulse controlled him, and his impulse enlisted him upon the girl's side against Carew. Little Billy and the boatswain he accepted without question as friends. Had they not opened the window, and the way to freedom? So he listened at the door while the hunchback exchanged signals, alert for alarming sounds from the big room. But he heard nothing.

For several moments the strange conversation continued through the wall. Twice, Martin heard the hunchback mutter an oath. Then, after a final series of raps, the little man left the wall and crept to Martin's side.

"Yes, she is in there," he announced. "We will have to work swiftly. What do you know of this house—how constructed?"

Martin described in whispers the plan of the building as he knew it—the hall and stairs, the large room, the two smaller rooms opening off it. He also told Little Billy of his own rough experience, though he did not mention the envelope.

"Spulvedo is on guard on the other side of this door," he concluded. "He is armed, and he won't hesitate to shoot."

"I know he would shoot," said Little Billy grimly. "So will I shoot, if necessary. You have been thrust into a desperate business, my friend. Oh, I understand your position, even better than you, yourself. I know why you were seized and locked in here. I warn you truly, you are in some danger. Carew, or any of his crowd, would snuff you out in an instant if he thought fit. I am not going to ask you to risk your skin in an affair that does not concern you. There is the window—the bosun will let you pass."

"I'll stay and help you, if you'll have me," promptly replied Martin. "I am not afraid to take a chance. And that girl—those yellow—"

"I knew you would stick!" interrupted the hunchback. His hand grasped Martin's in a congratulatory grip. "I knew I had not misjudged you—you are a white man. We must get her away, and we dare not call the police into this affair. But there is nothing crooked on our side of the fence. Here, take this—you may need it!"

Little Billy thrust something into Martin's hand, and Martin thrilled at the feel of it. It was a pistol, a compact, automatic messenger of death. But once or twice before had Martin ever handled such a weapon, and he had never shot one at a living mark. Nevertheless, it fitted snugly and naturally into his palm. He even contemplated, with a certain amount of pleasure, its instant use upon the divekeeper's gross person. There was a subtle and lasting change of character in that brief moment—Martin Blake, law clerk, became of the dead past, and Martin Blake, adventurer, stepped into the law clerk's boots.

"It is too risky to make a rush through this door," Little Billy was saying. "They would hear us and be on guard. We will try the next window."

He darted to the window, and Martin followed. The purposeful hunchback was a stimulating surprise, a far cry from the eloquent Little Billy of the fire hydrant to the energetic Little Billy of the moment! The man of words became the man of action.

Little Billy leaned out of the window, and whispered.

"Aye, aye," Martin heard the hoarse whisper in reply.

"Stand by, we are coming out—both of us," admonished Little Billy.

He vaulted over the sill, clung a moment, and dropped. Martin saw the boatswain catch the little man in midair and lower him gently to his feet.

"Come on," the hunchback then called softly.

Martin divested himself of his overcoat. The cause, he thought, was worth the sacrifice, and the garment was cumbersome. Then he clambered over the sill and lowered himself.

He was preparing to drop, when a resistless clutch fastened upon his hips. He was handed through the air as if he were a feather, and set gently upon his feet at Little Billy's side. The boatswain's gruff whisper was in his ear—

"Swiggle me, ladibuck, I 'ad no thought to run afoul of you again."

"Come on—next window," commanded Little Billy.

He shrank against the side of the building and began to edge himself along. Martin and the boatswain followed. Martin looked up. The window they had just climbed through was a mere black blot, the window that was their objective was a mere outline overhead and a few feet to one side. No betraying light hazarded them, there on the shed. The warehouse behind them, and the building against which they crouched, combined to drape them in black shadow. Unless they made a noise, Martin divined there was not much chance of their being discovered.

Little Billy paused beneath the other window, and Martin and the boatswain pressed close to his side.

"Now, bosun, lend me your shoulders," said Little Billy. "If this shutter is fastened the same way the other one was, we won't have much trouble. Hand me the bar."

The boatswain produced a short steel bar from some place about his person and handed it to the hunchback. Then he braced his back against the building, directly below the desired window, and picking up Little Billy, hoisted the little fellow to his own broad shoulders. The hunchback perched there a moment and delivered instructions to Martin.

"You stand lookout," he instructed. "Watch the street. Listen for footsteps."

Martin obediently crept to the edge of the shed's roof that overlooked the street and posted himself there as watchman. The alley was on his left hand, but it was so dark there he could not see the ground. The street, just before him, was not so impervious to peering eyes.

The cobblestones and the sidewalk pavement gleamed dully. By stretching his neck, he could see the corner where the street lamp spluttered before the saloon entrance, and beyond the



corner, the wide vista of the Embarcadero and a section of dark wharf. But he saw nothing threatening in the scene. Nothing moved—the street was empty of life. The only sounds were the hooting of steamboat whistles on the bay and the light rattle of Little Billy's bar against the shutter.

Then, abruptly, came from around the corner, in front of the saloon, the muffled throb of an automobile engine. It sank to a purr, and stopped. Martin stiffened tensely and gripped the revolver in his hand. Behind him, he heard the boatswain mutter:

"Ear that, Billy? Swiggle me, 'e's back—'urry!"

The scraping sound of the steel bar upon the shutter increased in volume. Martin heard a mumble of voices, and a stamping of feet on the pavement. Then a door closed and the sounds ceased. Martin knew that several men had entered the saloon. The danger seemed to have passed them by.

He heard Little Billy give vent to a satisfied grunt. He looked up, over his shoulder, and saw that the jimmy had completed its task. The shutter was open, Little Billy was clambering down from the boatswain's shoulders, an indistinct figure was half over the sill, clambering out of the newly opened window. And in the same glance, he saw a beam of yellow light illumine the other window, the window of the room in which he had been prisoner. His ears were assailed with a sudden outcry coming through that window—

"He ees gone!"

It happened in the twinkling of an eye. Martin wheeled about at the sight and sound. He had no time for reflection, but he knew instantly that his escape had been discovered, that the light above came from the big room where he had bearded Carew, that they had opened the door and found him gone.

Feet trampled in the room. A man's figure was framed in the lighted window—a bloated bulk that he knew was Spulvedo. A flame shot from that figure into his very face. The missile struck the roof close to his side and splattered shingle and dirt in his face. Without hesitation, he straightened his own arm and fired point blank at the living mark. Spulvedo emitted a stifled shriek and fell from sight.

The window was empty again. Not until long afterward did Martin recall that his conscious mind never received the sound of those two shots.

A dark figure brushed past him and dropped over the edge of the roof to the street. The boatswain followed. Little Billy was by his side, grasping his shoulder.

"Come on—roll off!" the hunchback was urging.

The second window overhead was suddenly alight, and a booming voice was cursing in the room. Martin rolled off the edge and fell into the boatswain's arms.

Then he was on his feet, running, by the boatswain's side. Just in front of him raced the hunchback, and a queer figure in man's clothes, whose long hair streamed behind. He heard men shouting.

They passed the corner and started across the Embarcadero toward the wharves. Far down the street a police whistle was blowing shrilly. Behind them, the Black Cruiser was spewing forth its brood.

The street was wide. They were not nearly across when these sounds of pursuit reached Martin's ears. He heard the pounding of feet behind him, and the sound of shots. He heard the hunchback fling over his shoulder:

"Hold them back, bos! We'll get the boat free!"

The boatswain stopped short and wheeled about. Martin's momentum carried him several steps farther, then he too checked his stride. Intuitively, he knew his place was at the boatswain's side.

The boatswain was on one knee, shooting rapidly at a cluster of retreating figures. The Black Cruiser was still emptying itself. Everywhere before the saloon, it seemed to Martin, were darting forms.

From behind telegraph poles, from kneeling figures, came the spurting flames of revolver shots. The reports were a sharp rattle. Martin dropped to his knee and raised his arm. The gun in his hand leaped like a live thing as he pulled the trigger. He was given entirely over to the battle lust of the moment. He was cool, he was happy, he laughed aloud, and he shot rapidly, with intent to kill, at the enemy figures yonder.

The police whistles sounded insistently, more shrilly. Martin sensed there was a commotion a block or so down the street—approaching police, he knew.

The boatswain was on his feet and backing toward the dock. His voice warned Martin—

"Avast there, nipper!"

Martin found his feet also and commenced to retreat. One of the enemy figures was coming straight for them, ignoring the shots. There was something distinctive, contemptuous, about that charge. Martin knew the approaching figure was Carew. He took aim, crooked his finger, and found his weapon empty. He drew back his arm and hurled the gun straight at the other, and at the same instant the charging man shot. And darkness enveloped Martin as he fell.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MATE OF THE BRIG *Cohasset*

Martin returned to consciousness gradually, and *via* the nightmare route. He was being put to torture. He was bound, helpless, and a steel band encircled his head, and sharp spikes were probing his brain.

He was surrounded by gibbering and leering slant-eyed yellow faces; they screamed at him without letup, and his ears rang with their fiendish outcry. But mingled with, and woven into, that barbarous howl was a softer and friendlier note, at which his groping wits clutched eagerly; it was a clear, musical chant, and somehow, it soothed his hurts, and gave him courage to face his torturers. The yellow faces grimaced horridly at him. He was being roughly rolled about. So, he opened his eyes.

He was staring upward at the bare, wooden bottom-side of a bunk. It was a long moment before he could identify that blank expanse. Then he discovered that he was lying in a bunk, and there was something the matter with his couch, it bounced about, and his feet were, as often as not, higher than his head.

He was in a room. Just before his eyes was a little round window in the wall, and through it filtered a feeble daylight when his feet were ascendant, and when his head was uppermost he glimpsed racing, green water on the other side of the thick glass circle. It was strangely unaccountable.

His eyes roved. The mists were clearing somewhat from his mind. He was in a room, yes, the queerest little cubby-hole he had ever seen. There was a lamp in a rack against the wall, and the lamp remained stationary and upright while the wall behind it reeled drunkenly.

Clothes dangled from pegs as if inhabited by dancing ghosts. Somewhere, crockery rattled. There was an alarming creaking, as if great timbers were grinding together. And there was, over all, a shrill, menacing, unceasing howl—the same dread sounds that had made part of his dream.

Also persisted the singing voice that had drawn him safely out of his marish visions. His eyes, continuing their sweep, passed by a tiny desk, a rack of books, a swinging wash-basin, and encountered the source of that musical chant. The hunchback, Little Billy, was seated crosslegged upon the floor, sewing on some piece of wearing apparel, and, as he deftly plied the needle, he crooned his ditty in the pure tenor that had before charmed Martin.

"A-roving, a-roving,  
Since roving's been my ru-u-in——"

So far he got, when he looked up and saw Martin's eyes fixed upon him. He promptly threw his work aside, leaped to his feet and bent over the bunk. His impish, friendly face was wreathed in a cordial smile.

"Why, hello, old scout! Had your sleep out? How do you feel?" was his cheerful greeting.

Martin had been fully occupied in receiving impressions during the few moments he had been awake, and until Little Billy spoke, he had not considered himself. But at the other's words, he suddenly discovered that something was the matter with his body. He was sick. His head hurt, and something terrible was happening to his inner man—he was ascending to great heights only to drop swiftly to great depths. It was his stomach, his stomach was performing a rapid and continuous journey between his throat and the soles of his feet. He ached all over. He felt it was the end; it was approaching dissolution.

"My inside—my stomach. I'm dying!" he managed to gasp.

Little Billy's elfish grin grew wider. The wretch even chuckled as he contemplated Martin's

misery.

"Oh, that is nothing," Martin heard him say. "Just a little bout with our old friend Mister Mal de Mer. You'll be all right once you get on your feet and get some warm food inside of you. How is the head?"

The mention of food was nauseous, but the remark anent the head acquainted him with a new ill. He touched the place where his hair should have been, and instead of hair his hand caressed a bandage. He discovered that beneath the bandage was the seat of the throbbing pain that bothered him. Also, memory began to stir in the chaos of his mind—head bandaged, street fight, Black Cruiser, shots.

"What—what," he stuttered.

"You were shot," little Billy replied to that interrogatory stare. "The bosun picked you up and carried you to the boat, and we brought you aboard with us. You were creased. The narrowest squeak I ever saw. The bullet just plowed over your skull. We thought at first you were gone—fractured skull, you know—but you came out of your trance and fell asleep. You have been lying in that bunk for about fifteen hours. It is midafternoon now, and we have been to sea since midnight."

"T-to sea!" gasped Martin.

The hunchback's matter-of-fact announcement fairly took his breath. The latter's chuckle became more pronounced at Martin's blank amazement.

"Yes, my legal friend, you have invaded the troublous domains of old King Nep.," he continued genially. "As the bosun remarked this morning, when a few playful tons of H<sub>2</sub>O rolled him along the main deck, "Ere we are, swiggle me stiff, safe and sound at sea again!" Little Billy struck an oratorical pose, and declaimed musically:

"O, we're running free with a gale abaft,  
And we're bound for the End o' the World!"

"But—why did you bring—" mumbled Martin.

"We had to fetch you along," interrupted Little Billy. "If the bosun had left you behind, those yellow devils would have finished you, or else the police would have nabbed you. The police were at our heels when we made the getaway from the wharf, as it was. By Jove! It was for your own benefit we shanghaied you—you realize, don't you, that a street fight with guns in a civilized town like Frisco, with wounded, perhaps dead, men lying around, makes a rather serious business? But don't you worry any about the future. Everything is rosy. We are safe at sea, and booming along with a gale at our backs. The law may have gobbled up Wild Bob Carew and his crew—hope it did, but suspect my haughty captain squirmed out of it as he usually does. We have made our getaway, anyhow."

At sea! Disturbing visions were dancing through Martin's mind. At sea!

It was one thing to stand in an office window, idly watching passing ships, and longing to be at sea. It was quite another thing to awaken without foreknowledge, in a stuffy and careening berth, on a strange ship that was plowing through a storm, possessed of a wounded head and a gadabout stomach, and be informed casually by a grinning gnome that he was fleeing the law—that he had been kidnaped so he would avoid the consequences of a wild and deadly street brawl.

A man accustomed to rough buffets and fickle fortune might well blink his eyes over such a situation. To Martin, the clerk, to whose law-abiding existence both fights and police had hitherto been strangers, the information was more than a shock. It was an earthquake. His world was tumbling about his ears.

The jolt galvanized him to action. He sat up in his bunk and swung his legs over the side. For a second he had some wild idea of rushing forth, and somehow stepping ashore, and back into yesterday. Then he steadied himself.

"But what will I do?" he demanded of the hunchback. "Where are you going? I am not a sailor, I am a clerk—and my job—"

"My friend," said Little Billy, "I think you may definitely assume that your connection with the legal profession is severed. Your job is close on two hundred miles astern. But as I told you a moment since, you need not worry about your future. Why, you have already been adopted into the happy family—you are already one of the jolly company of the brig *Cohasset*, with equal rights, and an equal share. And if we have decent luck with this job ahead of us, you will have no cause to grieve at being yanked out of your berth ashore. It isn't so bad, is it? We know you leave no family behind—oh, yes, we know quite a lot about you, Martin Blake, we had to look you up—and I think you will be blessing us in a day or two for prying you out of your rut. You are the right sort. You were never cut out for a clerk! By Jove! You should hear the bosun tell how you bowled

over Carew, himself, with your empty gun! You are a nervy one, all right. I'll wager this business ahead of us will be more to your liking than the one you leave behind."

"What is it?" asked Martin. "Where are you going?"

"Not my story—I can't tell you, now," answered Little Billy. "You'll find out tonight, after supper. There will be a pow-wow in the cabin, and the Old Man and Miss Ruth will enlighten you then."

"Miss Ruth!" echoed Martin, thinking for the first time of the girl who had innocently got him into this mess. "That is the girl! Then we got the girl safely?"

"Oh, yes, she is aboard, and safe enough. She dressed your head—neat job of bandaging she does. Well, Blake, I'll have to be about my duties. I'm steward, you know. This is my room. You are to bunk with me. I would advise you to get up on deck if you can manage it. There is no cure for seasickness like being on your feet in fresh air. Don't worry about your head—it is only a flesh wound, and it will heal in a couple of days. And after supper you'll hear all about it. So long."

The door closed behind the sprightly little figure, and Martin was left alone.

Alone, but with thoughts enough for company. He sat there with his legs swinging over the side of the bunk, nursing his sore head and trying to digest the information Little Billy had imparted.

He was troubled, yet somehow not depressed. His coward fears of a few moments ago were gone, and he could face the situation now with considerable aplomb. Of course, it was disturbing to learn that he was probably a fugitive from justice; and with his knowledge of the law he could very well appreciate the probably serious consequences of last night's affair. Why, there were likely dead men in the city morgue as a result, and old Smatt, judging himself betrayed by his clerk, might swear him a murderer. He was a vindictive old man, Martin knew. And Spulvedo—he knew he had shot Spulvedo; he had seen the man drop.

Martin felt a qualm at that remembrance—shooting a man was a new and terrible experience, and his conscience had scruples concerning the sanctity of human life. If Martin Blake could then have seen a few months into the future....

Yet he had no regrets for the part he had played. He had been headstrong, he knew, in so unreservedly joining forces with the strange people of this strange ship. But what else could he have done and retained his self-respect? A man, by George, owed it to himself to be willing to fight for a woman in distress—especially such a good-looking girl as this mysterious Miss Ruth. Little Billy, and these people, seemed to be at outs with the police, but he knew he was on the right side.

And so he was one of the jolly company of the brig *Cohasset*! This craft seemed to have been fated to enter his life. He recalled how interested he had been when the boatswain first mentioned the name, last night, in Johnny Feiglebaum's. Last night! Why, it seemed a year ago! "Happy ship," the boatswain had called her, and Little Billy had referred to the "happy family." A queer outfit he had fallen in with. Well, at least he would see that "blessed, bleedin' little mate" the boatswain was so exercised about.

Brig *Cohasset*! What kind of a ship was a brig, anyway? He would see.

Arrived at this conclusion, Martin felt better. He rolled clear of the bunk and balanced himself on the swaying floor. He was going to take the hunchback's advice and look over this new home of his, and take the tonic prescribed for his peripatetic stomach. Already, he felt much better. He even contemplated food without disgust.

He had been undressed, and he discovered his clothes hanging on the wall. While he donned them, his spirits continued to mount. He was done with fright and worry.

Things were not so bad. It was true there was no one ashore to grieve at his disappearance, save good Mrs. Meagher. But how in the world did the hunchback discover that fact? Come what might, he was done with his old drab life, done with musty legal forms, done with the job he so loathed. There was a jubilant tinge to his thoughts. Why, he was just where he had so often longed to be—"Out There where Things happened!"

That all-pervading screaming that rang in his ears—why, that was the wind whistling through the rigging, overhead, the storm king's brazen voice that he had so often dreamed of hearing. And that disconcerting lurching beneath his feet—why, that was the heaving deck he had so lusted to press foot upon.

What matter if it did play havoc with his midriff. That would pass; already he was feeling fit. Now he would go out and get acquainted with his shipmates—ah, shipmates! He smacked his lips over the word. Already he knew the hunchback and the boatswain—fine fellows. And the girl—he had seen her once and would never forget her face. That shining mass of hair....

And Martin laved himself in the basin, spruced himself before the little glass, and let himself

out of the room.

Martin stepped into the ship's cabin. He knew it was the cabin, because he had often read passages descriptive of just such a room.

There were several doors on either side. They led to the berths. There was the curve of the ship's stern in the after wall, portholes, and a divan which followed the half-round. Chairs, a large table, swinging lamps, a skylight overhead. There was the companion ladder, leading to the deck above.

He made for the ladder. At its base he stopped. Some one was descending. A hale, white-bearded, rosy-cheeked old man came down from the deck. He had a serene and smiling countenance.

Martin waited expectantly, with half-extended hand. This must be the "Old Man" of the hunchback's reference. But the old man's wide-open eyes stared over his head, or through him. He walked past within a foot of Martin and gave not the least indication that he noticed Martin's presence. A second later he disappeared through a door on the farther side of the room.

Martin's hand dropped to his side. He was nonplused and somewhat piqued. It was unbelievable that he had been unseen. Why, the man had passed within touching distance and had looked straight at him! If this were the captain of the jolly brig...

However, just now he was eager to reach outdoors. He mounted the ladder and found himself in a box-like hatch. He thrust aside a canvas flap and stepped out on deck.

A blast of cold wind slapped his face and almost took his breath for a moment. He was facing aft, looking out over the stern of the ship, and his eyes beheld a tumbling chaos, a fearsome waste of leaping waters.

In the foreground of this picture, just across the skylight from him, stood the man at the wheel. He was an integrant feature of that wild scene, felt Martin. In Heaven's name, what manner of outlander was he? Squat and bulky in oilskins, broad-faced, high-cheeked, brown-colored, his forehead was tattooed, and ridges of horrible scars disfigured both plump cheeks. His eyes were small, feral; he gave Martin a fleeting, incurious glance, and turned his attention to his work. He stood impassive, clutching the wheel-spokes.

The deck was wet and slippery. The ship lunged down the slope of a sea, and Martin slid to leeward. He fought his way up-deck again and grasped the side of the hatch for support. The mishap had turned him about. He now faced forward, and the wheelman was forgotten.

He was on the poop, and he overlooked the length of the ship. The brig *Cohasset* was before his eyes, as much of her as was above water. But, as a matter of fact, and as he was later informed, he did not look upon a brig at all; the *Cohasset* was a brig only by virtue of sailors' loose habits of speech. She was in truth "a rig what ye rarely see, lad, a proper brigantine, a craft what I'll be swiggled stiff if ye can mate 'er anyw'ere for sailing and comfort."

But nice distinctions of rig did not bother Martin on this, his first, view of his new home. He was looking through his landsman eyes.

He saw, over the break of the poop, a sweep of deck that careened till the lee rail dipped, and green seas lolloped aboard and swirled, foam-flecked, aft. He saw the long jib-boom, now stabbing the leaden sky, now plunging into the depths. He saw the pyramid of bellying canvas on the foremast, the great foresail, the topsails, and the bare spars above.

He saw the great boom above his head, and the vast expanse of the mainsail, a tremendous canvas, even though reefed. He saw the straining, board-like staysails. He heard the harsh scream of the wind aloft, the vibrant thrumming of tautened stays, the banging of a block, the crash of boarding seas. Grim sounds, and an outlook to daunt a young man whose maritime experience consisted of an occasional ferry-boat trip.

Martin was aghast. The ship was a chip in a maelstrom, lost, tossed about, sport of those monster waves. The ticklish game of "carrying on" was beyond Martin's present ken. He was thinking in the terms of his favorite literature. He was awe-struck by the fury of the elements, by the limitless expanse of upheaving waters, by the long, white-crested seas racing down the wind. He was beholding the raging main!

"Hello, Mr. Blake! Glad to see you about. Nice little puff we have had for a starting boost—about blown out, I'm afraid."

The words, rich, throaty, tinged with amusement, came down the wind to Martin's ears. Martin turned his head. Opposite him on the sloping weather deck, regarding him with a smile, stood the girl—"Miss Ruth."

Martin stared. Had he heard aright, "little puff"? This battle of wind and wave a little puff!

And she who regarded this cataclysmic scene with such contempt—that brave and confident figure, swaying so easily to the deck's reel, that bizarre costume, that sparkling face—was she the distressed maid he had fought for the night before? Yes, he remembered that vivid, expressive face. By George, she was a beauty!

She was, without doubt, an uncommonly pretty girl, and the strange costume she wore accentuated, rather than hid, her charms. A serge skirt came but little below her knees, and beneath it Martin saw feet and ankles encased in stout, trim, absurdly small sea boots.

She wore a sailor's pea-coat, open at the front and disclosing a guernsey covering a swelling bosom. The great mass of dark hair Martin remembered so well was knotted and piled atop her head, and a blue, peaked cap perched saucily aslant the mass.

Her face was alive, vivacious. The eyes were large, dark, bright, the lips were ripe and smiling, the cheeks weather-bronzed but not swarthy.

Martin drank in the details of her appearance greedily, and they left him tongue-tied. Yes, by George, she was a beauty! Her carriage was regal, and there was about her an air of competence, of authority. She was not disturbed by her surroundings—she laughed. What had she called the storm? A puff! She seemed, by George, like a sprite of the storm! Like the steersman yonder, she seemed to belong to this setting of laboring ship and tumultuous sea. Here she came toward him with hand outstretched.

She walked easily, body inclining gracefully to the ship's whims, disdainful of skylight or hatch. Martin clung to the hatch with one hand and extended his other.

He thrilled to the warm clasp she gave him. He glowed at the friendly light in her eyes. She was tall, taller than she looked at a distance, almost as tall as he. She did not seem to raise her voice, yet her words reached him distinctly above the howl of the wind. He had to shout his answers.

"How does your head feel?" were her first words.

He answered reassuringly, and remembered of a sudden that it was those brown, shapely fingers that wrapped the bandage.

"I am Ruth Le Moyne," she continued. "I would like to thank you for what you did last night. You were splendid! Little Billy has told us how promptly you volunteered your aid, when you knew it meant danger to yourself. It was brave of—oh, words are so tame! But you can guess what it meant to me—I, a girl, and Carew—"

Yes, Martin knew. He hastened to shout that he knew. The girl's attitude made him uncomfortable. He shouted that he knew all about it, and that it was nothing, really nothing. He would like to do it again; he was really glad to be at sea on such a jolly little ship; the bump on his head was nothing; no, his seasickness was past; what he had done was nothing, by George, not worth mentioning!

So he said, while he held Ruth Le Moyne's hand and looked into her eyes—dark brown eyes, he noticed, not bright now, but misty with gratitude—and he meant what he said.

"Of course, you feel strange and lost," she said. "But you will get quickly used to ship life, and I know you will like it. You know, we call ourselves the 'happy family.' You are one of us, now. You share in the venture, and if we are successful—but you will hear all about it after awhile."

She broke off abruptly, looked aloft, then turned to the helmsman.

"Watch your eye, Oomak!" she called.

The savage-appearing steersman inclined his head submissively and pulled upon the wheel spokes. Martin stared, surprised. What had this entrancing bundle of femininity to do with the steering of the ship?

She turned to him again.

"We are losing the breeze," she said regretfully. "I suppose, though, we shouldn't complain. We have gained a good offing."

Losing the breeze!

"Do you mean—is the storm passing?" asked Martin.

"The storm?" She stared, then smiled. "Oh, yes—see!"

Martin looked up. Rifts of blue sky showed in the leaden blanket overhead. But the sea seemed as wild, his ear sensed no decrease in the wind's howl. This girl seemed very sure.

"I'll set the t'gal'n's'l and shake a reef out of the mains'l at eight bells," she continued. "Just a few moments of the time, now. You know, we are cracking on."

"Oh—of course," said Martin blankly. He didn't know just what she was talking about, but the salty words rolled off her tongue very glibly. "W-what are you on the ship, Miss—"

"Oh, I forgot that you didn't know," laughed the girl. "Why, I am the mate."

The mate! This radiant, laughing creature the mate! This slip of a girl! Oh, ho, no wonder the boatswain wept and spoke of posies, and the hunch-back waxed poetical in description. This girl...

Martin suddenly gulped. He remembered the prim, mutton-chopped little man of his imaginings, the gentle, senile little mate of the brig *Cohasset*. He winced and blushed at the recollection of his idle thoughts. But a woman for mate! Why—and he stared about him—this girl must be in practical command of the ship. His life, the lives of those oilskin-clad figures he saw lounging forward, all the lives on the ship, were in her hand, dependent upon her skill. Mate! He had never heard—

"You seem rather surprised," she rallied him. "I see disapproval in your face. But I assure you, I am a very good mate. I even have a master's ticket."

Martin stuttered in his confusion and tangled himself in a web of denial. Then came a blessed interruption. Up through the companion hatch, to which he still clung, arose a white head, and then the man. It was the serene-faced old man who had passed him by in the cabin.

"The captain!" announced the beskirted mate. "Captain, here is Mr. Blake—Mr. Blake, meet Captain Dabney."

The old man stepped out on deck and turned his head about uncertainly. His hand wandered an instant, and then met Martin's. His face wreathed in a cordial smile.

"Glad to meet you, lad," he said.

Martin found himself without words. He was fascinated by the captain's eyes, those serene, blue eyes that stared at him without seeing him. Captain Dabney was blind.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AROUND THE CABIN TABLE

Martin lounged upon the divan, on edge with impatience, his attention divided between the faces of his companions and the face of the clock hanging on the forward bulkhead. The two big lamps, upright in their gimbals, shed a warm, bright glow about the cabin.

The supper remains had disappeared. Little Billy was completing his steward's task by spreading over the table the damask cloth that graced the board between meals. The blind captain sat in a chair, quietly puffing a pipe. The clock showed a quarter of eight. At eight o'clock, eight bells would strike overhead, the bosun would relieve the mate, the mate would come below, and then his burning curiosity was promised satisfaction.

The mate! Martin's thoughts buzzed around the girl like a moth around a candle-flame. Not yet could he reconcile Ruth with her duties as ship's first officer. It seemed so absurd. She and the giant bosun divided the watches between them. What an ill-assorted brace! And she was the superior. She was the right arm, and the eyes of the old blind man. Oh, she was a proper sailor, right enough!

Yes, she had set the t'gal'n's'l and shaken the reef out of the mains'l. He knew now what she had meant.

What a superb figure she was, standing there on the windswept deck, singing her orders. Yes, singing—that full, contralto *halloo* of hers was naught but a song. And how the wild men of the crew had leaped to obey! Wild men—he had seen but few white faces forward—wild islanders of some sort.

He would never forget his first dogwatch, spent by the boatswain's side, pacing the poop deck. How niftily he had gained his sea legs! He had easily learned the trick of throwing his body to meet the ship. He had learned lots, besides, from the deep voice rumbling in his ear.

"A smart little 'ooker lad, and a smart crew, all married to 'er. Swiggle me! Ain't many 'er size can show 'er a pair o' 'eels. Ay, small, but big enough for 'er work—'undred thirty ton. Great trader, the Old Man is. 'Square Jim' Dabney, 'e's called, from the Arctic to 'Obart Town, and across Asia side; except them Rooshuns—they call 'im the 'Slippery Devil.' Says I, fine 'auls we've 'ad, seal and fur, from them Rooshuns.

"Blast o' dynamite, lad, took the Old Man's sight. Fine 'aul this time if we 'ave luck. Swiggle me stiff, it'll set us up ashore for bleeding toffs! ... ye'll 'ear about it later.... Ay, that's the royal, lad—topmost spar—be shakin' that rag out afore long.... Ay, mate, and a proper fine mate she is, bless 'er bleeding little 'eart! Grew up at sea—proper shark for navigation—Old Man never 'ad 'er 'ead for figures.... See—them's the 'alyards, lad! ... Ay, prime sailorman, she is, too...."

Such was the burden of the boatswain's discourse throughout the dogwatch. A shark for navigation, and a prime sailorman, bless her bleeding little heart! Oh, she was the apple of the boatswain's eye! And of other eyes. And the boatswain had called her "mister" when he came on deck—

"Ow's she going, mister?"

She grew up at sea! So the boatswain had said. Had been able to "take a sight at ten year, lad, an' work out a position, which, swiggle me, I can't do for all my size and years!" Could even match the red giant at sailorly work with ropes and wires.

What a strange upbringing for a girl! He had gathered that Ruth was the granddaughter of the blind man, Square Jim Dabney, that she was orphaned; that this cockleshell of a vessel had been her home since babyhood. Bred of seamen and to the sea. No wonder she paced the deck so confidently, and flung a laugh into the East Wind's very face!

She was of the breed of the silent old man who bore his affliction so steadfastly. Martin studied the patient figure of the blind man with a new interest. What a pity, that hale, active man caged in darkness! What misery, what despair, thought he, might lurk behind those fine, unmarred eyes! Yet the face was happy enough. Indeed, it was serene, unscarred by impatience or passion; the race of one who awaits Fate fearlessly. Martin had difficulty in connecting that kindly and peaceful figure with the "Old Man" of the boatswain's talk.

What stirring adventures the boatswain's casual words had hinted at! In what a bald, matter-of-fact manner had the *Cohasset's* various activities been mentioned! Pearl shell and island trade; "a bit o' filibustering now and then," to Mexico and South America; seal and fur poaching on the Siberian coast, in open defiance of the Czar's mandates!

Square Jim Dabney, might be the captain's name from the Arctic to Hobart Town, but some of the exploits the boatswain had boasted of suggested "Freebooter Jim" Dabney to Martin's mind. How about that affair where the captain had lost his eyesight? Raiding a gold-bearing reef in the Louisiades with dynamite, the boatswain had said, in derisive revolt against the Australian mining laws.

It had happened but a few months before, and a premature explosion of a dynamite charge had been the unusual fruit of the raid—unusual because when the boatswain and others had rushed to recover what they thought was their captain's mangled body, they discovered their leader unmarred by the blast but stone-blind from the shock. An injured optic nerve, the San Francisco specialists had said, a hopeless case.

Yet even permanent blindness did not place a period to the career of this venerable Pacific freelance. Was he not engaged in some wild venture even now? Some mysterious business that had begun with bloodshed, and would end—how? What had Little Billy said? "Bound for the End o' the World!" And what, pray, would they find at the End o' the World?

Well, he didn't care what they found there, but he was very glad to be able to voyage to the world's end with this company. He was glad he had been pitched head foremost into the affair, little as he yet understood of it all; he was glad to be at sea and shipmates with the "happy family." No longer was he a despised quill-pusher.

Just what he was at present, Martin could not decide, but he was determined to become a valued and accomplished member of this adventuring household. He was determined—like the moth to the flame, Martin's thoughts came back to the girl—he was determined to win the respect of Ruth Le Moyne, to match her self-reliance. He would show her, by George, that he did not lack for courage; that stranger though he was to sea life, he could acquit himself creditably in the face of any danger he might encounter in his new environment!

The boatswain came out of his room and paused at the foot of the companion-ladder to fill his pipe. He looked like some huge, red-shagged bear, thought Martin, a well-fed, contented bear. The hands of the clock were almost on the hour—in a moment the bosun would be on deck, and Ruth would come below. Then...

The boatswain's enormous sea boots disappeared through the hatch, and a moment later eight bells struck overhead.

Martin sat up expectantly. Little Billy grinned at him from across the room. Confound the fellow! He had insisted on treating Martin as an invalid during the supper, had been absurdly solicitous about the wounded head and the turbulent stomach, when Martin had forgotten the existence of both; he had persisted in interrupting when Martin wanted to talk to Ruth. Here she came!



A light step, a little boot poked into view, and Ruth bustled down the ladder. By George, she was a beauty!

"Due west—setting more canvas," she announced briskly to Captain Dabney.

The latter turned his sightless eyes on the rosy face that bent above him; the serene, white-bearded face was suddenly beautiful with its welcoming smile. The blind man's hand reached out and gently stroked the girl's arm. Martin saw there was complete agreement between the two.

Ruth divested herself of the heavy pea-coat she wore, tossed it upon the divan, and drew up a chair beside the captain's.

"Well, let us commence at once with our tales of woe, and our council of war," said she laughingly. "I am quite sure Mr. Blake is perishing with curiosity. I know I would be in his place."

It was an odd assortment that gathered about the table—a girl, a blind man, a hunchback, and a clerk. A strange company for a ship's cabin, at sea.

But the incongruity escaped Martin. For the moment he had eyes but for the figure opposite him, for the trim figure revealed by the tight-fitting guernsey, for the vivid face that bloomed above. Ruth bore his gaze with composure; she even smiled at him, with a twinkle in her eye. Martin blushed.

Little Billy had brought to the table a small, locked cash-box, made of light steel. He set it carefully in the center of the table, and then took a seat by Martin's side.

Ruth spoke.

"First of all, we had better tell the whole story of the *Good Luck*, and the code, and the log, to Mr. Blake. It is unfair to keep him in darkness any longer."

"Yes—that will be best," said Captain Dabney. "I will tell you about finding the wreck. But Billy must finish the tale—he is the more used to yarn-spinning. Billy, have you the box there?"

"Yes—here," answered the hunchback.

He rapped the cash-box with his fingers, and the captain nodded at the metallic sound. Then Little Billy drew a key from his pocket and unlocked the box. He threw an envelope out upon the table.

Martin blinked. He knew that plain wrapper. Yesterday afternoon, old Smatt had handed him that envelope, and last night at the Black Cruiser he, himself, had delivered it to Captain Carew. Now, it was here before his eyes!

Little Billy chuckled at his amazement. Even Ruth smiled at him.

"Hello! Our friend seems to recognize Exhibit A," bantered the hunchback. "Well, Blake, without waiting for counsel's advice, I will admit that you probably have seen this very envelope before. But I bet the contents are stranger to your popping eyes!"

With that, Little Billy spread the envelope's contents upon the table.

Martin saw a plain sheet of paper, written upon by Smatt's angular hand, and a strip of some kind of animal skin, or gut, about 4x5 inches in size, and of a leprous-white color. The skin was covered with what he took to be a multitude of faint, red scratches, but upon a second look he saw that the scratches were figures.

Ruth indicated the skin with her finger.

"The secret of Fire Mountain," she said.

"Yes, the secret of Fire Mountain," echoed Little Billy. "And this—" he pointed to the paper containing Smatt's writing—"is the secret kindly bared for us by that genial gray vulture of the law, Mr. Smatt. The envelope also contained Wild Bob's clearance papers—cleared for Papeete, the slick devil—but we presented them to the gulls off the Farallones. They can go a-voyaging on them if they wish."

"A little thing like a clearance will not keep Bob Carew in port," interposed Captain Dabney.

"No, I suppose not," replied Little Billy, his face sobering. "He is on our heels now, I dare say. However, we have had the satisfaction of putting a good one over on him."

"But—but what—" stammered Martin, his eyes still upon the envelope; the others' reference were Greek to him.

"So friend Blake is puzzled!" exclaimed the hunchback, his light humor returned. "Are you not beginning to see light, Blake? Observe—" he tapped the skin with a finger—"this cryptic skin contains the secret of Fire Mountain. Ichi, the wily one, abstracts it from its discoverers and

rightful owners and carries it to that fine legal rascal who employed you; fine legal rascal gives it to clerk to deliver to Wild Bob Carew. Wild Bob Carew has rakish schooner ready to scoot for loot, but needs code translation, and latitude and longitude; friend Blake carries code in pocket, friend Mate carries position in head—so, there is plot and counterplot; gumshoeing and shanghaiing. You, my friend, at the center of one storm circle. Devious and devilish machinations assail you—at first with failure, for the mate lost her wits, and the boatswain lost his balance. But Little Billy Corcoran, King of Legerdemain, succeeds. With his prattling tongue and dexterous fingers he effects the substitution, and the lost is regained."

Little Billy finished triumphantly, and beamed at Martin's blank face.

"Substitution!" exclaimed Martin.

"Yes. Must I place a tack upon your head, and smite it with a hammer, in order to drive the point home? Do you not comprehend? Little Billy sat upon a fire hydrant and very carefully picked a young gentleman's pocket."

"Why, then it was you placed the envelope containing the blank paper—" commenced Martin.

"Exactly. Your intuition is remarkable," stated the hunchback. "But—please—do not look so shocked. I assure you I do not commonly pick young gentlemen's pockets. It is a vulgar pastime, and I am an accomplished villain. Why, once upon a time, I wrote an epic poem. What mere larceny can compare with that fell deed! Besides, this particular outrage upon the sanctity of your overcoat was not without justification. Observe: Ichi, the beast, picks Little Billy's pocket, and the way to Fire Mountain is lost; Little Billy picks Mr. Blake's pocket, and the way to Fire Mountain is regained! Is it not beautifully simple?"

"Way to Fire Mountain! But I don't understand," answered Martin.

"Oh, don't listen to him," interrupted Ruth. "Billy, you shut up! You will have plenty of chance to talk after awhile. Captain, you tell about finding the *Good Luck*."

"Squashed!" sighed Little Billy.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE MOUNTAIN IN THE SMOKY SEA

"It won't take me long to tell my part of the story," commenced Captain Dabney. "It happened last Summer, up in Bering Sea. I dodged out of the fog-bank, where I had been playing hide-and-seek with the Russian gunboat, and saw the sun for the first time in a week, and at the same time clapped eyes upon Fire Mountain. Ay, I had my eyes then—good eyes, too."

The captain drew his hand across his sightless eyes. He had spoken in the inflectionless voice of the blind, but Martin sensed a note of bitterness, of revolt, in his voice. Ruth patted his shoulder comfortingly, and the old man continued.

"Fire Mountain, lad, is a volcano. It is a volcanic island sticking up out of the water several hundred miles off the Kamchatka coast. But I guess I had better tell you how we came to be in Bering last Summer.

"You know, lad, I am a trader. Fur is a mighty profitable trade, if you can get enough fur, and at reasonable prices, and for the last ten years I have traded every Summer along the Kamchatka and Anadyr coasts. I have left the seal rookeries alone—they are too well guarded nowadays—and traded with the natives for their furs.

"The Russian Chartered Company has a monopoly of the fur trade in Eastern Siberia, and, like any monopoly, they gouge. They insist upon about five thousand per cent. profit in their dealings with the natives. Naturally, the natives are more than anxious to trade with a free-lance. The Russian Government keeps a little tin-pot gun-boat cruising up and down to prevent poaching, and if you are caught it means the mines for all hands. But, Lord! Any live Yankee can dodge those lubbers. They have chased me every year for ten years, and I have won free every time.

"The last chase they gave me was last August. We sighted the Russian just as we were coming out of a little bay below Cape Ozerni, where I had had business with a tribe of Koriaks. There was a nice little offshore, ten-knot breeze blowing, and we cracked on and made for the fog-bank.

"The fog, you know, lad, is the poachers' salvation in the Bering. In the Summer, the fog lies over the water in banks, either low and thick, or high and thin, caused by the Japan current

meeting the Arctic streams. They call those waters the Smoky Seas, sometimes. You don't see the sun for weeks on end.

"This was a low-lying and thick bank we made for, and we slipped into it with the Russian about three mile astern of us. We were safe enough then, though he entered after us. We played a game of 'catch me, Susie,' for three days. It was funny. We had enough wind to drive us at about four knots; the fog was so thick you couldn't see half a cable-length in any direction; and the bank seemed of limitless width.

"We could hear the gunboat's screw miles away, but he couldn't hear us—though we'd give him a blat out of our patent fog-horn every now and then, just to let him know we were still around. Three days he rampaged around, looking for us, and then he gave us up for a bad job. The second morning after, we slipped out of the western rim of the bank and found ourselves in sunshine, and almost on top of as wicked a looking saw-tooth reef as I ever want to see.

"The reef encircled a mountain that stuck straight up out of the sea for about two thousand feet. It was an old volcano—still smoking. We sailed around it, and on the south side discovered a break in the reef, a little bay bitten narrowly into the mountain, and a beach.

"Well, volcanic islands are common in Bering Sea. But we were interested in this one, both because of its strange appearance, and because it was unmarked on the chart. That last was not so unusual, though. The charts of that section of Bering are mostly guesswork.

"We got a boat over the side, and Little Billy and I were pulled ashore, while Ruth kept the brig standing by. I wanted to make a closer inspection of the place, and the landing seemed good.

"The break in the reef was quite wide, and we sounded and found a channel, and good holding ground inside. We landed on a shell and black-sand beach, about forty yards wide at high water, and a couple of hundred long.

"The mountain stuck up sheer in front of us and on either side of the bay. It was full of caves—riddled like a sponge. A strange place! The mountain sides were overlaid for an unknown depth with black lava, from ancient eruptions; and this lava had hardened and twisted into all manner of shapes, all the way to the still smoking crater. That is what formed the caves—and formed also, tremendous columns, and castles, and animals' heads.

"On the level with the little beach were several cave openings. One was a jutting rock that looked just like an elephant's head carved out of the black lava, and beneath the outflung trunk, was a black opening leading into the mountain. There was the sound of running water from within, and the wind howled like a sabbath of witches. We didn't investigate—no torches. At one end of the beach we found three springs of hot water squirting out of the rock—tasted sulphurous.

"The beach contained quite a bit of driftage, and some old timbers we knew were from a wreck. Then, 'way up on the beach, and behind some big bowlders, we discovered the ribs of a whaleboat, a rust-eaten sheath-knife, and a board that contained part of a ship's name. The lettering was almost effaced; we made out the letters LUC— and beneath it the word, BEDFORD.

"Well, the discovery of that wreckage told us that we weren't the first to visit the place. The word 'Bedford' was a good clew—it meant that a New Bedford whaleship had been there at some time; and the wreckage meant that she had probably been wrecked upon the reef. There was nothing else to be found, though we searched for evidences of castaways. But the wreck had happened a good many years ago, we could tell from the appearance of the whaleboat's remains, and if there had been any castaways, all signs of them had disappeared.

"We snooped around a little bit longer, felt a baby earthquake, and then went back aboard the ship. I marked the location on the chart, and we squared away for the Kamchatka coast. An hour later, the fog shut the smoking mountain from our view and from my mind until Little Billy made his discovery in Honolulu a few months ago.

"Now, Billy, you commence—it is your yarn from now on!"

The captain heaved a contented sigh, settled himself into a listening attitude, and turned his blind face to the hunchback.

## CHAPTER X

### THE WHALEMAN'S LOG

"My turn to talk?" exclaimed the lively hunchback. "Fine! Talking is my favorite sport. But before I commence, I will show friend Blake, here, Exhibit B."

He reached into the cash-box and drew out a little book. Martin observed that it was apparently a pocket notebook, a cheap, dog-eared thing with cracked cardboard covers. Little Billy held it up before Martin's eyes.

"This is Exhibit B," he continued. "Read this, on the fly-leaf!"

Martin leaned closer and saw written in faded ink on the fly-leaf the inscription,

John Winters,  
His Log.

Bark *Good Luck* of New Bedford.  
1889.

No. 2.

"Ah, I see your mind is leaping to conclusions!" went on Little Billy, as surmise and understanding flitted across Martin's face. "And correct conclusions, I have no doubt. But before I confirm your suspicions, by reading excerpts from John Winters's Log, I had better tell you how this little book came into our possession.

"So then, let us jump from Bering Sea to Honolulu, and from August to January. My narrative commences with the night I spent in Kim Chee's Chamber of Horrors, while recovering from my semi-annual drunk.

"Oh, don't try to shield me—" as Ruth attempted to interpose—"Blake may as well be made acquainted with my failing. He would find out anyway."

Martin was taken aback by the violent interjection. A grim cloud rested for a moment on the hunchback's sunny face, and the man looked suddenly aged. Martin saw that Ruth's face was soft with sympathy. But Little Billy's next words were enlightening.

"Perhaps I could justly pass the buck to my begettors," he said. "I came into the world handicapped—a crooked back, and a camel's desire and capacity for liquids—alcoholic liquids. I am a periodical drunkard. Every six months, or so, I am constrained by the imp within me to saturate myself with spirits and wallow in the gutter, like a pig in a sty."

"Oh, don't believe him—it is not so bad as that!" cried Ruth.

"It is indeed," asserted Little Billy. "As witness this time, when I fought the 'willies' in Kim Chee's rubbish room. It must be admitted, though, that this particular spree had a fruitful ending, for it was in Kim Chee's that I discovered the secret of Fire Mountain. It was this way:

"When we came down from the Bering in September, we sold our furs to a Jap syndicate in Hakodate. The captain has dealt regularly with that Jap firm—they pay good prices, and ask few questions. Then we left Hakodate on our Winter trip—captain had the idea that he might run across something worth while in the neighborhood of Torres Straits. But, let me mention in passing, before we sailed we shipped a cook. He was a Jap named Ichi, an affable little man who couldn't speak very good English, who seemed rather dull-witted for his race. More of him, later on.

"Down South we had the accident, and the captain's eyes were injured. We made a record passage to Honolulu, arrived there the first week in January, and the captain went ashore to the hospital. The bosun and I snugged down everything on board, and then I succumbed to my habit. I went ashore and tried to place Honolulu in the dry column by swallowing all the whisky in town. I suppose I had a glorious time—I don't remember much about it. But about a week later I came to one evening in Kim Chee's place, with a dollar and five cents in my pocket, a blazing stomach, and a troupe of goblins affixed to my person as a retinue.

"Kim Chee is the oldest, most wrinkled-up Chinaman in the world. He has had that drinking den in Honolulu for forty years—ran it in the old days when the King and the Opium Ring governed Hawaii. It has always been a sailor resort; in the old days it was a whalemens rendezvous. Fine old gentleman, Kim Chee.

"I couldn't drink any more, and I was jumpy. So Kim Chee ushered me into his Chamber of Horrors. The Chamber of Horrors is an institution at Kim's place. It is a rubbish room, filled with the junk the old Chinaman has collected during a lifetime, and whenever one of his patrons gets the horrors from imbibing his bottled dynamite, Kim chucks him into this room to die or get over it as the Fates decree.

"So I found myself in this room, with an old lantern for light. I was in a bad way. I was seeing things. Not alligators or monkeys, such as the conventional drunk is supposed to see, but Things, faceless formless Things who brushed against me and leered at me out of the corners. *Urrgh!* The memory makes me quake.

"I was afraid of losing control of myself, and to keep myself occupied, and my tormentors in the background, I commenced to paw over the junk pile. I was searching for something to read.

"Well, there was an assortment in that room that would have gladdened the heart of any collector—native weapons from all the islands of the Pacific, carved whalebone from the North, knickknacks from wherenot, everything that a couple of generations of sailormen could leave behind them. There were sea-chests and sea-bags that belonged to men who, I doubt not, were drowned before I was born. But nowhere did I find what I sought—something to read.

"I was about to give up the search when I picked up a small package, oilskin-wrapped and securely tied with marlin. It had lain in that corner for a long, long time. It was covered with dust, and the oilskin was brittle dry. The package felt like a book. I opened it, and found I had John Winters's diary in my hand.

"I read that inscription on the fly-leaf, but I must confess that I didn't think of Fire Mountain at the moment. That came later. But I was interested—a sailor's private log always interests a man who knows the sea. I sat down on one of the old chests, drew the lantern close and commenced to read. And as I read, I forgot my ills entirely.

"Now, I'll read you portions of this little book. Afterward, if you wish, Blake, you may read it through yourself. It is worth while—the record of a whaling voyage. But just now I will confine myself to the parts that directly affect us. Queer thought, isn't it, that the words this chap wrote a quarter of a century ago, whose face none of us has ever seen, who is also twenty-five years dead, should affect our several destinies? Fate is a strange jade!

"But first, a word about the author of this log. This John Winters was the second mate of the whaling bark *Good Luck* of New Bedford, one gleans from reading the book. The inscription on the fly-leaf mentions the date, 1889, also the figure 'No. 2.' The number two means that this is the second log on the voyage. Research through some old 'Marine Bulletins' the captain owns told us that the whaleship *Good Luck* left New Bedford on her last voyage in the year 1887, and that she refitted in Honolulu in the Fall of 1889, reported missing, with all hands, two years later. Winters's log commences with the departure of the ship from Honolulu in November, '89.

"The first entry that interests us is made several months later, on March 23rd, 1890. Position given as 158° E. 9°, 18' N. That places the *Good Luck* somewhere in the Carolines, on the sperm whale grounds. It goes:

This day Westphal fell from the fore rigging and broke his arm. Still no sign of fish. The Old Man is in a bad temper because of our poor luck, and he is talking of going north already. Mr. Garboy says there is a Jonah aboard. I think he is the Jonah. Westphal is a Dutch lubber.

"I read this entry mainly to acquaint you with John Winters," continued Little Billy. "You see, this was his private journal, and he was given to expressing his true feelings concerning his shipmates. This Mr. Garboy he mentions was the chief mate of the *Good Luck*. The next entry I have marked is dated March 26th, and they are still on the Caroline grounds.

This day I did cover myself with glory, and did take Garboy down a peg. This morning we raised fish, a big school of cachalot, about three mile to leeward. We lowered four boats. I had Silva for harpooner, the best man on the ship. The mate had Lord Joe, the Jamaica nigger.

Murphy and Costa bore south to head the school, and Garboy and I bore straight for them. Raced to see who would first back, and I won. Backed a big bull, and Silva gave him the iron deep. He flurried without sounding, and I did not have to lance. Garboy backed his whale and Lord Joe made a poor cast, and they lost the fish. I backed a cow, and made fast. She sounded, but we overhauled at her first blow, and I lanced. Short flurry. Two fish in less than hour!

Garboy went for a big bull. He had put Lord Joe at the sweep, and was going to harpoon himself. He backed, and made a fine cast. But the fish, instead of sounding, turned on their boat, and took it in his mouth. They all spilled clear except Lord Joe; the poor nigger was caught. Then the fish sounded, and made off with a tub of line. I picked up Garboy and his crew, all except Lord Joe—the nigger was gone—and I made fast to the wreckage. Garboy was wild. I never heard better swearing.

Costa and Murphy both made a kill, making four fish. And Costa picked up a lump of amber grease near his kill. Captain Peabody was very pleased with my work, but he dug into old Garboy. The mate squirmed, and it tickled me, because he has bragged so much about his record. He damned Lord Joe mightily, but Lord Joe don't mind, he is with Davy Jones. The ambergrease weighs twenty-five pounds. A fine day's work!

"There you are, 'a fine day's work,' and the pestiferous Mr. Garboy taken down a peg. I read the entire entry, but the part that really concerns us, is the part about the ambergris they picked up. Tell me, Blake, do you know anything about ambergris?"

"No, never heard of the stuff," answered Martin.

"Then we will have to digress a moment, while I attend to your neglected education," said Little Billy. "Because, from tonight, you will think of ambergris by day, and dream of it by night—ambergris in kegs, oodles of it! I don't suppose your legal training acquainted you with the technical details of the perfume industry?"

"No, I must plead ignorance," conceded Martin.

"Then pay attention," admonished Little Billy. "Ambergris, my friend, is the stuff John Winters calls ambergrease, like the good whaleman he was. It is a waxy substance, very light weight, that forms inside of a sperm whale, and which friend whale belches forth when he gets the colic from feasting too heartily upon squid. Squid, otherwise cuttle-fish, is a horrid monster, all arms and beak, which the cachalot considers a most dainty tidbit. Scientific sharks disagree as to the exact process that forms ambergris, but they all agree that it comes from an overindulgence in squid. Ambergris is very rarely obtained, especially nowadays when the whaling industry is almost dead, and it is actually worth double its weight in gold.

"It is used as a base in the manufacture of the finest perfumes. It is the best perfume base obtainable—it has the virtue of making the odor super-fine and enduring. The demand for it is insistent, and unsatisfied—doubly insistent at the present time, for the supply of the best substitute for ambergris, the sac of the Himalayan musk deer, has also been steadily waning, and has now almost been dried up by the European War. Today there is an almost unlimited market for ambergris, and the lucky seller can command his own price. The stuff is precious. We looked up prices in Frisco and found that forty dollars an ounce will be paid without haggling.

"So now you know what ambergris is, and its connection with the perfume industry. Soon you will see its connection with us. Meanwhile, let us to John Winters's journal again.

"The next relevant entry is five days later, March 31st:

This day we picked up another piece of ambergrease, floating past overside. Silva spotted it, and he gets ten pounds of tobacco as a reward. It weighed ten pounds. The Old Man is very joyous; he says it means good luck. This afternoon we raised two islands, well wooded. Captain Peabody knows these islands. They are uninhabited, and the north one is well watered. Tomorrow we wood and water.

"And then, comes the smashing dénouement, the very next day, April 1, 1890:

This day there did happen to us the like which no whaleman aboard can remember. I will write it down like it happened.

This morning, at dawn, we came through the channel into the lagoon of the north island. It is a very difficult channel. A current sweeps the shore and runs through it like it was a big funnel, and all the driftage hereabouts comes into the lagoon. We let go anchor in ten fathoms, a half mile from the beach.

I was given the wooding, and Costa was told off to water. We towed the casks ashore, and landed on a fine, white beach, that was littered with driftage. While the men were rolling the casks up to the spring Captain Peabody told us about, Costa and I took a walk along the beach. We came upon a great squid lying dead. He had been bitten in two by a cachalot, and had only three arms left, but they were of tremendous length. Then we saw pieces of other squid all along the beach.

Suddenly Costa ran forward, and gave a great shout, and bent over what I had taken to be a big jelly-fish. "By Gar—grease!" says he. It was a big lump of ambergrease, the biggest any man aboard has ever seen. It weighs 198 pounds.

But this was not all. Costa and I danced around our find like madmen, and the hands came running up. Then Silva gave a shout, and we found he had discovered a lump of grease. Then we looked along the beach, and we found it was dotted with the precious stuff.

I sent Costa straightway to tell the captain, and he and Mr. Garboy came ashore in a great hurry. I never saw anybody take on like Garboy. The Old Man brought everybody ashore, except the cook and chips, and we combed the beach all the way around the lagoon, and around the seaward rim of the island. But we didn't find any grease except inside. By nightfall we had a big boatload, and we went aboard. The captain and Mr. Garboy are on the poop now, helping the cooper stow it, themselves, so afraid are they that some of it will be smuggled forward. The Old Man is dancing with joy.

"There you are—all of that entry. Just think of those two chaps dancing around their find, beside a giant dead squid! I wager that was the supreme moment of their greasy lives. I wager that old spouter seethed with excitement and gossip that night. No wonder the Old Man danced! How would you like to stumble on a windfall like that, Blake? But let us get on.

"I'll read the entry for three days later. In the interim, they had lain to anchor in the lagoon, and continued their search for more ambergris.

We did not get any more grease today, though we raked and scraped the beach. There is no more. The Old Man says he is satisfied, and we leave tomorrow morning. Everybody is speculating about how so much grease came to be here. Nobody knows for sure. Garboy says that this is a great place for squid, and that the school of Cachalot we were in a couple of weeks ago had been here feeding. He says that something was the matter with the squid and that the fish got sick and vomited the grease.

I don't know, it may be so, the stuff is full of squid beaks. But Garboy is too cocksure. Anyway we have the stuff, and stowed safe in the lazaret. Counting what we picked up before, we have 1,500 pounds. A great fortune for the owners, and a fine bonus for us. When I get home, I will buy a farm, and settle down ashore.

"So—1,500 pounds, and worth more than half a million dollars, according to prices paid in those days—today, worth a million. John Winters might well indulge in dreams of bucolic bliss; the whalemens, you know, received a substantial bonus on ambergris finds, over and above their regular lay.

"The log for the next few days is filled with the various speculations rife as to the origin of the treasure, of visions of quiet farm life in New England, and of hopes concerning a girl named Alice. Then, on April 25th, 144°, 48' E. Longitude, 20° 33' N. Latitude—that shows they were at the northern limits of the Ladrões—he writes:

We are to have another season up north, in Okhotsk and Bering seas. The Old Man and Mr. Garboy have had a fine argument about it. Garboy says we have enough to make the owners happy, and give us all a fine lay, and that we can't trust the foremast hands with all the grease aboard.

Captain Peabody says he is going home with a full ship, grease or no grease, that the hands may be —, that they haven't the guts to get at the grease anyway, and that it isn't the mate's place to give him advice. So Garboy shut up, and we are bound north after the baleen. Well, I think Garboy is right, though he hasn't any business offering advice to the Old Man. I am glad the Old Man shut him up. Anyway, a full ship means more dollars, and I will need plenty of dollars to start life ashore with. I will have enough to buy the old Wentworth place. I think Alice will take me, and if she don't, there are plenty of other girls in the world.

"You see, friend Winters is indulging in the time-honored pastime of spending his payday before he has it; and of vowing the usual sailor vow to leave the sea and buy a farm. Well, perhaps the poor devil was in earnest; but he didn't have a chance to achieve his ambition.

"Now we will skip to the last regular entries in the book. They are dated several months later, August of 1890, and the *Good Luck* has been on the northern grounds for some time. No position is given, for reasons you will appreciate. First is dated August 15th:

Still in the fog. We have been three weeks without a sight, fogbound, and blundering God knows where. The breeze holds from the southwest at about three knots, but the bank is moving with the wind. It is so thick we can not see a ship's length in any direction. The current is strong and westerly.

I know the Old Man is worried, because the Kamchatka coast is close a-lee. Garboy says he was in a bank in these seas one time for ten weeks. I think he is a liar. I am thinking a lot about Alice.

"Next entry two days later, August 17th," said the hunchback.

Still fogbound. Heavy groundswell from sou'east. Garboy says it means a sou'east blow, and I think he is right. Well, anything to blow away this cursed fog! The Old Man is drunk today. The old skinflint never hands out a swig to any of us, though. We must be

near land, for we hear birds flying above the fog. All hands standing by, and we are keeping the best lookout possible. The Old Man should sober up, and attend to business.

"There, that is the last regular entry, the last one he wrote upon the ship. Here is the next one—observe the different ink! This is written in red, the same color as those figures upon the skin. I think Winters wrote with one of those red writing-sticks you buy on the China coast; he probably had one in his pocket. This entry tells of tragedy—mark how it begins:

May God have mercy! I will write down our plight, though I know there is small chance of these words reaching civilization. I sit in the window of the dry cave, on the Fire Mountain, and write by the light of the midnight sun!

Manuel Silva and I are the sole survivors of the wreck of the *Good Luck*. Thirty-five were lost. We are cast away on a barren island. It is a volcanic mountain, filled with black caves. There is a bottomless hole that belches steam, and the earth shakes. We do not know our latitude or longitude. God help us, we only know we are cast away in the empty Bering sea, near the Asia coast!

It happened a week ago. I had the deck. We were running before a hard gale from the sou'east, and the Old Man was drunk. It was very thick, and impossible to keep a good lookout. Then, just after two bells in the middle watch, I heard breakers. I had only time to order the wheel up, when we struck. We jammed between two monster rocks, and the masts went by the board, and the ship broke in two. The fore part went to pieces, and all the hands forward, except Silva, who was at the wheel, went to.

The stern was wedged fast. Garboy and Costa gained the deck from the cabin. The others must have drowned in their bunks. We launched the quarterboat, but it swamped, and we were spilled into the boiling sea. I was washed free of the reef, and made the beach. I found Silva there.

We were 'most frozen, and bruised badly. I got out the matches I had in the waterproof packet I carry this log in, and we made a fire of driftwood in one of the caves, and warmed ourselves. Then, we looked for the others, it being daylight, except for the couple of hours after midnight. But we found not a body.

We salvaged all the wreckage we could reach. It was not much, for the currents swept most of the stuff to sea. We got a cask of beef, and one of biscuit. The quarterboat came ashore, only a little damaged. We also got the wreckage of No. 4 whaleboat, and her gear, and some timbers, and a handy billy.

That day the gale was spent, and next day was clear and calm. We repaired the quarterboat with stuff from the whaleboat, and she is tight. Then we pulled off to the wreck, and succeeded in boarding her. Then the Devil entered into us, and we were possessed by greed. We had planned to get clothes, and stores from the lazaret; but when we got into the lazaret, we had no thought but for the treasure of ambergrease. We spent all the day getting the ambergrease to shore. We were greatly tired by the labor, and, since the wreck showed no signs of breaking up, we went into a cave and turned in.

While we slept, it came on to blow again. When we awoke, the seas were breaking over the wreck. The bay was quiet, sheltered by the mountain, so our stuff on the beach had come to no harm. But during the day the wreck broke up, and swept to sea. We salvaged but one box of candles—not a particle of the clothes and food we so sorely need. So, doth Providence justly punish us for our greed!

Silva was greatly disheartened, but I braced him up. We set about to explore the caves, with the candles; for we wanted a dry cave to sleep in, and to stow the ambergrease in. The ground-level caves are all wet from steam, though they are warm. So, we went into the mountain through the Elephant Head, toward the great noise. We came to a windy cave, where there was a great Bottomless Hole, that the noise came out of. Silva went half mad with terror, for he is very superstitious, but I saw it was steam. But it is an evil place. And afterward we found the hole in the roof that led to this dry cave.

This window I write by is the only daylight opening of the dry cave, and it is full forty feet above the beach. But we had no nerve to look deeper into the black guts of this awful place, and we decided to use this cave. So, I rigged the handy billy, and we hoisted all the grease in through the window, and stowed it. And we have taken up our quarters here, and I have made a ladder from the rope of the handy billy, so we can come in through the window, and don't have to pass through that fearsome place where the hole is.

"There—that was written a week after the wreck," said Little Billy. "The next one, three days later:

We have been here ten days now, and I think things look mighty black. Silva's nerve is gone, and I have to fight to keep mine. The mountain shakes continuously, and we fear



it will erupt. And always, there is the noise, the moaning in the hole, and the great rumble. It has got Silva.

Silva has gone down to the beach to get shellfish. We are saving the beef, as much as we can. I am glad Silva is out of my sight. He is mad—and, God help me! I fear I am going mad, too. He sits and looks at me by the hour, just looks, looks, and says not a word, and his eyes burn.

I am feared of him. He is a murderer. He told me so, when his conscience mastered him. He told me why he feared the hole. He drank of the hot spring, and when he got a bellyache, he thought he was dying. Then he told me that he was one of the hands on the *Argonaut*, a dozen years ago, and that there was mutiny, and that he strangled the captain with his hands. And he says the moaning down in the hole is the captain calling him. He is very superstitious. Now he prays by the hour, and then curses horribly. And he goes down to the edge of the hole and howls at the captain. I try to talk with him, and plan to reach the mainland in the quarterboat, but he shakes his head, and just looks, looks. I have taken his sheath knife, but I fear to wake and find him strangling me. But I will leave here, whether he will go or not. Better to die at sea, than in this black place!

"Now—the next entry. Day or two later, I judge," said Billy.

He is gone! He was sitting opposite me, and suddenly he sings out something in his own lingo, and sprang to his feet, and rushed down toward the hole leading to the windy cave. He was laughing awfully. I followed—but could not catch him. He jumped into the hole and the noise stopped. And I stayed through the shake, and saw the lights from the pit. God help me, I wanted to jump, too!

I am going to leave this place tomorrow. I have repaired the quarterboat, and hopeless or not, I will try to reach Kamchatka. It is better than to stay here, and go mad, and follow Silva!

I have written the secret of the cave on a piece of the lining of my parka, though God knows if I shall ever need it. I have a little beef, and biscuit, and the breaker from the wreck of the whaleboat. Little enough! If I only had the latitude and longitude of this place, I might guess my chances. But—not even a compass!

"The next entry is just a scrawl," said Little Billy. "It is barely legible."

I am in the fog—the terrible gray fog! No water! I see Alice in the fog!

"And then—the end."

I see Silva sitting opposite me. He looks, looks! Lord God, hast thou deserted me?

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CODE

There was a moment's silence as Little Billy finished reading. There was in the hunchback's face, and in the faces of the girl and the old captain, a somber understanding of John Winters's fate.

The whaleman's pitiful experience was a commonplace of the sea, and it required no effort of mind on their part to vision the tragedy of an open boat on an empty sea. But Martin was more sharply impressed. The sea held as yet no commonplaces for him, and the poignant question that ended the castaway's chronicle kindled a flame of pity. Martin had the picture mind, and a habit of dramatizing events.

As Little Billy read, Martin had unconsciously followed the narrative with his mind's eye, building a series of vivid, connected pictures. He had witnessed the battle with the whales, the finding of the treasure, had peered baffled into the blanket of Bering fog, had seen the leaping breakers at the base of the smoking mountain, had excursed through the caves by Winters's side, and, at last, had beheld clearly the little open boat, with its despairing occupant, disappear

into the gray mist.

"The poor devil!" cried Martin.

His words broke the spell of silence that was upon the table.

"Yes—the poor devil!" echoed Little Billy. "My very words, as I finished reading, there in Kim Chee's place. 'The poor devil!' A fitting epitaph."

"But why an epitaph?" asked Martin quickly. Visions of an eleventh-hour rescue were surging through his mind. He felt one was necessary to round out his reel of pictures. "Could he not have been rescued after making that last entry? Why, he must have been rescued! How else could the journal have reached Honolulu?"

"He was picked up," interposed Ruth.

"By another whaler," added Little Billy. "Sick to death, and completely lunatic. He never recovered his reason. He died in Kim Chee's place. But I will continue my yarn, and you will see.

"You can imagine, of course, the progressive transformation I underwent, while curled up on that old sea-chest, perusing the log. I began merely with the intention of forcing my mind away from myself, and thereby quieting my booze-jangled nerves; in a moment, I was interested; then I was excited by the whalers' discovery of the ambergris, and lastly I was overwhelmed by the fact that John Winters's Fire Mountain was identical with the *Cohasset's* Fire Mountain. The description clinched that fact. And to make more certain, I recalled the wreckage the captain and I had come across, and the board with the nearly effaced lettering upon it. The letters upon that board were, 'LUC,' and beneath, the word 'BEDFORD.' Of course, it was the remnant of '*Good Luck*, of New Bedford.'

"It was about four o'clock in the morning when I finished the book. I summoned the Chinaman, straightway. Kim was asleep, and he came grumbling, in answer to my call. He thought I wanted drink, but John Winters had effectually doused the flame in my vitals. I had happened upon the probable clew to a vast treasure, and the thought of it obsessed me.

"I put the question to Kim as to how the journal came to be in the Chamber of Horrors. It was a poser for Kim. His old yellow face wrinkled into a thousand dark creases, in the lantern's dim light, and his shrewd, beady eyes wandered uncertainly between the book and my face. But at last he remembered, and in his forcible and inimitable manner he enlightened me.

"'Why flor you sing out? Me catchie one piecie dleam. You no catchie 'lisky? Why flor you want? Me savvy blook. Long time—one time come glease ship. Up no'lth, sailorman he catchie one fellow walk about one piecie boat alone. Velly sick. Catch 'im bats in 'liskers. Bring um Kim Chee. Sailorman go 'way— — 'tief! No pay. Qleer fellow velly sick. No eat, no dlink, velly 'ot—all time tllak, tllak, about plecie glease. — fool clazy! Bimeby die. Flind piecie blook under clothes. Kim Chee no savvy. Why flor you want blook? 'Ow much you got? Dolla flive—all light, you take. Me go bed.'

"From which discourse, I gathered that Kim Chee had been rudely interrupted in the midst of a sweet dream; that he could not fathom my sudden distaste for whisky; that a long time ago a whaleship had come into port with a sick man aboard, whom they had picked up in an open boat, up north; that they had brought the sick man to Kim, and departed without paying over any money; that Kim Chee had cared for the sick man, until the latter died; that the sick man had been out of his head, had talked constantly of 'grease,' had been crazy; that Kim had removed the diary from the man's body, after death; that he would let me have it gladly for a dollar and five cents; that he was going back to bed and didn't want to be disturbed again by the unaccountable vagaries of a dipsomaniacal white man.

"I didn't bother Kim again. Indeed, I clasped my cheaply purchased treasure close, hied myself with speed to the docks, and had myself pulled off to the brig. My spree was ended, and I felt that I held in my hand the best piece of fortune that had befallen the happy family in many a day.

"I reasoned, you see, that the treasure of ambergris was still in its hiding-place on Fire Mountain—and subsequent events have not shaken that belief. I reasoned that Winters had been picked up some time after he had made his last entry in the log, that he was out of his head when rescued, and that he never regained sanity.

"His rescuers apparently did not bother to search him, or else, with the cunning of the crazed, Winters concealed from them his journal. If they had happened upon it, they would surely have appropriated it. Their dumping him off on Kim Chee was not so heartless as it sounds—the sick man was undoubtedly better off ashore in Hawaii than aboard a cruising whaler, and Kim Chee is famed for his charity from one end of the Pacific to the other.

"At breakfast that morning, I acquainted Ruth with the discovery, and read to her the passages I read to you. It was an exciting breakfast.

"We were waited upon by Ichi, the little Jap we shipped as cook in Hakodate. Polite, stupid, unfamiliar with the English language, we did not think it necessary to guard our speech against him. Indeed, we never gave him a thought, and we discussed my find pro and con very freely. We dwelt upon the value of the treasure, verified the *Good Luck's* reported loss by research, congratulated ourselves upon our knowledge of the position of Fire Mountain—all in the hearing of the self-effacing Ichi. We were only daunted by the prospect of searching blindly through that cave-riddled mountain. Then, Ruth found the code."

"Yes, it was pure luck," interposed Ruth. "I was examining the book, and I noticed a crack in the length of the cover. I looked more closely and discovered that the cover had been slit lengthwise, and that a piece of skin had been inserted."

"That is it—Exhibit A," said Little Billy. He pointed to the white strip on the table. "We recognized it instantly as the piece of parka lining Winters mentions using to write upon the secret of the cave. It is a piece of the skin of an unborn reindeer. The Kamchatka tribes line their fur garments with that skin, and Winters had evidently obtained his parka from them. The writing, you see, is all numerals."

Martin picked up and inspected the skin curiously. Unborn reindeer skin! He rubbed the glossy substance between his fingers. It felt uncanny to his touch, this relic of a long-past tragedy, this message from the world's end. And the message seemed to be no more than a faded jumble of figures. He read them carefully, searching in vain for some hint of meaning.

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43344544536153314612151113236243361531153523113344
62315111464643441142123411421465224331454613115115
62635344244611313421446333442442361334423315426144
254613115115
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[Transcriber's note: the first two rows of the above numbers in the source book had been defaced to the point of being almost unreadable. A best guess was made on some of them.]

"But how do you know this is a code?" Martin asked curiously.

"Three excellent reasons," said Little Billy. "First, John Winters mentions writing down the secret of the treasure's location, and we discover this skin; second, your genial former employer deciphered these figures for the affable Ichi; third, Ruth and I proved the correctness of the deciphering this morning."

"I guess I had better acquaint you with the method of this means of communication. I don't know how a simple seaman, like John Winters seems to have been, could have become familiar with the art of cryptography—probably from reading, possibly devised the thing himself. It is very simple once you have the key—quite useful, too. Ruth and I talked to each other through a wall by this code, back there in Bob Carew's lair. Consultation with Poe's *Gold Bug*, and an hour's application that morning after breakfast, gave me the key, though I had no chance that day to discover more. It is what is called a 'checker-board' code. Here, I will draw it out!"

The hunchback turned to a blank space in the diary and rapidly sketched a diagram. He handed it across, for Martin's interested inspection, and Martin beheld the following:

```
  1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
1  a | b | c | c | e
  ---|---|---|---|---
2  f | g | h | i | j
  ---|---|---|---|---
3  l | m | n | o | p
  ---|---|---|---|---
4  q | r | s | t | u
  ---|---|---|---|---
5  v | w | x | y | z
```

Number 6 for spacing  
between words

"You will observe that the letter 'k' is missing," said Little Billy. "You use 'c' for 'k,' and to write a message, you merely write down the line the letter is on, and its position on that line. Thus, in Winters's message, the first two numerals are '43.' That means, fourth line, third letter, or the letter 's.' You see, you take the numbers in pairs—that is, until you reach a number 6."

"There are no numbers in the code above 5, so Winters used a 6 to indicate the spaces between words. To illustrate: Winters's secret begins with the numbers 43344544236. Pair these numbers off, and we have 43-34-45-44-23-6. Decipher with the diagram, and we have, 4th line 3rd letter, or 's,' 3rd line 4th letter, or 'o,' 4th line 5th letter, or 'u,' 4th line 4th letter, or 't,' 2nd line 3rd letter, or 'h.' That makes s-o-u-t-h, or the word 'south.'"

"But there is no need of my continuing the translation. Friend Smatt has kindly attended to that for us. Here it is."

Martin took the proffered piece of paper, the piece of paper covered with Smatt's

handwriting, that had come out of the envelope. He read in Lawyer Smatt's bold, angular hand,

South end beach—in elephant head—4 starboard—windy cave—2 port—aloft—north  
corner dry cave.

"That marks the location of our prospective, odorous loot," continued the hunchback. "No doubt about it. The captain and I remember very well the cave opening in the rock shaped like an elephant's head, on the south end of Fire Mountain's beach. It is up to us to get there first."

"But how did Smatt—" commenced Martin.

"How did Smatt come to be in possession of the skin? I am coming to that. The Jap, Ichi, brought it to him.

"That morning, after Ruth and I had discussed the diary, Ruth set out for shore to visit the captain in the hospital. She took Winters's book along with her to read to the captain—good thing she did, as it turned out. I stayed aboard and tackled the code. As I said, I discovered the key after an hour's or so application. That is, I had fathomed the checkerboard, had drawn a diagram, and had begun to decipher. Then my much-abused body went on strike.

"You remember, I was just at the end of an extended spree. For a week I had swum in stimulants and gone without rest. I was near a breakdown when Kim Chee took me in hand. The discovery of the log braced me up. But all of a sudden, while I was working here in the cabin, over that scrap of reindeer skin, I collapsed.

"I called for Ichi and ordered black coffee. I remember he answered my call by materializing almost instantly at my side. He must have been lingering behind my chair—though I do not recollect seeing him about the cabin after Ruth left for shore. He brought me a large cup of black coffee. I drank it, and went promptly to sleep. It may have been a drug, or it may have been nature having her way with me."

"It was drugged coffee the Jap gave you," stated Captain Dabney with finality. "I know those yellow imps!"

Martin started at the blind man's sudden interjection into the conversation. Since he had concluded his story, Captain Dabney had sat listening, immobile and silent. At times Martin had suspected him of dozing. But now, his emphatic outburst proved that he had followed Little Billy's words closely.

"That Ichi lad was no dunderhead," continued the captain. "He was playing a part aboard here. He was commissioned by that Hakodate crowd to discover our trading points—if this ambergrease affair hadn't turned up and tempted him, he would have stayed with us and made the trip north this Summer. Then next year a couple of Jap schooners would have gone ahead of us, peddling booze to the tribes, and killing the goose that laid the golden egg. Blast their yellow hides! I never traded with a trustworthy Jap in my life."

"Yes, he was doubtless a spy of the syndicate," assented Little Billy. "Certainly he was playing a part aboard here, for when I ran across him yesterday morning, in Frisco, he was anything but the cookie of a wind-jammer, and his English showed a remarkable improvement.

"In any event, whether Ichi drugged my coffee or not, I was dead to the world as soon as I swallowed it. When the boatswain came aboard—he had been ashore for a couple of days, searching for me—in the middle of the afternoon, he found me asleep in my chair. He thought I was drunk, and he picked me up and carried me to my bunk. When Ruth came aboard later, bringing the captain with her, it was discovered that Ichi had vanished, and Ruth had to prepare the cabin supper that night. I slept till morning. When I awoke, I discovered that Winters's code had vanished with the cook."

"We also discovered that Ichi had tried unsuccessfully to open the safe in the captain's room," said Ruth. "He was undoubtedly after the old log book that contained the entry about the discovery of Fire Mountain, including the latitude and longitude."

"Well, he was successful enough in making off with the code," said Little Billy. "We combed Honolulu for him that day, without result. Two ships had left the afternoon before—one bound for the Orient, the other for California. Our missing cookie appeared upon the passenger list of neither vessel, but we concluded that he had taken steerage passage for Yokohama.

"The loss of the code was a serious matter. Of course, we knew the location of the island, and we were determined to square away for Fire Mountain as soon as the season permitted, but we were rather dismayed by the prospect of having to search blindly through that labyrinth of caves for the *Good Luck's* treasure. That Winters and Silva had stowed the stuff in some well-concealed place was evident from the entry in the log, and from the use of a code. We were dubious of success in our quest until last night.

"Jump from Hawaii to San Francisco. We came up to Frisco, you know, to consult some specialists about the captain's eyesight. Yesterday, the captain came aboard from the hospital. We were lying off Angel Island, ready for sea, and awaiting the captain's word to up anchor and away for the Bering—it will be the open season up there by the time we have completed the passage.

"Yesterday was a holiday with us. It was the occasion of our revered and beloved chief mate's twenty-first natal day, and in the morning, the boatswain and I set forth for shore in search of suitable offerings."

"I know—you were setting forth to buy flowers," broke in Martin. "Bosun told me—you got \_\_\_"

"We got lost from each other; intentionally lost on my part, as I confessed to you. Well, friend Ichi was the innocent cause of that harrowing separation.

"It happened in one of the many thirst parlors that line Market Street. The bosun and I had stepped in to wet our whistles, and, looking out of the open door, I was astounded to perceive our truant cookie pass by. The bosun was occupied at the moment with a nickel poker machine. I did not disturb him—he is a hasty, straightforward person and unfitted for a subtle pursuit. I slipped through the door and fell into the wake of the Jap. But what a metamorphosed sea-cook I trailed! Resplendent in fine feathers, Ichi looked more like a diplomat or banker than anything else.

"I trailed him through the streets for an hour. Once he stopped before a news-stand and purchased a paper, and I was close enough to overhear him speak perfect English to the clerk. He finally led me into an office building, up an elevator, and to the office of one Josia Smatt, Attorney at Law. Ichi entered this office. I, following by the elevator's next trip, saw him disappear through the door. I applied my eagle eye to the aperture intended for keys and spying, and saw you, my dear Blake, direct the Oriental blossom into an inner office.

"Along the hall meandered one of the loquacious brotherhood, book under arm, conquest in his eye. Inspiration struck me a thump. I fell in the way of the book agent and became a ready victim of his wiles. For a consideration, I became owner of the volume. As soon as he had my money, the agent made for the stairs, evidently fearing I would repent my bargain. When he had disappeared, I adopted his role and burst in upon the hapless clerk of Lawyer Smatt with the matchless 'Compendium of Universal Knowledge.'

"You know what transpired then, for you were that very hapless clerk. You were very pleasant to the poor book agent, Blake, but you refused to be seduced by the alluring description I gave my wares."

"By George! You talked like a sure-enough book pest," asserted Martin. "But I noticed something phony about you—your tanned face, and the tattoo marks on your arms. I remember, I wondered how a book agent came by such ornaments."

"Yes, and I noticed you wondered why my eyes were roving around your office," added Little Billy. "I was looking for Ichi. I placed him in that inner office, heard his voice, and the voice of your employer. I was wondering what to do to get past you and attempt to spy upon them, and then Smatt helped me out by summoning you. Do you recollect, when you dismissed me and entered the inner office, you saw me leaving the outer office? Yes, you did—not. You had no sooner closed the inner office-door behind you than I was at the keyhole.

"I tried first to overhear. Nothing doing. Couldn't distinguish but an occasional word. Then, I placed my eye to the keyhole. I saw you standing before the desk, Ichi staring at you, and Smatt addressing you. I saw Smatt hand over the envelope. I was morally certain it contained the code, from the care Smatt exercised and the interest Ichi showed. Then you started for the door, and I had to beat a hasty retreat. I guess I reached the hallway about the same instant you opened the door from the inner office."

"I felt your presence!" cried Martin, recalling of a sudden his feeling of that moment the previous afternoon. "I remember I looked out—"

"—Into the hall," finished Little Billy. "Yes—I was concealed around the corner of the cross corridor. I saw you. I left the building at a double quick and made for the water-front. I went aboard and told Ruth and the captain what I had discovered. Then Ruth and I went ashore.

"I was sure you had the code in your possession, and I had overheard enough to know that you were to deliver the envelope to somebody, some place, last night. So, you were the unconscious burden of our thoughts, the prospective victim of our wiles.

"I had obtained your name from the janitor of the office building, by pretending I was searching for a friend who worked in one of the offices. Consultation of the city directory gave us your home address, and we headed in that direction. First, though, we picked up the bosun, hard by where I had deserted him. His condition was rather bibulous, but owing to his hollow legs and ivory dome, he was clear-headed and able to fall in with our plans. A shrewd-enough person is the bosun, an actor of no mean ability. His strategy served us well in the evening.

"Well, having the bosun, we set forth to gather information concerning your own estimable self. We went to your boarding-house. I donned the role of census-taker for the new city directory, and interviewed the chatty Mrs. Meagher. From her I learned the names and occupations of all the boarders in the house; specifically, I was informed of your orphaned and comparatively friendless condition, your age, your lodge, your studious habits, and your very, very respectable residence. From another source we later learned of your adorable curly brown hair, your calm, gray eyes, your strange aversion for the dangerous sex, even though they be 'puffick loidies.' A fellow lodger of yours gave us most of our information—or, let us say, a companion lodger. A lady, a 'puffick loidy,' a gimlet-eyed and talkative maiden, with a glorious crown of golden hair—though, alas, I fear 'tis a drug-store gold."

"Good Lord—Miss Pincher!" exclaimed Martin.

He felt his ears burning, and knew he was blushing. Confound that manicure girl! "Adorable hair—calm eyes" indeed! He shot a glance at Ruth. She was laughing at his discomfiture.

"We discovered she lodged in your house and we trailed her to the beauty parlor where she labors. Ruth pumped her."

"Oh, you are a fine favorite of hers," rallied Ruth. "She swears by you, Mr. Blake. I happened to casually mention your name, and she was charmed by the coincidence of your being a mutual friend. She gave you a very fine character indeed, though, she hated to admit, you were not as gallant as you might be. 'Regular goop with goils,' I believe she said."

"Silly little mush-head," mumbled Martin, greatly confused. "Suppose she told you everything she knew about me."

"Yes, and then some," remarked Little Billy. "Oh, Ruth has your entire history, Martin Blake. But I would not blush about it. Indeed, if my record were as good as yours, I would straighten my back. Ruth came out of that beauty-parlor with a record that goes something like this: very good-looking, muscular, studious, poor but honest, does not drink or smoke to excess, though has been known to swear violently and indulge in combat on occasion of coalman flogging horse up a hill, is impervious to wiles of beskirted siren, be her hair ever so yellow, and her eyes ever so blue.

"Frankly, we were disappointed by your uncompromising rectitude, friend Martin. We were, you see, greatly desirous of obtaining that envelope you had in your pocket. We had hoped to discover some weakness, some vice, in your composition—a fondness for drink, or for women, or for cards—something we might use as a leverage to pry loose from you that envelope. We failed in our quest, and we had to abandon our safe scheme of cunning in favor of more direct and violent methods.

"We hired an automobile for the day—I'll wager that garage man was peevish when he discovered his machine abandoned in an alleyway, today—and Ruth and the bosun departed for that neighborhood that lodged you. I waited around the office, and when you left I trailed you home.

"I met Ruth and bosun, and we hit upon a plan. I went to a clothing store and purchased a suit of men's clothes, and overcoat, and a cap. Ruth donned them in the privacy of the car. Then, she and I took up our position in the dark doorway of the vacant house next door to you."

"Why, I recall! I saw a chap in a gray overcoat!" cried Martin.

"On the steps as you came out of the house," supplemented Little Billy. "Yes, that was Ruth. You came out before we expected you, and we were not prepared. You see, we had decided to hold you up. I was to shove a revolver in your face, and Ruth was to relieve you of the envelope. Your popping out so unexpectedly upset us.

"Ruth sneezed, and attracted your attention, and then she lost her wits and beat it down the street. If you had looked more keenly into that doorway next door, you would have seen yours-truly lurking nervously there. But you went straightway down the street yourself, and, in truth, I was not sorry that accident spoiled our coup. Neither Ruth, nor I, liked very well the idea of sticking up that active-appearing and uncertain quantity termed 'Martin Blake,' not to mention our scruples anent law-breaking violence.

"Well, the hold-up was off. Ruth beat you to the corner, and informed the waiting bosun of the failure. The bosun was properly valorous. He would attend to the 'blasted law shark.' So, while Ruth sought refuge in the automobile, the bosun lay in wait for you by the corner. He was to grasp you in those enormous hands of his, subdue you properly, and extract the treasure from your pocket—Ruth had told him which pocket.

"But, friend Martin, your penchant for making friends on sight saved you. The bosun's scheme was to pick a quarrel with you, but when you encountered him, your courtesy disarmed him. He confided this morning that you were 'such a proper little lad, I didn't 'ave the 'eart to 'it 'im.' So, to gain time, and to boost his courage, he carted you into the saloon and bought you a drink. And a good thing he did; otherwise we would have been in ignorance of Wild Bob Carew's joining this game. Ay, and Ruth might have disappeared and left us in ignorance of her fate!"

A sudden, forcible, inelegant oath, ripped forth by the blind captain, startled the group. It was not an epithet to use before a woman—though Martin did not think of that at the moment, nor did Ruth appear shocked. Martin was surprised by the wild rage that suddenly suffused Captain Dabney's serene countenance.

"I'll make that renegade hound pay!" swore the captain, thumping the table in emphasis. "I told him I'd kill him if he bothered Ruth again. By Heaven, blind though I be, I'll keep my word! I'll see him, and recognize him, when we meet—the lying cur!"

The outburst ceased as suddenly as it had commenced, and the captain's working features assumed instantly their accustomed immobile serenity. Martin noticed that the hunchback's face was sober, and that Ruth's face was white. He judged that the captain was not indulging in vain boasting.

"Wild Bob Carew is the jinx of the happy family," said Little Billy, after a moment. "He is a human devil right enough. And the discovery that he is interested in this affair was serious and important news for us. I understand it took the wind out of the bosun's sails for a moment. You see, before your conversation with the bosun in that little tavern we did not know where you were taking the envelope. You mentioned 'Carew' and 'Black Cruiser,' and we were enlightened.

"But the bosun failed in his undertaking, after all. He slipped on the floor, and your agility saved you. You hopped a street-car and escaped the bosun's clutches.

"You didn't shake us off, though. We picked up the bosun, and followed you in the machine, keeping your car in sight the entire way to the Ferry Building. During the journey, the bosun communicated his news. At the Ferry we shot ahead of you, ditched the machine in an alleyway, and prepared the new plan I had evolved.

"I dodged into a pawn-shop and bought a legal-size envelope and some sheets of paper. Then I doubled back ahead of you and awaited your coming, perching myself on a handy fire-hydrant. The rest you know. My eloquence charmed you, and while you so kindly encircled me with your arm, to keep me from falling, I picked your pocket of the treasure and substituted the trash I had prepared.

"Such was our campaign against the person of Martin Blake. You went on and entered the dive. I dodged across to the wharf where the bosun and, I thought, Ruth, were awaiting me in the brig's dingey. I found the bosun, but not Ruth. She had been too curious to remain in safety. She had left the bosun in charge of the boat and taken up a position where she could watch my operations."

"Not altogether curiosity—I had a scheme of my own in case you failed," broke in Ruth.

"Well, your scheme got you into a pretty fix," retorted Little Billy. "I was nervous because of the proximity of Carew to Ruth," he continued to Martin, "and I straightway set out to look for her. I came abreast the Black Cruiser just in time to see a certain young gentleman in a gray overcoat being hustled through the saloon's side entrance, by a group of suspiciously chunky-appearing men. I heard no outcry, but I knew that Ruth was in Carew's toils."

"I couldn't cry out," said Ruth. "One of those yellow runts had a jiu-jitsu hold upon my neck. My speech was paralyzed for the instant. Indeed, I could hardly walk. They practically carried me into Carew's presence."

"I saw you, in the hall," broke in Martin.

"I didn't see you," replied Ruth. "Indeed, I hardly recall passing through a hall. I came to my senses when they brought me into a big, lighted room, where Carew sat behind a table. I was—the girl paused uncertainly, and Martin saw her face was white and strained—"I was frightened. There is no use my disguising the fact—that man terrifies me. He is—he is——"

"He is a scoundrel!" exploded Captain Dabney.

"Yes, but a courageous and resourceful scoundrel," commented Little Billy. He turned to Martin and continued: "Bob Carew is not a new acquaintance of ours. We have had trouble with him before. He is, er——"

"He is possessed of the idea that he loves me," Ruth quietly continued Little Billy's stammering words. "And he is a man who acts upon his ideas. He has made my life miserable for four years. Oh, I am afraid of that man! He is so determined and ruthless. And I would rather be dead than mated with that heartless wretch!"

"Aye, and I would rather see you dead," commented Captain Dabney. "Carew's life smells to heaven. He is more odorous than those yellow men who own him."

"If you knew the Pacific, you would know Carew," explained Little Billy to Martin. "He is the best and least favorably known blackleg between the two poles. He is an Englishman—the cast-off son of some noble house, I believe. And he is a cruel, treacherous, brave, and cunning beast! No other words fit him. Add to that a really beautiful body, a brazen gall, and a well-bred and

suave carriage, and you have Wild Bob. He has an apt nickname—'Wild Bob.'

"The man has come through more wild, disreputable escapades than any other three men afloat. He has robbed right and left all over the Pacific. Half the island capitals are closed to him. He robbed the captain, here, when the captain first knew and trusted him. Two years ago, his schooner the *Aileen* was confiscated by the United States government for opium-running into California. Since that time he has been employed on shares by the same syndicate of Japs who have bought the captain's furs. They gave him the *Yezo*, which he renamed the *Dawn*, the fastest little schooner in the north and south Pacific, and he has been poaching seal for them, up north."

"Aye, and next year he would have ruined my trade, had not their spy cleared out with your secret," rumbled the captain.

"Yes, I have no doubt those gentlemen in Hakodate placed Ichi aboard to spy out our trading secrets," assented Little Billy. "And Ichi's learning of the million in ambergris awaiting an owner up there in Bering Sea upset their little plan. Ichi fled to Frisco, instead of to Japan, as we thought. He knew Carew and the schooner were in Frisco, and I suppose he turned to Smatt for assistance in deciphering the code, and also in preparing the *Dawn* for sea. Carew could not have attended to that personally. He has to keep under cover in United States' territory. I hazard the guess, Blake, that you are not acquainted with all the activities of Mr. Smatt?"

"No," admitted Martin. "Smatt is a very secretive man. All I know of his affairs I learned from handling his court papers; but I know he has many interests I am entirely ignorant of. For instance, I did not know what brought Dr. Ichi to the office, though he and Smatt were very chummy. I thought it was business connected with the Nippon Trading Company. Smatt is American counsel for a Japanese firm of that name. I never heard of the *Dawn*, nor of Carew, before yesterday."

"I guess we are better posted concerning your former employer than you, yourself," informed Little Billy. "Smatt's name is a byword with the Pacific traders—the shrewd old spider! 'Nippon Trading Company' is the same syndicate we have done business with; and those yellow financiers of Hakodate and Tokyo have many irons in the fire besides the fur iron. Opium and coolie smuggling into California—both very profitable. And old Smatt looks after their American interests, fixes officials, keeps them clear of the law. It was Smatt who rescued Carew two years ago.

"I have no doubt that immediately on receipt of Ichi's intelligence, Smatt set about outfitting Carew for a trip to Fire Mountain. But I don't know whether the attempted shanghaiing of Ruth was premeditated or not. Of course, they knew of our presence in the port, and they may have been waiting for a chance to pick up Ruth—aside from Carew's mad infatuation, they may have expected to force from Ruth the latitude and longitude of Fire Mountain. I would not put a planned kidnaping beyond them. But it doesn't seem probable in the light of our undisturbed efforts to filch the code from you."

"No, I am sure my capture was not the result of forethought," stated Ruth. "I think they just noticed me standing steadfastly in the same position, just across the street from their rendezvous, and naturally they concluded I was a spy of some sort. Indeed, Carew's exclamation, when they brought me before him, is convincing proof that he did not know whom his men had bagged. 'My word, it is my spitfire, Ruth!' he cried. I acted the spitfire, too, and I am afraid I said some very unladylike things to him. But he only laughed in high glee. I was horribly frightened, though I took care he didn't suspect it. I know he meant to take me to sea with him.

"I only faced him for a few moments. There was an interruption from the hall, a banging and a knocking——"

"I did that, kicking a door," said Martin.

"I thought it was Little Billy, also captured," went on Ruth. "I was desperate. And Carew had me thrust into that other room, and the door secured upon me. I heard a commotion and quarreling without, and somebody was thrown into the room next to me. I thought it was Billy, and I tried to communicate by raps. You know, Billy and I have become quite expert in the use of that code; we practised on the passage up from the islands. You could not answer me, so I knew it was not Little Billy who had been imprisoned in the next room. I waited patiently and fearfully, until Billy burst open the window."

"Yes, we didn't lose any time starting our rescue," added Little Billy. "When I saw them haul Ruth into the house, I rushed back to the boat and told the bosun. We reconnoitered. We saw a taxi drive up in front of the saloon, and Carew storm out, and drive off."

"I guess he was bound to see Smatt about the blank sheets of paper in the envelope," said Martin. "I swore up and down that they had been placed there by Smatt."

"Yes, we guessed as much," responded Little Billy. "Well, we encircled the building, discovered that back shed, and decided to try and force entrance from the rear. I hustled back to where we had left our automobile, and got a small steel bar from the tool-box. When I rejoined the bosun, we mounted to the roof of the shed and tackled the windows.



"Luck was with us. You separate prisoners were in the rear of the house. We had a narrow squeak of it, though. Wild Bob returned before we had freed Ruth—that was that engine noise that startled us, Martin—and Wild Bob lived up to his reputation by that vicious pursuit he gave us.

"We won aboard safely, yanked up the hook and slipped out with the tide, without waiting for pilot or clearance. And so—well, now you know all. Remains nothing but for us to extend you a formal welcome to the bosom of the happy family."

Martin became suddenly aware that the recital was ended, and that three unlike, friendly faces were beaming upon him with smiling lips. Unconsciously, as he had followed the course of the tale with absorbed interest, he had lost sight of the fact of his own intimate connection with the narrated events. He had seemed to be a listener to an interesting fiction. His old habit of identifying himself with the characters in the tales he read had mastered him. Little Billy's recital, and his own responses and interjections, all seemed part of a melodrama which, played out, would vanish and leave him secure in his accustomed law-abiding world.

Now he suddenly realized that the melodrama was real, that the first act only was ended, and that the last was obscured in the future.

The day had been replete with shocks, but the greatest shock was this, when Martin finally and completely realized that the even course of his life had been rudely and permanently changed, that he had been plucked out of his humdrum niche and cast willy-nilly into this violent drama by sportive circumstance. The tumultuous incidents of the previous night arrayed themselves in his mind with something of their true perspective.

He touched his head, and felt the bandage about the forgotten wound. He became more keenly conscious of his surroundings—the unfamiliar furnishings of the cabin, the careened table, the motion of the ship that had at first disturbed and now soothed him, the measured footfalls of the boatswain, overhead, the sigh of the wind aloft.

He looked with fresh eyes upon his companions. They too were actors in the play—the forceful blind man, the lovable cripple, and this blooming, merry-eyed girl whose every glance sent a strange thrill through his being. They were his partners, his shipmates! He was committed with them to this adventure, and he was glad. They, too, seemed glad, for they were smiling a welcome.

"Of course, Martin, we feel rather diffident before you," spoke up Little Billy. "We know it is an outrage, this causing you to lose your comfortable berth ashore, and——"

"Say no more about it," interrupted Martin. "You had sufficient provocation for all your actions. And really, believe me, I am very glad I fell in with you. I am glad to be here. I have wanted to go to sea all my life. We are going to Fire Mountain now, aren't we?"

"That's the spirit!" cried the captain heartily. "And you will not lose by your joining us, lad. Even if this venture prove a failure, there is still a mighty good living to be picked up on the Pacific."

"We are a sort of coöperative association," explained Ruth. "We work on shares; something like the whaleman's lay, though more generous. Of course, we pay straight wages to the hands forward. But we of the afterguard work this way: After all expenses of a voyage have been paid, the captain as master and owner takes fifty per cent. of the net profits. The remaining fifty per cent. is divided among the rest of us, not according to rank but pro rata. We want you to join the partnership. You are to share equally with Billy, the bosun, and myself. And if we really find this stuff on Fire Mountain, your share will come to a neat fortune. No, don't start protesting—of course you are entitled to it."

"And don't commence counting your chickens before they are hatched," admonished Little Billy. "It is quite on the cards that we will reach Fire Mountain to discover Carew ahead of us. Or somebody else may have happened upon the stuff during the twenty-five years since Winters died. The last is not probable, but the first is, at least, possible. It will not do for us to rest in false security. Carew and his backers are sure to have a try for that million on Fire Mountain."

"But he does not know the island's position. I am sure of that!" objected Ruth.

"But he does know Bering Sea, almost as well as I," spoke up Captain Dabney. "And he knows the particular corner of Bering we are bound for. No—Billy is right. We must not imagine the *Dawn* isn't on our heels, even now. In any event, he would be setting out for the Kuriles to pick up the seal-herds, about this time; and, knowing Carew as we do, we may prophesy that he will try to find our island. Indeed, the man may have already run across Fire Mountain during his excursions in those waters—he may know its position as well as we do. He'll try to poach on our preserve, no fear.

"That ambergris would represent the profits of a score of seal-raids—and besides, there is you, Ruth, drawing him like a lodestone. His attempt to shanghai you, back there in Frisco, shows

the temper of the man. If we meet the *Dawn* up north, and I have a hunch we shall meet her, we want to keep our eyes open. Meanwhile, we want to make a smart passage, and get there first, and away. We want to carry on—by the Lord, crack on to the limit!"

"If it has come to a race, Carew's schooner has the heels of us," observed Little Billy.

"Yes, the *Dawn* is the better sailer," reluctantly admitted the captain. "If the *Cohasset* were ten years younger, I wouldn't admit it, but the old girl isn't quite as limber as she used to be. But the log line isn't everything in an ocean race. I know Bob Carew is a good seaman, but I'll show him a trick or two this passage, for all that I'm a blind man!"

"I hope we don't meet him up north. I am afraid," muttered Ruth.

"But haven't you considered that the police may have grabbed Carew, and the rest of that gang, for their part in that street fight?" broke in Martin. "Of course, I didn't see the finish of that affair, but I remember that I saw the police coming just before I fell."

"The police! Lay Carew by the heels!" The captain shook his head. "No such good luck, I'm afraid. Trust Carew to win clear of the police every time."

"And if they did grab him, you may trust Lawyer Smatt to have procured his release, at least upon bail, ere now. There is the hope, of course, that when you, Martin, shied that gun into his face, he was badly injured," said Little Billy.

"Oh, I hope not!" ejaculated Martin.

"We hope so," went on Little Billy. "If you had killed him, you would have rendered mankind a service. No such luck, though—the devil never fails to look after his own. He may not have even been stunned. The bosun did not see what happened after you fell—he picked you up and turned tail and ran for it. But I have no doubt Carew's men gathered up their leader and made off ahead of the law's coming. Carew is too much the fox not to have had a getaway prepared; and the clearance we dumped off the Farallones showed that he had the *Dawn* ready for sea. I'll wager we didn't beat him out through the Gate by many hours!"

"I suppose the police are looking for us?" ventured Martin.

"Not likely," assured the other. "We are safe away, at any rate. But I doubt if they have even heard of the *Cohasset*. The denizens of that groggery would have given no evidence against us—they are themselves too deeply implicated. Also, shooting affrays are common enough on the Frisco waterfront, even gunfights of such magnitude as we indulged in. The police will forget all about it within a week's time.

"Of course, if we had left you behind, to be arrested, the consequences might have been serious enough for you, providing you did not have money or influence. That is the main reason we brought you to sea with us. But as it is, a dead or wounded Jap does not amount to much in Frisco, and the affair will have slipped men's minds long ere we see Market Street again."

"But—I think I killed that man, Spulvedo!" urged Martin, with a qualm at the recollection.

"A good job if you did," was the reply. "He was a notorious scoundrel. If you snuffed him out, I suspect the police would feel inclined to vote you a medal. But don't feel badly about that incident, Blake. Remember, you dropped him in self-defense."

"Gentlemen!" broke in Ruth suddenly. "We will have to adjourn this meeting till another time. Seven bells went some time ago. I have just time to get my coffee and relieve the bosun by midnight."

"What—the watch gone!" cried the captain. "But, lass, you have had no rest."

"Small matter," assented the girl, rising. "I'll make up for it. Is there any change in course, captain?"

"No, make all the westing we can," said the captain. "If this breeze will only hold a couple of days longer, we'll pick up the trades. Then for the passage!"

"But—a second!" exclaimed Little Billy. "We have not yet assigned our new brother to his duties. You know, Blake, there are no drones in the happy family. Now, I suggest, you are eminently qualified to assist the hard-driven steward."

A hearty laugh from the girl and the old man checked the hunchback's speech.

"No, you are not going to sluff your job upon poor Mr. Blake's shoulders!" cried Ruth. "That is—unless he wishes to become a steward."

"I want to be a sailor," Martin asserted emphatically.

"Well said, lad—I know you have mettle," commented Captain Dabney. "But it means work. You cannot learn a sailor's work by pacing a poop-deck."

"I am more than willing to work—common sailor work," said Martin.

"Well, we'll assign you to a watch," said the old man. "Of course, you will live aft. Keep your present berth with Billy. You had better join the starboard watch, I think. The bosun is a great hand to break in a greenhorn."

But Martin objected to this disposition. He was watching Ruth. She was buttoning her pea-coat around her throat, preparatory to braving the raw night. There was, he dared to think, a welcome twinkle, a meaning message, in the sidewise glance she shot at him.

"I would rather be in the mate's watch," said Martin.

The captain grinned, Little Billy chuckled and muttered something about a "sheep to the slaughter," and the mate rewarded him with a flash of white teeth.

"I'll be glad to have you in my watch," she said. "But remember—it is all work and no play! I keep strict discipline in my watch!"

Martin then proposed to commence straightway his seaman's career, by standing the impending watch, by accompanying Ruth on deck. Thereupon his officer voiced her first command:

"I don't want you blundering about the decks to-night with that sore head. Time enough for you to start in the morning; after breakfast I'll examine the wound, and if it looks well I'll turn you to. Also, you need to visit the slop-chest." She pointed to his once natty, now bedraggled, business suit. "You are hardly dressed for facing weather. Billy will outfit you in the morning. Meanwhile, turn in and sleep."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PASSAGE

It was the night of April 29, 1915, that Martin Blake, clerk, sat at the *Cohasset's* cabin table and heard the tale of Fire Mountain. It was on the morning of July 6, 1915, that Martin Blake, seaman, bent over the *Cohasset's* foreroyal yardarm and fisted the canvas, with the shrill whistle of the squall in his ears.

The interim had fashioned a new Martin Blake. In the bronzed and active figure, dungaree clad, sheath-knife on hip, who so casually balanced himself on the swaying foot-rope, there was little in common, so far as outward appearance went, with the dapper, white-faced clerk of yore.

He completed furling the sail. Then he straightened and swept the sea with keen, puckered eyes. It was a scrutiny that was rewarded. Ahead, across the horizon sky, floated a dark smudge, like the smoke-trail of a steamer, and beneath it was a black speck. It was no ship, but land, he knew. It was the expected landfall, the volcanic island, there ahead, and he, of all of the ship's company, first perceived it from his lofty perch.

He sent the welcome hail to the deck below—

"Land ho!"

He leaned over the lee yard-arm, grasped a back-stay, and commenced a rapid and precipitous descent to the deck. A few months before, he would have descended laboriously and fearfully by way of the shrouds; sliding down a backstay would then have rubbed his palms raw, and visited giddiness upon him. But now his hands were rope calloused, and his wits height proof. He was now the equal, for agility and daring, with any man on the ship. He had won, without much trouble, a seaman's niche on the ship.

In truth, Martin was to the life born, and he took to the sea like a duck to water. He won quickly through the inevitable series of mishaps that rubbed the greenhorn mark away; and he gleefully measured his progress by his ever-growing ability to outpull, outclimb, and outdare the polyglot denizens of the brigantine's fore-castle.

He had expert coaching to urge his education on apace. He knew the many ropes and their various offices before he was two weeks on board; and he was able to move about aloft, by day or night, quite fearlessly. By the end of the first month he was standing his regular wheel trick. And, as the weeks passed, he gained more than a cursory knowledge of the leverages and wind surfaces that controlled and propelled his little floating world.

He applied himself earnestly to master his new craft. It was the life he had lusted for, and the mere physical spaciousness of his new outlook was a delight. He contrasted it with his former

city-cramped, office-ridden existence.

He rejoiced openly as each day lengthened the distance between him and his former slavery. On the very first day he had mounted to the deck to commence work, the morning after the meeting in the cabin, he had enacted a ceremony that, to his own rollicking mind, placed a definite period to his old life. He came on deck bravely bedecked in his new slop-chest clothes, a suit of shiny, unstained dungarees.

He held carefully in his hands a black derby hat, and a starched collar of the "choker" variety. He carried the articles to the ship's side and cast them into the sea. Then he declaimed his freedom.

"They were the uniform of my servitude—badges of my clerkhood! I have finished with them. Into the ocean they go! Now—ho for the life on the billowy wave!"

"Very good!" the mate applauded his act and words. Her next words were an incisive and frosty command. "You may commence at once your life on the billowy wave! Go for'rd and stand by with the watch!"

Martin went forward, and he began to learn the why and wherefore of things in his new world. He learned to jump to an order called out by that baffling and entrancing person aft, learned to haul in unison, to laugh at hard knocks and grin at pain.

He learned to cultivate humility, and to mount the poop on the lee side when duty took him there. He learned the rigid etiquette of the sea, and addressed that blooming, desirable woman with the formal prefix, "mister."

His body toughened, his mind broadened, his soul expanded. But his heart also expanded, and it was unruly. Ruth was such a jolly chum—off duty. On duty, she was a martinet. Below, she was the merry life of the "happy family." On deck, she lorded it haughtily from the high place of the poop, and answered to the name of "mister"!

The *Cohasset*, Martin discovered, was manned by a total of eighteen souls. Besides the five persons aft, there were a sailmaker, a carpenter, a Chinese cook and ten fore-castle hands. His first impression—that the crew was composed of wild men—was partially borne out. Of the ten men in the fore-castle, but four were Caucasian—two Portuguese from the Azores, a Finn and an Australian—and the quartet were almost as outlandish in their appearance as the other six of the crew.

The remaining six were foregathered from the length and breadth of the Pacific. There was a Maori from New Zealand, a Koriak tribesman from Kamchatka, two Kanakas, a stray from Ponape, and an Aleut. The six natives, Martin discovered, had all been with the ship for years, were old retainers of Captain Dabney. The four white men, and the cook, who rejoiced in the name of Charley Bo Yip, had been newly shipped in San Francisco.

Martin's watchmates were five of the natives. Martin suspected they composed the mate's watch because they were all old, tractable hands. They were the Maori, Rimoa, a strapping, middle-aged man, Oomak, the Koriak, the man with the tattooed and scarified face whom Martin had seen at the wheel the first day at sea, the two Kanakas, and the Aleut. They talked to each other, he found, in a strange pidgin—a speech composed mainly of verbs and profanity, a language that would have shocked a purist to a premature grave. But Martin found his watchmates to be a brave, capable, though rather silent group.

Martin's initiation into the joys of sea life was a strenuous one. The gale that had sent the *Cohasset* flying from San Francisco, died out, as Ruth had predicted. Followed a couple of days of calm.

Then came another heavy wind, in the boatswain's words, "a snortin' norther," and for three days Martin's watches on deck were cold, wet and hazardous. He blindly followed his watchmates over lurching, slippery decks, in obedience to unintelligible orders. He was rolled about by shipped seas, and his new oilskins received a stern baptism. His clerk's hands became raw and swollen from hauling on wet ropes, his unaccustomed muscles ached cruelly, the sea water smarted the half-healed wound on his head, now covered with a strip of plaster. But he stood the gaff, and worked on. And he was warmly conscious of the unspoken approval of both fore-castle and cabin.

During that time of stress he learned something of the sailor's game of carrying on of sail. The wind was fair, and by the blind captain's orders, they held on to every bit of canvas the spars would stand. The little vessel rushed madly through the black, howling nights, and the leaden, fierce days, with every timber protesting the strain, and every piece of cordage adding its shrill, thrummed note to the storm's mighty symphony.

During that time Martin first proved his mettle. He fought down his coward fears, and for the first time ventured aloft, feeling his way through the pitch-black night to the reeling yard-arm, to battle, with his watch, the heavy, threshing sail that required reefing. After the test, when he came below to the warm cabin, he thrilled to the core at his officer's curt praise.

"You'll do!" she muttered in his ear.

But it was not all storm and battle. Quite the reverse. The calm succeeded the storm. Martin came on deck one morning to view a bright sky and a sea of undulating glass. Astern, above the horizon, were fleecy clouds—they afterwards rode high, and became his friends, those mares' tails—and out of that horizon, from the northeast, came occasional light puffs of wind.

Captain Dabney, pacing his familiar poop with firm, sure steps, turned his sightless face constantly to those puffs. There was upon the ship an air of expectancy. And that afternoon Martin beheld an exhibition of the old man's sea-canniness; he suddenly stopped his steady pacing, stood motionless a moment, sniffing of the air astern, and then wheeled upon Ruth.

"To the braces, mister! Here she comes!" he snapped.

She came with tentative, caressing puffs at first, each one a little stronger than the last. Then, with a sigh, a dark blue ripple dancing before her, she arrived, enveloped and passed them.

The brig trembled to the embrace and careened gently, as if nestling into a beloved's arms. About the decks were smiling faces and joyous shouts, and the sails were trimmed with a swinging chantey. For the *Cohasset* had picked up the northeast trades.

That night the wind blew, and the next day, and the next, and the next week, and the weeks following. Ever strong and fresh, out of the northeast, came the mighty trade-wind. Nine knots, ten knots, eleven knots—the brig foamed before it, into the southwest, edging eleven knots—the brig foamed before it, into the southwest, edging away always to the westward.

Every sail was spread. Sails were even improvised to supplement the vast press the ship carried, a balloon jib for the bows, and a triangular piece of canvas that the boatswain labored over, and which he spread above the square topsails on the main. He was mightily proud of his handicraft, and walked about, rubbing his huge hands and gazing up at the little sail.

"An invention o' my own," he proudly confided to Martin. "Swiggle me stiff, if the *Flyin' Cloud* 'as anything on us, for we've rigged a bloody moons'il, says I."

Day by day the air grew warmer, as they neared the tropics. One day they sighted a school of skimming flying fish; that night several flew on board and were delivered into Charley Bo Yip's ready hands, and Martin feasted for the first time upon that dainty morsel. Bonito and porpoise played about the bows.

Martin could not at first understand how a ship that was bound for a distant corner of the cold Bering Sea came to be sailing into the tropics. But the boatswain enlightened him.

"It's a case o' the longest way being the shortest, lad. The winds, says I. We 'ave to make a 'alf circle to the south, using these trades, to make the Siberian coast this time o' year. We're makin' a good passage—swiggle me, if Carew an' his *Dawn* 'ave won past, the way we're sailin'! And the old man reckons seventy days, outside, afore 'e makes 'is landfall o' Fire Mountain. Coming 'ome, now, will be different. We'll sail the great circle, the course the mail-boats follow, an' we'll likely make the passage in 'alf the time. We'll run the easting down, up there in the 'igh latitudes with the westerlies be'ind us."

They were bright, sunny days, those trade-wind days, and wonderful nights. The ship practically sailed herself. A slackening and tightening of sheets, night and morning, and a watch-end trimming of yards, was all the labor required of the crew.

So, regular shipboard work, and Martin's education, went forward. "Chips" plied his cunning hand outside his workshop door; "Sails" spread his work upon the deck abaft the house.

A crusty, talkative, kind-hearted fellow was Sails. He was an old Scot, named MacLean; and the native burr in his speech had been softened by many years of roving. He always took particular pains to inform any listener that he was a MacLean, and that the Clan MacLean was beyond doubt the foremost, the oldest, and the best family that favored this wretched, hopeless world with residence. He hinted darkly at a villainous conspiracy that had deprived him of his estates and lairdships in dear old Stornoway, Bonnie Scotland. He was a pessimist of parts, and he furnished the needed shade that made brighter Martin's carefree existence.

MacLean had followed Captain Dabney for six years—most of the crew were even longer in the ship—and before joining the *Cohasset*, he had, to Martin's intense interest, made a voyage with Wild Bob Carew.

"Och, lad, ye no ken the black heart o' the mon," he would say to Martin. "Wild Bob! Tis 'Black Bob' they should call the caird. The black-hearted robber! Aye, I sailed a voyage wi' the deil. Didna' he beach me wi'oot a penny o' my pay on Puka Puka, in the Marquesas? An' didna' I stop there, marooned wi' the natives, till Captain Dabney took me off? Forty-six, five an' thruppence he robbed me of."

"I am a MacLean, and a Laird by rights, but I could no afoord the loss o' that siller. Oh, he is the proud deil! His high stomach could no stand my plain words. Forty quid, odd, he owed me, but I could no hold my tongue when he raided the cutter and made off wi' the shell. The MacLeans were ne'er pirates, ye ken. They are honest men and kirkgoers—though I'll no pretend in the old days they didna' lift a beastie or so.

"I talked up to Carew's face, an' told him a MacLean could no approve such work, an' I told him the MacLeans were better folk than he, for all his high head. Ye ken, lad, the MacLeans are the best folk o' Scotland. When Noah came oot the ark, 'twas the MacLeans met him and helped him to dry land.

"On Puka Puka beach he dumped me, wi'oot my dunnage, and wi'oot a cent o' the siller was due me. Och, he is a bad mon, yon Carew, wi' many a mon's blood on his hands! He has sold his soul to the deil, and Old Nick saves his own. He is a wild mon wi' women, and he is mad about the sweet lassie aft. Didna' he try to make off wi' her in Dutch Harbor, three years ago? And didna' the old mon stop him wi' a bullet through the shoulder? And now he tries again in Frisco!

"The lass blooms fairer each day—and Carew's madness grows. Ye'll meet him again, lad, if you stay wi' the ship. Wi' Old Nick to help him, 'tis black fortune he'll bring to the lass, ye'll see." And Sails would croak out dismal prophecies concerning Wild Bob Carew's future activities, so long as Martin would listen.

Indeed, the adventurer of the schooner *Dawn* was ever present in the thoughts of the brig's complement. He was a real and menacing shadow; even Martin was affected by the lowering cloud. The old hands in the crew all knew him personally, and knew of his mad infatuation for their beloved mate. In the cabin, it was accepted that he would cross their path again, though it was hoped that Fire Mountain would be reached and the treasure secured before that event occurred. But, save for an ever-growing indignation against the haughty Englishman, for daring to aspire to Ruth LeMoyné's hand, Martin gave the matter small thought; he was too busy living the moment.

Concurrent with his education in seamanship, progressed Martin's instruction in the subtle and disquieting game of hearts. Ruth attended to this particular instruction unconsciously, perhaps, but none the less effectively.

Of course, it was inevitable. When a romantic-minded young man aids in the thrilling rescue of an imprisoned maid, that young man is going to look upon that young woman with more than passing interest. When the maid in question happens to be extremely pretty, his interest is naturally enhanced. When he is thrown into a close shipboard intimacy with her, and discovers her to be at once an exacting tyrant and a jolly chum, when the maid is possessed of a strange and exciting history, and congenial tastes, when she is not unaware of her own excellence, and, at times, not disinclined to coquet a trifle before a young, virile male—then, the romantic young man's blood experiences a permanent rise in temperature, and there are moments when his heart lodges uncomfortably in his throat, and moments when it beats a devil's own tattoo upon his ribs.

And when there are wonderful tropic nights, and bright eyes by his side that outrival the stars overhead, and a glorious tenor voice softly singing songs of love nearby—then, the heady wine of life works a revolution in a romantic young man's being, and in the turmoil he is accorded his first blinding glimpse of the lover's heaven of fulfilled desire, and his first glimpse also of the lover's hell of doubting despair. A man, a maid, a soft, starry night upon the water, a song of love—of course it was inevitable!

Martin's previous experience with the tender passion was not extensive. Circumstance, shyness and fastidiousness had caused him to ignore most of the rather frequent opportunities to philander that his good looks and lively imagination created, and upon the rare occasions when he had paused, it was because of curiosity—a curiosity quickly sated.

Of course, he had been in love. At twelve years he had betrothed himself to the girl who sat across the aisle, at fifteen, he exchanged rings and vows with a lady of fourteen who lived in the next block, at seventeen he conceived a violent affection for the merry Irish girl who presided over his uncle's kitchen—but Norah scoffed, and remained true to the policeman on the beat, and Martin, for a space, embraced the more violent teachings of anarchy and dreamed with gloomy glee of setting off a dynamite bomb under a certain uniformed prop of law and order.

The uncle died, and Martin was henceforth too busy earning a living to indulge in sentimental adventures. After a time, as he grew to manhood and his existence became more assured, he became a reader of stories; and unconsciously he commenced to measure the girls he met with the entrancing heroines of his fiction. The girls suffered by comparison, and Martin's interest in them remained Platonic.

By degrees he became possessor of that refuge of lonely bachelorhood, an ideal—a dream girl, compounded equally of meditation and books. She was a wonderful girl, Martin's dream girl; she possessed all the virtues, and no faults, and she was very, very beautiful. At first she was a blond maid, and when she framed herself before his eyes, out of the smoke curling upward from

his pipe, she was a vision of golden tresses, and rosy cheeks, and clear blue eyes.

But then came Miss Pincher, the manicure maid, to reside at Martin's boarding-house. Miss Pincher's hair was very, very yellow—there were dark hints about that boarding-house board anent royal colors coming out of drug-store bottles—and her eyes were a cold, hard blue. She cast her hard, bold eyes upon Martin. She was a feminist in love. Martin fled horrified before her determined, audacious wooing.

His blood idol was overthrown, his ideal slain. He went to bed with the stark corpse, and awoke to contemplate with satisfaction a new image, a brooding, soulful brunette.

Then, Martin suddenly discovered that his ideal was neither a rosy Daughter of the *Dawn*, nor a tragic Queen of the Night—she was a merry-faced, neutral-tinted Sister of the Afternoon, a girl with brown hair, so dark as to be black by night, and big brown eyes. A girl with a rich contralto voice that commanded or cajoled in a most distracting fashion. A girl who commanded respect by her mastery of a masculine profession, yet who thereby sacrificed none of her appealing femininity. A girl named Ruth LeMoyné.

There was nothing staid or conservative about the manner of Martin's receiving this intelligence. It was his nature to fall in love with a hard bump, completely and without reservation. He recognized Ruth as the girl of his dreams the very first moment he obtained a good daylight look at her—that is, upon the afternoon he first mounted to the *Cohasset's* deck, and was welcomed by the smiling, lithesome queen of the storm. Blonde and brunette had in that instant been completely erased from his memory; he had recognized in the mate of the *Cohasset* the companion of his fanciful hours, in every feature she was the girl of his dreams.

There are people who say that every person has his, or her, preordained mate somewhere in the world. They say that the true love, the big love, is only possible when these predestined folk meet. They say that love flames instantly at such a meeting, and that the couple will recognize each other though the whole social scale divide them. They say that Love will conquer all obstacles and unite the yearning pair. They are a sentimental, optimistic lot, who thus declaim. Martin, when he thought the matter over, inclined to their belief. Only—the trouble was that Ruth did not seem to exactly recognize or welcome her predestined fate.

But there is another theory of love. Any shiny-pated wise man will give the formula.

"Love at first sight! Bosh!" says the wise man. "Love is merely a strong, complex emotion inspired in persons by propinquity plus occasion!"

Perhaps. Certainly, the emotion Martin felt from the time he spoke his first word to Ruth LeMoyné, was strong enough and complex enough to tinge his every thought. And the propinquity was close enough and piquant enough to flutter the heart of a monk—which Martin was not. And a headlong young man like Martin Blake could be trusted to make the occasion.

He made several occasions. His journey along Cupid's path was filled with the sign-posts of those occasions.

Off duty, Ruth and he were boon companions, during the rather rare hours when she was not in attendance upon the blind captain or asleep. Martin stinted himself of rest, Ruth was too old a sailor for that.

The dog-watches, and, after they had gained the fine weather, the early hours of the first watch, were their hours of communion. They eagerly discussed books, plays, dreams, the sea, their quest, and themselves. They called each other by their first names, in comradely fashion. Oftentimes Little Billy joined them and enlivened the session with his pungent remarks, or, on the fine evenings, treated them with wonderful, melting songs.

Martin had the uneasy feeling that Little Billy, of all the men on the ship, divined his passion for Ruth. He seemed to feel, also, that Little Billy was, in a sense, a rival; with a lover's insight, he read the dumb adoration in the hunchback's eyes whenever the latter looked at, or spoke of, the mate.

But, of course, Ruth knew what was in Martin's mind and heart. Trust a daughter of Eve to read the light in a man's eyes, be she ever so unpractised by experience. It is her heritage. Nor did Martin attempt concealment of his love for very long. A dashing onslaught was Martin's nature.

Ruth teased him and deftly parried his crude attempts to make the grand passion the sole topic of their chats. She would hold him at arm's length, and then for a swift moment drop her guard. It would be but a trifle—a fugitive touching of shoulders, perhaps—but it would shake Martin to his soul.

She would hold their talk to commonplaces, and then, as their hour ended, would transfix him with a fleeting glance that seemed to bear more than a message of friendship, and he would stand looking after her, weak and gasping, with thumping heart.

One evening they stood together on the fore-castle head, watching the setting sun. Sky and

sea, to the west, were ablaze for a brief space with ever-changing gorgeous colors. The sheer beauty of the scene, added to the disturbing nearness of his heart's wish, forced Martin's rose-tinted thoughts to speech.

"I see our future there, Ruth," he said, pointing to the rioting sunset colors. "See—that golden, castle-shaped cloud! We shall live there. Those orange-and-purple billows surrounding are our broad meadows. It is the country we are bound for, the land of happiness, and its name is \_\_\_"

"Its name is 'dreamland'!" finished Ruth, with a light laugh. "And never will you arrive at your voyage's end, friend Martin, for 'dreamland' is always over the horizon."

She looked directly into Martin's eyes; the brief dusk was upon them, and her face was a soft, wavering outline, but her eyes were aglow with the gleam that set Martin's blood afire. Her eyes seemed to bear a message from the Ruth that lived below the surface Ruth—from the newly stirring woman beneath the girlish breast.

It was a challenge, that brief glance. It made Martin catch his breath. He choked upon the words that tried tumultuously to burst from his lips.

"Oh, Ruth, let me tell you—" he commenced.

Her laugh interrupted him again, and the eyes he looked into were again the merry, teasing eyes of his comrade. With her next words she wilfully misunderstood him and his allusion concerning the sunset.

"Indeed, Martin, that cloud the sunset lightened is shaped nothing like Fire Mountain, which is a very gloomy looking place, and one I should not like to take up residence in. And no bright meadows surround it—only the gray, foggy sea. Hardly a land of happiness. Though, indeed, if we salvage that treasure, we will have the means, each of us, to buy the happiness money provides."

"Confound Fire Mountain and its treasure!" exclaimed Martin. "You know I didn't mean that, Ruth! I was talking figuratively, poetically, the way Little Billy talks. I meant just you and I, and that sunset was the symbol of our love."

But he was talking to the air. Ruth was speeding aft, her light laughter rippling behind her.

Another night, when the brig was near the southern limit of her long traverse, they stood in the shadow, at the break of the poop, and together scanned the splendid sky. Ruth was the teacher; she knew each blazing constellation, and she pointed them out for Martin's benefit. But Martin, it must be admitted, was more interested by the pure profile revealed by a slanting moonbeam than by the details of astronomy and his mumbled, half-conscious replies revealed his inattention.

After a while, she gave over the lesson, and they stood silent, side by side, leaning on the rail, captivated by the witchery of the tropic night.

The heavens were packed with the big, blazing stars of the low latitudes, and the round moon, low on the horizon, cut the dark, quiet sea with a wide path of silver light. Aloft, the steady breeze hummed softly; and the ship broke her way through the water with a low, even purr, and the sea curled away from the forefoot like an undulating silver serpent. The wake was a lane of moonlight, barred by golden streaks of phosphorescence.

On the ship, the decks were a patchwork of bright, eerie light and black shadow. The bellying sails and the woof of cordage aloft, seemed unsubstantial, like a gossamer weaving. The quiet ship noises, and the subdued murmur of voices from forward seemed unreal, uncanny.

The unearthly beauty of the night touched strange fancies to life in Martin's mind—he was on a phantom ship, sailing on an unreal sea. The desirable, disturbing presence so close to his side enhanced his agitation.

His shoulder touched her shoulder, and he could feel the gentle rise and fall of her breast, as she breathed. The bodily contact made his head swim. When she raised her head to stare at the sky, a fugitive moonbeam caressed her face and touched her briefly with a wondrous beauty. Her curved, parted lips were almost within reach of his own at such instants; he had but to bend swiftly forward! Martin was all atremble at the daring thought, and he clutched the rail to steady himself.

Behind them, a golden voice suddenly commenced to sing an age-old song of love, "Annie Laurie."

Softly the hunchback sang; his voice seemed to melt into and become one with the hum of the breeze aloft and the snore of the forefoot thrusting apart the waters. It seemed to Martin that the whole world was singing, singing of love. His heart thumped, his breath came quickly, pin-points of light swam before his eyes.

The girl trembled against his shoulder. Martin leaned eagerly forward, and their eyes met.



They both stiffened at that electric contact. His eyes were ablaze with passion, purposeful, masterful; and in her eyes he again glimpsed the fresh-awakened woman, beckoning, elusive, fearful. For a brief instant they stared at each other, man and woman, souls bared. But that blinding moment seemed to Martin to encompass eternity. The songster's liquid notes fell about them, and they were enthralled.

The song ended. Quite without conscious movement, Martin put his arms about Ruth and drew her into a close embrace. He pressed his hot lips to hers, and with a thrill so keen it felt like a stab, he realized her lips returned the pressure.

It lasted but a second, this heaven. The girl burst backward out of his embrace. Martin's arms fell to his sides, nerveless, and he stood panting, tongue-tied with emotion. Nor did he have the chance to master himself and speak the words he wished, for Ruth, with a half sob, half laugh, turned and sped across the deck, and through the open alleyway door, into the cabin.

The next watch Ruth stood upon her dignity, and her manner was unusually haughty toward her slave. And the next day, in the dog-watch, he discovered that the old comradeship was fled. She was shy and silent, and she listened to his stammered apology with averted eyes and pink ears.

When Martin attempted to supplement his apology with ardent words, she fled straightway. And never again during the passage did Martin find an opportunity to avow his love. He discovered that somehow Little Billy, or the boatswain, or Captain Dabney was always present at their talks. Her elusiveness made him very wretched at times. But then, occasionally, he would surprise her looking at him, and the light in her eyes would send him to the seventh heaven of delight.

There came the day when the little vessel reached the southern point of the great arc she was sailing across the Pacific. Martin came on deck to find the bows turned northward, toward the Bering, and the yards braced sharp to catch the slant from the dying trades.

The *Cohasset* raced northward, though not as swiftly as she had raced southward. The winds were light, though generally fair, and the brig made the most of them.

The weather grew steadily cooler; the brilliant tropics were left behind, and they entered the gray wastes of the North Pacific. Forward and aft were smiling faces and optimistic prophecies, for the ship was making a record passage. The captain's original estimate of seventy days between departure and landfall was steadily pared by the hopeful ones. The boatswain, especially, was delighted.

"Seventy days! Huh!" he declared. "Why, swiggle me stiff, we'll take the days off that, or my name ain't Tom 'Enery! 'Ere we are, forty-one days out, an' already we're in sight o' ice, an' runnin' free over the nawstiest bit o' water between 'ere an' the 'Orn! It'll be Bering Sea afore the week out, lad! And afore another week, we'll 'ave fetched the bloody wolcano and got away again with that grease! Bob Carew? Huh—the *Dawn* may 'ave the 'eels of us—though, swiggle me, what with my moons'il, an' that balloon jib, I'd want a tryout afore admitting it final—but it ain't on the cards that Carew 'as 'ad our luck with the winds. 'E's somewhere a week or two astern o' us, I bet. We'll 'ave the bleedin' swag, an' be 'alf way 'ome, before 'e lifts Fire Mountain—if he does know where the bloomin' place is!

"Ow, lad, just think o' all that money in a lump o' ruddy grease! Ow, what a snorkin' fine time I'll 'ave, when we get back to Frisco! 'Am an' eggs, an' a bottle o' wine every bloomin' meal for a week! Regular toff, I'll be, swiggle me—with one of them fancy girls adancin', and one o' them longhaired blokes afiddlin' while I scoffs!"

Only old Sails declined to be heartened by bright expectations. He wagged his gray head solemnly.

"The passage is no made till we are standing off yon Island," he warned Martin. "Aye, well I remember the smoking mountain. Didna' that big, red loon aft split a new t'gan'-s'il the very next day, wi' his crazy carrying on of sail? Aye, I mind the place—a drear place, lad, wi' an evil face. I dinna like to see the lassie gang ashore there, for all the siller ye say the stuff is worth, an' I ken well she'll be in the first boat. 'Tis a wicked place, the fire mount, and I ha' dreamed thrice o' the feyed. Nay, I'll tell ye no more, lad. But do you give no mind to yon talk o' Bob Carew being left behind. He is the de'il's son, and the old boy helps his own. But keep ye a sharp eye on the lass."

No more than this half mystical jargon could Martin extract from the dour Scot. MacLean would shake his head and mumble that feydom brooded over the brig and hint darkly of battle and bloodshed.

That night, in the privacy of their berth, Martin mentioned MacLean's dismal croakings to Little Billy. He was minded to jest about the pessimist, but, to his great surprise, the hunchback listened to his recountal with a very grave face. But after a moment Little Billy's smile returned, and he explained.

"Sails is a Highland Scot," he told Martin. "Of course he is superstitious, as well as a constitutional croaker. He claims to be a seventh son, or something like that, and to be able to foretell death. When he speaks of a 'feyed' man, he means one over whom he sees hovering the shadow of death. He didn't say who was feyed, did he?"

"No, he wouldn't talk further," answered Martin. "What bosh!"

"Yes, of course," assented Little Billy. "You and I, with our minds freed of superstition, may laugh—but Sails, I think, believes in his visions. And, to tell you the truth, your words gave me something of a start at first. I have known MacLean a long time, you know. Last voyage, he told me one day that Lomai, a Fiji boy, was feyed, and that very night Lomai fell from the royal yard and was smashed to death on the deck. And once before that, before I became one of the happy family, he foretold a death to the captain. I am glad you told me about this. He didn't mention a name?"

"No. Just said he had dreamed three times of the feyed," said Martin, impressed in spite of himself.

"I'll speak to him, myself," went on Little Billy. "Won't do any good, though. He only tells one person of his foresight, and he has chosen you this time. But I wish—oh, what is wrong with us! Of course it is bosh! The old grumbler has indigestion from eating too much. I am going to read awhile, Martin, if the light won't bother you. Don't feel sleepy."

The hunchback clambered into his upper bunk and composed himself, book in hand. Martin finished his disrobing and rolled into his bunk, beneath the other. He was tired, but he didn't go to sleep directly. His mind was busy. Not with thoughts of Sails and his ghostly warning—Martin had not been long enough at sea to be tinged with the sailor's inevitable superstition, and he was stanchly skeptical of supernatural warnings. Martin lay awake thinking of the deformed little man, ostensibly reading, a few feet above him.

For some nights, now, the hunchback had read late of nights, because he "didn't feel sleepy." Daily, Little Billy's lean face grew more lined and aged; in the past week his appearance had taken on a half-score years. He still retained his smile, but it was even wan at times. In his eyes lurked misery. Martin knew that the books he took to bed were mainly a subterfuge to enable Little Billy to keep the light burning. For Little Billy was waging a battle with his ancient enemy, and he had grown afraid of the dark.

A week before, he had abruptly said to Martin:

"I gave the key of the medicine-chest to Ruth today. I won't be able to get at *that* booze, anyway." To Martin's startled look, he added: "I want you to know, so you won't be surprised by the capers I am liable to cut for a while. You see, I am dancing to old Fiddler Booze's tune. I want to go on a drunk—every part of me craves alcohol. And I am determined to keep sober."

"Oh, it is nothing to startle you, Martin. I never get violent. Only, I'll be in plain hell for a couple of weeks. Then the craving will go away, to return at ever shorter intervals, until I do get ashore on a good bust. No, I'll keep sober till I reach shore again—whatever comes. No raiding the bosun's locker for shellac or wood-alcohol this voyage."

"Good Lord, you wouldn't do that!" exclaimed Martin.

"Oh, yes—I did it once," confessed Little Billy easily. "Indeed, a swig of shellac punch is drink for the gods; my very soul writhes now at the thought of it. But, I'll admit, the wood-alcohol beverage conceals complications. It was the captain, and his little stomach-pump, that brought me to that time. But no more of such frolicking on board ship. That episode occurred during my first year with Captain Dabney. Never since have I succumbed to the craving while at sea. Oh, I'll be all right this time—only don't be startled if you hear me talking to myself, or roaming about in the middle of the night."

That was all that passed between them. But during the days following Martin's eyes often rested on the other with curiosity and sympathy. It was a new experience for Martin, to be room-mated with a dipsomaniac, and besides Little Billy had grown to be a very dear friend, indeed. Everybody on the ship loved the sunny hunchback.

Little Billy's happy face grew bleak, and many fine lines appeared about the corners of his eyes and mouth. He was suffering keenly, Martin knew. Even now, he could hear the uneasy, labored breathing of the man in the bunk above.

It was a strange, changeable, eager face, Little Billy had. It seemed to vary in age according to the hunchback's mood; these days he looked forty, but Martin had seen him appear a youthful twenty during an exceptionally happy moment. Actually, Martin learned during the passage, Little Billy Corcoran's age was thirty-one.

He learned, moreover, that Little Billy was the son, and sole surviving relative, of Judge Corcoran, a famous California politician in his day. Judge Corcoran had been a noted "good fellow" and a famous man with the bottle. And his son was a hunchback and a dipsomaniac. Little Billy was blessed with a fine mind, and he had taken his degree at Yale, but throughout his hectic

life the thirst he was born with proved his undoing.

"I am an oddity among a nation of self-made men," Little Billy once told Martin. "They all commenced at the bottom and ascended fortune's ladder, whereas I started at the top and descended. And what a descent! I hit every rung of that ladder with a heavy bump, and jarred Old Lady Grundy every time. I was the crying scandal, the horrible example, of my native heath. That old rogue, my father, used to boast that he never got drunk—I used to boast that I never got sober. Finally, I bumped my last bump and found myself at the bottom. And there I stayed, until Captain Dabney, and the dear girl, pulled me out of the mire."

Almost literally true, this last, for Martin learned that five years before, Captain Dabney had salvaged Little Billy off the beach at Suva, a dreadful scarecrow of a man, and Ruth's nursing, and the clean sea life, had built a new William Corcoran. But the appetite for the drink was uneradicable, and the genial hunchback's life was a series of losing battles with his hereditary curse.

But the boatswain was proved a poor prophet. Not that week, nor the next, did they reach Fire Mountain. The *Cohasset* crossed the path of the Orient mail-packets, the great circle sailers, and they entered their last stretch of Pacific sailing, above the forty-eighth parallel.

Captain Dabney's objective was the little-used gateway to the Bering that lies between Copper Island and the outlying Aleuts. They sailed upon a wild and desolate waste of leaden sea; a sea shrouded frequently with fog, and plentifully populated with those shipmen's horrors, foot-loose icebergs. And their fair sailing abruptly terminated.

It began in the space of a watch. The glass tumbled, the wind hauled around to foul, and it began to blow viciously. For days they rode hove to.

That was but the beginning. For weeks, they obtained only an occasional favorable slant of wind, and these, as often as not, in the shape of short, sharp gales. They made the most of them; the blind man on the poop coached cannily, and Ruth and the boatswain carried on to the limit.

Martin, once again, as in the days leaving San Francisco, saw the smother of canvas fill the decks with water. But such sailing was rare, and of short duration. Always, succeeding, came the heavy slap in the face from the fierce wind god of the North.

Martin labored mightily, in company with his fellows, it being a constant round of "reef, shake out, and come about." The days were sharp, and the nights bitter cold—though, as they won northward, and the season advanced, the days grew steadily longer.

Went glimmering, as the weeks passed, the high hopes of a record passage. Disappeared, also, the assurance of recovering the treasure. The shadow of Wild Bob Carew fell between them and their destination.

When one day the capricious wind drove them fairly past Copper Island, and they plunged into the foggy, ill-charted reaches of the Bering, their jubilation was tempered with a note of pessimism. They debated, in the *Cohasset's* cabin, whether the adventurer of the *Dawn* had been beforehand; and Captain Dabney discussed his plans for proceeding on to the Kamchatka coast for trading in case they discovered Fire Mountain to be despoiled.

The situation, it seemed to Martin, resolved itself to this: If Carew knew the latitude and longitude of the smoking mountain—and being familiar with the Bering Sea, all hands admitted that he might well know it—the ambergris was most certainly lost to them, unless, as was most unlikely, the *Dawn* had had even worse luck with the weather than the *Cohasset*. But if Carew did not know Fire Mountain's location, they had a chance, though Carew was probably cruising adjacent waters, on the lookout for them—and if they encountered him, they might prepare to resist a piracy.

Martin, in truth, had a secret hope that they might encounter Carew's schooner. He had a healthy lust for trouble and a scorn bred of ignorance for the Japanese crew of the *Dawn*. He harbored a grudge against the *Dawn's* redoubtable skipper. Ruth was the kernel of that grudge.

And, oddly enough, he had a queer companion also wishing they might be compelled to battle the Japanese. It was none other than Charley Bo Yip, the cook.

Yip hated the Japanese with a furious hatred, if the garbled words that dropped from his smiling lips were to be believed. He hated them individually and nationally. And he sharpened, ostentatiously, a meat-cleaver, and proclaimed his intention of procuring a Jap's head as a trophy, should they have trouble.

"Me China boy, all same Melican," he told Martin, as he industriously turned the grindstone beneath the cleaver's edge. "Me like all same lepublic—me fight like devil all same time when China war. Now Jap he come take China. No good. Me kill um Jap. Velly good. All same chop um head, chop, chop!"

And Yip waved his cleaver over his head, and a seraphic smile lighted his bland, unwarlike face.

At last, on the sixty-eighth day of the passage, Martin came on deck for the morning watch and found the vessel bouncing along under unaccustomed blue skies, and with a fair breeze. The boatswain went below, swigging himself very stiff with the fervent hope that no bleeding Jonah would interrupt the course before the next eight bells, and Ruth took up an expectant watch with the glasses handy. Captain Dabney also kept the deck. Martin knew the landfall was expected.

At the middle of the watch, a squall sent Martin racing aloft to furl the royal. It was then that his sea-sharpened sight raised the land.

His hail to the deck aroused the ship. By the time he had finished his descent from aloft, all hands were at the rail, endeavoring each to pick up the distant speck.

Four bells had gone while he was aloft, and he strode aft to take his wheel. As he passed along the poop, he heard Ruth say—

"If the breeze holds, we'll be inside in a couple of hours."

Captain Dabney turned his old, sea-wise face to the wind. After a moment, he shook his head.

"I feel fog," he said.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FIRE MOUNTAIN

Within the hour, Captain Dabney's words bore fruit. The spanking ten-knot breeze dropped abruptly to a gentle four-knot power. Then in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, the fog enveloped them.

Martin, at the wheel, was straining his eyes, trying to make out the land ahead that he had seen from aloft. Abruptly before his eyes rose a wall of opaque gray.

It was a typical Smoky Sea fog, a wet, dense, Bering blanket. From his station near the stern, Martin could not see the rail at the break of the poop, could hardly, indeed, discern objects a dozen paces distant. Familiar figures, entering his circle of vision, loomed gigantic and grotesque. The *Cohasset* sailed over a ghostly sea, whose quiet was broken only by the harsh squawking of sea-birds flying high overhead.

Of recent weeks, Martin had become accustomed to fog. But there was about this fog a peculiarity foreign to his experience, though he had been informed during the cabin talks of the frequent occurrence of this particular brand of mist in these waters. For, though Martin, standing on deck, was surrounded by an impervious wall of fog that pressed upon him, though he could not see the water overside or forward for a quarter of the little vessel's length, yet he could bend back his head and see quite plainly the round ball of the sun glowing dully through the whitening mist overhead.

He understood the wherefor. The fog was a low-lying bank, and thirty feet or so above his head it ended. He could not, from the wheel, distinguish the upper hamper, but he knew the topmasts were free of the mist that shrouded the deck. Presently, from overhead, and ghostily piercing the gray veil, came Ruth's clear hail. She ordered him to shift the course a couple of points. So he knew his officer was aloft, up there in the sunshine, in a position that enabled her to direct their course.

In such a fashion, creeping through the fog, the *Cohasset* came at last to Fire Mountain. The fog delayed, but did not daunt, the mariners of the happy family.

After the hurried noon meal, Ruth returned to her station aloft and resumed conning the vessel by remembered landmarks on the mountain's face. On deck, Martin, in company with his fellows, labored under the boatswain's lurid driving to prepare the ship for anchoring. They cockbilled the great hooks, overhauled the cables, and coiled down running braces and halyards; for, said the captain, attending upon their bustle with his abnormally sharp ears:

"It's a wide breach in the reef that makes the cove, and the water is deep right up to the beach. The lass should have no trouble conning us in, for she has a clean view aloft. But just have everything ready for quick work, bosun, in case we get into trouble."

Hence it was that Martin, a-tingle though he was with curiosity, found no opportunity to run aloft into the sunshine and view the place he had talked and dreamed so much about. Other men

went aloft on ship's work, but Martin's duty kept him racing about the wet decks.

The fog pressed closer upon them as the day advanced, it seemed to Martin. It required an effort of his imagination to admit that a few feet above him the sun shone.

The ship seemed to be crawling blindly about in a limitless void. Anon would come Ruth's cheering and mellow halloo, cleaving sweetly through the drab enveloping blanket, and seeming to Martin's eager ears to be a good fairy's voice from another world.

The screaming of the sea-birds grew in volume—but not a wing did Martin spy. The air appeared to take on an irritating taint; the fog tasted smoky.

Added to other sounds, slowly grew a great surging rumble. Aided by Ruth's calls, Martin knew he heard the sea beating against the reef that encircled the mountain; but he saw nothing overside but that dead gray wall.

The upper canvas was clewed up and left hanging, and the brig's slow pace became perceptibly slower.

A boat was lowered, and Little Billy was pulled into the void ahead; and directly his musical chant came back, as he sounded their path with the lead.

The surging thunder came from both sides, and Martin knew they were entering the haven. The voices of Ruth and Little Billy brought echoes from the giant sounding-board ahead.

A sharp command from Captain Dabney, a moment's rush of work to the accompaniment of a deal of fiery swiggling on the boatswain's part, the ship lost way and rounded up, the anchor dropped with a dull *plub*, the chain roared through the hawse-pipe and brought a vastly multiplied echoing roar from the invisible cliffs, and there was a sudden, myriad-voiced screeching from the startled birds. Succeeded an ominous, oppressive quiet, broken only by the dull thunder of the surf.

Martin drew a long breath and stared at the blank, impervious void about him.

"So this," he thought whimsically, "is the terrible Fire Mountain!" He was excitedly happy.

A few moments later, when he went aloft to furl sail, he saw the shore, this unmarked, unknown rock that had filled his thoughts for months.

It was a sudden and eery transition as he mounted the rigging, from gray night to sunshine in the space of a few ratlines. On the foretopgallant-yard he was above the fog, the very roof of the bank lying a dozen feet below. The decks were concealed from him.

Overhead, the sky was blue and the gulls drove past and circled about in white screaming clouds. Before him, and on either side, not five hundred yards distant, loomed the mountain.

Martin stared intently and curiously, and, despite himself, that bleak and desolate outlook sobered the gaiety of his mood. On three sides the rock reared skyward, bare and black, with never a hint of vegetation.

The mountain formed a rough cone; some two thousand feet overhead was the summit, and over it hovered a cloud of white steam vapor, and a twisting column of curiously yellow-brown smoke that trailed away lazily on a light wind. Martin, staring at it, decided that the air he breathed did have an alien, a sulphurous taint.

There were no raw fissures about the crater edge, and no evidence beyond the rather thin volume of smoke that the volcano contained life. Yet Martin seemed to hear, above the thunder of the surf in the fog beneath him, a distant, ominous rumbling, as if the slumbering Vulcan of the mountain were snoring in his sleep.

But it was the mountainside that longest held Martin's fascinated gaze. For, in her fiery past, the volcano had clad her flanks with black lava that was now molded into a vast chaos of fantastic architecture and sculptures. It was as if an army of crazy artists had here expended their lunatic energies.

He saw huge, round towers, leaning all awry; a vast pile fashioned like a church front, with twin steeples canting drunkenly; the tremendous columns the captain had told him of; jutting masses that hinted in their half-formed outlines of gigantic, crouching beasts. And everywhere in that weird field of shapes were the openings of caves—dark blots in the black stone.

The mountain was truly a sponge-like labyrinth, Martin perceived. He could not see the strip of beach, however, or the cavern mouth, shaped like an elephant's head, of the whaleman's log. The fog hid them from view.

But what he did see was sufficient. It was an evil landscape. It loomed black and forbidding against the background of blue sky, and the sun failed to lighten the aspect. It threatened. The stark desolateness of the place was enhanced by the wild cawing of the gulls and the mournful booming of the sea upon the reef.

Martin was depressed, as by a foreboding of ill fortune. He turned to Rimoa, who was on the yard-arm with him, and spoke with forced lightness—

"A cheerful-looking place, eh, Rimoa?"

The Maori shuddered, and there was fear in his eyes.

"No like!" he said. "This place bad, bad, bad!"

Then, as they bent to their work, the fog-bank suddenly lifted, enveloped them, and hid the black mountain from view.

## CHAPTER XIV

### OUT OF THE FOG

"No, we'll not go ashore tonight," stated Captain Dabney at supper. "We would only lose ourselves blundering about in this fog. If the stuff is still there, it will keep until tomorrow. In the morning we'll have a try, whether the fog has lifted or not."

"We'll find the junk unless Wild Bob and Ichi have beaten us to it," said Little Billy. "Hope they are not snugged close by behind this blooming curtain."

"No danger of that," answered Ruth. "If the *Dawn* had been anywhere near us, I would have raised her topmasts above the bank. I didn't, so she is neither outside nor inside. They have either been here or gone, or they never arrived. In either case, I am thankful for Carew's absence. Shall we stand watch and watch tonight, captain?"

"Hardly necessary," said the captain. "Make it an anchor watch. Guess you'll welcome a couple of extra hours in your bunks. Let's see, Martin, you stand watch with the afterguard; that will make four of you—Ruth, Bosun, Little Billy, and Martin. Have the fo'c's'le stand watch in batches of two. Make Chips and Sails—they have been farmers the passage—stand watch and watch. That will make four hands on deck at a time—plenty for any sudden emergency. But if the fog lifts during the night, rouse the ship at once and we'll set off for the beach. Got your directions ready, Billy?"

"Yes, in my pocket," said the hunchback. "But I venture that we all know them by heart."

"If the fog lifts, wind may follow," added the captain. "If it breezes up from the south we may have to hike out of here in a hurry. How much chain is out? Forty-five? Well, have the bosun clap the devil's claw on ahead of the shackle, and loosen the pin, in case we have to drop the cable. And—all hands at four o'clock."

In the lottery that presently followed, Martin drew the watch from two to four in the morning. Little Billy's paper called for from twelve to two. Ruth and the boatswain divided the first four hours.

Before he turned in, Martin went forward to discover which of the forecastle hands would share his vigil. When he came abreast the galley door, where a beam of light shining out lighted dimly a small patch of the pervading, foggy murk, he encountered Sails.

MacLean was standing in the light, bitterly recounting his troubles to the cheerfully grinning Charley Bo Yip. Martin paused, and was promptly aware that Sails had transferred his flow of words to the newcomer, as being a better audience than the unresponsive Chinaman.

Martin gathered that Sails was to stand the middle watch, and that he was aggrieved that the best blood of Scotland had been bested in a game of chance by a blanked squarehead ship's carpenter, who had, it seemed, won the right to stand the earlier watch. And, in any case, it was sacrilege to violate the night's rest of a MacLean. And a sailmaker was a dash-blanked tradesman and should never be blankety well asked to stand a watch under any dashed circumstances! So quoth Sails.

Martin commiserated with the other.

"You'll be on watch with me, Sails," he concluded. "I have the two to four. Little Billy has the earlier half of the watch."

"Little Billy!" echoed Sails. "Did ye say Little Billy, lad?" His belligerent voice dropped to a hoarse whisper. "*Och*, lad—Little Billy?"

"Why, yes. What is wrong with that?" answered Martin.

Suddenly Sails raised an arm and shook a clenched fist at the mountain that brooded invisible behind the fog curtain.

"*Och*, ye black de'il's kirk!" he declaimed. "Ye blood-sucker! The MacLean's curse on ye!"

He stood in relief against the muddy background, his features dimly lighted by the ray from the galley lamp, wisps of fog eddying about his gray head and beard, his features wild and passion-working. And he cursed the Fire Mountain. It was unreal, unearthly, a scene from another age. But Martin felt a superstitious thrill.

"Great Scott! What is the matter?" he cried, startled.

MacLean lowered his arm, and his shoulders slumped despondently. He mumbled to himself. Then, in answer to Martin, he said:

"Little Billy—*och*, 'tis Little Billy, dear Billy! 'Tis feydom, lad!" And he turned abruptly, strode forward, and was lost in the fog.

When Martin reached aft again, he intended to tell Little Billy about MacLean's strange behavior. He found the hunchback restlessly pacing the tiny floor space of their common room. Little Billy lifted a haggard face as Martin entered.

"Hello, Martin," he said. "I was waiting up for you. Here—keep these for me, will you?" He extended a bunch of keys. "I'm feeling extra dry tonight, and I don't want to be tempted by knowing I have the key to the medicine-chest in my pocket. Whenever I pass that confounded box, I think of the two quarts of booze inside, and my tongue swells. Just keep the keys till tomorrow, will you? Ruth kept them for me when I had my last big thirst, a few weeks ago—remember? But I would rather you kept them this time. I don't want her to know I'm having a hard time. She makes such a fuss over me, stuffs me with pills, and makes me drink that vile sassafras tea."

Martin dropped the bunch of keys into his trousers pocket. He regarded Little Billy with sympathy. For the past few days, the hunchback had again been engaged in a bout with his ancient enemy. Little Billy was fighting manfully, but the strain was telling, aging his mobile face, making rare his sunny smile and whimsical banter. Martin keenly felt the other's suffering, for he had learned to love the little cripple.

"Cheer up, Billy!" he said. "A better day coming."

"Oh, sure! Don't worry about me," responded Little Billy. "Turn in and get your sleep. I'm for the bunk, too—but I guess I'll read a bit before I turn the lamp down. Lord, don't I wish I owned a saloon! Well, tomorrow we'll find the ambergris, and I'll have money enough to drink myself peacefully to death—providing that devil, Carew, hasn't been before us to this cheerful spot. Good night."

Clambering into his bunk, the little man composed himself to a pretense of reading.

Martin decided he would not trouble Little Billy with a recital of MacLean's outburst. The poor fellow's mind was feverish enough without being bothered with the old Scotchman's wild, nonsensical raving. Martin knew the hunchback would consider gravely, and be disturbed, if he spoke. Little Billy apparently had some faith in Sails' mystical foresight.

In truth, Martin himself, was impressed and oppressed by the Scot's obscure hints of evil to come—they fitted so well with the wild and gloomy face of the volcano and the depressing fog. Martin was half ashamed of his dread of something he could not name; but he turned in standing, removing only his shoes and loosening his belt, before crawling into his bunk and drawing the blankets over him.

A strange hand grasping his shoulder brought Martin out of deep sleep to instant consciousness. The light still burned in the room, and his opening eyes first rested on the tin clock hanging on the wall opposite. It was one o'clock.

The hand that shook him belonged to MacLean. The old man was bending over him with the white face of one who has seen a ghost.

"He's gone!" he softly exclaimed, before Martin could frame a question.

Startled, Martin sat up and swung his legs outboard.

"What—Little Billy?" A glance showed him the upper bunk was empty.

"Aye—Billy," responded Sails. "*Och*, 'tis a bad night outdoors, lad—a thick, dark night. And Billy's gone. Didna' I see him in the dark, and wearing the black shroud, these months ago! He was feyed! Yon mount is the de'il's home, and others——"

"What are you talking about?" interrupted Martin impatiently. "What nonsense! Isn't Little Billy on deck? Isn't he on watch?"

"On watch? Aye, who kens where he watches now? He's gone, I tell ye!" hissed the old man fiercely. And then, apparently observing Martin's bewilderment, he went on: "He has disappeared from deck. *Och*, I can no say how! The Powers o' Darkness can no be seen through, and he was under the black shroud! I saw him at one bell when he came for'rd and routed me oot the galley where I was taking a wee spell.

"*Och*, 'tis a black, bad night the night. Ye canna' see your hand afore ye. And Billy went aft, and I leaned on the rail, and listened—listened, for I couldna' see. And I heard *It!* Aye, I kenned 'twas *It*, for 'twas no the soond o' the waves, nor the calling o' the birds, nor the splash o' anything that lives in the sea. I kenned it was *It*. Hadna' I seen the shroud? Soonded like an oar stroke. 'Twas the Prince o' Evil soonding his way, a-coming wi' his shroud. *Och!* I run aft to tell Billy, and I tell ye, lad, Little Billy was gone!"

MacLean leaned forward, grunting his words earnestly, his face working with superstitious fear.

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Martin. "You make me tired with your eternal 'fey' business. Little Billy is somewhere around the deck—probably seeking you, this minute."

"He's gone!" reiterated Sails. "I searched, I tell ye! I got my lantern, and I looked all about the poop, and all about the decks, clear for'rd, and I sang oot as loud as I could wi'oot rousing all hands—and no hide or hair o' Billy could I find. *Och*, he's gone, I tell ye, lad. Didna' I see him lying stark in the dark place, wi' the black shroud over him. The MacLeans ha' the sight, lad, and I am the seventh son."

"All right, all right! Don't chatter so loud, you'll awaken everybody," interrupted Martin. He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, and bent over and pulled on his shoes. "I'll go on deck with you, and of course Little Billy will give us the laugh."

But Martin was, in fact, a little bit impressed by the old sailmaker's earnest conviction. As he laced his shoes, a little superstitious thrill tingled along his spine at the thought of *It* plucking Little Billy from the deck and carrying him into the dark depths of the brooding mountain.

But that was nonsense, he immediately reflected, half angry with himself. By George! If he allowed that confounded volcano to affect him so, he would soon be as bad as old Sails! Still, he had better go on deck and take a look at Little Billy, and satisfy the old man. His watch was soon, anyway.

Martin was recalling the hunchback's nervousness a few hours previous; Little Billy was wrestling John Barleycorn. If he had disappeared as the sailmaker claimed, he had probably lost the bout and would be found in drunken sleep. There was whisky in the medicine-chest—no, he had the keys. Well, then the alcohol in the boatswain's locker.

"Was there anything unusual about Little Billy's manner when you saw him at one bell?" he asked MacLean.

"No, lad. I ken your thought," replied the other. "He'd no had a drop, though he was jumpy as a cat."

Martin was taken aback by Sails' shrewd guess. He tiptoed to the door.

"Come on," he whispered to Sails. "Don't make any noise. We don't want to disturb the others until we make sure Little Billy isn't on the job."

They stepped into the cabin, and Martin's first glance was toward the medicine-chest. It had not been disturbed. They went forward, through the cabin alleyway, toward the main deck. The boatswain's room opened off here.

Martin opened the door, half expecting to see the hunchback chatting with his bosom friend. But the room was dark, and the red giant was sleeping noisily. Then they opened the door at the end of the alleyway and stepped out on deck, Martin softly closing the door behind him.

Abruptly, Martin found himself isolated in a sea of murk. At that hour, the sun had dipped for its brief concealment beneath the horizon, and the fog, which had been a gray-brown curtain in daylight, was now an all-enshrouding cloak of blackness that rendered eyesight useless.

Literally, Martin could not see his hand before his face. Nor could he see the door to the cabin alleyway, that he had just closed, though he had stepped but a couple of paces away from it. Nor could he see Sails, though the latter stood but an arm's length distant. Sails's hoarse whisper came through the gloom:

"Ye see the night, lad? *Och*, 'tis a night for evil!"

Martin shivered at the sound of Sails' dismal croaking. See the night! He could see nothing. The other's voice came out of an impenetrable void. Above him, beneath him, all about him, was nothing but blackness, thick, clinging gloom. The Stygian, fog-filled night crushed, like a heavy,



intangible weight; one choked for breath.

Martin felt like an atom lost in back immensity. He wanted to shout at the top of his voice. But what he did do was lift his voice gently, so the words would not arouse the sleepers in the cabin.

"Little Billy! Billy!" he called.

His call was swallowed up, smothered, by the night. He strained his ears. But the only answer was the eery cry of a night-flying gull and the deep moaning of the sea upon the rocks—that and the hoarse, uneasy breathing of the invisible MacLean.

Martin was more than disturbed by that silence.

"Sails, who are the foc'sle hands who have this watch?" he said.

"Rimoa and Oomak," came MacLean's voice. "They were for'rd when I came aft for you."

Martin called again, along the decks.

"Rimoa! Oomak! For'rd there—speak up!"

The wailing voices of the night replied; not a word, not a footfall came out of the gloom to tell of stirring human life.

"Good Lord, they must all be asleep!" exclaimed Martin testily. "Sails, where is that lantern you spoke of?"

"In the galley—I left it there," answered the sailmaker. "I will go fetch it."

He heard MacLean's retreating footsteps, uncertain and uneven, as the man felt his way forward. The diminishing sounds affected him strangely; he was suddenly like a little child affrighted by the dark. The sinister night contained a nameless threat. The black wall that encompassed him, flouting his straining gaze, seemed peopled by rustlings and leering eyes. Abruptly, Martin decided to follow MacLean, instead of waiting for him.

He stepped out in the other's wake, as he thought. After a blundering moment, he fetched up against the ship's rail. He tacked away and bumped into the after capstan, which stood in the middle of the deck. He barked his shins there and swore aloud to relieve his surcharged feelings.

Then his groping hand encountered a little object, lying on top of the capstan, that checked his words instantly. It was a well-known article, one he had handled often, and recognized immediately he touched it—it was Little Billy's rubber tobacco-pouch. He fingered it apprehensively, staring about him. Why was Little Billy's pouch abandoned there on the capstan-head, this pocket companion of an inveterate smoker? Why, Little Billy must be near by! He called excitedly:

"Billy! Billy! Where are you?"

The night took his hail and returned its own sphinx-like reply. Martin stuffed the pouch into his pocket. He was distinctly uneasy, now, on the hunchback's account. Something had happened, he felt—some accident had happened to Little Billy. It was not like Little Billy to thus forsake his beloved shag, his constant ally in his fight against the drink hunger. Had the poor devil succumbed after all? Had he deserted Nicotine for Barleycorn?

Martin leaned over the capstan, peering into that baffling gloom. He stiffened tensely. He seemed to hear whispering; it came out of that black pit before him, the very ghost of a man's voice.

He strained his ears, but the sound, if sound it were, was not repeated. He was impatient for MacLean to appear with the lantern, but he could no longer hear MacLean's footfalls. Then his ears caught another sound; it was peculiar, like the patter of bare feet.

"MacLean! Where are you?" he called sharply. "Hurry with that lantern!"

Instead of MacLean's voice in reply, he heard a heavy breathing, the sound of a man taking several long, sobbing breaths. The breathing ceased immediately, but a light patter followed it, and then the scrape of a shod foot across the deck. The sounds came from just ahead, close by, but he could see nothing. But he sensed some kind of a struggle was taking place on the deck.

He started forward, and then stopped dead. Out of the black void before him came MacLean's voice—strangled words in a horrible, ascending pitch:

"Marty! Marty! My God! Ah-h-h!"

There, was the thud of a heavy, falling body striking the deck.

For a second Martin was anchored by horror. Then he leaped forward, giving voice as he did

to a great, arousing, wordless bellow. And even as he ran blindly ahead those few paces, he heard a heavy voice give a shouted supplement to his call.

The darkness was suddenly alive with rushing feet. A body hurled itself against him, an arm struck a sweeping blow, and he felt the knife rip through his flannel shirt and graze his shoulder near his neck.

He went reeling backward, his foot tripped on a ring-bolt in the deck, and he fell heavily. His head struck with stunning force against a bulwark stanchion.

The collision scattered his wits, and Martin lay in the scuppers, blinking at the dancing lights before his eyes. In his ears was a great humming. Then, after a moment, the humming broke into parts and became a babel of shouts.

He heard a harsh chatter—voices crying out in a foreign tongue. He heard a great booming voice that stirred memory. He heard a pistol-shot. He heard Ruth's voice, raised in a sharp, terror-stricken cry:

"Martin—Billy—Martin! Oh, help!"

The scream galvanized Martin to action. *She* was calling him!

He struggled to arise, got upon his knees, reached upward and grasped a belaying-pin in the rail above. Clutching the pin, he drew himself erect.

He swayed drunkenly for a moment, still dizzied by his fall. The pandemonium of a moment ago was stilled. Ruth did not cry out again, but voices came from aft. The belaying-pin he grasped was loose in its hole and unencumbered by rope. Quite without reasoning, Martin drew it out, and, grasping it clublike, lurched aft.

Twice during his headlong flight toward the cabin, hands reached out of the darkness to stay him. And twice the stout, oaken club he wielded impacted against human skulls, and men dropped in their tracks.

Martin burst out of the gloom into the small half-circle of half light that came from the now open alleyway door. He rushed through, into the cabin.

He had time but for a glimpse of the scene in the cabin. One whirling glance that took in the scattered company—the bedraggled Japanese, Captain Dabney lying face down across the threshold of his room, his white hair bloodied, Wild Bob Carew lifting a startled face. And Carew was holding a squirming, fighting Ruth in his arms!

Martin hardly checked the stride of his entrance. He flung himself toward the man who held his woman, and his club cracked upon another skull.

A man hurtled against him and drove him against the wall. He saw Carew fall, and Ruth spill free of the encircling arms.

Then a hand took him by the throat, long, supple, muscular fingers stopping his wind. He saw a face upraised to his—an expressionless yellow face, with glittering, slanting eyes. He drew up his club for the blow. The slender fingers were probing upward, behind his jawbone, and he was choking.

Then, it seemed to Martin, a stream of liquid fire flooded his veins, searing his entire body. The belaying-pin dropped from his nerveless hand, his arms dropped, his knees sagged.

The terrible fingers squeezed tighter. He could feel his eyeballs starting, his tongue swelling. The flame consumed his vitals. It was hellish pain—quite the sharpest agony Martin had ever felt.

He was upon his back on the floor. The fingers were gone, but the awful pain continued. His wits were swimming. A pair of soft arms were about him. His reeling head was cushioned against a loved and fragrant breast; a dear voice spoke his name anxiously.

"Martin, Martin! What have they done? Oh, Martin, speak to me!" He tried to speak, but could not.

Then the loved presence was gone, and he was alone. A face bent over him!—a yellow face. It was a well-remembered face, the face of little Dr. Ichi. But what a towsled, bedraggled successor to the former dandy!

Ichi was smiling at him. It was all very strange to Martin, unreal, like the fancies of a delirium. A mist came before his eyes and blotted out the smiling face. But his senses left him with Ichi's courteously spoken words in his ears:

"Very, very sorry, Mr. Blake. You were of such roughness we were compelled to use the jujitsu!"

## CHAPTER XV

### IN THE LAZARET

It seemed to Martin he was wandering in a vast and thirsty desert. To the very core of his being he was dry. Drink! Drink! With his whole life he lusted drink. He waded through that parched world, burning up with thirst.

Despite his efforts, his mouth sagged open, and his tongue, swollen to prodigious size, burst through its proper limits and hung down upon his breast, broiling in the rays of the hot sun. To make the keener his thirst, there lay before him a delectable oasis, a patch of moist green, with playing fountains and rippling cascades plainly visible to his tortured gaze. He struggled toward it, and always, as he neared it, some malign influence clutched his wrists—which unaccountably stuck out behind him—and jerked him back.

For ages and ages he waded through the dry sand toward the water, and ever the Evil One who controlled his wrists kept him from attaining his desire. Water! Water! He was in agony for water. Water! Would he never reach that blessed water?

Then something cold, slimy, horrible, ran over his face, and the loathful thrill he felt shocked him into reality.

The desert vanished. He tried to move and sat up. He heard a frenzied squeaking, and a light scampering on wood, and he knew that a rat had run over his body.

All the sensations of consciousness assailed him abruptly. He heard the rats, and a deep rumble near by; he saw dimly in the darkness; he smelled of mingled odors of provisions; he felt thirst. Though he was out of the desert, he was still consumed with thirst.

He sat quietly for a moment while his confused thoughts gradually arrayed themselves in orderly fashion. He knew where he was instantly—the jumble of casks, and kegs, and boxes, that surrounded him, and which he could dimly perceive in the gloom, and the smell, told him he was in the ship's lazaret. How he came to be there was as yet concealed behind a haze that clouded his memory.

Next, he became aware that something was the matter with his arms. They ached cruelly. After a moment's experimenting and reflection the truth came to him with shocking force—his arms were drawn behind him, and his wrists were handcuffed together. The shock of that discovery dissipated the fog over his mind. He began to remember.

But while his wits groped, he was sharply conscious of his thirst. It blazed. His tongue felt like a piece of swollen leather. He felt pain. His throat was throbbing with pain. Water! Water was the pressing need, the most important thing in existence.

He tried to mouth his desire, to speak it aloud, and a weak and painful gurgle struggled outward from his throat.

There was a stir close by him, and a voice spoke up. Martin was then aware that the deep rumble he had been listening to was the sound of a man swearing deeply and softly. The man now spoke to him.

"Ow, lad, is that you? 'Ave you come to, Martin!"

Martin peered toward the voice, and saw a few feet ahead of him, beyond a circular stanchion, the shadowy outline of a man. He tried to speak, to say, "Bosun! Bosun!" But his misused throat and parched tongue refused to form the words. And with the other's voice came memory, complete and terrible. The past was arrayed before his mind's eye with a lightning flash of recollection. The dreadful present was clear to him in all its bitter truth.

He remembered the trip to the deck in search of Little Billy; the black, evil night, and MacLean's horrified outcry. He remembered the scene in the cabin, Captain Dabney lying inert on the floor, the hateful ring of yellow faces, and Carew—Carew clasping Ruth in his arms!

He remembered felling Carew, and being felled himself by the lethal clutch of the Japanese. He remembered Ichi, and even Ichi's words, "compelled to use the ju-jitsu." They had ju-jitsued him! That was what was wrong with his throat.

The sum of his memories was clear, and for the moment it crushed and terrified him. For it was evident that that which they had speculated upon as a remote almost impossible, contingency, had come to pass—the brig was in Carew's hands. They had been surprised in the fog, a piracy had occurred, murder had been done, and Wild Bob and his yellow followers had taken the ship.

He was a prisoner in the bowels of the ship, his hands chained behind his back, absolutely helpless. And Sails was dead! And Little Billy was dead! Captain Dabney was dead! The crew—God knew, perhaps—they were slaughtered too! And Ruth—Ruth was alive, in Carew's hands, at the mercy of the brute she so feared. Ruth was alive—to suffer what fate? And he—he who loved her—was chained and helpless.

Panic, rage, despair, shook Martin. In excess of misery, he groaned aloud, a smothered sob of anguish.

"Martin, lad! 'Ave you come around? You're sittin' up. Ow, swiggle me, lad, pipe up!"

The words came from the huddled figure behind the stanchion, in a husky beseeching rumble. The shadowy figure stirred, and Martin heard the sharp clink of steel striking against steel.

The words and the sound pierced his dread, and brought his thoughts back to the boatswain. He tried a second time to answer the other's hail, and managed to articulate in a hoarse mumble. The words tore barbed through his sore throat, and were hardly managed by his dry, swollen tongue.

"All right—bos—dry—come."

He got upon his knees and peered into the darkness about him. He was in a narrow passageway between two rows of ship's stores that fan fore and after the length of the lazaret. He was facing forward. Just behind him, on his right hand, a ladder ran up to the cabin overhead, but the trapdoor in the cabin floor was closed.

His scrutiny was aided as much by memory as by eyesight, for he had several times been in this chamber, breaking out stores. The passage he sat in, he knew, ran forward to the row of beef casks which abutted against the forward bulkhead. Midway was an intersecting, thwart-ship alleyway between the stores. At this point of intersection was the stanchion, behind which was the boatswain, a hulking black blot in the surrounding gloom.

He hunched himself along upon his knees, and reached the stanchion.

"Drink—dry—water," he gabbled painfully.

"Marty—Marty, lad, I'm glad you're 'ere!" came the heartfelt whisper from the boatswain. "I feared 'e 'ad choked the life out o' ye. Dry, ye say? So am I, lad. Cussed so much I can't spit—an' my back's bloomin' well busted from bending over 'ugging this stanchion!"

Martin, leaning against a tier of boxes, was able to see the boatswain more clearly. He could not make out the other's features plainly, but he almost rubbed against an arm and leg, and he saw that the big man was in his underwear. The boatswain was seated on the floor, and his arms and legs encircled the stanchion.

"I'd 'a' come to you, Marty, but the blighters 'ave me ironed, ironed 'and an' foot around this bloody stanchion! Ow, but it's a black business, lad! But can ye stand, Martin? 'Ave they ironed you, too?"

Martin desperately endeavored to swallow the dry lump in his throat.

"Behind back—hand," he managed to gulp out. "Throat bad—can't talk—dry——"

"Be'ind your back!" broke in the boatswain. "Ow —— blast the cruel devils! Be'ind your back —ironed be'ind your back! An' you lyin' on your arms these hours! That's cruel 'ard—'arder than me 'ugging this ruddy post. Throat bad? I know—I seen them giving you the squeeze. Ju-jitsu—swiggle me if it wasn't! But can ye stand, Martin? 'Ave you the use o' your legs? Because, them boxes you're leanin' against are canned goods, tomatoes an' such, and——"

But Martin heard no more. He had struggled to his feet, and begun to investigate. For the boatswain's remark concerning canned goods had brought two memories to his mind. One memory went back to the old, half-forgotten days of his clerkhood in San Francisco. In those days he had occasionally gone on Sunday hikes over the Marin hills, in company with Fatty Jones, who worked in a neighboring office. And Fatty Jones, he recalled, always carried with him, in preference to a canteen, two cans of tomatoes for drinking purposes.

The second memory went back but a week. He, and the two Kanakas of his watch, had been sent below to break out a fresh cask of beef. As they struggled with the heavy burden in this very passageway, one of the Kanakas had knocked from its position on top of a pile, a box of tomatoes. The fall broke open the box. They had tossed it back into place, unrepaired. Unless some one had subsequently renailed the cover on that box, it was open to him, somewhere along the top tier.

A vision of himself quaffing deeply of the cool, wet contents of those cans, filled Martin's mind to the exclusion of aught else.

The row of boxes was about breast-high. Unable to use his hands, Martin leaned over and explored with his chin. The fourth box rewarded him. He broke his skin upon a bared nail, and,

craning further, rubbed his jawbone over the cold, smooth, round tops of cans.

He crooned with delight. Then followed despair as he discovered that he was unable, without the use of his hands, to either move the box or extract a can.

The boatswain, following his progress with eye and ear, counseled him:

"Turn around, an' bend over, an' reach up backwards. No? Well, try and get on top o' the pile, and flop over."

It was bracing advice. Martin pulled himself together and essayed the attempt.

Slowly he wormed his way upward until his middle balanced on the edge of the top tier. A quick writhe placed him atop. Then he bent back, and his manacled hands felt around till they encountered the cans.

It required repeated attempts ere he was able to draw one out of the box, for the cans were large, of gallon size, and his numbed arms were almost strengthless. But at last he plucked one out and canted it over the edge of the box. It struck the deck with a thud. He scrambled down from his perch, croaking excitedly—

"Got it—bos—got—one."

An instant later, he had kicked the can to the stanchion, and was squatted again by the boatswain's side.

The boatswain slid his arms down the post and felt of the treasure.

"Aye—ye got it!" he commented. "But 'ow'll we open the thing? Too big for me to get my 'ands around, or I'd twist it open—an' the way we're tied up we can't bash it against anything. Strike me a blushin' pink, what rotten luck. An' we fair perishin' with thirst!"

"Got—knife?" mumbled Martin.

"Knife! I ain't got my bloody clothes, let alone my knife! Caught me in my bunk, asleep, they did. And you needn't twist about looking for your sheath-knife, lad. I seen them take it from you, up there in the cabin. Swiggle me' we're stumped—but, you 'aven't a pocket-knife, 'ave you?"

"No," answered Martin.

His spirits were at zero, with the diminishing prospect of tasting those wet tomatoes. His raging thirst, whetted by expectation, assailed him with added force; he was actually dizzy with lust of drink.

"Blimme! 'Aven't you anything in your pockets what's sharp?" asked the boatswain. "Ow, what tough luck!"

Martin suddenly remembered something.

"Got—keys," he croaked. "Bunch—keys."

"Keys!" echoed the other. "Bless me that's better. May work it. Can you reach them—what pocket? Side? 'Ere—lean closer to me, an' I'll get 'em out. Keys! Ow—any of them sharp pointed? Any Yales?"

Two of the boatswain's clublike fingers worked their way into Martin's trousers pocket.

"Don't know—not—mine," Martin answered the questioning. "Keys belong—Little Billy—gave \_\_\_"

The boatswain's fingers stopped prodding for a second. The man tensed, drew in a sharp breath, and then exploded an oath.

"What! Billy's keys? God 'elp us lad, did ye say you 'ad Little Billy's keys?"

The fingers dove into the pocket with redoubled energy, grasped the keys, and drew them out. And then the boatswain pawed them over for a moment.

"Ow, strike me, 'e spoke right!" he muttered exultingly. "Billy's keys—the steward's ring! Oh ho! An' may the devil swiggle me bleedin' well stiff, if 'ere ain't the wery key! By 'Eaven, I'll 'ave my bare 'ands on that bloke yet! Ow—what luck!"

"What—" commenced the astonished Martin.

"What!" echoed the boatswain. "Ere—you just stand around, and let me get at them bracelets. I'll show ye what! Ow—where's the bloody 'ole! Ah-h!"

There was a tiny click—and Martin felt his steel bonds being drawn from his wrists. His nerveless arms fell to his sides.

The boatswain explained the miracle.

"Little Billy's keys—'ow'd you 'appen—don't ye see, lad? There's a duplicate key to these irons on Billy's key-ring. Old man 'as the other key—or 'ad, suppose Carew 'as it now. It fits all the irons. 'Ere, turn me loose now. This little key!"

A moment later, Martin's fumbling fingers completed their task, and the big man's limbs were free. The boatswain straightened and stretched with a grunt of satisfaction. Martin, obeying the dominant need, which was to drink, seized the can of tomatoes and commenced to pound it against the stanchion, in the hope of bursting it open.

"'Ere—stop that!" hoarsely commanded the boatswain. "You'll 'ave them down on us with that noise. Give me the can—an' the keys. Ah—'ere's a Yale, saw edge. Just drive it through—so. An' use it like a bloomin' can-opener—so. 'Ere you are, lad, drink 'earty. I know 'o'w a chokin' like you got makes a man crazy with thirst. I'm some dry myself."

Martin seized the can. The boatswain had cut a small, jagged opening in the top and Martin clapped his mouth over it, cutting his lips in his eagerness. He drank, drank. It was an exquisite delight to feel the cool stream pouring down his throat; his whole body was instantly refreshed, invigorated.

He paused for breath, and drank again. The contents of the can were three-quarters drinkable, and he gulped the major portion down. Then he stopped with a sudden shame of his greediness, recalling the boatswain's expressed need.

"Oh, bosun, I forgot!" he exclaimed, noting as he spoke that his tongue was limber and tractable again, and that he could form words.

"That's all right, laddie," said the boatswain, taking the proffered can. "I know 'ow you felt. Enough for me 'ere. Ah, that's better than the best drink ever mixed be'ind a bar. Plenty, lad, plenty—I feel fit now. 'Ere, 'ave some more."

Martin finished the tin. Then he heaved a surfeited sigh.

"Oh, I didn't think I'd ever get enough," he said. "Why, I was so dry I couldn't talk. And my throat——"

"I know," interrupted the boatswain, sitting down beside him. "You're bleedin' lucky to be talkin' now, even in a whisper. I've seen other men choked like you was, an' they couldn't say a word for days. Slick beggars with their fingers, them jitsu blokes! And now, Martin, let's figure it out. Ow, swiggle me, what'll we do? The lass——"

The boatswain swore deeply and energetically.

Martin groaned in unison with the other's oaths, his love-born panic for the girl's safety overwhelming him again. Grim, horrible fears surged through his mind and pricked him unendurably. God! Ruth, his Ruth, was alone, helpless, at the mercy of those devils' lusts! And he was sitting here inactive! It was unendurable!

He scrambled to his feet, with the wild idea of mounting the ladder to the cabin and battering his way through the trap-door. He must succor Ruth!

The boatswain reached up a huge hand and pulled him down again. Martin struggled for a moment, his reason clouded by his hot fear.

"But, bosun—Ruth!" he cried. "Ruth is—Good God, man, Carew and those yellow men have Ruth!"

The giant restrained him as easily as if he were a child, and talked soothingly.

"Aye, aye, lad—I know. But Ruth is safe, I think, so far. An' ye can bet your bottom dollar Carew will keep the Japs at their distance of the lass, and she'll stand off Carew—for a w'ile, any'ow. Swiggle me, Martin, 'ave sense. What can ye do bare-'anded? 'Ere, now, sit still, and we'll figure out some plan. Ruth's all right. She's in the Old Man's room, a-nursin' 'im."

"No, no—the captain is dead!" asserted Martin. "I saw him lying dead on the floor!"

"'E wasn't dead," said the boatswain. "Carew took 'is gun away, and 'it 'im over the eye with the butt of it. Laid 'im out, same as you. They let the lass take 'im into 'is room and stay there to nurse 'im. I seen it, I tell ye!"

Martin subsided.

"But what will we do?" he exclaimed. "We must do something, bosun!"

"Aye—please God, we'll do something," said the boatswain. "Please God, I'll 'ave my 'ands on that black-'earted murderer—and on Ichi, too! I 'ave a plan. But first, tell me what 'appened to you? 'Ow did you 'appen to be on deck? It wasn't your watch. What 'appened on deck before you

came bouncing into the cabin and batted Carew on the knob with the belayin'-pin? Neat crack! Too bad it didn't 'urt the beggar much. And brace up, lad! I know 'ow ye feel. I know 'ow 'tis between you and the lass—I've seen the eyes ye give each other. She'll be safe, Martin. Strike me, God will never let them 'arm 'er, swiggle me stiff if 'E will!"

There was a wealth of simple faith in the giant's voice, and some of it found lodgment in Martin's troubled breast. He composed himself, held himself in sure check, and upon the boatswain's repeated request, told what had happened to him from the moment the old sailmaker had awakened him till he felt his senses leave him in the cabin.

When he finished, he discovered it was his turn to hearten. The boatswain was immersed in grief, and the hunchback was the cause.

"Ow, swiggle me! I 'oped as 'ow Billy was safe somewhere—locked up like us," he groaned. "But 'e's gone. Got 'im first, likely. Must 'ave slipped up be'ind 'im, while 'e was fillin' his pipe there w'ere ye found 'is baccy, and give 'im the knife. They didn't 'ave guns—used knives. They got guns now, blast 'em. An' Little Billy's gone! I—I loved the lad, Martin." The man's voice choked.

"But he may not be dead, not even injured," urged Martin. "I only heard Sails cry out. Perhaps Billy wasn't around when they slipped aboard. You know his failing, bosun, and you know how he has been the last few days. The reason I have the keys, you know, is because he didn't want to be tempted by the medicine-chest. Maybe he gave in, and got some alcohol, forward, and got drunk and went to sleep."

The boatswain snorted indignantly.

"You don't know Billy like I do!" he cried. "Drunk, no! Billy 'ad 'is failing, but 'e'd sooner 'a died than give in at such a time. No—'e's gone. Ye say old Sails told ye Billy was feyed! Ow, that proves it. That — burgoo-eater was always right in such things! Billy, dear Billy—'e was a proper mate, Martin."

The boatswain's mood changed abruptly, and rage possessed him. Martin felt the man's great body tremble with the intensity of his passion. He spoke through his clenched teeth, slowly and strangely, without using his accustomed expletives.

"They killed 'im! They'll pay. We're goin' to get out o' 'ere, Martin—I know 'ow, now. We're going to try an' take the ship back. Aye—maybe they'll get us, but I'll twist the necks o' some o' them first. And I'll get Carew, 'imself!"

He spoke the words with a cool positiveness that bred belief. Martin, in almost as vengeful a mood as the other, was grimly cheered by the pictured prospect.

"I'll tell you what I know about it," went on the boatswain in a somewhat lighter voice. "They got me in my bunk. 'Ad the irons on me before I was awake—ye know 'ow I sleep, like a ruddy corpse. Ichi steered 'em. The blighter knows the ship, knew where the irons 'ung in the cabin, knew 'ow the rooms are laid out. When I woke up I was 'elpless, and 'alf dozen o' them picked me up and packed me into the cabin and threw me down be'ind the table. That's where I lay when you busted in. They 'ad gagged me with my own socks.

"They must 'ave been on board before Sails came aft, and as soon as the two of ye went for'rd, they slipped into the alleyway be'ind ye. I was already dumped on the cabin floor when the rumpus broke out on deck—at the same instant Carew appeared. At the noise, the Old Man jumped out of 'is room, gun in 'and, and 'e shot at Carew's voice. Carew grabbed the gun, and banged 'im over the eye with it, and the Old Man went down across 'is doorway. Then Ruth popped out o' 'er room, and Carew grabbed 'er. She fought like the devil. Then you bust in with your belayin'-pin.

"After they 'ad choked you, an' after Carew 'ad got to 'is feet and pulled the lass away from 'uggin' and kissin' you, Carew and Ichi began to confab. It was English, and I 'eard a bit. Ichi went to the Old Man, 'oo was breathin' heavy, and examined 'im like 'e was a sure enough sawbones. 'E says the Old Man is just knocked out, and no fracture. 'E takes the Old Man's keys. Then Carew 'as a couple o' 'ands hoist the Old Man into 'is bunk, and 'e says to the lass as 'ow she can 'tend to the skipper. Ruth bounces into the room and slams an' locks the door. Carew laughs and turns to business.

"An' what do ye think 'is first order was? To 'ave the cook aft. In a jiffy, they 'ad Charley Bo Yip afore 'im. 'E ordered grub—slathers o' grub, immediate, for fifteen. Yip took the order without turnin' a 'air—trust a Chink for that. Then they give us attention, an' they lift the trap an' dump us down 'ere. They leave you where you fell, but they boosted me along to this 'ere stanchion and, while Carew tickled my shoulder-blades with a knife, Ichi, using the skipper's key, trussed me up around the post. Then they went aloft again, slippin' the cuffs on you as they passed, I think, for they didn't do it in the cabin.

"Well, in fifteen minutes they were back—'alf dozen o' them, with Yip, and plenty o' lanterns. Breaking out stores for Yip. Yip never looks at me till he's ready to go aloft again. Then, making sure I can see 'is mug, 'e tips me a big wink. That means something, Martin. They're deep uns

them Chinks.

"That's all. I sat there, cuffed up proper, for hours, cussing, and thinking, and calling to you. Hours! Swiggle me stiff, 'twas a bloody lifetime, it seemed like. About five or six hours though, I think—must be about seven or eight o'clock now.

"That's all that 'appened. But I'll tell you what I learned from Carew's and Ichi's talk, and from lookin' at them. They've been cast away, lad! That's why we didn't sight the schooner when we looked for 'er. The *Dawn* was wrecked, some time ago. Carew ordered food for fifteen—the *Dawn* was fitted for seal 'unting, and carried a crew o' nigh thirty. That shows only 'alf were saved—a bad wreck.

"They ordered grub first thing—shows they didn't save stores, and 'ave been starvin' ashore. Must 'ave saved a boat though, or they couldn't 'ave boarded us. Must 'ave seen us come in; spied us from one o' the caves in the wolcano, an' we could not see them. The blasted fog just played into their 'ands. 'Av'ing been ashore, they must 'ave found the ambergrease. They needed a ship, and they took us. And there ye are! Sails dead, Little Billy dead, God knows 'ow many o' the crew gone, the lass at the whim o' Wild Bob Carew. Ow, what a bit o' blasted luck! Swiggle me stiff!"

The boatswain growled desperate oaths to himself. For a few moments he gave himself up to lurid and audible thought.

Martin, in as black a mood himself, kept his peace, but he, too, spent the time in thought, in gloomy surmising, in attempting to form some plan of action. "What to do—what to do!" The refrain sang in his troubled mind. They must act, and act quickly. Ruth's safety, and the lives of their comrades, if any were alive, depended on the boatswain and himself. But—what to do?

Though they were free of their bonds, they were still boxed in this storeroom like rats in a trap! Obviously the first thing to do was to get out of the lazaret.

Martin commenced to formulate a hazy plan of lurking beneath the trap-door until opened from above, and then trying to burst into the cabin, trusting to luck aiding them there. A mad plan, fore-doomed to failure, he conceded to himself, even as he thought of it. But, what else? They must act! Ruth ...

In the somber field of Martin's misery bloomed a tiny flower; and whenever his mental eye rested upon this exotic, a sudden glow of happiness pervaded his being. This bright flower was a memory—the thought of himself lying helpless on the cabin floor, while two soft arms pressed his sore-addled head to a protecting bosom, and warm lips caressed his face, and a dear voice entreated; the thought of the boatswain's confirming words, "Carew pulled the lass away from 'uggin' and kissin' you."

So, she loved him! She returned his love! The love he had seen lighting her eyes, but which he could never force her to acknowledge by words, she had unmistakably admitted by action. In that black moment in the cabin, she had bared her heart to him—bared it fearlessly before all that hostile, leering company. His love was returned. Ruth loved him!

Such was the origin of the exultant thrills that shot brightly through Martin's despair. But the triumphant thought was momentary. Love could not brighten their lot; nay, love but made more numerous the grim host of cruel fears that pressed upon him. Ruth—God! What would happen to Ruth, what had happened to her, what was happening to her even now, while he sat mooning, cooped and helpless in this black hole? It was unendurable! He exploded a fierce oath.

"Bosun, we must do something—now—at once!" he cried.

The giant placed a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

"Easy lad! Not so loud, or ye'll 'ave them coming down for a look-see. We don't want that," he admonished. "Steady! I know 'ow you feel—but raising a rumpus down 'ere won't 'elp us none. We'll do something right enough. I got a plan, didn't I tell ye! I was just thinking it out—'ere, I'll tell you. First, though, let's fix these bleedin' irons, in case they pay us a visit."

He leaned over, searching about on the dark deck, and Martin heard the clinking as he gathered up the cuffs. He fiddled with them for a moment.

"'Ere, Martin, stick out your 'ands!"

Martin complied, and felt the handcuffs close about his wrists.

"See if you can pull your 'ands out."

Martin found he could, easily.

"All right—just keep them 'anging from one wrist," said the boatswain. "In case they come down on us, we don't want them to find us loose. Just clap your 'ands be'ind you and slip your irons on. I 'ave mine fixed, too, and I'll be 'uggin' the post in the same old way. They won't think o' examinin' us."



"But we can't lounge here indefinitely," commenced Martin impatiently.

"We'll bide quiet for a bit," said the boatswain. "I 'ave a 'unch they'll be coming down soon to give us some scoffin's. They wouldn't 'ave gone to the trouble o' chuck'in' us down 'ere if they was going to kill us off'and. And they won't starve us to death—they'll feed us till they get ready to slit our throats an' dump us overside. And if ye strain your ears, lad, you'll 'ear the occasional rattle o' dishes over'ead. They are eatin' up there. Now, what's the natural time to send scoffin's below to the prisoners? Why, thinks I, after they 'ave their own bellies full, and Charley Bo Yip is clearin' away the leavin's. If they don't come in an 'alf-hour or so, I'll commence work."

Martin immediately proposed rushing the hatch as soon as it was opened. The boatswain vetoed the proposal.

"They'd slaughter us, lad. We'd never 'ave a chance. No—'ere's my scheme: We can get out o' this lazaret into the 'old. Aye, that's something ye didn't know, isn't it? Nor does Ichi know, for all 'e was cook aboard. One time, some years ago, we was tradin' in the New 'Ebrides, and the Old Man stowed some o' 'is trade stuff in the after'old. 'E 'ad a door cut in the for'rd bulk'ead, 'ere, so 'e could get at the goods without opening the 'atch on deck. Afterward, we boarded it up—but the boards aren't nailed; just 'eld by cleats. Right at the for'rd end o' this alley we're squattin in, be'ind the beef casks. We can get through into the 'old."

"What good will it do?" queried Martin. "We would be just as much prisoners in the hold as where we are. The hatches are battened down."

"Don't ye see? We can make our way for'rd, there being naught but a bit o' ballast in the 'ooker. And from the fore'old I think we can reach deck by way o' the peak. The two of us ought to be able to bust our way into the peak. And ye know where the forepeak 'atch is—in the middle o' the fo'c's'le deck! Well, I figure they 'ave what's left o' our foremast crowd locked in the fo'c's'le. Aye, I figure there is some o' them left. If Carew 'ad meant to make a clean sweep at once, we'd not be down 'ere. So—if we can get into the fo'c's'le and join our lads, the odds won't be so great against us. Be great enough, though, even if most o' our 'ands are safe; swiggle me, fifteen o' them, and the blighters 'ave the use o' our own guns, out of the cabin.

"But our lads are good boys. They'll fight if we get to them to lead them; every man Jack would go to — for the lass! And if we can bust out on deck, there's capstan bars and belaying-pins to fight with. It's a long chance, Martin, but a better one than your plan would give us, tryin' to break into the cabin from 'ere, just us two, and gettin' knocked on the 'ead, or shot, soon as we started through the 'atch!"

Better than his plan! Why, it was a definite campaign. A flame of hope kindled in Martin's breast. He was for immediate action.

"Come on—let's start!" he exclaimed, and he started to scramble to his feet.

"'Ere—'old on!" exclaimed the boatswain, pulling him back on his haunches. "Swiggle me, don't fly up like that, lad! Keep your 'ead cool. We got to wait a bit. We don't want them comin' down 'ere to find we've did the wanishin' stunt. We got to pull this off as a surprise. We ought to wait till night when 'alf o' them, at least, would be asleep; but, blimme, I can't wait till then, nor can you. But we'll wait a little while an' see if they bring us grub; if they do, we can be pretty sure they won't visit us again for several hours. That'll give us time. Hist, Marty, 'ere comes some one now! Quick, slip on your 'andcuff and play 'alf dead!"

Some thin points of light, suddenly shooting into their dark prison, from around the edges of the trap-door over their heads, gave rise to the boatswain's exclamations. Martin, observing the light at the same instant as the bosun, knew that the rug that covered the square in the cabin floor had been drawn aside. Some one was about to come down to them.

Martin bent his arms behind him and quickly slipped his free hand into the handcuff. Then he lay down on his side.

The boatswain encircled the stanchion with his arms and legs and adjusted the loose manacles to his wrists and ankles. Except to a close examination, the pair appeared to be as tightly shackled as when their captors introduced them into their present surroundings. They crouched tense and still, their eyes on the square door overhead, waiting.

The trap-door opened. A flood of daylight rushed into the storeroom and lighted a wide patch of boxes and kegs; not, however, reaching to the spot where Martin and the boatswain lay.

"Fog gone," Martin heard his companion mutter.

A man stepped into the light, bearing a lighted lantern in his hand, and started to descend the ladder. But it was not Charley Bo Yip with food, as the boatswain had expected. It was the Japanese, Ichi.

Ichi stepped out of the square of daylight at the bottom of the ladder, lifted his lantern, and

sent its beam down the gloomy passage. The two observant prisoners were disclosed.

"Ah, Mr. Blake! I perceive you have regained consciousness, and the power of locomotion," came to Martin's ears in the softly modulated, even voice he so well remembered as being part of the one-time visitor to Josiah Smatt. "May I inquire if you have also recovered speech?" added Ichi.

"Answer 'im," whispered the boatswain, as Martin lay silent and glowering.

"Yes," said Martin.

"Ah, my dear boatswain, Henry, is a wise counselor," remarked Ichi, proving the acuteness of his hearing. "You are to be congratulated, Mr. Blake. One does not usually recover with such admirable quickness from the effects of the cervical plexus hold my man, Moto, practised upon you. And you, my good boatswain—it is with great pleasure that I perceive the workings of Fate have chastened the—er, boisterousness I remember so well from the days of my servitude."

The words were mocking. The Jap was clearly revealed where he stood, with the patch of daylight behind him, and the outheld lantern before him. Martin could not read a thought in that bland, smiling face. But the words mocked.

"Ye monkey-faced, yellow toad!" burst forth the boatswain. "If I 'ad the use o' my 'ands, ye'd not stand there grinnin'!"

"Ah, it grieves to discover I am in error," was Ichi's smiling response to the outburst. "The lessons Fate teaches are learned slowly by rebellious natures. My good boatswain, I would recommend your heated mind to solitude and meditation. If you think with much hardness upon the uncertainties of life, you may achieve that humility of spirit and manner which is so blessed in the eyes of our ancestors."

Ichi stepped forward a pace and lifted higher his lantern, the better to enjoy the effect of his words upon the shackled giant.

"My dear boatswain, do you recall the occasion when my honored self so unfortunately spilled upon your decks of whiteness the grease from the cooking; and how with great furiousness you applied to my respected person the knotted end of a rope? Ah, so then, it would perhaps add interest to your meditation to ponder the possiblens of physical persuasion to correct your faults—in the guise of the fingers of my good Moto! You have beheld the handling of the worthy Mr. Blake—yes?"

A vindictive note had crept into their visitor's soft, impersonal voice as he gibed the boatswain. Martin, staring upward at the lantern-lighted face, half expected to see the smirk flee the lips that threatened torture, and the hateful passions that inspired Ichi's gloating to reveal themselves in his features. But no hint of emotion disturbed the surface of that bland, yellow mask the one-time sea cook wore for a face; only the eyes were leagued with the sinister voice. Martin fancied he saw a cruel and mirthful gleam in Ichi's beady eyes, such a gleam as might creep into the eyes of a cat while playing with a captured mouse.

But the boatswain seemed not a whit appalled by Ichi's words. His response was prompt, and liberally tinged with sulfur and brimstone.

"Aye, I remember rope's-ending you, ye rat-eyed son o' a Hakodate gutter-snipe! If I 'ad my 'ands free now, I'd do worse—I'd pull your rotten 'ead from your shoulders! Aye, swiggle me, 'tis like your breed to mock a man what's tied, ye blasted coolie!"

At the words, expression suddenly enlivened the Jap's face and to Martin's astonishment it was not an expression of hate but of wounded conceit.

"No, no, I am not a coolie!" he exclaimed vehemently. "I am not of common blood—I am a gentleman, a Japanese gentleman!"

The boatswain snorted contemptuously, and Ichi turned to Martin. "You are with knowledge of my gentlemanness, my dear Mr. Blake! You have seen me with proper attire, having conference with the honorable Smatt. I am a Japanese gentleman, sir. I have from my revered ancestors the blood of a Shogun. I am graduated from the University of Tokyo. I have a degree from your own most honorable institution of Columbia."

"Ow — your ruddy eddication!" broke in the boatswain. "Ye bloody murderer! Ye'll 'ang if you've gone to a dozen colleges! Wait till they 'ear about this business at 'ome, or in any port ye call at! They'll know the brig—and ye'll 'ang, every last scut o' ye!"

The Japanese gentleman recovered his composure as suddenly as he had lost it, as the boatswain swore. He was again his suave self. Martin cast a quick glance toward the boatswain, and a certain sly expression that flitted across the giant's fierce features enlightened him. He glimpsed the method in the boatswain's madness.

"Ah, my boatswain, you have a defect in your reflectiveness," Ichi purred smoothly, in

response to the boatswain's prophecy. "We do not fear hanging; rather will events shape thusly: If the authorities of your America learn by some unlikely favor of Fate of our barratry, they will say, 'The brigantine *Cohasset*, commanded by the notorious filibuster, Captain Dabney, which slipped out of San Francisco without clearance—yes, we know that, my worthy friend—is again in trouble. The trouble has happened in Russian waters—let the Russians attend to it. We are satisfied if the respected Dabney never again is able to arouse our worry.' Is it not so the American officials would speak, Mr. Henry?"

The boatswain swore luridly.

"And the Russians, if the affair came to their attention, would move not at all against us," went on Ichi, smug pleasure in his voice. "Indeed, the chartered company might even reward us for removing one of such dangerousness as Captain Dabney from their trade reserves. And if you suppose my Government would act, I fear you underestimate with greatness the powerfulness of my connections in my country. No, my dear boatswain, it is most unlikely this incident will ever reach unfriendly ears, or ever cross the Pacific. You might meditate upon your chance to carry the tale."

"Ye may silt all our throats," said the boatswain, "but as long as the old brig's above water, there's the evidence that'll 'ang ye."

"Ah—not so," answered Ichi. "There are many closed harbors in my native Yezo, and the honorable Captain Carew assures me that rigs may be altered. The honorable captain will have a new schooner, to replace the *Dawn*, for next year's season—and at slight expense to my company. A skilful man in his profession—the honorable Carew!"

"Skilful—!" taunted the boatswain. "'E wasn't skilful enough to save 'is ship!"

"Fate. A night of darkness, and much wind," said Ichi. "Yet Fate relented—for, after a week of starving in the holes on the quaking Island, Fate sends you to our rescue. Fate smiles upon our side, my boatswain—brings us to the Fire Mountain, plays you into the trap, gives to the honorable Carew his wish, and now, only——"

A heavy voice boomed down through the open hatch and interrupted Ichi's smirking revelations. Martin directed his gaze beyond the Jap. A man was leaning over the opening, peering into the arct. The heavy voice belonged to Carew, Martin knew.

"I say—what is keeping you down there, Ichi?" called Carew. "Do you need help?"

"All right, captain, directly we come!" answered Ichi.

"Can't you get the young blighter to his feet?" went on Carew. "I will send a couple of hands down, to heave him out."

"I am of the opinion he can walk," replied Ichi. He turned to Martin. "My dear Mr. Blake, we muchly desire your presence in the cabin. Can you travel there without assistance?"

Martin received a sharp, meaning glance from the boatswain.

"Yes—I can make it," he told Ichi.

He promptly scrambled to his feet and stumbled toward the ladder.

The boatswain wailed behind him.

"Ow—swiggle me stiff! 'Ere now, Ichi, you ain't goin' to leave me down 'ere alone, all ironed up, and with these bleedin' rats runnin' about!" There was positive fear in the cry.

Ichi chuckled.

"Yes, Mr. Henry, I am convinced that solitude will benefit your manners. Ah—I had not thought of the rats. But surely the great bull boatswain of the *Cohasset* can not fear the little rats! Ah, I am glad you mentioned them; yes, they shall be companions of your meditations."

The boatswain, in a forcible sentence, disclosed his opinion of the Japanese gentleman's ancestral line. Then, abruptly, his tone became conciliatory.

"Ow—but say! Ye'll send me some grub? Swiggle me, ye ain't going to bloody well starve me, are ye?"

Ichi, retreating to the ladder before Martin's advance, delivered his parting shot at the boatswain.

"Fasting, my dear friend, is an ancient companion of meditation. Tomorrow, perhaps, when thought has chastened your mood, there is a possibleness you may receive food."

Martin mounted the ladder with mingled feelings; with dismay at leaving the boatswain, with a wild hope of encountering Ruth above, with exhilaration at the success of the boatswain's

strategy.

For Martin had fathomed the boatswain's reason for baiting the Japanese. The boatswain had known of the alloy of vanity in Ichi's composition, and he had seized upon it to extract needful information. He had succeeded; Ichi's conceit and vindictiveness had overcome his native caution.

The boatswain knew now something of the enemy's plans. More important, he knew that he was to be left alone, without disturbance, in the lazaret for a whole day. Ichi had already stepped into the cabin with his lantern. Martin called into the gloom behind him:

"Good-by, bos! Good luck!"

He could not see his friend, but he shrewdly suspected the boatswain was already divesting himself of his bonds. The big fellow's hoarse growl reached him:

"Good-by, lad. Good luck!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### THREE GENTLEMEN CONVERSE

Daylight, dazzling to Martin's gloom-accustomed eyes, filled the *Cohasset's* cabin. Martin's upward ranging gaze, as he clambered out of the lazaret, saw, through the open cabin skylights, the blue sky and the sunshine sparkling upon brass fixtures. So he knew the fog had lifted and the day was clear.

He took a step aside from the lazaret hatch, and then sent his eager gaze about the cabin. But Ruth was not present. He was intensely disappointed.

He stared hard at the closed door to Captain Dabney's room, as if the very intensity of his troubled gaze might penetrate those blank oak panels. The boatswain had said Ruth was nursing the captain in that room. But was the boatswain's opinion correct? Hours had passed. Was she still safe in the captain's room?

The slamming shut of the trap-door over the black hole by his side abruptly brought his thoughts back to himself, and his eyes to his surroundings. A man was leaning over, spreading out the rug that ordinarily covered the lazaret opening. Martin recognized the fellow as the same wooden-faced Jap who had choked him unconscious a few hours before. Ichi, he discovered standing by his side, regarding him with an ingratiating smile. But it was neither the ju-jitsu man nor Ichi who fastened Martin's attention.

A large man sprawled in Captain Dabney's easy chair at the farther end of the cabin table. The table was littered with the debris of a meal, which Charley Bo Yip was phlegmatically and deftly clearing away, and Martin stared across the board's disarray at Wild Bob Carew's disdainful face. The erstwhile commander of the schooner *Dawn*, his comrades' unscrupulous enemy, his own rival, was the same aloof, superior rogue he remembered from the night in Spulvedo's dive.

As Martin looked, Carew engaged himself with filling and lighting his pipe, and seemed to be totally unconscious of the disheveled young man standing before him, with wrists manacled behind his back.

Martin was again surprised, as he had been that night in San Francisco, with the incongruity of Wild Bob's appearance contrasted with his activities. Was this splendid figure of a man the vicious outlaw of wide and evil repute? The renegade thief? The persecutor of women? The pitiless butcher of defenseless men? Were those fine, clean-cut features but a mask that covered an abyss of black evil? Did that broad forehead actually conceal the crafty, degenerate brain that planned and executed the bloody and treacherous piracy upon their ship?

The haggardness of recent hardship was upon Carew's features, and a week's, or more, stubble of yellow beard covered his cheeks, yet the growth in nowise brutalized the handsome face. There was a long scar on Carew's forehead, which glowed a vivid red as he sucked upon his pipe; there was also a wide cross of court-plaster on a clipped spot on top of the head. Martin suddenly realized that both disfigurements were his handiwork; one was a memento of the fight on the Frisco waterfront, the other the result of his blow the night before.

Carew suddenly lifted his eyes and met Martin's stare, and a cold thrill tingled along Martin's spine. For there was a hot ferocity lighting the man's eyes; there was a hot, yet calculated, hatred in the level look.

Ichi's suave voice broke the uneasy silence.

"Mr. Blake, we have brought you up here for a little chat," said Ichi. "And before we commence, I beg please to inform you I am your very dear friend, and I think of you no ill. So—will you not be seated?"

Martin seated himself gingerly upon the edge of a chair. It was an uncomfortable position, and his arms ached keenly from being constrained in the unnatural position the handcuffs demanded, but he dare not slip out a hand and relieve himself.

"Ah, let us trust none of the violence of epithet which marked my discourse with the worthy boatswain Henry will mar our conversation, Mr. Blake," went on Ichi. Martin perceived his conceit still smarted under the boatswain's curses. "You are an American gentleman, the honorable Carew is an English gentleman, I am a Japanese gentleman. So, our discussion need not be intruded upon by those exclamations of great explosiveness with which your wonderful English language is so enriched. We gentlemen have civility."

"Never mind talking manners, doctor!" broke in Carew impatiently. "It would please me if you would permit me to forget your gentility for an hour. Come to the point! State our proposition to this fellow, and let him make his choice."

"The point. Ah, yes," said Ichi. "You know, my captain, you people of the West are brutal with your directness. But I shall to the point. Ah, Mr. Blake, I am not mistaken in assuming you would with relishness accept refreshment? You would talk with more easiness?"

"Water—coffee," said Martin briefly.

He was agreeably surprised by the question. He was again very, very dry, and his sore throat pained him and made speaking difficult. He was hungry, too, his supper the night before having been his last meal. He had been looking longingly at the food and drink the Chinaman was rapidly and silently removing from the table, which perhaps inspired Ichi's question.

"I will offer you drink," said Ichi.

Carew snorted disgustedly but did not offer an objection.

"You will pardon us for not offering food," went on Ichi, "but you would be unable to eat in your present condition of bondage, and we regret muchly our disinclination to free your hands at this juncture. With arms free, you have impressed us most unfortunately."

He glanced toward Carew's plastered head. Carew disclosed some white, even teeth, with a half snarl, and Martin saw beneath the concealing mustache, as he had seen that night in San Francisco, the cruel mouth that gave the lie to Wild Bob's face.

"But your national beverage of coffee contains much food value," added the Japanese, and he barked an order to the Chinaman.

Yip seized a large cup, filled it with black coffee from the big percolator standing in the center of the table, and carried it to Martin. He held it to Martin's lips.

Martin drank eagerly, tilting back his head and staring upward into Yip's face. He half expected to see some sign of friendship there, a fleeting smile, or the flutter of an eyelid. He recalled that Yip had winked at the boatswain, down in the lazaret, and the boatswain had attached importance to the action. But he was disappointed. There was not the hint of an emotion in Charley Bo Yip's moon-like face; not the ghost of an encouraging recognition. Not even Ichi's passionless countenance could match Yip's serene, blank face for lack of expression. The Chinaman might have been pouring the coffee down a hopper, rather than down a man's throat, from his impersonal demeanor.

But if Yip disappointed, the coffee did not. The strong, hot stuff flooded strength through Martin's veins, eased his smarting throat, lubricated his parched tongue. When Yip turned away with the empty cup, Martin heaved a satisfied sigh.

"That is better," he said to Ichi. "Fire away. I can talk now."

Ichi started off on a rambling and flowery appreciation of Martin's implied thanks. Martin gave attention with his ears, but his eyes roved. He had been puzzled since his entry into the room by a certain oddity, familiar oddity, about the other men's appearance.

Carew was wearing a guernsey much too large for him, and Carew was a very big man. Martin suddenly recognized the guernsey as the property of the boatswain. Ichi was clad in shirt and trousers belonging to Little Billy—not a bad fit. The ju-jitsu man sported a complete outfit of his, Martin's. Obviously, the belongings of the *Cohasset's* crew had been looted to cover the scarecrow nakedness of the captors.

Something else Martin noticed, while Dr. Ichi talked on with Oriental indirectness. There was a large cupboard affixed to the cabin's forward bulkhead. It stood open and empty. Martin knew what its contents had been. It had been the ship's armory; it had contained four high-powered

rifles, two shotguns, and four heavy navy revolvers, with a plentiful supply of ammunition for all arms. They were gone. He reflected they must be in the hands of Carew's men. Not a pleasant reflection in view of the boatswain's scheme.

Carew, breaking roughly into Ichi's speech, commanded his attention.

"Never mind all that, Ichi! By Jove! We can not afford to waste time listening to pretty courtesies!" He swung upon Martin with menacing eye and voice. "Here you! No — hedging now! What has become of the code writing that directed to the ambergris hidden ashore? Come—spit it out. Where is it?"

Martin blinked with surprise at the sudden attack, and at the question itself. He and the boatswain had taken it for granted that Carew, having been ashore on Fire Mountain, had obtained possession of the treasure. The question implied that Carew and his followers had failed to locate the cache; that he had been hauled out of the lazaret for the purpose of giving them information.

"Come—speak up!" commanded Carew, again.

Martin attempted to dissemble.

"I don't know anything about it," he lied. "I have been a common sailor on the ship, and have not been in the confidence——"

"Enough! Spin that yarn to the marines. I want the truth!" cried Carew. "Common sailor—not in their confidence—hey? And since when has Old Man Dabney permitted his foremast hands to live aft? How long since Ruth Le Moyne takes a heart interest in common sailors? Hey?"

He leaned forward in his chair, and shot the questions at Martin. His face was suddenly debased with evil passion, and bitter hatred was clearly revealed in his blazing eyes.

"Listen to me, my fine fellow!" he went on. "You fooled me once and spoiled my plans with your double dealing. But this time you'll throw no dust in my eyes! You'll not get by with any cock-and-bull yarn this time. I know just how warmly you feathered your nest—humoring that old blind fool and making love to his granddaughter. A pretty reward opened to you by your treachery that night in Frisco—a fortune and a sweetheart to boot! Hey, my winsome fancy man! A fine chance you've had for your billing and cooing; but now by Heaven, you'll pay the piper!"

Martin gasped before the wordy onslaught. But Carew's hot words, and his appearance, conveyed to Martin's alert mind a startling truth—it was not lust for treasure that inspired Wild Bob's verbal flogging, or venomous glances; it was jealousy, a wild, hate-filled jealousy of him, Martin Blake. Ruth was the core of Carew's rage.

"Come—where is that code?" went on Carew. "Speak up lively, now! By Heaven, if you sulk, I'll jolly well draw the truth out of you! Here, Ichi, call up that finger devil of yours and we'll see if a little gullet-twisting will loosen this cub's tongue! Here—Moto!"

The wooden-faced ju-jitsu man, who had been seated on the divan, got on his feet and moved toward Martin's chair. His face was absolutely expressionless, his attitude impersonal, but he was rubbing his hands together and stroking his fingers as if to make them supple for the work that lay before them.

Martin observed the maneuver with a suddenly contracted heart. He had a vivid recollection of the terrific pain that accompanied the former application of those writhing fingers to his person. He cautiously worked the handcuffs down upon his hands so that a quick movement would fling them off.

If he was to be put to torture, he would first fight! He eye-marked a carving-knife lying on the table within leaping reach.

But Ichi intervened and relieved the tension of the moment. He halted the businesslike bravo with a word.

"Let us not use Moto just yet," he said to Carew. "Our dear Mr. Blake does not understand, perhaps. We will explain the matter. I am sure he will not then be of stubbornness. You know what we decided upon, captain? We do not want to use Moto just yet."

"One would think you were advocate for the fellow," sneered Wild Bob. "Oh, all right—have your way. We'll save Moto till we call in the chit."

Moto resumed his seat at a nod from Ichi. Martin breathed heavily with relief and relaxed, readjusting his bonds. Ichi turned to him.

"My dear Mr. Blake," commenced the Jap, "let me repeat that I am your very good friend. It makes me very, very sorrowful to view you in your present condition of uncomfortableness, and I trust you will reflect that resentment of Fate is idle. We understand Fate, we gentlemen, and

accept what the gods decree.

"So, I will be of complete frankness in explaining our need, Mr. Blake. We thought it was ill fate when, seven days ago, our schooner was wrecked upon the rocks that guard this mountain. Even though we had searched with diligence for this very spot, we regarded it as fortune of much badness to be compelled to land on the Fire Mountain from an open boat, with but half our company, and without provisions. During days of hunger we cursed Fate. And all the while Fate was preparing our succor. So—if we are wise we accept Fate, Mr. Blake.

"Yet Fate has not been of too great kindness to us, for we could not uncover the so precious lodestone which drew us all to this desolate corner of the world. Fate intended we should wait until the honorable *Cohasset* should arrive.

"You see, the translation of the scarlet writing which the eminent and worthy Smatt furnished us, after the occasion of your unfortunate defection, was lost in the wreck. We had, we thought, a memory of truthfulness of the paper, for we had read it muchly. We were mistaken. We have not discovered the ambergris, though we have searched with industriousness.

"We have also searched the ship for the original writing. We have not as yet obtained it. The young woman has informed us with much readiness of a place where the paper is. But there are certain reasons—" Ichi glanced at Carew—"why we may not test the truth of Miss Le Moyne's statement.

"So, we look to you, my dear Mr. Blake, to enlighten us, to dispute to verify the young woman's words. We ask you, where is the whaling man's writing? And before you give answer, I would with much earnestness beg of you to reflect that Fate is undoubtedly with us, that you and yours have not favor with the gods. It is wisdom to accept Fate! And reflect also, please, that the young woman's immunity from—let us say—physical persuasion to speak, does not extend to your respected self. And bear in mind, please, that the throat-hold you have already experienced is by no means the hold of most painfulness, out of the several score my Moto is of expertness in applying. So—where is the code?"

"Come, spit it out!" growled Carew.

Martin reflected, though not upon Fate, as the Japanese advised. He knew he must speak. Moto was quietly massaging his deadly fingers, and Martin did not relish the torture he knew those digits could inflict. But should he speak truth?

He wondered if Ruth had really answered their question, and if she had told them truly where the writing was. One thing vastly cheered him—he gathered from Ichi's words that Ruth was safe from molestation so far. He decided he had best tell them the truth. It would not help them, and it could not harm Little Billy, for poor Billy was gone.

"Billy Corcoran has the code," he said. "I saw him place it in his pocket last night."

"Ah—so!" exclaimed Ichi. He exchanged a significant glance with Carew. "What unfortunateness! Just as the young woman said!"

"Little Billy, eh!" said Wild Bob. "Well, young fellow, can you tell us what became of that blasted hunchback?"

Martin almost leaped from his chair. What! Had Little Billy escaped? Did they know what had become of Little Billy? Martin had accepted without question the fact that Little Billy was dead. The probabilities, and the boatswain's conviction, had convinced him. But now...

"I don't know what has become of him," he told Carew. "You ought to know. He had the watch on deck when you came out of the fog, last night."

"— queer!" muttered Carew. Then to Ichi: "I tell you, doctor, he must have been settled and dumped overside with the rest. We fixed every one who was awake, except this fellow, Blake. The hunchback must have been knifed and thrown over without being recognized."

"No, there were only three, and the cripple was not of them," returned Ichi.

Not of them! Martin's heart was pounding joyfully. Then Little Billy was alive.

"Well, he isn't on the ship," asserted Carew. "He isn't in the hold with that fo'c's'le crowd, nor aft, here, nor hidden anywhere about the vessel. We know that. Let us not waste any more time—we'll get the information the other way. Call in the minx. Perhaps it will tame some of that cursed spirit of hers to witness her pretty darling, here, being made uncomfortable!"

He accompanied his remark with a hateful glance toward Martin, a glance that was filled with cruel anticipation. But neither look nor words much disquieted Martin's mounting spirits. "In the hold with the fo'c's'le crowd!" Carew had said. Then the boatswain would not have to chance breaking into the forepeak. He need only get into the hold to join the remnant of the crew, and it was a stout remnant if only three had been slaughtered. Why, the boatswain must already have joined them; be leading them now in an attempt to break out of the hold. And Little

Billy was alive, and at large!

Martin wriggled his wrists in the handcuffs and stiffened tensely in his seat. Almost, he expected to hear that instant the commotions of battle from the deck, and to see his friends burst into the cabin. He eyed wistfully the carving-knife on the table and marked it for his weapon. No, he could contemplate these thugs about him now without that hopeless sinking of the heart; he could even withstand torture with fortitude born of hope. For there was a fighting chance.

"Go knock on the door and fetch her out," said Carew to Ichi. To the silent Moto he added: "All right, Moto, we are ready for you. Stand by!"

## CHAPTER XVII

### TWO MEN AND A MAID

Ichi rapped softly on the door of Captain Dabney's room. The door opened a space, and a clear, fearless voice demanded—

"Well, what do you wish?"

The happy thrill Martin felt at the sound of that undaunted voice was nowise dampened by the knowledge that Moto, the torturer, stood behind his chair, with fingers ready to Carew's bidding. Martin, for the instant, had but eyes and ears of love.

"My dear miss, we would consider it a favor of much greatness if you would but spare us a few moments of your honored time," said Ichi, bowing profoundly to the crack in the door. "If you will but grant us the delightfulness of your presence for a very short time—then you may return to carefulness of the honorable Dabney."

Ruth stepped out of the berth and softly closed the door behind her. Then she faced about and saw Martin sitting stiffly on the edge of his chair, with his arms behind his back.

"Oh, Martin!" she cried.

Martin caught his breath as he returned her look, while a sudden surge of feeling clogged his throat and stabbed his heart with a thrust half pain, half pleasure. She was beautiful! She was glorious!

She stood there, swaying easily to the gentle motion of the riding ship, her wide-open eyes full upon his with a look that held a world of anxious love. Her face appeared like a bright, rare flower, in contrast with her blue blouse and skirt, and the dark wood-paneling behind her. The night had placed its mark upon her features—there were dark circles beneath her eyes, and a droop at the corners of the sweet mouth. But courageous self-reliance was still her bearing; and the haggard hints of suffering on her face but enhanced its loveliness.

She was glorious, superb! Martin, his own love in his kindling gaze, recalled of a sudden how she had looked that night when he had stolen the kiss. A glancing moonbeam had that time lighted her beauty. So, too, this time a light ray brightened her—a sunbeam darting through the open skylight set her in a golden frame.

A sharp, sobbing intake of breath came from the head of the table where Carew sat. Ruth directed her gaze from Martin to the outlaw, and her mouth became grim, and her eyes, but now so soft with love, became hard and alert.

Martin, too, looked at Wild Bob. And the sight of the man's face brewed wild rage in Martin's soul, stirred the elemental instinct that makes the male fight to keep his mate. For Carew was also staring at Ruth, much the same as Martin had been staring. His face was hungry, avid, with desire—desire for the wonderful woman before him. His very soul was in his burning gaze, and it was an ugly, bestial soul.

The man was mad—mad with love, insane with a heedless, reckless passion for the girl. Martin could well understand now Wild Bob Carew's turbulent and persistent wooing of Ruth. His whole ruthless, lawless nature was dominated by his evil passion; for so long balked, his love had fed wildly upon itself till now it was his master.

Yet, in that brief, illuminating moment when Martin regarded the other's passion-heated countenance, he beheld something that soothed his rage, checked his panic, and made his heart suddenly swell with pride and tenderness for his love. For behind the lustful glistening in Carew's eyes there lurked a shadow of fear.

Carew was afraid of the girl! Martin, with the lover's insight, discerned and interpreted that



lurking shadow. For Carew's fear was bred of man's nature, and made strong by the intensity of his wild emotion; the fear was a vicious nature shamed, an impure love abashed, by the virgin goodness of the woman.

The fleeting glance Martin had of the conflict in Carew's mind conveyed meaningful information to his own love-sharpened senses. Carew was baffled by the girl.

It was Ichi who interrupted the tense silence that followed Ruth's entry. He beckoned to Yip, and then bowed low before Ruth.

"But, miss, will you not be seated?" he said.

Charley Bo Yip left his work at the table and brought a chair, placing it, at the Jap's direction, directly opposite Martin, but several feet distant.

Ruth sat down, ignoring Ichi, but smiling an acknowledgment of the service to the impassive Chinaman. Her hand, Martin noticed, brushed against Yip's hand as she took her seat. Yip returned to his labors and immediately left the cabin with a tray-load of dishes.

Martin's speech at last broke through the host of emotions and impressions that had swarmed upon him during the past few moments. Ruth's eyes were on him again. For a moment there was a swift, though broken, conversation.

"Oh, Ruth, how is it with you? Have they——"

"Safe, Martin. And you—oh, the beasts! Your arms!"

"Nothing, dear. Captain Dabney——"

"Alive—unconscious. The bo's'n—Billy? What——"

"Billy's alive, Ruth! Free! How——"

"Enough of that!" broke in Carew roughly. "You two were not brought together for conversation. Any more of that chatter and I'll have Moto place a finger on 'dear Martin's' windpipe!"

As if obeying an order already given, Moto became alive. Martin had for the time being forgotten the ju-jitsu man standing behind his chair, but now Moto suddenly leaned forward and gently stroked his neck with long and supple fingers.

Ruth's eyes widened at the action, and horror crept into them as she looked past Martin and observed the cruel, impassive calm of Moto's yellow face. She turned to Carew.

"You beast! Have you brought us together, then, to torture us?" she cried.

Martin saw the red blood mantle the renegade's cheeks. But Carew held check on his tongue. It was Ichi who answered the girl's scornful words.

"Torture? Ah—no, no! It is, ah, persuasion," said Ichi. "But let us trust, my dear miss, you will not compel us to persuade. Believe me, my honored captain and myself are your very fine friends; it would muchly harrow our gentlemanness to order Moto to make painful the person of esteemed Mr. Blake, and thus make disturbful your own honorable mind. We would not like to be hurtful to dear Mr. Blake—ah, no."

"You gloating, yellow cat!" was Ruth's response. "Why, you are torturing him now. Look at his arms!"

"Well, well! You seem to be greatly exercised over the comfort of your pet!" broke out Carew angrily; his mouth was sneering; Martin saw the devils of jealousy were prodding him. "Well, milady, your fancy boy is ironed up because we have learned from somewhat harsh experience that he is rather impulsive in the use of his hands. I do not care to have him assault me and be compelled to kill him—at least, not yet. His arms will remain as they are. And as to whether Moto will work upon him, why, that depends upon you, my girl!"

Martin drew a breath of thankful relief. He had tried to check Ruth's outburst with a frown; he feared her words might cause them to unlock the handcuffs. Cruelly as his arms ached, he much preferred the pain to having them discover the cuffs had been tampered with. If his bracelets were once closely examined, and they learned he could remove them at will, he knew that a prompt investigation would forestall the boatswain.

Carew's decision pleased him. He knew there was no danger now of their loosing his bonds—they were pleased to see him suffer; Carew, because of jealousy, and Ichi, because of native cruelty. He determined to bear his lot with stoicism. If they were about to command this yellow fiend with the deadly fingers to torture him, why, he would stand it. He would not give them the satisfaction, nor Ruth the pain, of hearing him squeal. He would keep his arms behind him and his mouth shut though Moto did his worst.

"It depends upon me? Why, what do you mean?" demanded Ruth, staring from Carew to Ichi.

"Ah, yes, on you," purred Ichi. "Just a morsel of information, you could with such easiness give——"

"Tell them nothing!" burst out Martin. "Don't mind me, dear. They can't hurt——"

The fingers suddenly pressed hard upon a spot on the back of Martin's neck. His speech was choked. Sharp pain flooded his body. Despite himself, Martin squirmed.

"Oh, you fiends! Stop! Stop!" cried Ruth.

She sprang to her feet, with the evident intent of flinging herself upon Moto. Ichi grasped her two wrists. She exclaimed with pain and sank back into her seat.

"Here—stop that, Ichi!" roared Carew. "None of your —— tricks with the girl! Don't dare place a hand on her again! Be still, Ruth! Your darling is not being murdered! Ease up, Moto! Next time wait for orders!"

The fingers lifted from Martin's neck. The relief from the shooting pain was instant, though his misused nerves continued to prick their protest.

Ruth panted to master her emotion. Then she flung hot words at Carew, words colored with scorn and loathing.

"Oh, you unspeakable brute!" she cried. "You coward! It is like you to find pleasure in inflicting pain upon a helpless man, and a defenseless woman! What is it you wish me to tell you? Come, speak up. Don't sit cringing in that chair!"

"By Heaven, girl, you'll go too far!" commenced Carew.

"Ah—we wish to know such a little thing," interrupted Ichi, answering Ruth's demand. "We wish to know the directions that lead to the ambergris hidden ashore, in the mountain. Ah, yes, you recall you boasted of your knowledge of the code directions, and dared us to unlock your memory? But now you will so nicely tell us—yes, please?"

"Yes, that is what we are after, Ruth," added Carew. "And, by Jove, you should be jolly well thanking me, instead of calling me names. You know well enough that but for me, Moto would be playing his fingers upon your nerves, instead of Blake's."

"I see. And in order to spare me, you are going to torture this bound man in my presence, in order that his agony will make me speak!" retorted Ruth. "What a hypocritical beast you are, Captain Carew! I suppose that next you will apologize to Mr. Blake for the inconvenience my stubbornness is causing him. Of course, you are sorry for him!"

Carew swore at the girl's gibing.

"Sorry!" he exclaimed. "By Heaven! I'd like to twist the young blighter's neck with my bare hands! Don't go too far, milady, or it will be the worse for this fine lover of yours!"

He suddenly left his chair, and strode to Martin's side. He favored Martin with an angry, jealous glare, and then turned tempestuously upon the girl.

"Look at me, woman!" he cried. "By ——! Am I not a man? Compare us, girl! Compare me with this half-baked cub you ogle so sweetly! Am I not the better man? Why, I could break that booby in two! Compare us, girl!"

He drew himself up with shoulders back and stood there, a splendid figure of a man. His face was flushed and working, showing plainly the jealous passions and the intolerable longing for the girl's approval which had whipped him into this melodramatic outburst. Ruth faced him with silent, contemptuous scorn. Martin's gorge rose to fever pitch. With difficulty he restrained himself from slipping the cuffs and springing at the insolent egotist's throat.

"It is not ambergris I want!" went on Carew. "It is you, Ruth. I want you of your own free will. Look at me, Ruth! Am I hideous, or a weakling? By Heaven! Women in plenty have come to me ere now, and without my pleading! I am the mate for you. This pup, this runaway clerk, has no right to you. I could kill him for his presumption! Come to me. Ruth, you shall be anything, everything, you wish! I'll make you a fine lady—a queen—I know islands——"

"An island where you will install me as queen of your harem, I suppose," interrupted Ruth acidly. "Have you informed the other ladies you mentioned of your intentions?"

"You are the only one. There will never be another, I swear to you!" avowed Carew. "Those other women—they did not matter. But you—you will be my wife! A true marriage. I can give you a great name, a clean name, not the name of Carew."

"And I suppose we are to live up to your great name with the treasure I am to deliver into your hands?" scoffed Ruth.

"No, no! I do not want you for that!" asserted Carew. "It is you, you alone! The ambergris goes to my employers, to Ichi, here, and his partners. I must get it for them. It is the bargain I made. My own share will not be great, Ruth; I would gladly give a hundred times as much for your favor. But I am rich, girl. I have plenty salted away. I'll make my peace with my family, and we shall go home, to England. You'll be my wife, my legal wife!"

"I would rather be dead than your wife!" declared Ruth with vehemence. "I hate you!"

"And I say I will take you, hating me, rather than lose you!" returned Carew. His manner of impassioned pleading changed abruptly to threatening. "I'll beg no more of you, my haughty minx! But I will suggest that you reflect upon the reality of your condition. In any event, what will become of yourself? Hey? And what will become of this darling crew of yours, we hold prisoners below? And what will become of this scrub, here in the chair—this apple of your eye?"

"By Jove! You had better jolly well think about it! Would you rather have your grandfather, and the crew, and this lover of yours, set upon some safe shore—or, have the other thing happen to them? It rests with you!"

Martin's rage mounted to boiling-point during Wild Bob's remarkable wooing. The man's raw insults made him furious; the stormy browbeating of the woman he loved set him a-tingle with the strongest desire he had ever known—a desire to fling himself upon this sneering wretch and vindicate his manhood by battle. His hands crawled in their restraint, in their lust to batter upon that supercilious face. But he dare not. He knew that an outbreak on his part would mean the death of their chance to regain the ship.

So he held himself in check, biting his lips over his enforced impotence. But Carew's final threat wrung speech from him, for he saw speculation in Ruth's eyes, as she measured her tormentor. The dreadful thought occurred to Martin, "Ruth will barter herself to save the rest of us!"

"No, no, Ruth!" he cried out. "Pay no attention!"

"Shut up!" roared Carew, wheeling furiously upon him. "If you speak again, I'll have Moto put a clapper on your tongue!" He turned to Ruth again. "And now, my girl, you will do the begging! We'll listen to you beg for this pretty boy! Are you going to tell us how to reach the ambergris or shall I order Moto to commence his work?"

"The information—ah, but I am certain the lady will tell us with much gladness," spoke up Ichi.

He had been waiting patiently and impassively while Carew underwent his travail of heart. Now he was again his smirking, leering self.

"You know ju-jitsu," continued Carew. "Moto is an expert—he will pick your darling to pieces and make him a screaming lunatic, here, before your eyes, unless you speak. And if you speak, be sure and speak truth; for Blake goes ashore with the gang, and God help him if you direct us wrongly! Now decide, please!"

Ruth looked at Martin soberly. Martin smiled at her, but his mind was busied with fresh information. He was to go ashore with the gang! So Carew said. Then this yellow band would be divided. If he could hold them ashore until the boatswain attempted his coup, the odds would not be so great against the *Cohasset* lads. If he only knew how the boatswain was progressing down below; whether he had gained to the fore-castle crowd! Anyway, it was a chance to take.

"Martin, dear, I had better tell them," said Ruth.

"Yes, yes, tell them," urged Martin feverishly. "Why—I know the code myself, by heart. I'll tell them."

"Ho, ho! See how your brave knight stands the gaff!" guffawed Carew to Ruth.

Ruth stared searchingly at Martin. Martin writhed in spirit. He longed to shout to her that he was not craven, that it was policy dictated his course.

But Ruth was evidently satisfied by what she saw in his face, for she smiled brightly and said without any trace of disappointment:

"Of course, Martin. It would be foolish to allow them to torture the words out of either of us. I shall speak."

"Ah—but just a moment!" exclaimed Ichi.

He drew a pencil and note-book from his pocket, and extended them to Ruth.

"If the young lady will be of a kindness," he said, "she will perhaps write the directions down on the paper. Then we shall compare it with dear Mr. Blake's directions. Yes, please?"

Ruth took the proffered articles and, without hesitation, scribbled a couple of lines. Ichi

recovered the book.

"Ah—so!" he exclaimed, after glancing at the writing. "Now, Mr. Blake, will you be of such a kindness? I make the comparing. Yes, please?"

Martin spoke, also without hesitation. His memory was exceptional, and he had read often and attentively John Winters' code writing.

"South end beach—in elephant head—four starboard—windy cave—two port—aloft—north corner dry cave," Martin rattled off.

"Ah! So, it is of a correctness!" sang out Ichi with more feeling than Martin had yet seen him exhibit. He waved the book at Carew. "They speak the same. And observe, captain, here is our error so great. It says 'aloft.' We searched with much diligence all about, and beneath. But we did not search overhead—so missed the cave of dryness. But now, ah!"

The little wretch almost danced for happiness.

Carew accepted the intelligence with calmness. It was apparent to Martin that Carew had spoken true words to Ruth—the man was more interested in the girl than in the treasure.

"Well, you had better go ashore after the stuff," he said to Ichi. "Take a full boat's crew, and Blake, here—yes, be sure and take Blake with you. I'll remain aboard—snatch forty winks, if I can, for I'll get no rest tonight if we pull out of this hole. You may return to your grandfather, Ruth!"

Ruth stood up. She half turned, as if to step for the door of Captain Dabney's room, then, swift as a flash, she darted to Martin's side and threw her arms about him. Her cool cheek pressed against his for an instant, and she breathed swift words in his ear.

"Courage, dear. There is a plan——"

Carew, with a snarled oath, placed his hand upon her shoulder, and drew her away with some violence, though he lifted his hand immediately.

"Nothing like that!" he admonished her. "By Heaven! I'll not stand by and watch you cuddling that cub! Get back to your room—go!"

Ruth threw a beaming, hope-filled glance to Martin. Then Captain Dabney's door closed behind her.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THROUGH THE ELEPHANT'S HEAD

The Japanese gentleman might ramble at length in his speech, but he proved himself to be direct and speedy enough in action. Martin found that Dr. Ichi was disposed to hurry. No sooner had Ruth disappeared within the captain's room than he commenced to act upon Carew's orders.

A volley of staccato Japanese relieved the grim Moto of his sinister attendance upon Martin and sent him scurrying forward to the deck, to Martin's vast satisfaction.

Next, he held a low-voiced consultation with Carew, who had stretched himself out upon the divan at the after end of the room. This talk was inaudible to Martin, but at its conclusion Carew said:

"Very well. If you find you need assistance, signal off and I'll send another boat. And if you are going to take Moto with you, have Asoki send a hand aft to stand guard in the cabin while I sleep. Best to keep an eye on the girl."

Ichi turned to Martin.

"So we have made prepare," he stated.

He drew a revolver from his hip-pocket, examined it ostentatiously, and placed it carefully in a side coat-pocket. Martin, regarding the weapon with covetous eyes, recognized it as one of the ship's arms.

"Now, my dear Mr. Blake, you will be of such kindness to go before me to the deck? Yes, please?"

Martin arose promptly and started for the alley-way leading to the main deck. In his mind

mingled triumph and trepidation—triumph because he knew that Ichi's expedition to the shore would lessen the number of the crew holding the ship and thereby aid the boatswain's plan for delivery which he was sure was maturing in the darkness of the hold; trepidation because despite his resolution to fortitude he was more than a little uneasy concerning his own future. If he went ashore with Ichi, would he live to return? Had Carew given orders as to his disposition? He had intercepted glances filled with a smoldering hate, during that whispered conversation a moment since.

Martin had a feeling that he was the object of that discussion, there at the other end of the cabin. Was Carew whispering murderous orders into Ichi's ready ear? The man was smarting under Ruth's scorn. What more natural to Carew's pitiless nature than to sop his mad jealousy with his rival's death?

The Japanese gentleman, cruel and vindictive beneath his surface suavity, would, Martin felt, be pleased to put a period to his existence. Was it merely to cow him that Ichi so carefully examined his gun? Or was it to have cruel sport with him, as Ichi had attempted to have with the boatswain?

"Whatever way," ran Martin's thought, "my job is to get as many of these yellow imps ashore as is possible, and hold them there as long as I can, so that the bosun, leading his outbreak, will have a chance of success. What if Ichi does let daylight through me? It is for Ruth!"

Closely followed by Ichi, Martin traversed the passage and stepped out on deck, and found himself bathed with the sunlight of a bright, calm morning. At Ichi's word, he paused outside the door.

Ichi continued across the deck and spoke to a man who was shouting over the rail to a boat crew overside. Martin recognized the man; he was the same bow-legged, muscular little Jap who had acted as his guide that night in the Black Cruiser. He wore an air of authority; Martin concluded he was the mate of Carew's yellow following, perhaps the fellow, Asoki, Wild Bob had mentioned.

The mate turned from Ichi and hallooed forward. A man who was sitting on the sunny deck, abaft the galley, arose and came aft in obedience to the hail. Martin saw the fellow carried one of the *Cohasset's* rifles. He paused while Ichi gave him some terse directions, then he passed Martin and entered the cabin. Ichi and Asoki then proceeded to inspect the boat overside.

Martin's eager eyes ranged about the decks. What he saw did not encourage his hopes. For just before him, on the main hatch, sat two impassive yellow men, one with a rifle across his knees, the other holding a shotgun. Forward, the galley blocked his view of the fore-hatch; but an armed man leaned against the rail at the break of the fore-castle. So he knew that both hatches were well guarded from the deck.

The two men on the main hatch were of alert and efficient appearance; and Martin knew that Carew's men, being seal-hunters, must be experienced and expert shots. Martin regarded them gloomily. What chance for a successful rising in the face of these armed watch-dogs? The lads would be slaughtered, even though their numbers were even.

The Japs before him were dressed in clothes he recognized as belonging to his shipmates. He concluded that the invaders were already domiciled in the fore-castle; probably a half of them were even then occupying the imprisoned men's bunks. Even so, the few armed men on deck would be more than a match for the boatswain.

If he only knew what time the boatswain would make his attempt! It was ten in the morning now—he had noticed the cabin clock—and the boatswain might wait till night, not knowing of the shore expedition. How long could he manage to hold the party ashore? If there only was some other, safer plan! Plan! What was it Ruth tried to tell him? Had she also a plan?

Such were Martin's troubled thoughts during the moment of his leisure. They were black bodings, and they almost killed the cheerful spark that had been born in his heart during the tilt of wits in the cabin. The menacing peace of the deck occupied all his mind. He barely noticed the mountain looming blackly beyond the ship's bows, and on either side.

Smoke was pouring out of the galley smoke-stack. The rattle of pots against iron came to his ears. Yip was preparing another meal; the Japs, Martin reflected, were not denying their stomachs. Probably making up for the enforced starvation they had lately suffered.

He wondered if the men imprisoned in the hold had been given food, or whether they were being starved, like the boatswain, because of Dr. Ichi's whim. Beneath the Japanese gentleman's velvet exterior existed a merciless humor. He delighted in cruelty, and Martin sensed that, for some reason, he bore a sly and implacable hatred toward the entire company of the *Cohasset*.

Martin wondered just what position Ichi filled in Carew's following. In the cabin, his manner toward Carew had been of a man toward an equal, rather than a subordinate to a leader. Martin wondered if the yellow crew were at bottom Carew's men or Ichi's. They jumped to Ichi's orders; there, at the rail, Carew's mate was actually fawning upon Ichi's words. Ichi was plainly the owners' man.

Yip stuck his head out of the galley door, looked aft, and then withdrew from sight. Immediately after there issued from the galley the shrill caterwauling of a Chinese song, and a renewed rattle of pots.

Martin listened resentfully. Charley Bo Yip's cheerful acceptance of change of masters angered him. He had been quite friendly with Yip during the passage, and he knew the Chinaman was a veteran of the Chinese revolution and a professed enemy of all Japanese. Yet here he was working for these same Japanese, apparently content with events, and serenely indifferent to the fate of his shipmates. During the scene in the cabin, Martin had divined from Ichi's bearing toward Yip that the thugs from the *Dawn* regarded the Chinaman—or rather, disregarded him—contemptuously, as one of a despised and slavish race, born to serve obediently and menially. Which he was, thought Martin disgustedly.

During this short period of his musing, Martin's eyes were not idle. He suddenly was aware of the cause for Ichi's delay.

From the recesses forward appeared Moto and another man, coming aft. Moto carried a lantern in each hand, and the fellow who followed him bore a watch-tackle on his shoulder. As they passed the galley, Yip's song ceased, and the Chinaman also stepped out on deck and ambled aft.

Martin wasted no glance on the cook. He watched with interest the Japs. The burdens they bore were to aid in the exploration of the caves, he knew. At the sight of the lanterns, a dim plan for future action germinated in his mind.

The two Japs reached the spot where Ichi and Asoki stood waiting. They handed their loads over the rail to the waiting hands below. Then they followed, by way of a Jacob's ladder.

Charley Bo Yip approached, bound for the cabin entrance. He passed close behind Martin, almost brushing against Martin's handcuffed hands. He stepped on into the alleyway without slackening his stride, but Martin marked the silent passage with a suddenly thumping heart—for Yip had pressed a piece of paper into one of his manacled hands. Ichi turned to him and motioned —

"Come, we are of readiness, Mr. Blake!"

Martin twisted his hand around and thrust the paper into his hip pocket. Then he stepped forward to the rail.

A couple of moments later, Martin sat in the stern-sheets of a whaleboat. He was much shaken and somewhat bruised from his attempt to negotiate a Jacob's ladder with his hands behind him, but his swift descent had not dimmed his mind. His first thought, even as he clambered over the brig's rail, was to count the men in the shore party. His fall hardly interrupted him.

There were four men at the oars, he saw. And beside him stood Moto, manning the steering oar. On the opposite gunwale perched Ichi. Six of them!

"That will leave nine of them aboard," ran Martin's mind. "Ichi said only three were killed last night. They would be Rimoa and Oomak and MacLean. Then there are eight fore-castle hands, and Chips, and the bosun, down below. Numbers are even, more than even! But odds! Oh, if only a couple of those rifles were in the bosun's hands! If only Ichi would take them ashore!"

Martin searched the boat with his eyes, but no firearms were visible. If the boatswain and the lads reached the deck, they would have those armed watchers to reckon with. Hopeless!

At a sharp order from the steersman, the four oarsmen gave way smartly, and the boat left the ship's side, headed beachward. It was not one of the *Cohasset's* boats, Martin noted. The dingey, in which Little Billy had sounded to anchorage yesterday, still rode to its painter under the counter. The rest of their own boats were still snug on the skids. The whale-boat was Carew's boat in which he had boarded them.

Little Billy! The sight of the dingey brought the hunchback into Martin's racing thoughts. Where was Little Billy? The paper Yip had slipped him, fairly burned in his pocket. But, of course, he dare not attempt to read it here in the midst of his enemies. For he had not the slightest doubt the paper was a note written by Little Billy, and conveyed by Yip's friendly hand.

Good old Yip! Martin felt shame of his recent low estimate of the Chinaman. Yip was fooling the Japs—perhaps coached by the safely hidden hunchback!

Martin's hopes leaped again. Why, thought he, with Little Billy's fertile mind on the job, and Yip free and friendly, their chance of success in an outbreak was greatly increased. Likely enough Little Billy was in communication with the men in the hold. A well-timed surprise might overcome the terrible handicap of the guns. If he only knew what that paper in his pocket contained! Well, perhaps he would know soon, if things went right.

Ichi's right side was toward him. Martin carefully noted the revolver-butt peeping from the coat-pocket. That revolver occupied an important place in the plan that was forming in Martin's mind. He carefully scanned the other occupants of the boat. So far as he could see their only weapons were sheath-knives.

The tide was ebbing swiftly and the *Cohasset* tugged at her cable, bow on to the beach. The breach between the ship and the whale-boat widened; the panoramic view of the mountain and the little bay interrupted Martin's thoughts. He twisted about in his seat, and sent his gaze about the cove in an encircling sweep, thus gaining his first clear idea of the actual geography of the place.

Nature had formed the bay, he saw, by pinching a small chunk out of the huge cone of the volcano. The bay was a watery wedge cutting into the mountain to a depth of about twelve hundred yards, a half-mile wide at the entrance, and narrowing down to a bare half hundred yards of narrow beach at the point of the wedge.

The *Cohasset* was anchored about five hundred yards from the beach, and at a like distance on either side of her the flanking cliffs rose sheer from the water. The waters of the bay were quiet, but, at the mouth, Martin saw the seas beating fiercely upon the girdling reef, smashing thunderously upon jutting, jagged rocks, and sending the white spray cascading into the sunshine. But he searched in vain for signs of a wreck. He interrupted Ichi's reverie with a question.

"Where did the *Dawn* strike?"

To his surprise, the Japanese answered promptly.

"On the opposite side of the island—on the reef. Ah, that was a happening of much terribleness, Mr. Blake. It was night and fog—the same utterly darkness that was of such disaster to you honorable gentlemen last night. Honorable Carew did not suspect the nearness of land. The rock pierced our bottom and we sank with immediateness. Ah—it was of much sadness! We saved not food or clothes and but half our number. We rowed away.

"After while, there came to us a morning of much niceness, like the present one, and we found that the schooner had been altogether taken, as honorable Carew remarked by one god of the sea, named David Jones. So we rowed around the volcano and came in this bay, and I knew the place from the memory I had of hearing the reading, so long ago, in Honolulu.

"Ah, but the days we spent here before the worthy *Cohasset* was sighted were days of much badness! We thought you had come and departed, for we did not find the ambergris. We thought we would all have to go out from hunger and exposure. We thought it would be of much sadness to go out in this place of blackness; the spirits of our honorable ancestors would regard us with much unkindness if we came from this evil place." The man suddenly leered upon Martin. "How would you like to go out in this place of bleakness? Ah—what a sadness!"

He turned and stared at the fantastic, brooding face of the rapidly nearing rock.

"I will with frankness say I do not like this place," he concluded. "I shall be of gladness when I see the last of that smoke, up there, and feel no more the shakes of awfulness."

They were within a few yards of the beach. Martin stared upward. The mountain tapered steeply to the crater thousands of feet above him. The yellow-brown smoke poured upward lazily, and he was sensible, as on the day before, of an acrid, unpleasant taste in the air. Also, as when he had obtained his first fog-obscured view of the mountain from the topgallantyard, he felt oppressed as he looked at that desolate wilderness of crazily jumbled rock towering above him; the sunlight, which sparkled upon the water, failed to brighten the mountain's somber tone, and the nightmare architecture looming above him shivered him with dread.

The openings of numberless caves gaped blackly, like blind eyes. The myriad-voiced screeching of the sea-birds added to the bleakness of the aspect. As Moto swept the boat through the gentle surf that laved the little beach, the Fire Mountain was invested, in Martin's excited mind, with personality, with a malignant, evil personality.

In truth, Martin looked upon himself as doomed. "How would you like to go out?" Ichi had queried; and his manner had made the question a promise. Well, he would try not to go out alone. His work was cut out for him, and it was desperate work. There was slim chance, he knew, of surviving the execution of his plan, but he contemplated his probable death with the high courage of self-sacrifice.

His life, he felt, was a small price to pay for the recovery of the ship and the freeing of his sweetheart. For he was convinced that the boatswain's success was dependent upon his keeping these six Japs on shore. He felt sure his comrades, warned by Yip and Little Billy, would seize the opportunity presented by Carew's divided forces. He meant to fight to keep the Japs separated.

As the boat grounded, and he stood up to leap ashore, he wriggled his wrists in the cuffs, making sure he could free himself with a jerk. He might die, but he vowed he would take some of these yellow devils with him on his passage out.

Also, he reflected, it would make little difference to him, even if he remained docile. The issue would be the same. He was certain Ichi would murder him, so soon as the treasure was uncovered. He was certain Carew had commanded that very ending.

So, it was with a mind made up to grasp any desperate chance, with a courage utterly reckless, that Martin disembarked on the volcanic sand of Fire Mountain beach.

They had landed at one end of the beach. The first object Martin's curious eyes encountered was the "Elephant Head." John Winters' directions ran in his mind—"south end beach, in elephant head." That curiously fashioned jutting rock was the elephant head; cleanly sculptured were the rounded head, slab ears, arched trunk, all gigantic. Beneath the rock-snout was a narrow slit about six feet high by half as wide. It was, Martin knew, the entrance the whaleman had written of.

But Martin had little time to inspect the beach. Ichi commanded dispatch. Martin noticed with surprise that as soon as Ichi touched foot on the sand, his accustomed phlegm was replaced by visible nervousness.

Ichi ordered, and the four sailors ran the boat up on the beach. Then, Moto leading the way, carrying the two lanterns, they all trooped toward the cave entrance.

Martin used his eyes as he walked. There were, he saw, many cave openings on a level with the beach. One in particular was a gaping cavern. Ichi, by his side, and talkative, indicated this place.

"Where we lived," he informed. "Very nasty place—damp, and of coldness. But our torches were poor, and driftwood of much scarceness, so we dare not investigate greatly the interior for better place. Our wood was all gone, and we feared muchly we must break up the boat, when Fate with so great a kindness sent the honorable Dabney to rescue us."

"A queer rescue, you murderous little wretch!" thought Martin. But aloud, he said, "What did you live on?"

They had fallen behind the others. Martin considered swiftly whether or not to fall upon his companion now. He was certain he could get the gun, and commence shooting, before the others assailed him. But he decided promptly that it would not do. They would witness the affair from the ship.

"Oh—we eat the gulls," replied Ichi. "And the shell-fish, and a seal that was dead—ah, he was long dead and of great nastiness! But mostly it was the shell-fish. See the many shells on the sand?"

Martin looked. He gulped a swift, deep breath to keep from crying out, and stopped dead in his tracks. He stared into the yawning mouth of the cave Ichi was speaking about, his heart thumping furiously. Good Heaven! Had he seen a ghost? Was it a crazy trick of his overwrought mind? Or had he actually beheld, for a fraction of a second, a white face framed in the dense gloom of the cave's interior? But that face!

"Ah—but do not pause, my dear Mr. Blake," said Ichi with a hint of sarcasm. "It is of great interest, I know, but the view that awaits you as we seek the ambergris inside, is of much more interestness. Come! See, our dear Moto has the lanterns lighted!"

Martin with difficulty maintained a disinterested expression. He recovered his stride, and they joined the others beneath the overhanging elephant rock. Moto and Ichi held for a moment a chattering interchange of their native speech.

Martin peered into this other opening, his agitated mind half-expecting to see the startling vision again, flashing white in the interior blackness. But beyond a few feet of sand floor and black lava walls, he saw nothing. The opening in the elephant head led into a narrow gallery, a hallway into the mountain.

A blast of hot, sulfur-tainted air swirled out of the opening. It made his eyes smart. Coincidentally, his ears were assailed by strange sound. It came out of the black hole, and it was like the wailing of souls in torment. It was a dolorous whistling that increased to a shrill screeching, then died away sobbingly.

Martin listened to that weird grief all a-prickle with shivery sensations. It was unnerving.

Nor were his companions indifferent to the sound. The four sailors huddled quickly together and gazed fearfully into the dark opening.

Moto chopped off short the word he was saying, and Martin saw his body stiffen and his eyes dilate. Even Ichi betrayed agitation, and Martin saw a violent but quickly mastered emotion flit across his yellow features.

The eery wail died quite away, and Martin's scalp stopped crawling. Ichi turned to him with a



somewhat shaken smile; Martin saw that the Japanese gentleman's nostrils were twitching nervously, and that his voluble speech was really an effort to regain composure.

"Have no afraid. The sound of much strangeness is from the cave of the wind," said Ichi. "It is from the deep place. Now will come the shake, perhaps."

The shake came on the tail of Ichi's words. A heavy, ominous rumbling came out of the black depths. Martin recalled hearing the same sound the day before, when he was on the topgallant-yard. And suddenly the hard, packed sand began to crawl beneath his feet, things swayed dizzily before his eyes, and a sharp nausea attacked the pit of his stomach.

It was but a baby temblor, and it lasted but an instant.

Martin was not much disturbed—a lifetime in San Francisco had made quakes a commonplace experience—but he had the sudden thought that there were safer journeys in the world than the one he was about to take into the heart of a half-extinct volcano. Not that the probable danger of the trip impressed him sharply—he was too much occupied with his plight, and desperate plan—but it was evident the Japs did not relish the undertaking.

The four sailors and Moto were plainly terrified, and, as the trembling and rumbling ceased, they exclaimed with awe and fear. Ichi held himself in hand, but his mouth sagged.

"Always comes the strange noise, and then the shake," he said to Martin. There was the hint of a quiver in his voice. "Out of the deep place, they come—like the struggles of Evil Ones!"

He broke off to speak sharply to his men, bracing them with words.

"They are of much ignorance," he continued to Martin. "They have much fear. They know a silly story their mothers have told them, about the Evil Ones calling from the deep pit; it is a—what you say?—a folk story of the Japanese. These men are of ignorance. But we gentlemen know it is of absurdness, and most untrue. It is a story of great unscientificness."

Ichi rolled the last word off his tongue with difficult triumph. "Unscientificness," was evidently the club his Western education gave him, with which to combat the inbred superstition of centuries. But Martin saw it was a straw club.

But if Ichi were frightened, he mastered his fear.

"It will, perhaps, be some time till the next shake," he told Martin. "We must haste. You shall follow me, please? And recall, as we walk, that Moto is but a pace behind you, and in fine readiness."

He chattered peremptory words to his followers. One of the sailors picked up a lantern, Moto stepped behind Martin, and Ichi lifted the other lantern and stepped toward the cave mouth.

"You might look well at the sky, dear Mr. Blake," he leered over his shoulder at Martin. "Who may say when you will see it again?"

But Martin was in no mood to be frightened. Indeed, if he had put his hot thoughts into words, he would have replied to the sinister hint by inviting Ichi to take *his* last look at daylight. He did look at the sky, but it was for another purpose than bidding farewell to sunlight. He brought his gaze down to the waters of the bay.

The *Cohasset* was quiet, lying peacefully on the easy water. Figures on her deck were plainly visible. Martin saw the bow-legged lieutenant standing on the poop, staring at the group on the beach. He saw more.

The tide had swung the vessel around during the past few moments. She now lay broadside on to the beach. From a cabin port, he saw a bit of fluttering white. A lump rose in his throat. It was Ruth, he knew, waving him good-by. Dear Ruth! Yes, it was farewell! Farewell to life, perhaps, and to love, to this wonderful love that made him almost happy in his misery. The thought of his sweetheart cooped up in that little room with the stricken blind man, with only her resourceful wit and high courage to combat the leaguering terrors, steeled his resolve. He would play his part, he vowed to himself, no matter what the price he payed. God grant that his shipmates be enabled to play their part!

"Ah—we wait, Mr. Blake!" came Ichi's voice, and he was suddenly conscious that Moto's hand was pressing his shoulder.

Ichi was already inside, lantern held high. As Martin stepped for the opening, he cast a swift, sidelong glance down the beach, toward the big-mouthed cave. He saw nothing—which was what he expected.

"I must have been mistaken," he thought. "It must have been a trick of imagination."

He brushed past the man who had the watch-tackle coiled over a shoulder, and fell in behind Ichi. The last sound he heard from the outer world was the clear, vibrant sound of the ship's bell. Five bells!

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS

During the voyage Martin had listened to many discussions between Little Billy and Captain Dabney concerning the formation of Fire Mountain, and their descriptions of the strange features of the island had made him impatient to see with his own eyes the grotesque sculptures, and with his own feet explore the mysterious caverns.

In some long past age, argued the captain, the volcano had erupted during the Arctic winter, and the flowing lava had been quickly chilled by the intense cold, and in the hardening formed the odd sculpting and the numberless caves. But, urged the captain, this lava cloak could not be very thick, and while the caves existed from base to summit and all the way around the mountain, it was unlikely that any of them penetrated into the heart of the mountain.

Little Billy disagreed. He cited John Winters's log in disproof; and he and Martin made plans to thoroughly explore the Island. The prospect charmed Martin. He felt he could hardly wait to reach Fire Mountain beach, and enter the gloomy depths through the portal of the Elephant Head on his errand of discovery.

And here at last he was on the very beach, stepping through the very opening! How different was reality from his bright dreams? Instead of friendly company, he was surrounded by alien, hostile figures; instead of Ruth's little hand snuggling confidingly in his, his arms were bound behind him; instead of inspecting his path with carefree, curious gaze, he looked about him with eyes of desperation.

He had little interest in discovery as he stepped through the Elephant Head. The details of the physical appearance of the passageway were sharply impressed upon his mind, but they were subconscious impressions. His active mind was at the moment wholly concerned with his arms. They ached cruelly. Would they fail him? When he jerked them free, would he be able to use them? Or would they drop numb and useless by his sides? No, he decided after cautious experiment, they were not numbed. He could wriggle his fingers easily.

Ichi walked first, then Martin, the grim Moto next, and the four sailors trailed behind, the last man carrying the second lantern. The gallery they traversed was a deep fissure in the black rock, of uneven height and width. The walls narrowed until they could hardly squeeze through, and then widened until the lanterns' rays failed to reveal them; at times Martin had to bend his head to pass beneath the low roof; again the roof was lost in the gloom.

After a few steps, the sand underfoot gave place abruptly to a floor of hard, smooth lava rock. The gallery twisted, and the thin shaft of daylight from the entrance was lost. The way sloped gently upward. The lanterns waged but a feeble battle against the darkness; Martin felt he was being crushed by that heavy, intense gloom. Their steps echoed upon the glasslike, slippery rock underfoot.

Soon Martin was sensible of a sharp rise in temperature. There was a strong draft in the passageway, and a hot, smelly air blew against his face, and ruffled his hair. And now he was also conscious of the low moaning, a vast, spine-prickling moaning like the protest of a giant in pain, that came out of the darkness ahead.

They wound this way and that. Martin had lost count of the steps, but he thought they must have gone sixty or seventy yards into the mountain. They passed an opening, but it was on the left hand.

The whaleman's directions were in Martin's mind: "4 starboard—windy cave." That must mean the fourth opening on the right hand. The cave of winds. Ichi said that was where the "deep place" was located. This horrible moaning must come from there. Ichi's "deep place" must be Winters's "bottomless hole"; the weird moaning must be the "Voice" that called the conscience-stricken Silva to his doom.

In quick succession they passed three openings on the right hand. The hot wind blew more strongly; it was a moisture-laden breeze and Martin's clothes were damp. Suddenly the passage angled obliquely. A few steps more and Ichi stopped. Over his head Martin saw the yawning mouth of the windy cave.

It was a large opening, and the agitated air rushed out through it as though expelled by a giant fan. The air smelled and tasted evilly of gas and sulphur. The moaning came with the air; it seemed to come from below, from an immense distance.

The group clustered at the mouth of the cave, and the two lanterns, held high, beat back the

gloom for a few yards. Ichi shouted orders to his men, and his words were hardly audible above the deep, rhythmic moan that rose steadily from somewhere beneath their feet. Martin peered into the cavern; it was huge, he knew, but he could not even guess its dimensions.

But it was not the length or breadth of the windy cave that fastened his regard. It was the depth. There, at his feet, plainly revealed by the lanterns' light, was the "deep place," the "bottomless hole." It was a crack in the floor, its width and length lost in the gloom. Its near edge was but a couple of feet inside the cavern entrance. It was from this half revealed gaping slit that the wind came rushing; it was from somewhere in that hole, down, down, an immeasurable distance, that the eerie wailing came.

The lanterns revealed white vapors swirling upward out of the hole. Everything was wet, water dripped from overhead, the black walls glistened with moisture, underfoot was wet and slippery as a waxed floor. Martin's clothes were wet through.

The four sailors huddled fearfully together, peering into the chasm. Ichi's orders finally aroused them to action. The man with the tackle slipped it from his shoulder, and, with the aid of another, overhauled it. Martin had supposed the tackle was to be used in recovering the treasure, but now he saw it was intended for another purpose. This was not Ichi's first visit to the cave of winds, and he came prepared.

The opening in which they stood was near the left hand wall of the windy cave. A ledge, no more than six feet wide at the widest, ran between the wall and the edge of the pit. It sloped towards the gaping hole, and it was wet and shining like the walls. Martin could see it must be a most treacherous footing, and he knew from the words of the code—"windy cave—2 port—aloft"—that they must travel that dangerous path.

It was here, on this ledge, that the blocks and tackle were to be used. The man who carried the second lantern, took the head block in his free hand, and stepped onto the ledge. He sidled along, hugging the wall, dragging the rope behind him.

A few feet inside he crept past the first opening in the wall. A score of feet beyond, man and lantern melted into the wall, and Martin knew the second opening was reached. In a moment, man and lantern reappeared, and the fellow sang out.

The sailor in the entrance, who held the foot block, fastened its hook in a little raised hump of rock; then, grasping the hauling line, pulled the tackle taut. The result was a serviceable lifeline, waist high, across the dangerous passage.

The sailor took a turn about his body with the bight of the rope, and leaned back, holding a steady strain upon the tackle. Martin could see now why they had fetched a tackle, and not just a length of rope—there were no boldly jutting rocks about which a rope might be looped and knotted, but the hooks of the blocks fitted into the small inequalities the edges of the walls presented. So long as a strain was kept upon the hauling line, the hooks would bite, and the lifeline would be quite safe.

Martin followed this work with a watchful eye. He was on the lookout for a chance to execute his plan, waiting for a careless moment on the part of those about him, which would give him an opportunity to free his hands, and strike his blow.

For this was the time and the place! Here, by the edge of the abyss, must come his opportunity, his only opportunity. Somehow he must get possession of Ichi's revolver, the only firearm in the crowd. If he obtained that, he might be able to hold this gang at bay, and prevent them returning to the ship until after the bosun's surprise party. Or, failing that, he could surely finish some of them before their sharp knives finished him. He could dispose of Ichi.

And this was the only plan he had. To fight, and to sacrifice himself, if need be. He had dismissed the thought of escape, of making a dash and losing himself in the black caves. He could do that, he knew. But his escape would not help his shipmates; it would not save Ruth.

He knew that if he did not run for it, his death was almost certain. If he fought, when he fought, he would be killed. If he did not make his chance to fight, Ichi would murder him as soon as the ambergris was discovered—he was sure this program was agreed upon by Carew and Ichi. And if the ambergris were not discovered he would be given over to Moto for torture. Martin was afraid of Moto, and a little bit afraid of death—but his fear for himself was quite overshadowed by his other great fear, his fear for Ruth. His fate was nothing. But her fate! It was because of Ruth he disdained an attempt at flight; it was for Ruth he would strike his blow, and take death if it came.

Hence Martin stood meekly by while the sailors rigged the line, and watched for his chance. Moto's eyes remained fixed upon him unwaveringly; Ichi was surrounded by his men. The moment was not yet.

Martin could not help according the little yellow men a certain admiration. They were frightened, plainly terrified, by this gloomy cave, and especially by the gruesome sounds that came from the "deep place." But their native courage, or, perhaps, the iron discipline to which they were accustomed, caused them to fight down their superstitious fears. Even Ichi, himself,

was visibly unnerved by his surroundings. "Scientificness" and "Fate" evidently could not stop his ears, nor quite eradicate inherited fears. But he held his disquiet firmly under control, and his bearing was sure as he shouted his orders—only a side glance into the hole, and a momentary shudder, betrayed his nervousness.

Ichi placed his lantern on the ground, beside the man who was holding the line, and beckoned to Martin. Then he stepped out upon the ledge, one steadying hand upon the tackle.

For the fraction of a second, Martin hesitated to follow. "What if they shove me over?" he thought. His hands were useless, doubled behind him; if Moto were to give him the slightest shove, over the edge into that dreadful hole he would go, for he would have no saving grip upon the lifeline. But the instant's reflection reassured him. They would not try to get rid of him until the treasure's hiding place were discovered; and by that time he would have made his opportunity to strike.

He followed Ichi. Although the comforting touch of the lifeline was not for him, his nerves were steady, and he did not falter on the glassy, inclined way. Ichi minced his steps, compelling Martin to shorten his stride. Martin saw that Ichi was trembling, and gazing fearfully into the abyss. He had an impulse to throw himself upon Ichi, and roll with him over the edge. But then, he thought, this blow would not help his shipmates; indeed, it would harm them, for the rest would immediately scurry back to the ship. No, he must try to get the revolver into his hand.

Ichi reached the lantern, and stepped into the cleft in the wall. Martin followed, and found himself again on a level floor, and in the entrance to another cave.

This entrance was not large. There was standing room there for but four of them, the sailor who had strung the line, and who was guarding the head block, Ichi, Moto, and himself. The other two sailors were compelled to stay on the ledge, grasping the tackle. The remaining man in the party held to his position at the other end of the tackle, the rope wrapped about his body.

"Ah—It is here we must commence our looking," exclaimed Ichi. "It is here we must test the statements of the young female and your honorable self, Mr. Blake. You are—ah—of a sureness as to direction? My worthy Moto is of a readiness."

Martin could feel the worthy Moto's fingers resting lightly upon his shoulder. But he also felt against his leg, the hard outline of the revolver in Ichi's coat pocket—so closely were they crowded together in the cave entrance.

"The code says 'aloft,'" answered Martin. "Look for a hole in the roof leading up into a dry cave."

Ichi chattered an order, and the sailor picked up the lantern and held it over his head. Very cautiously, so Moto would not feel and interpret the movement, Martin began to squeeze his hand free from the handcuff.

The lantern revealed the overhead rock for quite an area. It revealed the very spot they sought. Just to the left of the entrance and on level with Martin's chin a shelf of rock jutted out a couple of feet from the wall. Above this shelf was an opening, a crack in the ceiling wide enough to admit a man's body.

Ichi pointed and exclaimed excitedly. The lantern light illumined his upturned face and Martin saw it contorted with triumphant greed. The others also exclaimed their joy. Half glancing over his shoulder, Martin saw that Moto's attention was fixed on the ceiling. It was the careless moment Martin awaited, his moment—with a convulsive jerk he freed his hands.

But before he could straighten his arms, Ichi turned and grinned up into his face.

"Ah—so, it was with truthfulness you spoke. But we must prove, yes?" He gave an order to the sailor, and the latter, replacing the lantern on the floor, boosted himself to the ledge and disappeared through the hole. Martin backed against the wall to conceal the fact that his hands were free, that one-half of his handcuffs were empty. He waited stolidly—Ichi and Moto were both watching his face, gloating upon him.

In a moment the expected hail came from overhead. The sailor returned from his exploration, stuck his head through the opening, and shouted a sentence to Ichi, a triumphant, exultant shout. Martin's knees bent slightly and his body tensed for the leap. And Ichi, leering up at him, said, "And now—we have no needfulness of Mr. Blake—"

So far he got. And then the smirk disappeared from his sagging mouth, the cruelty and cupidity left his eyes, and terror crept in.

It was not Martin that checked him. It was the Voice of the Pit. In the passing of a second, the moan from the chasm had become an appalling roar. A very gale of hot air hit their backs as it gushed up from below. The terrifying roaring grew in volume. It seemed to be a tangible thing approaching them. Moto and Ichi, their prisoner forgotten, were crouching, staring wide-eyed into the pit.

Martin reached out and gathered Ichi into his arms.

He had mentally rehearsed his movements. He hugged the Jap with his left arm, from which wrist the irons dangled, while his right hand dove for Ichi's coat pocket. His fingers closed about the pistol butt, and he jerked the weapon out.

Ichi struggled furiously, awake to danger at the first touch. He could not break Martin's bear-like hug. He screamed at the fascinated Moto; Martin could see his lips framing cries, but not a syllable sounded above the huge roaring that filled the caverns. Then Ichi bent his head and sunk his teeth into Martin's arm.

The pain of the bite caused Martin to jerk his arm violently upward. He wrenched it free from the other's teeth; involuntarily, he pressed the trigger, and the weapon discharged. But he did not lose his grasp on the gun; he clubbed it, and brought it down with all his might on Ichi's head.

Ichi collapsed. He sagged in Martin's encircling arm as limply and as lifelessly as a sack of wheat. The shot had aroused Moto; the torturer's terrible fingers were reaching for Martin's throat. The latter dropped Ichi, and sprang backward; and even as he did so, he hurled the weapon at Moto's face.

It was a true shot. The heavy butt caught the Jap squarely on the forehead, and sent him reeling and stumbling, hurled him off the level underfooting at the cave entrance, and caused him to slip and over-balance upon the sloping edge outside. He fell. His momentum carried him on, and he slid down the slope toward the chasm, clutching futilely at the wet, glassy surface. At the edge he appeared to hang motionless for an instant, his face lifted to Martin, his mouth wide open, his contorted features half obscured by the wreathing vapors. Then he vanished.

Martin's knees sagged. He was horrified. So suddenly had the tragedy happened, he was still in the posture of throwing the revolver—and now revolver and victim were both gone, and Ichi—Ichi was this lump at his feet. Unconsciously, he strained his ears for Moto's death cry. But the thunder that ascended from the depths drowned all other sounds. This roar was swelling, swelling; it seemed to rock the world.

He felt sick. He squatted there in the entrance, beside Ichi's body, his wide eyes fixed upon the dancing rim of the chasm. In his mind's eye he could see Moto falling, falling down, down, down, past black, slippery walls, down into the heart of that tremendous sound. But he was too stunned by the awful noise to feel either glad or sorry. Only horror, and a dumb wonder.

He thought, "This is death." Then, strangely, his mind inquired, "Why the sound? What is it?" Once the query was put to himself, his mind worked upon it quite independent of his will. It was a saving quest, something to keep him sane, this groping for an explanation. He watched the vapors. The windy cave seemed less dark, and the white clouds poured upward and swirled about like dancing ghosts. The hot, wet air beat upon him. He was half choked, and sopping wet. And the noise grew and grew. It was like a thousand huge boilers all blowing off at once.

Steam! The thought of boilers was the clue. He had it; he was sure he was right. It was the roar of escaping steam far, far down in that fearful hole. The vapors, the hot, wet wind—dead steam, half condensed during its long rush upward. Down there in the bowels of the mountain the sea seepage was being turned to steam. The live heart of this old volcano was nothing else than a tremendous boiler, and this chasm was the boiler's safety valve. But, God—how far down must be the fires! Miles, perhaps. He wondered if Moto had yet reached bottom.

Gradually, he became conscious that the roar was diminishing, that the vapors no longer gushed forth in such volume. He had lost track of time; he felt he had always been sitting here by the edge of the pit; he had forgotten all about the other Japs, all about the bosun and Ruth. The noise had even driven Ruth from his conscious mind. But now, with the lessening of the pressure against his ear drums, and the end of the great humming inside his head, his apathy was gone. He peered about him.

He looked out of the entrance, along the ledge. The two sailors still clung to the lifeline; there was only air between them and the chasm, and they clutched the ropes tightly and stared down into the hole. Martin could not see their faces, but their postures were eloquent of their terror. Beyond, by the light of the lantern at his feet, the remaining Jap was plainly revealed. His face was visible—and terror-stricken. But he still had the hauling line about him, and was leaning backwards keeping the saving strain upon the lifeline.

The great steam roar died away to the rhythmic, whistling wail that had preceded it. But another great noise was commencing. It was not the shattering scream of steam, but a mighty rumble that came from an immense distance. Coincidentally, the mountain itself came alive and shook, not violently, but gently, shudderingly, as if Atlas, far beneath, were hunching his burdened shoulders.

A dim light appeared, hovering over the great crack in the cave floor. It seemed a reflection of some distant glare, in color a pale green. Slowly it mounted and spread, diffusing a soft, eerie radiance, and revealing to Martin's fascinated gaze the truly vast dimensions of the cave of winds.

Something forced Martin's gaze to the other entrance. And, as his eyes rested upon the figure of the rope-holding Jap, Martin's own body stiffened convulsively with a shock of surprise. His heart skipped a beat, and then began to furiously race, while cold chills crawled up and down his spine.

For a second figure had suddenly materialized beside the figure of a Jap. Another figure—a gnome, a wraith! The unholy light from the pit painted it an unearthly greenish hue, and accentuated the haggardness of face, and the gleaming eyes, the humped body, its crookedness magnified by the crouched attitude. It looked like some demon come floating up on the wicked light from the "deep place." It crouched to leap, to strike, and a bared knife gleamed in an upraised hand; it glared balefully, fixedly, at the living anchor of the lifeline.

The yellow sailor seemed to feel that fearsome presence at his side. He did not turn his head, but he slowly rolled his eyes and regarded the menacing apparition. An expression of complete horror and despair swept into his face.

For an instant he remained motionless. Then his surrender to his terror was complete. He leaped as though released by a spring, cast the rope from him, covered his face with his hands, and backed away from the figure. He backed into the big cave, toward the pit.

In another second they were gone—all three of them. Gone before Martin could utter his cry of warning—or recognition. Gone before the stranger could move.

For, when the sailor cast away the rope, the strain on the tackle was released, and the freed hauling line whipped snakelike through the air as it rushed through the sheaves. The two men on the ledge fell backward, as their lifeline collapsed; the blocks, with no weight to hold them taut dropped from the rock; and the two poor wretches sliding down the incline towards the pit dragged the tackle after them. The tail block, swishing over the smooth surface, twined about the feet of the backward-stumbling first man, and jerked him from his feet. With the swiftly waning light revealing a writhing jumble of outflung arms and legs, ropes and blocks, the three men slipped over the chasm edge.

The quake rumble had ceased. Above the simmering moan of the steam, Martin heard the death wail of the trio, a wild, hideous shriek that grew fainter and fainter, farther and farther away, and finally merged completely with the other sound.

The greenish glow subsided into the depths from which it had sprung. The black gloom swept down over the caves, covering all save the narrow circles about the lanterns. And Martin squatted, sick and shaken, by one lantern, and stared beyond the ledge at the other lantern. By it stood Little Billy.

## CHAPTER XX

### TREASURE CAVE

"Is it little Billy?" thought Martin. "No, it can't be. Little Billy is on board, planning the uprising, directing Yip and Bosun." The guess he had made, born of hope and Ruth's hurried whisper, that Little Billy was at large on the ship, combated the evidence of his sight. He could not believe it was Little Billy.

But then the voice came across from the other entrance. It was unmistakably Billy's voice.

"Martin, Martin! Are you all right?"

Martin found his own voice then. He shouted loudly, "Billy, Billy!" He staggered to his feet, intent on joining the other. But Little Billy was already on the ledge, sidling towards him.

An instant later he was pawing the hunchback, and gabbling gladly, "Billy, Billy!" It really was Little Billy, a real flesh and blood Billy. The mere feel of him was medicine to Martin's sick soul; it shoved back the horror of the last few minutes. He was almost hysterical, so intense was his relief and joy at having Little Billy by his side.

But the hunchback's first words effectually checked this mood. "Ruth!" he said. "My God, Martin—the ship—Ruth—what has happened!"

It was like a cold blast—these words. They shocked Martin sober, blew the stupor from his mind. "Ruth—the ship!"

"Is she—is she—" stuttered Little Billy.

"All right. So far. Carew has the ship. But there is a plan—" Martin stopped. The plan! Good

Lord, what now of the plan? He had taken it for granted that Little Billy was on the ship, directing a rescue. Why, Yip had passed him a note from Little Billy—

That note! Martin clapped his hand to his hip pocket.

"What is it?" cried Little Billy. "Talk to me—tell me, Martin, about the ship—Ruth!"

Martin bent over the lantern, and unfolded the paper he had drawn from his pocket. It was a mere scrap of paper, hurriedly and irregularly torn from a larger sheet; on it, in Ruth's hand, was penciled a few words.

"Grandfather has regained his sight—courage, dear—Yip has a plan. The noon meal."

Their eyes met above the papers, Martin's kindling with understanding, Little Billy's bewildered.

"By George, she wrote it!" exclaimed Martin. "I know—she slipped it to Yip in the cabin, and he slipped it to me. And all the time I thought I had a note you had written. She wrote it—Ruth!"

All of a sudden Martin realized that the hunchback's presence by his side was a mystery. For the first time his eyes began to critically inspect his companion. Revealed in the lantern light, Little Billy was a truly pitiful figure, coatless, shoeless, clad only in sea-soiled trousers and singlet. The twisted, meager frame slumped dejectedly, the face was haggard with fatigue and worry, the eyes deep-sunken, distraught.

"What happened, Billy? You—how did you get ashore?" began Martin.

"Swam," was the succinct reply. "Never mind me. Just now, you talk. What are conditions aboard? How many of us are left? The note—the plan—to retake the ship?"

"Yes, I think so. The crew—I'll explain, Billy. But this place—" The distant roar was audible again, and, despite himself, Martin fell to trembling. "Let us get out of here," he urged Little Billy. "Back to the beach—where we can see the ship."

"We can't show ourselves on the beach," said the Other. "Winters' cave—did you discover it?"

Martin nodded. The dry cave overhead—that was the place. He did not relish recrossing the ledge by the chasm edge at that moment; he did not think he could do it without falling in. And Winters' cave, if he recalled aright the description, had an outlook over the bay.

He motioned Little Billy to hold the lantern, while he bent over to inspect Ichi. A dim idea was at work in Martin's mind; not yet clear cut, not yet a reasoned plan. It concerned Ichi. If only the little wretch were not dead, or badly injured, as he feared. The man had lain there so motionless; he seemed such an inanimate lump as Martin rolled him over on his back.

But the fear was groundless. There was blood on Ichi's face from a torn scalp, and a big lump on the side of his head. The hunchback felt the lump, and cried, "Knocked out!" Immediately he added, "He's coming around—or playing 'possum. His eyes! He isn't shot. I thought you shot him; I saw the flash. But he's just knocked out—and waking up. See his eyes! Frisk him. Not even a knife."

Ichi's lids were fluttering. Presently they drew back slowly, and the man stared up at them. At first it was a vague, wavering, uncomprehending stare. But after a moment, intelligence—and fear—crept into the beady black eyes, and the gaze fastened upon the two grim, white faces above. Ichi tried to raise his head, his body. But Martin's hand was at his throat, and his knee upon his chest.

"He's alive!" exclaimed Martin, triumphantly. "Don't you see, Billy—we can bargain——"

"Use him, or kill him," cried the cripple, savagely, and he cursed at the prostrate man's face. "Drag him to his feet, Martin. Let's be going. The way to Winters' cave—up here?"

With his clutch on Ichi's collar, Martin dragged him to his feet and propped him against the wall. Ichi was groggy, but he kept his feet; and he was plainly conscious, though he did not open his mouth. The handcuffs which had chafed Martin's wrists for so many hours were still dangling from his left arm. He slipped them off, and, with no gentle hand, forced his prisoner's wrists together behind him and ironed them tightly. Tit for tat, thought Martin; and he made certain that Ichi would not wriggle his wrists through the steel clasps.

"Look here!" called Little Billy. "I had a hunch that shot hit somebody. Look—up here!"

He held the lantern over his head, and its rays lighted the shelf beneath the hole in the ceiling. On it was sprawled the body of a man. It was a gruesome sight; the form seemed oddly shrunken and twisted, one leg hung over the edge of the rock, the face was towards them, eyes and mouth wide open. Unmistakably dead.

"Hole in the forehead," said Little Billy.

The nausea had Martin's stomach again. But he fought it back. His mind searched for and immediately found the answer.

"When Ichi bit my arm, and I jerked it up and the gun went off. Yes, that's it. And that—I'd forgotten about that fellow, Ichi sent him aloft to explore. He must have been crawling back when I—when he was struck."

"Good riddance," said Little Billy.

"Watch this bird a moment," commanded Martin.

He stepped forward, and, conquering his repugnance, put his arms about the corpse and lifted it to the floor. Then, on second thought, he knelt and removed the leather belt and sheath knife from about the man's waist. He had remembered he was weaponless.

It was no easy task to boost the prisoner to the shelf, and thence through the crack in the ceiling. Ichi was none too willing to proceed, though he made no audible protest. But with Little Billy—who went first—pulling from above, and Martin prodding and thumping from below, the three finally negotiated the unhandy entrance.

They found themselves in a tunnel, much like the one below that connected with the Elephant Head. But this shaft, when they got a little ways into it, was dry, and the air was sweet. A cool, sweet wind touched their faces, so they knew they were approaching blessed daylight.

Little Billy went first, with the lantern. Martin brought up the rear, and, with his hand on Ichi's collar, directed the latter's somewhat faltering steps. Their way climbed sharply, then leveled; the tunnel was as tortuous as the one below. They turned a corner and discerned a bar of daylight cutting athwart the darkness of the passage. Another turn, and they were on the threshold of a wide and lofty cavern, a great room that was dimly lighted by a large, natural window in the farther wall.

"Watch him!" Martin cried to Little Billy; and, deserting his prisoner, he rushed forward to the opening.

He looked out over the beach and the sun-sparkled waters of the little bay. This cave was a good forty feet above the beach. He looked down on the vessel, which was but a few hundred yards distant; the flooding tide had swung her stern to the shore, and her decks were plainly visible.

At his first glance, Martin suffered a sharp stab of disappointment. For nothing was changed. There, leaning over the taffrail, staring shoreward, was the Japanese mate, Asoki, in the exact attitude in which Martin had last seen him, when he entered the caves in Ichi's wake. The man seemed not to have budged since then. And forward, the guards were still at the hatches. He saw Yip step out of the gallery, empty a pot overside, and stand there by the rail, gazing aft.

Asoki suddenly came to life, walked over to the skylight and glanced below, and then struck six bells' on the bell that hung by the wheel.

Martin's feeling of disappointment was changed to one of astonishment. Six bells! It was unbelievable. Only thirty moments since he followed Ichi through the Elephant Head! A half hour!

The swift tragedies by the chasm brink, the earth's convulsions, and the darkness, above all the darkness, all combined to lend error to his time reckoning. He had felt he was immersed in the black bowels of the mountain for hours. But now he looked into daylight, and reasoned about it, he realized how short was the time spent in the cave of winds. It was but a half hour since they landed. Thirty moments! Why, the bosun and the boys must still be quiet in the hold, and Yip's plot was still a-borning. And now, he was not impotent; he could help, perhaps. With Ichi.

He turned to call Little Billy and the prisoner forward. He discovered the hunchback by his side, peering out at the ship. But Ichi was gone.

"My God, where is he?" exclaimed Martin.

"Eh? Damn! I forgot him!" was Billy's answer. He glanced swiftly around. "There he goes!"

Martin saw him the same instant—the squat figure streaking for the dim recesses at the farther end of the cavern. He sprinted after the vanishing form. Before he could overhaul it, Ichi rounded a spur of rock; there was a crash, and a yelp of terror and pain. Martin, rounding the corner, came into collision with a round rolling object, and sprawled headlong over it.

He landed on a softer couch than the rock, on Ichi, himself; and the Jap's remaining wind was expelled from his body with a forcible "*woof!*" Something made of wood fell on Martin's back, and bounced off; then a barrel rolled against him and stopped. He did not feel either blow; he was too intent on making sure of the safety of the captive. He flopped the limp and groaning Ichi over on his back, and sat on him.

Just then Little Billy appeared around the jutting rock with the lantern.



"Got him safe?" he exclaimed. "Oh, Martin, I was so anxious—the ship—took my eyes off him just a second, and—" He stopped his excuses suddenly, and held up the lantern, gazing about.

"Good heavens, do you know what this is?" he cried.

Martin knew. He had guessed it even before Billy spoke, even before the lantern brought clear sight. The thing he had tumbled over: the other things that bumped him; the reek of musk in the air. He knew it was the treasure.

None the less, he was astonished when he followed Little Billy's gesture with his gaze. They were in a corner of the dry cave, and the jutting rock which had spelled grief for Ichi formed a pocket or alcove. This little chamber, in which they now were, was nearly filled with kegs. They were stowed neatly, tier on tier, from floor to sloping roof. They were about the size of pickle kegs, and there were dozens of them. Ichi had evidently plumped headlong into the pile and sent several kegs (and himself) rolling, one of which had tripped Martin.

Martin's knowledge of ambergris was still very vague. He would not have been surprised at the sight of a couple of barrels and an iron-bound chest or two. But a regiment of kegs! Dozens of kegs! If they all contained ambergris, he thought, there must be tons of the smelly stuff.

"See it, Martin?" cried the volatile hunchback, all else forgotten in the excitement of the instant. "By Jove, the entire fifteen hundred pounds, or I'll eat this lantern! *Phew*—it hasn't lost any of its virtue."

"But all those kegs can't be filled with it," said Martin. "Fifteen hundred pounds—why, there must be fifty kegs there."

"Fifty-five," answered Little Billy, "counting the ones you knocked over. Not as much as it looks. There is hardly any weight to ambergris; it takes quite a lump to weigh even an ounce. Specific gravity is—is—oh, I forget."

"It is .09," came a muffled voice from underneath Martin.

Martin started, and lifted his weight from the prostrate form.

"That is of betterness," said Ichi, more clearly. "May I see, please?"

"The rat smells cheese," observed Little Billy. It seemed so. Ichi struggled into a sitting posture, and his little black eyes were bright and greedy as he feasted them upon the kegs. He even sucked in the burdened air greedily.

"Let's get back where we can see the ship," said Martin. He jerked the Jap to his feet, and propelled him before. "That cursed stuff sickens me," he told Little Billy, as they rapidly retraced their way. "Think of the ruin—the murder—all the trouble it has caused."

"Aye, Sails," responded Little Billy. "Poor Sails. And who else? For God's sake, who else, Martin? And the ship—Ruth—everything! I know nothing."

"Lend a hand while I truss him up, so he won't lead us another chase," said Martin.

They had regained the window, and a glance had assured Martin the ship had remained peaceful during their brief absence. And now he took the strap belt he had salvaged from the dead sailor and with it tightly bound Ichi's ankles. It rendered him quite helpless. Martin deposited him with his back to the wall, a few feet from the window.

"Sit there awhile and think over your sins," he told him, when Ichi tried to speak. "When I'm ready, I'll talk with you."

## CHAPTER XXI

### DECOY

"If we could only get on board to help," complained Little Billy. "If it were only dark. That whaleboat down there."

"But we can't," was Martin's prompt rejoinder. "You said yourself we dare not venture on the beach. They would only knock us over with their rifles—and besides, Carew would learn that something had happened to his landing party."

They were sitting on either side of the opening, watchfully regarding the ship. Martin, in response to the hunchback's importuning, had just briefly related the details of the previous

night's misfortune, and he now summarized the situation on board as he knew or guessed it.

"The foc'sle crowd is locked in the hold—you see the guards, one at the fore hatch, and two amidships," said Martin. "The bosun has undoubtedly broken through from the lazaret and joined the boys by this time. Captain Dabney is laid up in his room, suffering from the blow Carew gave him, and Ruth is nursing him. But her note said he has regained his sight—what does that mean, Billy?"

"I don't know," said Little Billy. "It was a shock that blinded him; perhaps another shock has cured him. But the Chink's plan, Martin! What is it? 'The noon meal.' What does that mean?"

Martin shook his head. "I wish I knew. I shouldn't think eight bells would be a good time for the boys in the hold to attempt to break out. Now, would be a good time. There are only three of the gang on guard—or four, if you count the mate, there on the poop. Another one is in the cabin with Carew. The rest must be asleep in the foc'sle. There are only nine of them left, Billy. We have accounted for six, you and I—and that hole. There are ten of our fellows in the hold. If only they were armed! I am afraid to try my scheme just yet; it might upset their plans, it might spoil everything. Her note is explicit, 'The noon meal.'"

"Your plan? We can help?" exclaimed Little Billy.

Martin inclined his head towards the bound form of their captive, lying beyond earshot. "Decoy," he said.

Understanding lighted the hunchback's face. "I see. Draw them off—some of them. Just before eight bells. Oh, I am dopey, not to have thought of that. But I can't think straight. Nerves snapping. I've worried a lot since last night. You know how it is—I didn't know what had happened, and Ruth—"

Yes, Martin knew how it was. He smiled his understanding and sympathy, and leaned over and patted Billy's shoulder. Yes, he knew. His own nerves were snapping, when he thought of Ruth. He knew that his, and Wild Bob's, were not the only hearts enslaved by the maid of the *Cohasset*. And he, the accepted lover, could regard without disquiet the light that shone in Billy's eyes whenever the latter spoke of Ruth.

"I know how it is between you two," continued Little Billy. "And you—I think you know how it is with me. I—why, I'd die for her gladly. Oh, Martin, in my mind I think I died a thousand times last night."

"What happened to you last night?" inquired Martin. "How did you escape them, and get ashore?"

"I suppose they murdered Rimoa and Oomak while Sails was in the cabin, calling you. Poor Sails—so it was his concern for me that caused him to awaken you. He thought feydom had me."

"But he was wrong," said Martin, quickly.

"I don't know; I have had a feeling—oh, well, no matter," rejoined Little Billy. "I guess they would have finished me, as well as the others, had I been on board."

"Had you been on board?" echoed Martin.

"I was already on my way to the beach when they boarded. Passed them on the way. It was just an accident, a simple mishap," explained the other. "It happened just after I roused MacLean from his snooze in the galley. You recall how dark it was last night. I felt my way aft, and paused by the capstan, where you found my tobacco pouch. I placed it there preparatory to filling my pipe. My pipe wasn't in my pocket, and I remembered that it was lying on the thwart of the dingey, where I left when I came on board after sounding to anchor in the afternoon.

"Well, you may remember what state I was in. The booze craving made me jumpy and unreasonable. I decided I must have that pipe, no other pipe would do. So I crossed to the side and felt around until I grasped the boat's painter; and then I overhauled until the dingey was beneath me. I had climbed up on the rail, and was perched there on my knees, and as I twisted around to make the painter fast, I over-balanced and fell.

"I guess I struck the boat's gunwale a glancing blow with my head. Anyway, I bounced off into the water. When I came to the surface I was at first too stunned to cry out. I needed all my breath, anyway, to keep afloat. The tide was flooding like a millrace, and sweeping me with it. I couldn't see the ship; I was isolated in the black fog.

"The water was icy cold and my clothes dragged me under. You remember how chilly it was last night; I had on sea boots and reefer coat. I struggled desperately, under water half the time, and managed to slip off the boots; then I wriggled out of my coat and guernsey. By this time I knew I was near the beach, and I was almost spent.

"Then, a boat passed me. I could not see it—but I heard oars, or fancied I did. I tried to call out. But I was too far gone; every time I opened my mouth it filled with water, and I only

spluttered. Anyway, I wasn't sure it was oars; it was more likely surf on a rock, I thought. A little later, I felt the ground under my feet, and staggered up on the beach.

"I was lying on the sand, waiting for strength that would enable me to hail the ship, when they rushed you. I heard a shriek coming out of the darkness. It must have been MacLean. Then shouts, and a shot, and Ruth's scream, and—silence. Oh, I knew then what had happened, and that I had really passed a boat, Carew's boat!

"I don't like to think about the time that followed. I think I was crazy for a time; I know I ranged up and down the beach like a madman. But I retained enough sense to know I couldn't swim against the tide. It was a miracle I kept afloat with the tide in that Arctic water, and me a lubberly swimmer. Then, after a long while—how long a time I don't know; each moment seemed an age—I stumbled upon MacLean's body. Poor Sails, he could not foretell his own finish!

"He—he couldn't have been quite dead when they threw him over, or he wouldn't have made the beach so quickly. But he was quite dead then. I took his knife from his hip—this is it I have here—because I felt I might have a chance to use it. God, how I longed for a chance to use it! Finding MacLean sort of steadied me; it shocked me sane, so to speak. The fog began to thin out, and I slipped into a cave.

"Pretty soon the fog lifted altogether, and it was a bright calm morning. Through the cave mouth, I could see the Japs parading the deck. But I didn't see them making preparations to get the ship under way, so I reasoned the ambergris was still ashore, and that they would come for it. So I just waited.

"You see, I thought it was all ended for the Happy Family. I knew Carew, and these yellow devils; I was sure you had all been killed, and that Ruth—oh, well, I was going to meet them when they came ashore, and do a little work with Sails' knife before they finished me.

"At last their whaleboat started for the beach. I was ready to show myself, when I noticed you in the party—you, alive. I thought if you were alive, some of the others might also be alive, and there might be something to hope for. So I lurked in the cave, and watched."

"I saw you!" interjected Martin. "Lord, what a start the glimpse of your face gave me! I knew you were alive, but I was convinced you were on board. I thought I was seeing ghosts."

"You went in through the Elephant Head, and I went after you," continued Little Billy. "The cave I was in (the one those fellows lived in, by the reek of the place) communicated with the passage you traveled, so I could fall in behind without going out on the beach. I trailed your party to the big cave, stopped just back of the light, and watched you cross the ledge. Then came that awful blast (did you notice it was steam, Martin?) and I saw you struggling with one of them, and you knocked another one over the edge, and I thought it was time for me to lend a hand. But the sight of me was too much for that fellow who held the line.

"Well, they are gone, poor devils. I suppose I should feel a bit sorry for them. But I don't. I know just what brutes they were. What surprises me, is that they didn't make a thorough job of it and slaughter all hands, instead of only three. What do they want of prisoners? Except—Ruth?"

"I am sure Carew prevented that," said Martin. He rehearsed the scene in the cabin. "Carew is wild about Ruth, and she has him bluffed, actually bluffed. If it had been left to Ichi, there, I am sure we all would have been killed, and the directions for finding the treasure tortured out of Ruth. But Carew protected her—and us. He hopes to gain her favor, to compel her to love him, or—at least accept him. He even hinted he would place all the rest of us safely ashore. I think he was lying."

"Depend on it, he was," asserted Little Billy. "Place you safely ashore on this island, I suppose, And conduct you to the edge of that hole, and personally chuck you in. That's Carew's style! My God, that is an awful hole, Martin! It got on my nerves. Listen, she's blowing again!"

They regarded each other silently, listening to the roaring down there in the depths. It grew and grew, became for a moment a harsh menacing, overwhelming screech, and then slowly subsided to the murmurous moaning that never ceased.

"It happens continuously," commented Little Billy. "Every hour or so, since I've been ashore. Blow the roof off some day. Here comes the rest of it."

"The rest of it" was the rumble and the little quake. It brought vividly before Martin's eyes the horrid picture of the ghostly lighted chasm, and the yellow men falling to their death. It brought disquietude to another mind, also. Ichi emitted a wail of pure terror.

"This place has got him," said Little Billy. "By Jove, it has nearly got me, too. One could swear those were human voices in torment, down there. Eh, Ichi," he added in louder tones, "don't you hear your shipmates calling to you to join them? Down yonder in the hole?"

Ichi chattered in his native tongue. He may have been answering Little Billy; it sounded as though he were cursing him. Whatever it was, it was frightened and forceless talk; and when presently Ichi lapsed into English, it was the fear-stricken coolie who entreated, and not the

swagger Japanese gentleman who commanded.

"Oh, Mr. Blake, you are gentleman. Mr. Billy is not speak truthfulness, yis? Mr. Blake, please, you will not give me to the 'Deep Place.' Not to the 'Evil Ones.' Mr. Blake, I help you, I be of much usefulness. You promise—Mr. Billy spoke with jokefulness. Yis, prease?"

"He's forgetting his English. What do you know about that?" said Little Billy.

"He thinks you meant what you said about his shipmates calling," replied Martin, in a low voice. "He thinks you meant that you were going to drop him into the hole, after his gang. Threaten him some more. The more frightened he is, the more eagerly he'll do what we wish. There goes seven bells on the ship—we'll have to use him in a few minutes."

"So you don't like the thought of being chucked into the hole, eh, my yellow snake?" drawled Little Billy, strolling over to Ichi's resting place. Despite his knowledge that the hunchback was acting, Martin shuddered at his tones; his voice was vibrant with bitter hate. "But it is not what you like this time, Ichi. It is what we like, what I like, eh? You see this knife; you feel it when I prick your throat—so? Well, it is old Sails' knife, Ichi, poor old Sails' knife. Why not slit your lying throat with Sails' knife, like you slit Sails' throat—if I like, eh? But I don't like, Ichi. That's too sweet a finish for you. No, when we get ready we are going to cart you down to the edge of that hole, and—over the edge you go!"

"Oh, please, please—oh, *prease* Mr. Brake!" chattered Ichi. "You come take him away. You not let him do it? Oh, Mr. Blake, a long time I your friend; you helpful me I helpful you, I be your man. Not the Deep Place, not the—*aiee-ee*," and his voice trailed off in a dolorous howl as some freak of the draught caused the voice of the pit to momentarily shriek.

"All right, Billy, on watch here. Let me talk to him now," said Martin.

He dragged Ichi closer to the window, so that daylight fell upon the man's face. Then he sat down in front of him, and regarded him narrowly.

Ichi was in a frenzy of mingled hope and fear. He gabbled half incoherently his allegiance to his captor, his love for him, his willingness to do this, that, anything—only, not the Deep Place—*prease!* He was a pitiable object, could Martin have found pity for him in his heart. He was no longer the suave, dapper Japanese gentleman. His boasted gentility was gone with his courage; and superstitious terror had quite overcome his Western skepticism. He was just a yellow coolie, terror-stricken, cringing before and begging of his master.

"Wild Bob has just come up on the poop. He's talking to the mate," called Little Billy.

"Good," said Martin. He unbuckled the strap from around Ichi's ankles, and hoisted the man erect.

"Now, Ichi, you do what I say, and I promise you it won't be the Deep Place. Indeed, I promise you your life, so far as I hold it—though you don't deserve it. But if you don't do what I say—"

"Yis—oh, yes, please, I helpful you muchly," he promised, eagerly.

"Carew is at the taffrail," said Little Billy. "He's hailing the beach—hailing Ichi."

Martin had finished looping the strap about the chain of the handcuffs. Now he thrust the man forward, into the window; he, himself, retaining a grasp on the leather, and remaining beyond the window edge, by the hunchback's side.

Captain Carew stood at the taffrail and searched the face of the mountain. Presently he cupped his hands, and sent a second stentorian hail across the water—"Ahoy-y-y! Ahoy, the beach! Ichi!"

"So he's a bit worried about his partner," whispered Little Billy. "That's good."

Martin commanded Ichi. "Answer him."

Ichi hesitated. But a jerk on the strap opened his mouth. He sent a piercing "Aiee-e-e!" out of the window.

Carew looked eagerly for the sender of the hail. But it was Asoki, the mate, who located the figure framed in the opening. He clutched Carew's arm, and pointed. And Martin noted that not only the pirate captain was interested. Charley Bo Yip's head popped out of the galley door; and the guards all stared shorewards.

"Are you all right?" hailed Carew. "Have you found the stuff?" The voice came very clearly over the water; the cliffs making a sounding board that accented, then echoed, every syllable.

"Tell him," Martin commanded Ichi, "tell him, 'Come ashore!' Come, sing it out. Remember the Deep Place!"

"Come ashore!" howled Ichi.

"Anything wrong?" demanded Carew.

"Tell him, 'Yes,'" commanded Martin. On the spur of the moment he added, "Tell him I have been lost. That's it. An accident. And you need him. Out with it."

"Yes! Accident! Mr. Blake lost! You come and helpful, Captain!" Ichi called, obediently.

"What's that—the cub lost—gone?" shouted Carew. He seemed not overcome by the news. He laughed, and slapped Asoki on the back. "D'ye want me to help locate the stuff?" he hailed back to Ichi. "Shall I bring the girl?"

"My God!" breathed Little Billy.

Martin jerked viciously on the strap. "Tell him yes, damn you, tell him yes!" he cried.

"Yes—the girl!" called Ichi.

Carew waved his arm. "Coming!" he replied. "Meet me on the beach!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### TABLES TURNED

They waited there at the window for some time longer, watching the preparations made for Carew's coming ashore. Carew, himself, had disappeared below, but a sailor appeared on the main deck, and hauled the dingey alongside. He was the cabin guard, thought Martin. Asoki, the mate, left the poop and lent a hand at the task, and supervised the placing of the oars in the boat, and the adjusting of the Jacob's ladder.

And they in the cave watched not only this task. Events were proceeding forward. It was evidently very near the noon hour, for Yip was preparing to serve the dinner to the crew. Even before Carew left the deck, the Chinaman banged a pan, at the galley door, announcing his purpose to the world. And now, three new figures were visible on the deck, coming up from the foc'sle.

Martin stared closely. The newcomers did not appear to carry their arms with them; the sunlight gleamed on but three rifles, the one carried by the fore-hatch guard, and the two weapons in the possession of the men lounging abaft the house, amidships. All of the Japs, save only the guard at the fore hatch, lounged over to the rail and watched their compatriots aft prepare the dingey. They were evidently more interested in this work, and in the aspect of the beach, than in the meal that Yip was now spreading for them on the deck abaft the house.

Presently, Carew was visible again—on the main deck, this time, at the rail. And—Martin's heart leaped into his throat—Ruth was with him. Ruth, cloaked and bowed, stood submissively by Carew's side.

Carew noticed his men lounging forward, gaping at him. He evidently disliked the sight, or perhaps, some word of theirs' about the girl reached his ears—he flung an order to Asoki, and the latter chattered angrily at the loafers. They left the rail precipitantly, and clustered about the mess kits Yip had just finished placing on the deck. The Chinaman, Martin noticed, retreated immediately into the galley; and, a second later, reappeared on the other side of the deck. He peeked around the side of the house at the diners; then he strolled forward.

Carew was already in the dingey, and Ruth was being helped to the rail by the Jap mate. The sailor was in the dingey, too, seated at oars, ready to give way. Martin had the thought: "There is now no guard in the cabin, and if Captain Dabney really has his sight—" But he did not pursue the speculation. He was thinking of Ruth, watching her descend the Jacob's ladder into Carew's waiting arms. He forgot to watch Yip. He forgot everything save Ruth, and the hated hands that fastened upon her waist and lifted her into the boat.

Grim-faced, savage-eyed, Martin stared down at the little boat; watched Carew seat Ruth beside him in the sternsheets; watched the sailor bend to the oars as Asoki cast off the painter. And Martin's mood was exultant as he watched. Carew was coming! Now he was going to square accounts with the renegade beast! Now he was going to wipe the smirk from those cruel lips! That sneering mouth would never again babble the brute's unclean love into *her* unwilling ears, by heaven, no!

It was a gasp from Ichi, and a stuttering exclamation from Little Billy, that brought his mind—and eyes—to the ship again. Something was happening amid the group of eaters. One of them was rolling on the deck, another was staggering about, consternation reigned over the rest, and their cries of surprise and fear were audible in the cave. Asoki was running toward the scene.

"The hatch! Yip!" cried Little Billy.

A blood-curdling whoop rode the air. Yip's whoop. The Chinaman was dancing on the deck, away forward by the foc'sle scuttle, brandishing something over his head. More than that, Martin saw—the fore hatch was open. Other figures appeared by Yip's side. The gigantic figure of the bosun appeared around the forward corner of the house, and he was rushing aft.

He—and his followers—almost reached the after end of the house before the rattled Japs spied them. Then was pandemonium. One of the armed Japs shot point blank at the bosun. He missed the mark at which he aimed, though a man behind the bosun fell; but the bosun, before his enemy could fire again, leaned over and scooped into his arms the figure that had been writhing on the deck, and, half straightening, hurled it at the man with the gun. The body hurtled true to its mark—both target and missile went scooting across the deck, to fetch up motionless in the scuppers. Then the bosun had the rifle and was swinging it, clubbed, the center of a *mêlée*.

Carew's voice, roaring at Asoki, brought Martin's gaze down to the small boat. It had made some hundred yards towards shore when the shot was fired at the bosun—the first inkling Carew had, it seemed, that his conquest of the ship was in jeopardy. He was standing up in the boat, trying to get a glimpse of the deck of the ship, and calling to know what was wrong. The man at the oars was backing water, holding the boat motionless; but as the sounds of general conflict came to the captain's ears, he evidently gave the sailor instructions, for the boat began to swing back to the brig.

But Carew was not destined to set foot again on stolen decks. A new factor suddenly entered the struggle. Martin noticed first, with a great gasp of astonishment; then Little Billy exclaimed, "The captain! Skipper Dabney! See!" and excitedly wagged his finger at the figure just emerging into the sunlight of the poop deck through the cabin hatch.

Captain Dabney was coatless, barelegged, bare-headed, all his white hair blowing. But he moved with the swiftness of a young man, and his step was no blind man's step. As soon as he reached the deck he spied and snatched up the rifle that was leaning against the skylight—it was Asoki's rifle, left behind when that worthy went to supervise Carew's departure—and rushed to the rail.

Carew shook his fist and roared a curse at the wild figure that so suddenly appeared at the poop rail. Asoki was climbing the poop ladder, come for his rifle or perhaps to take the Captain from behind. There was a shot forward (it was Hardy, the Australian, with the rifle taken from the hatch guard, Martin afterwards learned) and Asoki fell backward, out of sight. Then Captain Dabney drew down his bead, and his rifle barked—and Carew's cap flew from his head.

Carew did a thing that drew a growl of rage and fear from two of the watchers in the cave. He ducked, seized Ruth and swung her in front of him, covering his own body with hers. And in response to his orders, the sailor at the oars began to furiously pull towards the beach.

Martin never remembered much about that second, headlong passage of the caves, when he and Little Billy, and the cowering Ichi, retraced their path to the beach. He was in a frenzy of rage and fear. The hunchback was weeping and cursing in the same breath. Their prisoner howled hysterically as they kicked him along the ledge by the chasm edge. Martin could never afterwards figure out why they troubled with Ichi when time was so precious; he had no further use for the Jap that he knew of. But they dragged the little wretch all the way to the beach.

Not quite to the beach. Little Billy, in the lead, guided them into another passage, and instead of emerging through the Elephant Head, they found themselves in the great open-mouthed chamber where Billy had hidden before.

The beach lay revealed before them. Thirty yards distant, at the water's edge, the oarsman was beaching the dingey. Carew and Ruth were already halfway up the beach; he was literally almost dragging the girl over the sand, for she was struggling in his grasp. He was making for the Elephant Head.

"Ichi! Where are you? Lend a hand here!" Carew shouted. "You white-livered sneak—send a man out here if you are afraid!"

"Answer him!" Martin urged Ichi. "Tell him, 'This way!'"

Ichi stuttered, and hesitated. He was evidently less anxious to face Carew than was Martin.

Out on board the brig, the battle apparently was over, with victory for Martin's side. For Martin saw one of the *Cohasset's* boats swinging out in the davits, and heard the bosun's stentorian bellow as he encouraged the launching. On the poop still stood Captain Dabney, his rifle trained shorewards. Even as Martin looked, the rifle cracked, and the sand spurted about the feet of the Jap sailor by the dingey.

The closeness of the miss seemed to rattle the man, to take his wits and lend wings to his feet. He had been landing the gear of the boat; he now dropped his task and sped for the caves. He would have been quite safe had he fallen in behind his captain and unwilling companion, for they would not have ventured a shot from the ship with Ruth in line of fire. But he attempted to

speed by Carew and gain the—as he thought—comparatively safety of the caves.

"Help me here—hey, you—stop!" commanded Carew, as the man dashed past. "Damn you then—take, that!" And he threw down with the pistol he was brandishing, and shot the sailor in the back. The fellow pitched forward on his knees, and then fell face down on the sand.

In the cavern where the trio lurked, Ichi suddenly yelped as Little Billy pressed the point of his knife a half inch into the yellow hide. "Call to him," he commanded.

Ichi screamed it. "This way! This way, Captain!"

"Where? Show yourself! Give me a hand, here!" roared Carew.

Martin thrust Ichi half out of the cave, and, when Carew glimpsed him, jerked him back again. Swearing vilely, Carew changed his course, and began to draw Ruth towards the open-mouthed cave.

He had his hands full with the girl. His hand, rather, for he held her with one arm, leaving his other, his weapon arm, free. She was struggling furiously to break free from his grasp, wriggling, kicking, clawing, using all of her vigorous strength against him. Almost she succeeded. Then he had recourse to brute tactics to subdue her.

"Curse you, come along!" he exclaimed, and struck her heavy blows in the face with the fist that held the revolver. She sagged limply in his arm.

Something seemed to snap in Martin's mind at this sight. Gone was his caution, forgotten his plan. With a hoarse, wordless cry, he cleared the cave entrance with a bound, and threw himself forward towards his enemy.

Carew was still a score of paces distant from the cave mouth. But so startled was he by the sudden appearance of the charging, hostile figure, that Martin had covered half the intervening distance ere Wild Bob's sagging mouth closed. But by then Carew had recognized the oncomer, and realized his danger. He took snap aim with his weapon, and fired point blank at Martin.

The bullet seared Martin's cheek. Behind him, Little Billy, just emerging from the cave in Martin's wake, stopped short in his tracks, clutched at his poor, disfigured breast, and sank slowly to the ground.

Before Carew could shoot again, Ruth reached up her hands and clawed his face. Screaming a curse, Carew threw her from him and staggered back a step.

But Martin was closed with him now. He had Carew's wrist, wrenching it, and the weapon dropped to the sand. He had Carew's throat in his clutch. He was pressing, pressing, forcing the man back.

It was the very fury of his headlong, unreasoned assault that gave Martin initial victory. He was not as large as Carew, nor as strong. But at the moment he had the strength of three men in his body. He was berserk. He had no craft in his fighting; only blind rage and the strength it gave him. His hands were at the throat of the most hateful thing in the world—the man who had harmed loved ones, the man who tried to steal his woman.

Carew's fists battered at Martin's unguarded face. Martin did not even feel these blows. He squeezed and squeezed that cursed neck. Carew gave ground. He bent backwards. His glaring eyes were popping; his mouth was open. He was down.

And then something happened to Martin. He was conscious of pain, of sudden, paralyzing pain that pervaded his whole body. The strength left his fingers; he felt his entire body giving way, slumping weakly.

Now he was on his back, and fingers were at his throat. Carew's face loomed above him, red, contorted, the lips curled into a fiendish snarl, an insane murderous light in his eyes. Martin was choking; a tremendous weight was on his chest. In Carew's hand was a knife descending. Above the ringing in his ears, Martin heard Carew's voice saying, "You shall not have her!"

A sudden roar filled his ears. The weight on his chest jerked suddenly; the knife fell from the up-raised hand, the fingers loosened on his throat. He saw Carew's eyes blinking rapidly, and an expression of stupid surprise succeeded the triumphant ferocity in the man's face. And then Carew rolled off him altogether, and lay quiet on the ground by his side.

Dazed, Martin raised himself on his elbow. He saw the skirt, and then the smoking revolver clutched in the little hand, and, his eyes leaping upwards, Ruth's frightened face and wide open, horrified eyes. The pain still gripped him, but he tried to get up, and he held out his arms to her.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### CONCLUSION

"Aye, it was the knee he give you, lad. 'Ow was an innercent babe like you to know about foul tricks o' fighting? But 'twas a close shave you 'ad, a blinkin' close shave, swiggle me stiff, it was! If it 'adn't been for the lass grabbin' up 'is gun and potting the blighter—well, it's a lucky lad you are, Martin, with a double treasure won, and but sore muscles to pay." The bosun shifted his quid and spat over the rail into the racing sea. "Aye, the lass," he mumbled. "A lucky lad, that's wot."

"I know I am," answered Martin, humbly. "Oh, so lucky. If only poor Billy had had some of my luck."

"'E was feyed, Martin," declared the bosun. "I knew from the moment you told me wot Sails as 'ow I'd never clasp Little Billy's 'and again, and 'im alive and cheery. Poor Billy! 'E was my mate, my chum, and I'd give my share o' the swag ten times over just to 'ear 'im cuss me out again."

They took a turn or two on the deck in sorrowful silence, Martin limping somewhat painfully, and the big man accommodating his stride to the other's progress. The brig was running before the wind, over a sun-sparkled, white capped sea; every rag she owned was spread, and the breeze snored aloft like an organ. The bosun paused at the poop break, snorted into his large red handkerchief, and pretended to inspect the drawing of the mainsail. Then, his emotion conquered, he resumed the stroll.

"We left foul weather be'ind us in that black Devil's 'ole," he commented. "Now it's fair winds and bright skies. Ow, well, swiggle me stiff, wot's done is done and can't be undone, as Sails would 'ave said. 'Tis fine weather for you, eh, lad—and you standin' the moonlight watches with the lass by your side? Another day o' this, and we'll be landin' those five yellow imps we got in the hold on their own bloomin' coast, and then it's 'urrah for 'ome and the splicin' party, eh, lad?"

Martin smiled happily.

"I don't mind landin' the four 'foremast 'ands, and lettin' them off scott free except for their cuts and bumps," grumbled the bosun. "They didn't 'ave no 'and in the plannin' of it. But to land that feller, Ichi—swiggle me stiff, if I 'ad my way, I land that blighter in the air, below the tops'l yardarm, with a bloomin' noose around 'is neck! Why, 'e was the ruddy bird wot started the business!"

"But I promised him his life," said Martin. "And—my God, Bosun, hasn't there been enough death on this ship?"

"Well, anyway, that feller, Ichi, is lucky 'e wasn't on board when we 'ad the grand fight," vowed the Bosun. "I was looking for 'im; I 'ad 'im marked for my meat. Swiggle me, 'e'd 'ave gone over the side if I got my 'ands on 'im that mornin'. Aye, and Yip was layin' for 'im, too."

"How Yip hated them," mused Martin.

"Aye, that 'e did," agreed the bosun. "But 'e was a slick one, was Yip. 'Oo but 'im would of thought o' dopin' their grub? And the 'olesale way 'e did it—mixin' a pint bottle o' cockroach killer in with their rice. A white man wouldn't 'ave been able to do that. But it give Yip his chance, when they got the bellyache, to skip for'ard and lay out the 'atch guard with his cleaver. My blinkin' heye, when I come up after 'e opened the 'atch, there 'e was with that Jap's neck across the 'atch combin', and 'e was 'ackin' away and yellin' like a wild Indian. Aye, and 'e'd 'ave 'acked some more o' them, if that shot that was aimed at me 'adn't took 'im through the 'ead. Swiggle me, Marty, I wouldn't 'ave been able to eat 'is grub after that."

"Nor I," agreed Martin. "Well, Bos, I think I'll take a turn below."

"Aye, I 'eard the lass' voice through the skylight, a moment since," observed the bosun, slyly. "Swiggle me—get along with ye, lad!" He gave Martin a gentle nudge with his giant's elbow that nearly knocked him down the hatch.

She was in the cabin, when Martin descended the stairs. She welcomed him with a glance that more than repaid him for the bosun's thump; aye, that repaid him (he would have sworn) for all the pain and misery he had ever suffered.

She was standing by her grandfather's side, and the latter was seated at the cabin table, a mess of papers before him.

"Well, my boy, I've just been figuring out our fortune," he hailed Martin. "It's plenty; more than plenty. Something not much short of a million, as prices for ambergris were quoted when we left San Francisco. Not such a bad little treasure, eh?"

"We have paid a stiff price for it," answered Martin, soberly.

A shade crossed the captain's serene old face. "That we have," he assented. "Too great a



price. Gladly I'd give it all, and more, to get my men back again. To have—Little Billy—" He heaved a deep sigh, and smiled again. "Ah, and that is not all," he said, patting Ruth's hand, which lay on his shoulder, "for it seems I must lose my girl, as well. Even the thought of walking in on that doctor who told me I would never see again hardly reconciles me to the thought of losing my girl."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Ruth. "Why, grand-daddy, you don't lose me. You gain—a son."

Captain Dabney's bright, clear eyes searched Martin's face, and when he replied to Ruth it was in a contented, satisfied voice:

"Yes, I do," he said. "And a worthy son, girl, tried and tempered, by Fire Mountain."

## THE END

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIRE MOUNTAIN \*\*\*

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